

WOMEN AT WORK IN CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT : A CASE FROM DARJEELING TEA GARDENS

A Thesis submitted for Ph.D. Degree in Arts
(Sociology and Social Anthropology)

University of North Bengal

DECEMBER 2004



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C E R T I F I C A T E

It gives me immense pleasure to certify that the thesis entitled “**Women at Work in Cultural and Community Context : A Case from Darjeeling Tea Gardens**” has been prepared by **Smt. Indumati Rai** under my supervision and guidance.

Smt. Rai has prepared this thesis on the basis of her own investigation, observation and analysis. She has fulfilled the rules and regulations governing the preparation of doctoral thesis of the University of North Bengal. This is an original research work. To the best of my knowledge, realization and belief this thesis or any part of it has not been submitted to any other University or institution for any degree or qualification whatsoever.

I forward the thesis for adjudication as per rules of the University.


PROFESSOR SEKH RAHIM MONDAL

RESEARCH SUPERVISOR.

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Preface

In recent years there has been an increasing awareness and recognition of the fact that women who formed one half of the society can not be ignored at all. An increasing role of women in building the nation is extremely vital. Women issues are the key factors in the process of social change and development. The improvement of the status of women has now been recognized all over the world as an important aspect of national progress and development. It is also felt that the problem of poverty can not be tackled without providing opportunities of productive employment to women of a country.

The conference on International Women's Year held at Mexico City in 1975 and the World Conferences of the United Nation's Decade for Women Organised at Copenhagan in 1980 and subsequent conferences on Women's issues has attracted a number of Sociologists and Social anthropologists to study the various problems of women. There has been a remarkable increase in the study and researches on the issues of women. But an important area of women's work which escapes the attention of the scholars is working female in the agro-industrial setting of tea plantations in India. In tea plantations, women constitute overwhelming majority of the working force. There are a very few writers who have turned the focus of their enquiry on women tea plantation labourers. Hence, there is no serious study available on women workers of the tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas.

The basic objective of the present study is to examine the changing role and status of Nepali women in tea plantations of Darjeeling Himalayas in the context of their community, culture and society. Unlike the women plantation workers of Terai and Dooars regions of Northern part of West Bengal, the Nepali Women workers of tea gardens in Darjeeling Himalayas have come from diverse social, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds. About 90 per cent of women tea workers belong to middle caste Nepalis who were originally the indigenous communities of Nepal Himalayas and later Hinduised by Hindu rulers of Nepal.

The middle castes or communities like Khambus (Rai), Limbus (Subba), Yakhas (Dewan), Tamangs (Murmi), Gurungs, Mangers, Newars, Sunuwars (Mukhia), Bhujels (Gharti), Thamis, Jogis are found in tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas. Among them Rai and Tamang women workers are numerically dominant in the tea gardens. The number of Nepali Women workers belonging to higher castes (Bahun, Chhetri, Thakuri) and lower castes (Kami, Damai, Sarki, Sunar, Majhi etc.) are very few.

The predominance of women workers over the male workers is a distinctive feature of tea gardens in Darjeeling Himalayas. The family based recruitment policy of colonial planters and the nature of tea plantation works are mainly responsible for the numerical majority of women in working force in tea plantations.

The present study was conducted on seven tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas. The name of these gardens are Badamtam, Pandam, Happy Valley, Vah-Tukvar located in Sadar Sub-division and Singell, Springside and Castleton located in Kurseong sub-division of the District of Darjeeling in West Bengal.

The present study would not have been completed without the assistance received from many persons and institutions. First of all, I owe my gratitude to University Grant Commission for providing me Junior Research Fellowship through the Centre for Himalayan Studies, University of North Bengal during the period from April 1994 to May 1996. But I discontinued the J.R.F. for joining the service in May 1996. I did my Ph.D. registration under Prof. B.P. Misra of the Centre for Himalayan Studies. But unfortunately I could not complete my work under him as he retired from the University in April 2003. Later, on the basis of his advise and suggestion I re-registered my Ph.D. research under Prof. Sekh Rahim Mondal of the Centre for Himalayan Studies, University of North Bengal to continue the work. Prof. S.R. Mondal was kind enough to consider my problem and kindly agreed to guide and supervise me to complete the work and to prepare the thesis.

I feel a deep sense of gratitude to Prof. B.P. Misra, former Professor of the Centre for Himalayan Studies, University of North Bengal for his generous guidance at the initial phase of this research work.

It is my duty to convey my heartfelt thanks to Prof. Sekh Rahim Mondal, Prof. of Sociology and Anthropology, Centre for Himalayan Studies and Head, Department of Anthropology, University of North Bengal who has inspired me and offered me valuable guidance, supervision and suggestion to complete this work and to prepare this thesis. Without his generous help and active directions the work would not have completed.

I am thankful to Dr. (Mrs.) K. Dutta (Director), Dr. (Mrs.) M. Choudhury and Prof. R. Sahu of the Centre for Himalayan Studies, University of North Bengal for their valuable suggestions and support. I would also like to thank all other staffs of the Centre for Himalayan Studies, University of North Bengal for their kind encouragement to complete the work.

I must not forget to mention here the name of Mr. Subir Das Mahanta for typing the manuscript and Dr. D.P. Boot for drawing the maps of the study areas.

For the purpose of this study I visited many libraries like National Library, Kolkatta, Deshbandhu District Library, Darjeeling, Documentation Cell of the Centre for Himalayan Studies and Central Library of North Bengal University. I acknowledge the help received from the Librarian and other staffs of those libraries and thank them all.

During my field work in seven tea gardens I received immense help and support from all categories of the garden people, specially the women workers, staffs, trade union leaders and the managements. Among them, I would like to mention the names of Smt. Alka Rai (Singell Tea Garden), Sri Rajen Rai (Pandam), Smt. A. Chowdhury (Happy Valley), Sri Kumar Yonzon (Vah-Tukvar) and Sri K. Chhetri (Castleton) etc. for their active help and cooperation. I would also like to express my appreciation for the co-operation extended to me by the officials of the Assistant Labour Commissioner, DPA, Labour Department, DGHC of Darjeeling.

I owe deep gratitude to my family members especially my parents, brothers, sisters, brother-in-laws, sister-in-laws, and specially my loving daughter Surabhi whom I deprived maternal care and love during the busy schedule of work. I thank my husband Sri Bijoy Rai whose long association with Gooderick Group Ltd. Since 1985 enabled me to have an easy access to the old official records at Badamtam and other tea gardens.

Finally, I do not have adequate words to express my gratefulness to Mr. H.P. Chhetri, Director (HPI, DSC, HMCE) for his constant encouragement and moral support which he provided to me during the course of this research work. I shall ever remain grateful to him for the same.

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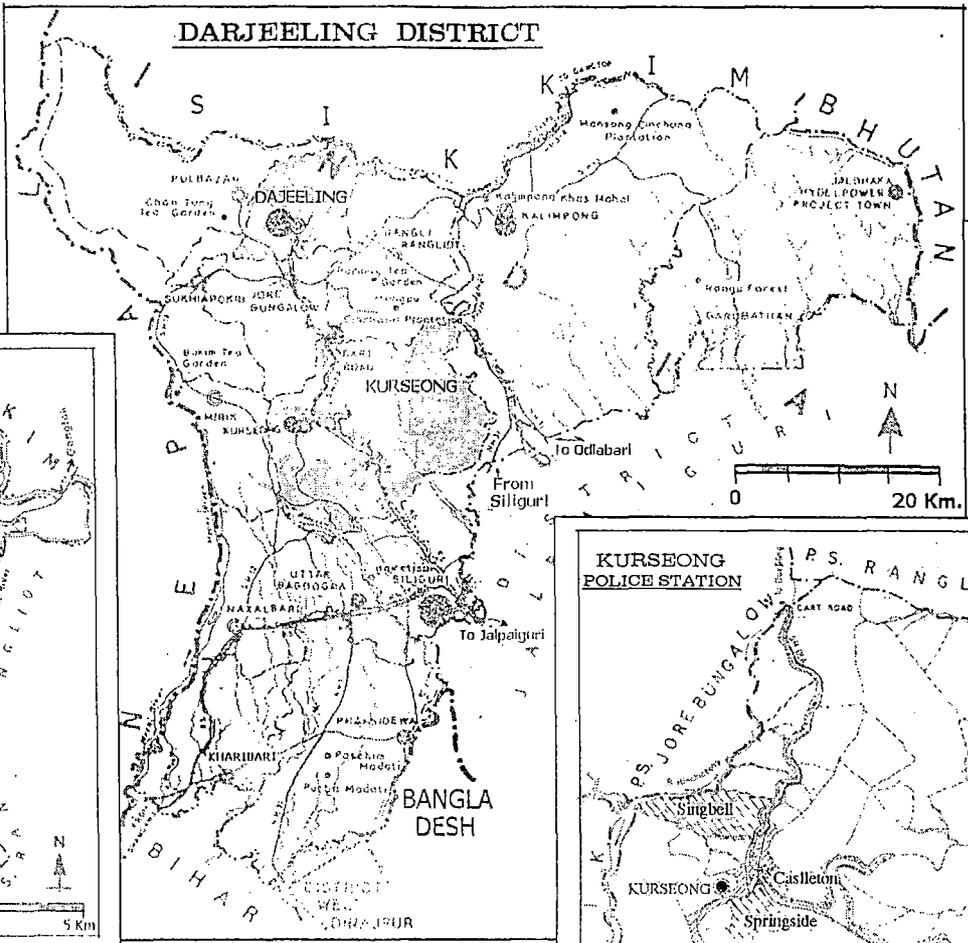
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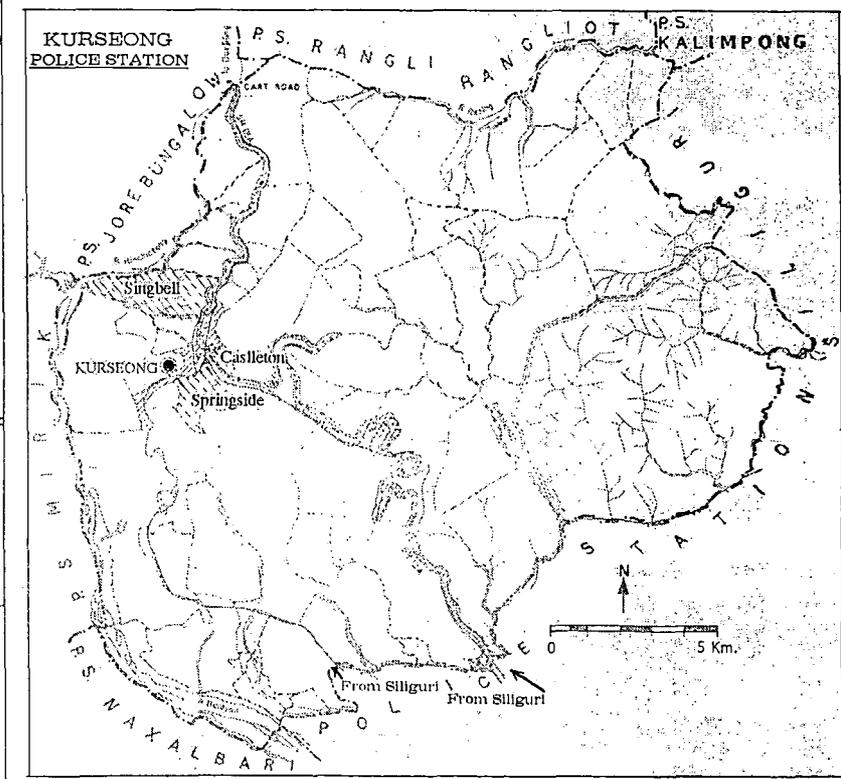
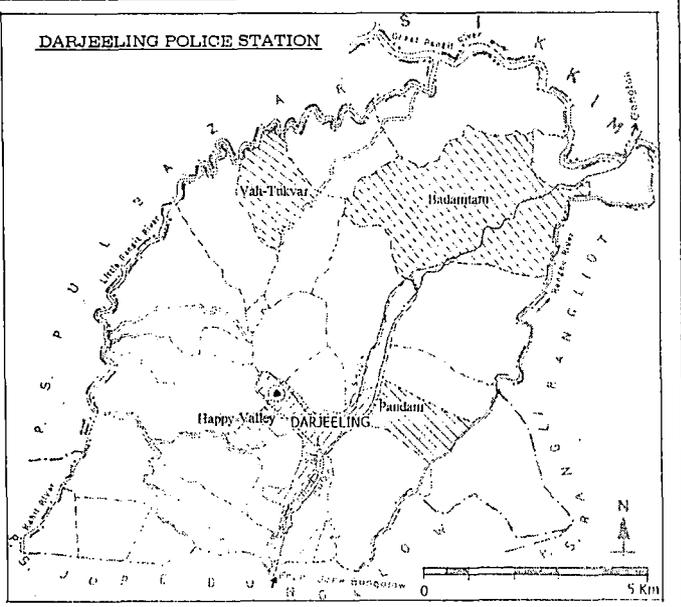
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MAP SHOWING STUDY AREA

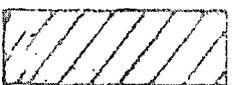


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International Boundary	-----
State	-----
District	-----
Police Station	-----
Road	-----
Railway Line	-----
River	-----



Urban Area



Village/Tea Estate



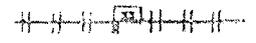
Study Area



Road



Railway Line



River



Source: Darjeeling District Census Handbook, 1981

Chapter – 1
INTRODUCTION

Chapter – I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background : The emergence of Women's issues, as an area of research in various disciplines of social sciences, is an event of immense theoretical and empirical importance. It is indeed amazing that even though constituting a massive one-half of the population, women have always been found residing outside the basic concerns of social science knowledge and enquiry. Women's existence, as a relatively autonomous and independent category of the humankind, generally stood concealed for a long time.

It was with the rise of new women's liberation movement in advanced societies, in late 60's and 70's, that women's issue began to be seriously discussed and debated. The last two or three decades can be characterized as a period of great spurt in women's studies. This was so partly because of the encouragement received from the efforts initiated by the International Organisations for the welfare of women such as International Women's Year Conference held at Mexico City in 1975 and the World Conference of the United Nation's Decade for women organized at Copenhagen in 1980. since then, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of Conferences, seminars and researches on the issues concerning women. The ideologies, that justified the subjection of women in society for several hundred years, took a new and unusual turn towards liberation of women. The women's liberation movement of the 70s created new visibility of women and their specific problems and concerns.

Recently when women began to ask about the origin of the unequal relationship between the sexes, they discovered that explanation put forward by social scientist for centuries were not at all satisfactory, for most explanations, a positivist-functionalist or a Marxist, or even a psychoanalyst approach see this situation biologically determined and, hence, consider it beyond the scope of change. They put forward their arguments that the woman owing to some inherent

characteristics of her nature and specially in fulfilling the demands of maternity and child rearing confined within the household; and had always been subjugated and subservient to men irrespective of the kinds of societies and cultures. But women, who struggle for their emancipation have taken opposite stance and rejected biological determinism on the ground that the unequal, hierarchical, and exploitative relationship between men and women is caused by social i.e., historical factors which are very much within the scope of social change. According to them the social and cultural determination of nature to be more crucial than the biological or psychological characteristics of women.

Murdock (1949) sees the biological difference between man and women as the basis of sexual division of labour in society due to greater physical strength of men and the fact that women bear children. Given the biological differences between men and women, a sexual division of labour is the most efficient way of organizing society.

Parsons (1965) characterizes the women's role in the family as 'expressive' which means she provides warmth, security and emotional support which is imperative for effective socialization of the young. He argues that for efficient operation of a family as a social system, there must be a clear-cut sexual division of labour. In this sense, the instrumental and expressive role compliment each other.

Culture as the determinants of human behaviour pleads for learning the respective male and female roles and justifies by a belief and value system which state that gender roles are normal, natural and proper.

Oakley (1974), a British sociologist and a supporter of the Women's Liberation Movement, comes down strongly on the side of culture as the determinant of gender roles. She pleads that the division of labour by sex is not universal. Human culture are diverse and endlessly variable. She cites the Mbuti Pygmies of Congo rain forest and Australian Aborigines of Tasmania not having sexual division of labour. Similarly, in present day societies, women form an important part of many armed forces, particularly those of China, Russia, Cuba and

Israel. In India, some 12 per cent of labourers on building sites are women and in some Asian and Latin American Countries, a quarter of the labourforce in mines is female. She claims that there are no exclusive females roles and that biological characteristics do not bar women from particular jobs. The mother role is a cultural construction. She says that gender roles are culturally rather than biologically determined. Bettelheim (1969) also expresses the similar view based on his study of collective child rearing in a Kibbutz system. He concluded that a close and continuous mother-child relationship is not essential for effective socialization of young.

Ortner (1974) also claims that it is not biology as such that ascribes women to their status in society but the way in which every culture defines and evaluates female biology, as in every society, a higher value is placed on culture than on nature.

1.2 Theoretical perspectives on Women's Studies : If one looks at the corpus of material on women's studies, following their assertions for justice and freedom, two kinds of orientations become easily discernible. The first type of orientation draws its strength from the over-arching paradigm of materialistic explanation of injustice and exploitation in society, propounded by Karl Marx and his followers. The Marxist paradigm of materialistic explanation of exploitation and injustice are the expressions of class inequalities and reflect the class contradiction among societies. While contradiction of classes centers around the classes of have and have not, they do not touch upon the issues of exploitation and injustice based on gender relations. The Marxist logic did succeed in sensitizing social scientists about the situation of women's oppression yet he ignored the real issue of women's historical exploitation. Women who constitute nearly one-half of the class of exploited, and who have equally been the subject of alienation and oppression, could not become the focus of Marxist revolutionary demand.

Engels (1972) made serious efforts to understand the issue of oppression on women in his book *Origin of Family, Private Property and the State*, but he could

not grasp in totality the problem of women's subordination and he simply reduced the whole issue of women's exploitation and fight for survival to abolishing of private property. He argued that with the establishment of collective ownership of means of production, oppression on women will automatically come to an end.

Some of the Feminist Scholars with Marxist orientation (Beneria and Roldan: 1987; Maria: 1988) have tried to apply the model of class contradiction to demonstrate the contradiction between the genders. However, the scholars who attempted at assigning class status to women have not been able to provide a basis for treating women as a class.

The second type of orientation in women's studies is known as Radical Feminist approach or paradigm. This feminist paradigm is further divided into two sub-orientation. The first orientation try to seek equality, freedom, social dignity and justice by being in relation to the male world. Women scholars of this orientation (Agarwal: 1988, Majumdar: 1979) demand reforms and change within the settings of domestic life and in their day to day interaction with the outer world.

The second orientation, on the other hand, demands a total break from all the nexes of man-made culture and society. It does not seek to negotiate for a just and dignified coexistence with patriarchal system in which they are located. This radical feminist (Firestone: 1972; Kausik: 1985; Kishwar: 1991; Spender: 1980), aims at carving out a parallel female world which defines its autonomy and freedom in terms of its own gender identity and existence.

The changing social conditions not only reshape the ideological basis of the nature of concepts and issues of social sciences, they also redefine the priorities and the directions of social research and enquiry. In this rapidly changing modern societies, the inter-play of the global and local intellects have provided for publication of numerous books on the various aspects of women's subordinated life in India. Scholars like, Agarwal, Majumdar, Desai, Kishwar, Kaushik, Jain and Kumar have raised women's issues especially in the area of analysis of women's movement, women's grassroots organizations, authority and power in the family,

condition of work, impact of technology on women, violence against women, patriarchy and gender and the like.

1.3 Conceptual Issues :

This section makes an attempt to present a conceptual issues like 'status', 'role', 'role-conflict', 'empowerment', 'culture', 'community' etc. So as to provide a matrix for the analysis.

The Constitution of India gives equality of status to Indian women with that of men. However, the question still looms large whether they have attained this equality in reality. As we know, there always exists a gap between theory and practice. Therefore, it is not merely equality of law that determines the status of women in a society. It is the tradition and custom that proves more powerful and crucial than law in determining women's status within the social structure.

Social scientist customarily use the term status as a recognized social position within a social group. Status simply refers to any socially defined position. Ralf Linton (1936) defines status as a "Collection of rights and duties." It meant a position in a social system occupied by designated individuals. By 'status' Bendix and Lipset (1957) refers to rank position with respect to chiefly income, prestige and power-one or all of these.

Morris (1971) defines status as the location of an actor in a system of social relationship and role as the set of expectations applied to the incumbents of that particular status.

Parsons (1951) defines role as the organized sectors of an actor's orientation which constitutes and defines his participation in an interactive process. Status, on the other hand refers to the actor's position within an institution i.e., within a system of roles. Role is, thus the "processual aspects" and status the positional aspect of an actor's participation in a social system.

According to Merton (1957) social status of an individual is his status-set, each of the statuses in turn having its distinctive role-set. Role set according to him is the complement of role relationships which persons have by virtue of occupying a particular social status.

The study of relative roles of the sexes has assumed significance in view of the concern expressed in the present era about human rights and social justice, and on the utilization of human resources. The women's liberation movement since the seventies has given special stimulus to sociological research on role-performance and related aspects.

Roles are the links between the individual and social structure. They refer to the expected pattern of behaviour in a given situation. The actual behaviour of an individual in a given situation is called role performance. It is the degree to which one carries out her expected roles. The role performance of an individual in the multiplicity of roles, he or she performs is conditioned by the norms and cultural values of the society at large and the sub-system to which one belongs.

Linton (1936) the eminent American anthropologist argues that role represents the dynamic aspect of a status. In practice there are no roles without statuses or statuses without roles. Merton (1957) says each social status involves not a single associated role, but an array of roles. Malinowski (1944) defined status as a synonym for role as it is largely taken by others, too. Roles are expected behaviour associated with a social position. Some social psychologists have distinguished actual behaviour from the role behaviour. Thus the actual role behaviour may not be identical with the expected role behaviour. Each status in society is accompanied by a number of norms which define how an individual occupying a particular status is expected to act. This group of norms is known as a role. Playing or performing roles involves social relationships in the sense that an individual plays a role in relation to other roles. Individuals interact in terms of roles.

Getzels and Guba (1954) state that role conflict refers to those situations where an actor is required to play simultaneously two or more roles that present

inconsistent, contradictory, or even mutually exclusive expectations. The actor cannot realistically conform to such expectations.

Behera and Padhi (1995) used the phrase 'role-conflict' to refer to the situation in which incompatible demands are placed upon an actor because of his role relationship with two or more groups. Generally the person involved feel internally the obligation to meet the conflicting demands, face the threat to possible sanctions if they fail to fulfill either demand and yet find it impossible to comply fully with opposing obligations.

The concepts like gender, Women's Empowerment and Patriarchy are very vital in the context of studying women's role and status in the society. Gender is the socially constructed roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women in a given culture and the societal structure that support them. Gender is a learned behaviour, which is dynamic. It is determined by society and not by biology. (Pelink: 1977, UNICEF: 1991). Empowerment is the process of generating and building capabilities to exercise control over one's own life. Women's empowerment is a model of gender analysis that traces women's increasing equality by empowering through five phases, viz. welfare access, conscientisation, participation and control (INSTREW: 1995) Patriarchy is a concept which essentially means the rule of the father or the patriarch i.e. the male members of the household or society. It leads women to internalize as well as to perpetuate patriarchal ways of thinking, both in values and in behaviour (Bhasin: 1991).

Linton (1936) states that, 'The culture of a society is the way of life of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation.' (Linton: 1936) According to Kluckhohn (1951) culture is a 'design for living' held by members of a particular society. Since man has no instincts to direct his actions, his behaviour must be based on guidelines which are learned and shared by its members. For Malinowski (1944) culture stands for a total way of life which secures for an individual the satisfaction of his bio-psycho drives and fulfillment of other desires ultimately investing with satisfaction.

For Majumdar and Madan (1970) culture is an integrated whole and therefore no single cultural trait has any meaning by itself unless it is seen and analysed in the context of the whole. To a large degree culture determines how members of a society think and feel, it directs their actions and defines their outlook on life. Members of society usually take their culture for granted. It has become so much a part of them that they are often unaware of its existence.

According to Maciver (1970) community means area of common life, village, or town, or district, or country, or even wider area. To deserve the name community, the area must be somehow distinguished from further areas, the common life may have some characteristics of its own such that the frontiers of the area have some meaning. Wherever men live together they develop in some kind and degree distinctive common characteristics – manners, tradition, mode of speech and so on. These are the signs and consequences of an effective common life. A community is a focus of social life, the common living of social life has territorial frontiers and exercises control over all. Community is a network of social interrelations. Community is the common life of beings who are guided essentially from within, spontaneously and freely relating themselves to one another, weaving for themselves the complex web of social unity. (Maciver: 1970)

1.4 Statement of the Problem :

The Tea Industry enjoys an unique place in our national economy by virtue of its position as an enterprise providing employment to around a million workers and supporting a number of ancillary industries and services and a major earner of foreign exchange.

It occupies an unique position due to its agro-industrial features and highest percentage of women's employment. Tea is the backbone of economy for the hill region of Darjeeling. It produce one of the finest tea in the world. At present, there are 76 tea gardens in Darjeeling hills with 18,428 hectares of land under tea cultivation and produce around 11 to 12 million kgs. of tea per year. The average yield per hectare is 647 kgs. As per 1991 census, there are 52,000 working

population with 2,08,000 dependents out of this more than 55 per cent (28,005) constitute women workers.

In the tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas about 95 per cent labour force is composed of Nepali community. The middle caste groups like Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Manger, Gurung, Bhujel, Thami, Sunuwar, Newar are dominant among the Nepalis. The tribals like Lepcha, Bhutia, Sherpa, Yolmos form about 3 to 4 per cent and the rest 1 to 2 per cent is composed of people from plains and terai Nepal. Women are numerically dominant as workers or coolie. They perform several kinds of plantation work like plucking of tea leaves, pruning, weeding, light skiffing, manuring, chilling, nursery work etc. Besides plucking and cultivation work, women are also employed in the manufacturing process particularly in sorting or shifting room. Besides worker or coolie category, women are also appointed in sub-staff (supervisory staff) and staff (clerical) categories though their percentage in these last two categories are very few.

1.5 Review of Literatures :

Plantation studies have come to be one of the main concerns in Social Science research in recent years. Unfortunately, however, there are only a few books focusing on the tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalaya.

Capital and labour in the Indian Tea Industry (Bose: 1954) delineates the process of labour recruitment, labour condition during pre-Independence period, workers struggle etc. The author very nicely described the different phases of development of tea industry in India since its inception in 1839. He has also given a detail analysis of various Acts and legislations of pre-Independence period regulating the labour recruitment and labour conditions.

Impact of Tea Industry on the life of the Tribals of West Bengal (Das and Banerjee : 1964) focuses on the impact of industrial work on tribal socio-economic system in the four tea gardens in Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal. The authors describe the changes in socio-cultural system brought about by new industrial work.

The change in their economy from simple agriculturist to wage worker have brought about tremendous changes in tribal's traditional social system and social activities.

The History of Indian Tea Industry (Griffiths: 1967) deals with origin and development of tea plantation in India along with the different aspects like production, wage system, ownership, labour recruitment, origin of trade union movement etc. The book is based entirely on secondary sources.

The savaras of Manatta – a study of the effects of Tea Industry on the Tribal life (Kar: 1981) deals with the social changes among the tribal labourers of Assam region. The author describes the socio-economic life of an immigrant tribal group in a plantation society. The book examines the changes into social, cultural and economic spheres.

Class formation in the plantation system (Bhowmick: 1981) is the most important and analytical book which deals with tea industry from sociological point of view. The book investigate and analyse the different social forces which have broken down the isolation of the adivasi worker (Oraon, Munda, Santhal, Kharia etc.) bringing them in contact with the wider social system and consequently, leading to a change in a plantation system. For this purpose, he has worked in Sonali Tea Estate which was a sick garden, has been the study area. The author has relied on both primary and secondary sources and analysis is done from Marxist perspectives. In this study, he has pointed out that though objectively, adivasi plantation labourers form a class, being sellers of their labour power, inter-tribal divisions among these adivasi workers separates their homogeneous economic life as wage-labourers from their heterogeneous stratified social life. This factor, coupled with the isolation of the plantation make the problem of class formation complex. He argues that mere unity among workers on the basis of their economic activity is not enough, their unity has to extend to their social life as well. Such a process is taking place as tribal barriers are now eroding, leading to greater integration in the social life of the adivasi workers.

Tea plantation in Sharat Devala's **Employment and Unionization in Indian Industry** (Bhowmick: 1992) highlights on the recent employment trends and unionization in the tea plantation. The author examines the high rate of casualisation in one hand and the stagnation of trade union Movement on the other. He also points out the reasons behind the high casualisation and stagnation in trade union movement.

Problems of Tea Industry in North East India (North East India Council for Social Science Research: 1981) is a compilation of Seminar papers. The various papers highlights the issues of labour-management relations, socio-cultural life of workers, labour problems, role of tea industry in the economic development of the region etc.

"Tea Gardens and Neighbourhood" A study in Hill Darjeeling. (Subba, 1984) is an interesting articles which deals with the changing plantation situations and the kind of impact they have made on the surrounding agrarian areas and vice-versa. In order to examine the relationship between plantation system and agrarian system he has taken the Dooteriah Tea Garden and Rungball Village which are close to each other. He has relied mainly on primary sources which is supplemented by secondary information. He has pointed out that during the pre-Independence period tea gardens were kept isolated from the neighbouring areas. After the Independence of India, legislative measures brought about many changes in their relationship. He has also pointed out the inability of the tea gardens to absorb the surplus labour population and its impact on neighbouring societies. The occupational diversification is the significant change in the tea gardens today. The cultivation of cash crops like cardamom, ginger, vegetables and oranges and animal husbandry is found widely practiced now-a-days. When the gardens fail to absorb the increasing labour force, the labourers began to look for alternative ways of earning their livelihood. This phenomenon was absent during the British period because most of the gardens were well run at that time as well as workers were for bidden to work outside the garden.

Impact of Tea plantation Industry on the life of Tribal labourers (Dasgupta and Khan: 1983) attempts to deal with the life and culture of the tribes who work in the tea plantation of West Bengal and Assam. This study was done in three tea gardens, taking each garden from Darjeeling (W.B.), Jalpaiguri (W.B.) and the Goalpara District of Assam. The study shows how the various tribes have forged into an inter-ethnic solidarity while maintaining some of the markers of individual ethnic identity. The authors have shown that though in all the three districts tea plantation started with migrant labourers from Chotanogpur and Nepal and the labourers in the long run had settled in the respective regions. Yet there is marked differences in attitude and behaviour among the three sets of population in their socio-cultural and political concepts.

Tea plantation workers in the Eastern Himalayas : a study on wages, employment and living standard (Sarkar and Lama (ed.): 1986) includes almost all aspects of Darjeeling tea industry viz., productivity, marketing, trade unions, employment pattern, wages and social security benefits, ownership pattern etc. This book also highlights the sickness or stagnating conditions of Darjeeling tea industry and its impact on labour population.

Tea Gardens of West Bengal: A critical study of land Management (Ghosh: 1989) is the book on West Bengal tea gardens. Most of the materials used in the book are collected from secondary sources. He has relied on various newspaper, Govt. reports etc. The aim of the book is to highlight the problems of tea gardens that were there in West Bengal since the inception of tea plantation in India and identify the areas where improvements could enlarge the scope for its overall developments. The author argues that the production of tea has increased despite the fact that area under plantation has remained more or less stagnant. This has been possible mainly due to technological developments in its cultivation like, greater use of fertilizers, insecticides and high yielding tea bushes and all these are short-term policy towards development. He says that different land management policy which may be term as long-term is still lacking in tea industry. According to the author, the major problems of tea industry in India are the results of lack of a suitable land

management policy but he has overlooked the other problems like out flow of capital, continuation of absolute technology, international price fluctuation of tea and its impact on tea production in India etc. These issues are not dealt with his study. Despite this short-coming this book calls on the attention of the planners towards various problems concerning land-management in tea plantation or overall development of it.

Economic Development of Darjeeling hill areas: Problems and prospects (Dasgupta: 1989) deals with the problems of Darjeeling tea industry. Dasgupta has written a number of books and seminar papers (i) Industrial Relation in Tea Industry in North Bengal, (ii) Labour productivity in Tea Industry in North Bengal, (iii) Trade Union Movement in Tea plantation in Terai). The running theme in all his papers is problems confronting the tea gardens of Darjeeling. However, none of his works has thrown any light on the participation of women in these gardens. For instance, the productivity of Darjeeling gardens is very low in comparison to Assam and other regions. This is mainly due to such factors as style of pruning, age-mix of plants, elevation of the gardens, vacancy ratio, use of chemical fertilizers are mainly responsible for it. According to him, the main reasons for the uneconomic condition of Darjeeling hill gardens are the frequent change of ownership of the garden, high turnover of managers, high cost of production, financial and liquidity crisis etc.

Taming the Coolie Beast : Plantation Society and the Colonial order in Southeast Asia (Breman: 1990) is an authentic book where the author vividly described and analysed the harsh colonial policies in promoting the interest of agrarian capitalism. In this book, the author vividly described how the life and work of the indentured coolies was conditioned by outside forces. The author gives detail account of the various colonial Acts and legislations designed to serve the sole interest of European colonialists. From this book one can understand how the land-poor or landless mass were recruited, migrated and formed the reservoir of plantation labour throughout Asia. Whether it is Tobacco plantation of Sumatra's East Coast, Sugarcane of Java or rubber plantation of Indo-China, one can find the universal recruitment pattern adopted by colonialists.

Industrial sickness (Shyamroy: 1991) is yet another book written on the sickness of tea gardens in Darjeeling hill. The main objective of this book is to find out the various factors which are mainly responsible for the sickness of Darjeeling hill gardens and also to explore the means through which the sick gardens can be revived. The author has mainly relied on secondary sources like newspapers, Govt. reports and magazines.

According to him, the tea industry in Darjeeling had been stagnating for quite sometime. Neither the acreage under tea nor the total production registered any increase which had been moving around 18,350 hectare with production around 10,000 kg. He has identified several factors as responsible for this stagnating conditions of tea industry. They are high vacancy ratio and little investment on infills, old age of tea plants, shift in ownership from foreign to Indian Companies, inefficient garden managers, heavy burden of taxation etc. The author has examined the various means through which the Darjeeling tea industry would be able to see better days in future. In this context, he has analysed the role of financial institution or scheme like NABARD which has now been directly looking after the subsidy scheme created to take care of the problem of hill gardens only. He has also examined the role of the State and the Central Govt. to look after or revive the sick or abandoned gardens.

Study of Trade Union Organization among the Tea workers of Terai and Dooars Regions (Sarkar: 1992) deals with the origin and development of trade union movement in Terai and Dooars plantation regions. The author has mainly focused on functioning of Trade Unions, leadership pattern and social change etc. He has relied both on primary and secondary sources of data collection. He worked on three tea gardens namely. Lalfa, Anrabhasa and Kurty Tea gardens. The author has highlighted the social changes brought about by the trade union functioning specially in the spheres of inter-caste marriage, purity and pollution, food habits, health practices behaviour, recreation etc.

Social dimensions of health of tea plantation workers in India (Bhadra: 1997) is another book on the health practices of plantation labour. The study aims to investigate into the behaviour of the tribal people in terms of health. The persistence of traditional health culture or the rejection of it and acceptance of modern health practices, housing, personal hygiene, intoxication, smoking, child rearing, sanitation are the aspects covered as parts of health culture. The contention that the traditional culture of the tribal acts as barrier in acceptance of modern medical system does not seem to hold good in the present context.

Colonial labour conditions in the plantation Industry: The case of Criminal Tribes on the Tea Estates of Annamalai Hills in India (Ramachandran and Maya: 1997) is an interesting article seeking to analyse the nature of the controls that the plantation labour in the erstwhile Madras Presidency were subjected to the colonial era. This paper also seeks to demonstrate how the imposition of the Criminal Tribes Act on certain migrants groups was used by both the colonial State as well as the planters to meet their own needs i.e. creation of a reserve labour force for the planters. This article has explored or revealed the coercive nature of employment on the plantation of the Annamalai Hills. The author vividly describes the adoption of repressive legislation like the Criminal Tribes Act which declared some of the tribals like Kaders, Chetties, Moplahs, Donga Dasaris, Nellore Dommaras and Kollar as criminal tribes. The Act was used by the colonial State to suppress marginal groups like wandering gypsies and traders who refused to lead a more conventional settled existence. The introduction of Act in the Madras Presidency in 1911 served the purpose of colonial interest who were in search of permanent, residential and bonded labour.

Tea Industries in India: An Introduction (Sharma: 1999) deals with the changing features of tea industry in India after the policy of economic liberalization adopted by our government since 1991. The problems and prospect of tea industry, human resource development, field practices and manufacturing of tea, history of tea industry are the various aspects incorporated in this book. The author has further highlighted the present set backs of tea industry in the global market facing stiff

competition from new tea producing countries of the world. The author has thoroughly discussed the commendable role played by the small tea growers for the development of tea industry in India.

The Himalayan Tea Plantation Workers (Sharma : 2000) deals with the plantation labour of Darjeeling Himalaya. In this book author has mainly focused his enquiry on the socio-economic conditions of the workers, their participation in trade unions, welfare measures, history of recruitment, settlement of workers etc. He has also discussed the role of ethnicity in the origin of trade union movement, setback of present trade union movement, problems and future prospects of trade union movement in the Himalayan tea gardens. Further, he has also highlighted the impact of new economic policy of 1991 on the tea industry as well as on working class.

In tea plantation, women constitute more than half of the work force however, there are very few writers who have turned the focus of their enquiry on the female labourers. Some of the books mentioned above covers women workers but their focus lies on workers in general i.e. men and women workers. There are few studies on women workers.

Socio-Economic conditions of Women workers in plantations (Labour Bureau: 1980) in a report provides a board picture of the characteristics of women's employment, their working conditions, wages and earnings, welfare amenities, social status available to them, besides throwing some light on their living conditions and other socio-demographic characteristics in Tea, Rubber and other plantation in India.

Study of wage labourers on a Tea Gardens of Assam (Jain: 1988) shows that the plantation Women workers, part of the largest and most viable section of Indian working Women possess a level of independence sufficient to enable them to live on their own. The independence is likely to be eroded if it is not viewed as an asset to mobilize action for changing the present working and living conditions on the tea gardens.

Women in Tea Plantation – A case from the Dooars Area of West Bengal (Balagopal: 1990) examines the status of women in Dooars plantation and for this purpose he has taken three aspects; the wages of women workers, their position in management hierarchy and trade unions. He argue that women have low status in plantation society with comparison to men which is evident from the analysis of wage-structure, work hierarchy and trade union activities.

The author accepts the Marxist feminist explanation of the subordinate position of women in Dooars plantation and argues that the productive and reproductive functions of women as well as inter-action between these two roles determine their subordinate position. Because of these dual-role women do not have an opportunity for competing with men in gaining education or equality of status in the tea plantation or Trade union hierarchies. The author highlights the roles of different agencies to bring about necessary changes into the life of women workers and he has also emphasized the role of strong women's organizations to better their living conditions.

Women workers of Tea plantation in India (Bhadra: 1992) is one of the few books written on plantation women. The main objective of this book is to deal with the position of women workers in plantation hierarchy, their status and role in plantation society, their socio-economic background, their attitude and commitment towards plantation work etc. Chandmoni Tea Estate of Terai in Siliguri sub-division of Darjeeling district has been taken as study area. The author has used the secondary sources as well. This book is divided into six chapters dealing with the women studies from various perspectives, women as a plantation workers, their social environment, their participation in the organization of work etc. In Chandmoni Tea Estate majority of workers are adivasis namely, Oraon, Munda, Kharia, Santhal and other minor communities like Mahali, Ghasi, Asur, Malpahari, Lohar, Turi etc. and few Nepali are there. All of them except Nepalis are tribals from Chotanagpur, Madhya Pradesh and Orrisa regions. According to the author hierarchy in plantation, process of recruitment, wage pattern, job opportunities etc. are same in all the plantation for this reason she has taken Chandmoni Tea Estate of

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Terai region to represent all the tea plantation. However, the conclusions she has drawn based on her findings do not corroborate to the situation in Darjeeling hills. Despite short comings as mentioned above, her work can be considered valuable so far as the focus and the analysis is concerned.

Status of Himalayan Women (Mondal: 1999) is an important article dealing with the status and role of Himalayan women, particularly of Eastern Himalayan. Though the article is not directly related with the tea plantation women yet it throws some light on the status of Himalayan Women in general. As the tea plantation of Darjeeling hills also falls under Eastern Himalayan region, plantation women also share many common features with the other women of this region as we know that the factors or forces like common ecology, environment and economy have crucial role to play in shaping or moulding the role and status of women everywhere. In this paper, the author has examined the status of Himalayan women by analyzing multi-dimensional role played by women in local economy, family, religious rituals and ceremony and other socio-cultural spheres. The author argues that the women of this particular region enjoy higher position in the society as compared to the plains, son preference is almost absent among them, birth of a girl child is not at all a problem, custom of dowry is not prevalent, remarriage of widow is widely practiced, work status of women is also high as they are the equal partner in all economic activities. Despite their multi-dimensional role in socio-cultural and economic spheres, the overall status of Himalayan women is low as compared to their men folk. Women also suffer from many problems like heavy work load because of male out migration, less education, lesser exposure to new ideas, lack of access to property, low participation in political spheres and low level of self confidence than men.

1.6 Aims and Objectives of the Present Study :

Keeping in focus the importance of the present study, the main objective is to examine and assess the changing status and role of Nepali women in the tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas from socio-cultural perspectives. The evaluation

of the Status of women and their role performance necessitates an indepth analysis of community culture and social structure, as the role and status of women are intricately interwoven with community culture and social structure. So we have examined the position of Nepali women in terms of their roles in family, religious rituals, community or social participation, different decision making process, marital practices etc. In this study, emphasis is also given on the dual-role and associated problems of women workers. We have identified the problems faced by working women both at domestic front as well as at place of work.

Another objective of the present study is to assess women's contribution in the production process of plantation economy and to identify the nature of the problems and issues concerning female work participation. In the view of many writers economic status is crucial to the overall status of women in the society. So one of the main objective of the study is to assess the economic or occupational status of women by analyzing their nature and degree of work participation, work opportunities or chances of upward job mobility, role in economic decision-making, wage-structure, nature and type of work done by women and so on.

In order to understand the role of women in the plantation economy it is necessary to study the work organization which gives an idea of the basic nature and salient features of the social system underlying a society. Keeping this in mind, we have attempted to study the work organization of tea industry and women's position in it. The study also attempts to critically examine the socio-economic change or impact of wage work on their life.

We have also try to examine the women's role in trade union movement as the present day working situation necessitates organized economic activity whether for wage earners or for white collar workers. Their membership and participation in the trade union activities have great significance for them as it gives a forum for developing their leadership qualities and thereby to compete with men in yet another non-traditional area. An attempt has been made to identify the factors that might facilitate or impede the effective participation of women in trade union activities.

Further, we shall try to assess the impact of economic participation on the socio-cultural life of the women and also study the inter-linkages among the different communities who have entered into the plantation life.

Another main objective is to explore or identify the various problems faced by Darjeeling tea industry particularly during the post-Independence period and its direct or indirect impact on working women and finally the study try to suggest some remedial measures to overcome the problems and thereby upgrade the socio-economic position of Nepali Women in the tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas.

1.7 Research Questions:

The study addresses itself to a number of questions.

1. Why is it that the Women workers have outnumbered the men workers in the tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas?
2. What are the factors, which are responsible for the numerical dominance of certain communities in the hill tea gardens?
3. How far the Women workers and their family with their respective cultural traditions have assimilated into a general community – Sharing certain common social features in the agro-industrial nature of plantation Society? If they have assimilated, what are the factors responsible for their assimilation, and if not, what are the main constraints or obstacles to the same?
4. Whether the different positions (status and role) traditionally enjoyed by Women in different communities have any impact upon the nature of their economic participation?
5. How far is it true that the Women's economic activities are a more accurate measure of female freedom?
6. Whether and how far the community factor and gender differences is reflected in the plantation work hierarchy?
7. Is there any change in the structure and composition of family or is there any change in the relative dominance of spouses in decision-making as a result of

wife's employment? How far the employment of women has contributed to enhance her status within the family and society at large?

8. What is the nature and degree of women's participation in the Trade Union Movement? What are the constraints to their participation in Union activities? Do these bodies help in ameliorating the condition of these workers?
9. What are the problems of Darjeeling Tea Industry and its impact on Women workers?

1.8 Importance of the Study :

The importance of the present study lies on the fact that no study relating to women workers in the Tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas have been so far undertaken. Though, there are few studies made on the women workers of Terai, Dooars and Assam regions. Women workers of Darjeeling Himalayas have different socio-cultural background, place of origin, migration history, occupational background, different positions in their respective community. The empirical investigation about the role and status of women belonging to different communities in Tea plantation from Socio-cultural perspective have remained scarce. This calls for a need to obtain more empirical knowledge on the Women's economic participation, employment condition, their status and role in Society. The present work is an attempt to fulfill this gap in the study of Women's work in cultural and community context in the tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas.

1.9 Methodology :

1.9.1 The Study Area

The Study covers only two hills sub-divisions i.e., Darjeeling Sadar and Kurseong of Darjeeling District. The tea gardens from Kalimpong sub-division is deliberately omitted as there are very few (only six) tea gardens located in the foothills of Gorubathan block of Kalimpong. The Terai (in Siliguri Sub-division of

Darjeeling District) and Dooars (in Jalpaiguri District) plantation regions have not been included because many works have already been done relating to the areas. Darjeeling Sadar Sub-division has the highest number of tea gardens i.e. 41, Kurseong and Kalimpong have 30 and 6 respectively. Considering the high number of tea gardens in Darjeeling as compared to Kurseong, it is proposed to take four tea gardens from Darjeeling and three from Kurseong area. The Seven tea gardens taken here for intensive case study are : Badamtam, Pandam, Happy Valley and Vah-Tukvar from the Sadar sub-division of the district of Darjeeling and Singell, Springside and Gourisankar (Castleton) from the Kurseong sub-division of the district.

1.9.2 Research Design

The design of this research has been formulated on the basis of nature of this research project. The study area, the people i.e. the informants or respondents of this study and the tools and techniques for data collection has been decided as per aims and objects of the present study. The present research is purely an exploratory study the approach of this study is purely analytical one. The comparative method, both synchronic as well as diachronic over space and time, has been adopted for understanding the present position of working women in an agro-industrial setting of plantation society as well as the changes that are taking place in their socio-cultural life. The data for this study has been gathered from primary (field work) as well as from secondary sources. For writing first three chapters extensive library work has been done. The secondary sources both published and unpublished materials like Gazetteers, books, journal, newspapers, Govt. reports Seminar papers etc. have been tapped. While the empirical facts are mainly collected through intensive field investigation of seven purposively sampled tea gardens of Darjeeling Hills besides stray visits to around twenty tea gardens in the area.

The data presented in this research work are the results of my field investigations in seven purposively sampled tea gardens conducted during the period between 1998-2001. The name of the tea gardens which are studied for the purpose

of this research are : Badamtam, Pandam, Happy Valley, Vah-Tukvar, Singell, Springside, Gaurisankar. So far tea gardens are concerned these were selected purposively taking into consideration the size of the tea gardens (area under tea cultivation), ownership and control (Private Ltd., Public Ltd., Govt.) economic health of tea gardens (sick, closed, abandoned, economically well-off or sound) availability of infrastructural facilities and existence of different castes and communities in the gardens. One of the purpose of selection was to represent different tea gardens under different ownership and control. For this purpose we have selected Badamtam, Castleton and Springside which are owned by Gooderick Group Ltd. Which is a subsidiary of Lowrie Group, one of the fourth largest company of U.K. Pandam and Vah-Tukvar are owned by West Bengal Tea Development Corporation and Tea Trading Corporation of India respectively though the latter is officially closed since 1995. Singell of Kurseong is now under private ownership while the Happy Valley of Darjeeling is running as small-scale industry. Another purpose of selection was to represent different sizes of tea gardens in terms of area under tea cultivation. For example, Pandam, Happy Valley, Gaurisankar and Springside are small tea gardens with less than 150 hectare of lands under tea cultivation. On the other hand, Badamtam, Vah-Tukvar and Singell are large size tea gardens with more than 250 ha. of land under tea. The third purpose was to represent various gardens in terms of health or economic condition or economic prosperity. For instance, Badamtam, Castleton represents economically sound or healthy tea gardens. Vah-Tukvar represents abandoned and closed garden under T.T.C.I., Pandam was also sick unit taken over by W.B.T.D.C. and Happy Valley represents normal tea garden under individual proprietorship. And last purpose was to see the availability of infrastructural facilities, existence of different ethnic groups (castes & tribes) in various tea gardens located at different areas.

1.9.3 Selection of Informants

For the present study, informants or respondents were selected purposively from different categories such as women workers or coolies, women clerical staffs and women sub-staff or supervisory staff. The total number of women respondents

from workers or coolie category were 300 taken fifty each from Badamtam & Singell (large tea gardens) and forty each from other five small size tea gardens. The total number of women as clerical staff and supervisory staff in the seven Tea Garden were thirty five and ten respectively so we have taken the interview of all of them. Information on migration process, recruitment system, origin of trade unions were obtained from village elders, mostly males. Information were also collected from tea garden officials, trade union leaders, and management.

1.9.4 Tools and Techniques of Data Collection

The information for this study were collected both from the primary and the secondary sources. The data on theoretical perspectives on women studies, conceptual issues, history of Darjeeling District, origin and evolution of tea industry, formation of trade unions etc. were gathered from published materials for which researcher visited different libraries like National library, Calcutta, Central Library, N.B.U. Documentation Cell, Centre for Himalayan Studies, District Library, Darjeeling and so on. While the empirical facts or first hand information were collected through intensive field work on seven tea gardens with the help of following sociological and anthropological tools and techniques of data collection, viz. census survey, interviews, case studies, genealogy, informal group discussions and observation.

First of all, to obtain quantitative data on the demographic and socio-economic life of the people a schedule was prepared containing various questions covering different aspects of plantation women and filled up this schedule with the help of interviews. As a method of data collection we have used both the structured and unstructured interview though we have mainly relied on the former as we thought this would be more reliable since the order and wording of questions are the same for all respondents, it was more likely that they would be responding to the same stimuli. Thus different answers to the same set of question would indicate real differences between the respondents. Interviews were conducted by the researcher at

the residence of respondents as well as in the field or place of work. Few Staff and sub-staff women were interviewed at the garden office.

Unstructured interviews also proved helpful for us as these are more like an informal conversation. Through this technique, we could obtain data on attitudes and opinions of women regarding their self-perceived status, appropriate age of marriage for girls and attitude towards early marriage, justification for sexual division of labour at home and place of work, gender discrimination, ideal size of family, son preference etc.

The genealogical technique made it possible to gather huge data at a time. This technique helped a lot to analyse the age structure, extension of kinship relations, changing pattern of household and family composition, marital distance etc. These data were further supplemented by participant and non-participant observations. The technique of observation (non-participant) helped a lot to understand the working of tea gardens, the relationship between women workers and their daffadars (group leader) or supervisors. Participation of women in different types of plantation work have also been observed from close quarters. Observation method also helped me to have an idea about their informal group in the place of work, their behaviour with the supervisors, social relations, cultural expressions etc.

As a means of gathering data, the technique of participant observation has also been used by researcher participating along with the women folk in various ceremonies and festivals celebrated at garden and community levels which helped a lot to get an idea about their actual role in religious and cultural activities.

Every tea garden conducts an annual census of households. The garden census is a regular feature of the tea garden. The researcher has extensively used the garden census to have an idea about recent trend of household composition and family structure, age of the working females, number of unemployed or dependents, major caste and ethnic group etc.

1.9.5 Data Processing and Analysis

The data collected through field study were processed after necessary checking and editing. In course of data processing the completeness and accuracy of data was looked carefully. Tabulation was done manually. Data were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Simple statistical methods consisting mostly of percentages were calculated. The analysis of qualitative data were made through systematic and analytical descriptions of the collected facts. In course of analysis methods of comparison has also been used. The data were finally organized into relevant chapters.

1.9.6 Presentation of Data and Contents

The material of this study has been presented into 7 (seven) chapters. Chapter 1 is Introduction which outlines the statement of the problems, theoretical and conceptual issues, review of literature, aims and objectives of study and the research design. Chapter 2 introduces the area under study including the historical background of the District of Darjeeling, evolution of tea industry in Darjeeling hills, problems and features of tea industry, labour force etc. A short profile of seven tea gardens under study were also discussed. Chapter 3 discusses the women and work organization in tea plantation of Darjeeling hills. We have also examined the position of women in the occupational hierarchy of tea plantation. We have tried to explore the reasons behind overwhelming majority of women as workers or *coolie* by analyzing the system of recruitment, nature and degree of women's work participation, types and nature of activities performed by women and soon. Chapter 4 deals with the ethnic, social, occupational and cultural background of Nepali women in the tea plantation of Darjeeling hills. We have analysed in detail the aspects like migration pattern, existence of various ethnic groups including castes and tribals, Nepali caste structure, religion and rituals, household composition and family types, Education levels, diverse marital rules and regulations, traditional occupations of various castes and tribals groups etc. Chapter 5 examines the status of Nepali Women by analyzing the multi-dimensional roles played by women in

their socio-cultural and economic life. We have examined the women's status in terms of sharing of domestic responsibilities or sexual division of labour, their role in various decision-making process, financial autonomy or access to property, leisure time activities, participation in socio-cultural organizations and so on. Chapter 6 deals with the women and Trade unions. In this chapter we have briefly discuss the origin and development of Trade union movement in Darjeeling tea industry with special reference to role of women in the trade union activities. We have analysed the nature and degree of women's participation in trade union activities, their nature of membership, reasons for joining trade unions and so on. We have also tried to explore the reasons for their low participation in trade union activities. Chapter 7 deals with major findings, conclusion and recommendations. This chapter is devoted to findings with overall discussions on status of Nepali women in tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas and in concluding section we have recommended some remedial measures to upgrade the socio-economic status of Nepali women.

1.9.7 Limitations

This study has certain major limitations. Since the empirical study on Nepali women in tea plantations of Darjeeling hills covering their status, role in cultural and community context is undertaken for the first time, benefits of earlier research studies were not available. Hence as an exploratory study it has its own limitations. Secondly, the study was undertaken on only seven tea gardens out of seventy six tea gardens of Darjeeling hills. Hence, the observations drawn from this study can not be generalized too far covering the whole tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas; even though the study provides an important ideas about the changing role and status of Nepali women in the tea plantations of Darjeeling Himalayas.

Chapter – 2

**THE PLACE AND THE PEOPLE
UNDER STUDY : A PROFILE**

Chapter – 2

THE PLACE AND THE PEOPLE UNDER STUDY: A PROFILE

Our objective in this chapter is to introduce the study area. As mentioned in the last chapter, this study covers the involvement or participation of women in tea industry in cultural and community context with specific reference to seven gardens taken from Darjeeling and Kurseong i.e., Badamtam, Pandam, Vah-Tukvar, Happy Valley, Singell, Springside, Castleton. In the first section, the history of Darjeeling District, its physical aspects, origin, development and problems of the tea industry in Darjeeling Himalaya is presented and in the second section we have tried to present a profile of seven tea gardens under study.

2.1 Historical Background of the District of Darjeeling

Darjeeling has very interesting history in that it has shifted from one power to another. Before the mid 19th century a part of Darjeeling and Kurseong belonged to the erstwhile kingdom of Sikkim whereas Kalimpong though initially also under the Sikkim, came under the control of Bhutan in 1796.

During this period, Nepal was a growing power under a Gorkha King, Prithvi Narayan Shah and Sikkim also could not escape from its onslaught. A large part of Sikkim, which included a part of present day Darjeeling was also overran and annexed to its Kingdom for as long as thirty years.

In the meantime war broke out in 1814 between the East India Company and the Nepalese. There was a total defeat of Nepalese by the British force led by General Ochterlony. A Treaty in 1816 (Segouli Treaty) was concluded between Nepalese and the East India Company and the tract which the Nepalese had wrested from the Raja of Sikkim was added to the East India Company. In 1817, another treaty was signed at Titaliya under which the company restored the whole of the country between Mechi and the Tista to the Raja of Sikkim and guaranteed his sovereignty. Sikkim was thus maintained as a buffer State between Nepal and Bhutan. (O'Malley: 1907)

Under the above treaty, the Raja was bound to refer to arbitration of the British Govt. any disputes between his subjects and those of neighboring States. Ten years after it was signed, disputes arose on the Sikkim and Nepal frontiers and were referred to the Governor-General. Two officers, Captain Lloyd and Mr. J.W. Grant were deputed in 1828 to deal with the disputes and Captain G.A. Lloyd spent six days in February 1829 in the old Gorkha Station of Darjeeling and was attracted by its advantages as a site of a Sanitorium (O'Malley: 1907). Mr. J.W. Grant and Captain Lloyd reported accordingly to the Governor-General Lord William Bentinck the numerous advantages of Darjeeling as a sanitarium and recommended its occupation for military purposes as the key of a pass into the Nepal territory. General Lloyd was directed to open negotiations with the Raja of Sikkim for the cession of Darjeeling in return for an equivalent amount of land or money.

Lloyd succeeded in obtaining the execution of a deed of grant by the Raja of Sikkim on the 1st February 1835. In 1835, Darjeeling, that is, "all the land south of the Great Rungeet river, east of the Balasan, Kahail and little Rangeet rivers and west of the Rungpo and Mahanadi rivers" was granted as a gift to the East India Company by the Raja of Sikkim. (Dash: 1947)

This was an unconditional cessation of what was then an uninhabited mountain. But in 1841, the Government granted the Raja an allowance of Rs.3,000 per annum as compensation and this was raised in 1846 to Rs.6000 per annum, Kalimpong area was annexed by the Company in 1865 following the signing of the Treaty of Sinchula in 1865 between the British and the Raja of Bhutan. The District of Darjeeling was formed around the hill areas of Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong in 1869 and some Terai areas (Siliguri, Khoribari, Phansidewa) were included in the district in 1880. (O'Malley: 1907)

One hundred and fifty years ago Darjeeling was not as populated as it is now and the population pattern was not exactly what it is today. When the British first acquired this hill territory in 1835, it was almost entirely under forest. L.S.S.O'Malley (1907) observed, "it was in fact estimated that the whole of tract comprising 138 square miles contained only 100 souls." In 1850 the population was

10,000. After the formation of the district, a rough census was taken in 1869 and it was found that the population aggregated over 22,000 person.

This indicates a tremendous growth of population within a span of thirty-four years, namely between 1835 and 1869.

Table – 2.1

Growth of Population in the Hill Areas of Darjeeling, since 1835.

Year	Population
1835	100 (approx)
1850	10,000 (approx)
1869	22,000 (approx)
1872	94,712 (approx)
1881	1,55,179 (approx)
1891	2,23,314 (approx)
1901	2,49,117 (approx)
1911	2,65,550 (approx)
1921	2,82,748 (approx)
1931	3,19,635 (approx)
1941	3,76,369 (approx)
1951	4,59,617 (approx)
1961	6,24,640 (approx)
1971	7,81,777 (approx)
1981	10,06,434 (approx)

Source : Compiled by the researcher from :

1. *Figures up to 1901 (O'Malley – Darjeeling District Gazetteer, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, (1907) pp.35-36*
2. *Figures from 1911-1941 (A.J. Dash – Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling Bengal Govt. Press, Alipore (1947) p.49*
3. *Census of India.*

The above table indicates that the growth of population was very high between 1869 and 1881, and between 1881 and 1901. This phenomenal growth of the population since 1872 is due to the rapid development of the tea industry. Therefore, the growth of tea gardens and the rise in the population of Darjeeling were closely interrelated. (Subba: 1989) In 1881 the construction of the Darjeeling

Himalayan Railway brought the station within a day's journey of Calcutta, and the population again doubled itself between the years 1881 and 1891. The above table shows a very high population growth up to 1891 and this can be correlated with the firm establishment of tea industry as there were 177 tea gardens in 1891 and the population of the Nepalese origin (born in Nepal) were 88,000 in the same year. After 1891, the growth slims down till 1941 has included the figures for a part of Phansidewa area which was earlier in Bihar but was later included in Darjeeling under the State Reorganization Act, 1955.

The most important reason for the rapid growth of population is the high degree of migration from the neighboring countries especially from Nepal (detail discussion is given in chapter-4). As a matter of fact, when the tract was first taken over, it was composed almost entirely of forest and was sparsely populated. The population consisted mainly of Lepchas, Bhutias and few Mangers, Limbus and Rais.

At present, the hill areas of the District of Darjeeling include the three hill sub-division viz., Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong. The other Sub-division namely Siliguri is situated in the plains. The three hill Sub-divisions consists of eight blocks : (1) Darjeeling – Jorebonglow, (2) Pulbazar – Sukhia Pokhri, (3) Rangli – Rangliot in the Darjeeling Sadar Sub-division, (4) Kurseong, (5) Mirik in Kurseong Sub-division, (6) Kalimpong-1, (7) Kalimpong-2 and (8) Gorubathan in Kalimpong Sub-division.

2.2 Physical Features of the District

2.2.1 Geophysical Setting

Darjeeling which has three hill and one Terai sub-divisions, is situated between 26°31 and 27°13 North latitude and between 87°59 and 88°53 east longitude. The shape of the district is triangular. It comprises mainly of mountains terrain with the Terai areas to the South. The north western boundary Commences from a height of about 12,000 ft. with Nepal and in the east the boundary touches Sikkim and is also separated from Bhutan by a small river known as Jaldhaka. Thus, the Darjeeling district touches two international boundaries of Nepal and Bhutan.

2.2.2 River System

The main rivers of Darjeeling are – (i) Teesta, (ii) Rungeet, (iii) Mahanadi and (iv) Mechi. Mahanadi has its source near Mahaldiram, east of Kurseong. Balason rises near Lepcha Jagat in the Ghoom – Shimana ridge west of Kurseong. The Mechi takes its rise under the Rangbang spur in the Singalila range on the Nepal frontier and flowing from North to South makes the western boundary of the district. The Tista rising from the Sikkim Himalayas forms the boundary between the State and the Darjeeling district. The Rangeet river enters Darjeeling district from the West and forms part of the northern boundary with Sikkim.

2.2.3 Flora

The richness and variety of the vegetation in this district are the result of a number of physiography, climate and biotic factors. The configuration of mountain and hills and the impact on them of strong moisture laden monsoon winds from the South greatly influence the character of the vegetation from place to place. The outspur experience heavy rainfall and are densely clad with moist forest of tropical genera. The valleys and gorges further inside have a lower rainfall and tend to bear a drier type of forest. The higher ridges of the interior have an exceptionally moist temperate climate in which moss-clad, lichen-draped trees thrives.

2.2.4 Climate

The climate of the hill areas of Darjeeling differ sharply from that in the plains. The variation is strongly correlated to the variation in altitude. Darjeeling receives about 120" of rainfall while Kalimpong gets 80" and Kurseong over 160". Similarly, temperature also varies a great deal. Darjeeling has a maximum temperature of 60°F and a minimum of 35°F, while Kurseong and Kalimpong are warmer. Almost every year in winter, the mercury in Darjeeling drops below the freezing point. In Summer Darjeeling is delightfully cool. Rainfalls mostly occur between May to October.

2.3 Origin and Development of Tea Industry in Darjeeling Himalaya :

According to the available records tea plantation was first started in Darjeeling by the British after they took over the control of the area from the Kingdom of Sikkim. As mentioned before, in 1835 British got this territory as a gift from Sikkim Raja. Dr. Campbell was transferred from Kathmandu to Darjeeling as the first Superintendent with wide civil, criminal and fiscal powers. In 1841 he brought China seeds from Kumaon and planted them at his residence at Darjeeling. Finding it encouraging, an experimental nursery was established at Lebong in Darjeeling in 1845.

Writing in 1852, Mr. Jackson says in his Report on Darjeeling – “I have seen several plantations in various stages of advancement and I have found the plants healthy and vigorous, showing that the soil is well adapted for the cultivation. In the garden of the Superintendent, Dr. Campbell in Darjeeling, in the more extensive plantations of Dr. Withecombe, the civil Surgeon and Major Cromelin, of the Engineers, in the lower valley of Lebong, the same satisfactory result have been obtained: the leaves, the blossom and the seeds are full and healthy. On the lower sites of Pankhabari and Kurseong, where plantation of tea has been established by Mr. Martin, and the plants are now in a highly thriving condition (O’Malley: 1907).

The year 1856 may be taken as the year in which the tea Industry was established as a commercial enterprise. In that year the *Alubari* tea garden was started by the Kurseong and Darjeeling Tea Company and another on the Lebong Spur by the Darjeeling Land Mortgage Bank; in 1859 the Dhotaria garden was started by Dr. Brougham; and between 1860 and 1864 four gardens at *Ging*, *Ambotia*, *Takdah* and *Phubsering* were established by the Darjeeling Tea Company and the gardens at *Takvar* and *Badamtam* by the Lebong Tea Company. Other gardens, which were started at this early period, were those of *Makaibari*, *Pandam* and *Steinthal* tea estates (O’Malley: 1907)

The concentrations of the gardens were around North-Western, Northern and South Central parts of the District. Most of the Tea gardens were situated on the western part of the Teesta River.

The development of Darjeeling tea plantation was rapid and the figures below testify to that :

Table – 2.2

Development of Darjeeling Tea Industry since 1861 – 1905.

Year	Number of Gardens	Area under cultivation (Acre)	Out-turn of tea (in lbs)
1861	22	N.A	N.A
1866	39	10000	433000
1870	56	11000	1700000
1874	113	18889	3928000
1885	175	38499	9090298
1895	186	48692	11714551
1905	148	50618	12447471

Source : *L.S.S.O'Malley – Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling (1907), P.74.*

In 1861, there were only 22 tea gardens in Darjeeling. By the end of 1866, i.e., only ten years after the establishment of the industry on a commercial basis, there were 39 gardens with 10,000 acres of land producing over 4,33,000 lbs of tea. In 1870, there were 56 gardens with 11,000 acres under cultivation, yielding nearly 17,00,000 lbs and 1874, the number of garden had increased to 113, the area under cultivation to 18,889 acres, the turnover to 39,28,000 lbs. In other words, between 1866 and 1874 the number of gardens under tea was almost trebled, the area under cultivation increased by 82% while the turnover of tea was multiplied nearly ten times. From the above table it will be seen that in 1905 the total number of tea gardens has been reduced to 148 from 186 in 1895 this was mainly because of the amalgamation of several estates.

The following table present the distribution of the tea gardens in Darjeeling hills.

Table – 2.3

Distribution of the Tea Gardens in Darjeeling Hills (1946)

Thana/Police Station	Number of tea Gardens
Darjeeling	19
Jorebungalow	16
Sukhiapokhri	9
Pulbazar	2
Rangli-Rangliot	9
Mirik	5
Kurseong	25
Kalimpong	0
Gorubathan	6

Source : *A.J. Dash – Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling (1947), P.114.*

It is seen from the preceding table that only in the Kalimpong Sub-division was land withheld from development under tea, Government's policy being to reserve that area for forest and ordinary cultivation. (Dash: 1947)

Towards the last quarter of the nineteenth century the tea industry could claim to be well established and it was not long before that the Darjeeling "Second flush" tea became famous for its unique quality. By the end of the century the planting of tea in Darjeeling was complete and records indicate that Darjeeling had 20,000 hectares under tea in the early part of the 20th century (TESDTI: 1979).

Thus, the entire operation of planting was completed in just around 50 years, giving a staggering rate of approximately 400 hectares per annum in hostile and difficult terrain.

It has been a little more than a century that the tea gardens were started in Darjeeling but their numbers have not increased much as is seen from the following table.

Table – 2.4

Distribution of the Tea Gardens in Darjeeling Hill (1981)

Police Station	Number of Tea Gardens
Darjeeling	20
Jorebungalow	17
Sukhiapokhri	11
Pulbazar	2
Rangli-Rangliot	8
Kurseong	31
Kalimpong	0
Gorubathan	6
Total	95

Source : *Census of India, 1981, series – 23 West Bengal – Darjeeling District.*

It is seen from the above table that out of 8 police station in Darjeeling hills, Kurseong has the largest number of tea gardens (31), followed by Darjeeling (20), Jorebungalow (17), Sukhiapokhri (11), Rangli-Rangliot (8) and Pulbazar (2). In the Gorubathan Kalimpong area the number of tea gardens is only 6 and those are mostly of small size.

2.3.1 Size and Landuse pattern of Tea Gardens in Darjeeling Himalaya

The majority of tea gardens in Darjeeling hills are comparatively smaller in size, the gross area of 47 out of 75 tea gardens range between 101-600 ha. as is evident from the following table.

Table – 2.5

Size classification of the Tea Gardens in Darjeeling Hills in 1985 (Gross Tea area shown in hectare).

Size (in hectare)	Number of Tea Gardens
Below 100	1
101-200	8
201-400	20
401-600	19
601-800	12
801-1000	7
1001-1500	5
1501-2000	2
2001-2500	1
Over 2501	Nil
Total	75

Source : Dasgupta – “Some aspects of the Economy of North Bengal” in souvenir – 47th Annual Conference of the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics, 1987, p.75.

Another important point in this respect is that the gross area of the tea gardens does not reveal the area under actual tea cultivation. The tea garden lands are used for various purposes like tea crop, the residence of the workers, office and other building factory, roads etc.

An idea about the land-use pattern in the garden may be obtained from the following table (Dasgupta: 1987).

Table – 2.6

Land-use in the Tea Gardens of Darjeeling Hill (Shown in percentage of total area) in 1985.

Total Area	18,148 hectares
Area under crop	54.47
Nursery	N.A.
Building factory, roads	13.95
Forest grazing etc	18.67
River Nalas	N.A.
Fallow Wasters	10.21
Total	100

Source : Dasgupta – “Some aspects of the Economy of North Bengal” in souvenir – 47th Annual Conference of the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics, 1987, p.76

The above table shows the land-use pattern in the tea gardens of Darjeeling hill. This type of land-use pattern is uniform for all the tea gardens in Darjeeling. The table reveals that on an average barely a half of the total land in the gardens is devoted for tea cultivation, leaving nearly another half to other uses.

The total available land is about 85,220 acres in Darjeeling hill area out of which, land used for cultivation is about 51,132 acres and for tea plantation about 34,088 acres. This means that of the total available land only 40% is used for tea cultivation (Dasgupta : 1987)

Most of the area in Darjeeling has been planted with the China variety which was for many years considered the only kind suited for the production of fine tea. Now-a-days, the Assam indigenous has been much in favour and it was certainly capable of producing the very finest tea.

About four varieties of tea produced mainly, leaf, broken, fanning and dust of which leaf variety fetch the highest price in the world market. Darjeeling Muscatel is the most expensive tea in the world which grows at an altitude range between 5,000 ft. to 7,000 ft. above the sea level.

The first flush produced between March to May is the most sought after and buyer from all over the world particularly from Japan and West Germany go for it in a big way. The Projeckt Wekstatt GmbH of Germany is the largest single buyer of Darjeeling tea from India. India started producing organic tea in 1986 from the tea estates of Darjeeling. The *Mullootar* tea estate of Kurseong is the first garden in Darjeeling and in the world to start organic tea in 1986. India is the largest supplier of organic tea in the world, with annual production estimated at approximately 2m. kgs. The various gardens from Darjeeling namely *Pandam*, *Mullotar*, *Monteviot*, *Seeyok*, *Ambootia*, *Dooteriah*, *Selimbong* etc. produce organic tea. Greater awareness about the environmental issues has created conditions for emphasizing the eco-friendliness of tea. So the organic tea is emerging as a special or the niche product. This certainly gets a premium price, but the case is different in the case of post rain produce for which main buyers are Russia, CIS Countries, U.K. and Iran.

The result is that the average price fetched by Darjeeling tea gardens work out to be only marginally more as compared to gardens of Assam.

2.4 Tea Plantations and Labour Force :

A vast majority of labour force in the tea gardens of the Darjeeling hills consists of Nepali immigrants and their descendents. These people had migrated to this region mainly from eastern, western and central hill areas of Nepal after the establishment of tea industry. About 90% labour force belong to Nepali castes and tribes of whom Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Manger, Gurung, Newar, Sunwar, Bhujel etc. are numerically dominant. The tribes like Bhutia, Lepcha, Sherpa constitute around 5% of the labour force. Beside these, there are 4 to 5% labour force from Terai Nepal and Indian plains. At present, almost all the Nepalis are fourth or fifth generation migrant and they have acquired the citizenship of India.

According to Dash, the total labour force in the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills was 8,000 in 1870 which rose to 44,279 in 1940. The steady stream of immigrants from the hills of eastern Nepal prevented any shortage of labour in the Darjeeling tea industry. (Dash : 1947)

The following table shows the total number of tea garden labourers in Darjeeling hills during 1965 – 1980.

Table – 2.7

Total Tea Labourers in Darjeeling Hills (1965 – 1980)

Category	Year					
	1965	1966	1967	1978	1979	1980
1. Resident (Permanent)	46837	49175	43275	47497	47426	48078
%	91.9	96.9	92.7	93.0	91.2	90.5
2. Outside (Permanent)	2463	164	1759	1754	1741	1832
%	4.8	0.3	3.8	3.4	3.4	3.4
3. Outside (Temporary)	1666	1400	1636	1823	2802	3206
%	3.3	2.8	3.5	3.6	5.4	6.0

Source : *Tea statistics, 1968-69, P.114, 1981-82, P.119*

Labour force consists of three categories namely, Resident permanent, Outside permanent and Outside temporary. Resident permanent is one who is permanently employed in the garden and he or she stays in the garden permanently. Outside permanent is one who is permanently employed in the garden but he comes from the nearby forests or villages. Outside temporary is one who works in the garden casually and stays outside the garden where he is employed. This type of outside temporary labour is recruited during the peak plucking season.

The above table shows that the total number of labourers has increased very slightly in a span of 15 years. It also shows the resident permanent labourers have always constituted more than 90 per cent of the tea garden labourers and that the temporary labourers constituted less than 10 per cent. The absolute number of the resident labourers (permanent) has increased over the years, ignoring the intermittent rise and fall, but the percentage has fallen down. Similarly, the percentage of the outside permanent labourers has fallen from 4.8 in 1965 to 3.4 in 1980. On the other hand, the percentage of the outside temporary labourers shows except in 1966, a steady rise and has almost doubled between 1965 to 1980 (3.3 to 6.0 respectively).

Such a trend shows the growing inability of the tea gardens to absorb the increasing number of labourers. The tea gardens, by and large, have cut down the roll of the permanent labourers (resident and outside) and thereby their own liabilities also. The hiring of temporary labourers has, on the other hand, become popular as it does not involve extra-wage liabilities and expenses. The temporary workers do not get the fringe benefits such as housing, sickness benefit, earned leave etc. Among the non-statutory items, such as food grains subsidy, dry tea, fuel and electricity only foodgrain subsidy or ration and dry tea are given to the temporary (resident) workers. Outside temporary workers do not get all the four non-statutory items. Among the common statutory items like provident fund, bonus, maternity benefits and gratuity temporary workers (both resident and outside) get only the bonus.

There is a rising surplus population in hill gardens. The actual tea gardens population of Darjeeling hills was 1,17,923 in 1941, which rose to 1,65,100 in 1981.

In 1960, the total number of working population was 52,000 with 80,000 dependent population. In 1990 the number of working population is same as before i.e., 52,000 but the number of dependents rose to 2,08,000.

The following table gives an idea about the area-wise distribution of Tea Garden population in Darjeeling hills during 1941 – 1981.

Table – 2.8
Area wise Distribution of Tea Garden Population in 1941 and 1981
(Darjeeling hills).

Name of sub-Division	1941	1981
Darjeeling Sadar	76,523	1,22,712
Kurseong	35,306	32,383
Kalimpong	6,094	10,005
Total	1,17,923	1,65,100

Source : 1. *A.J. Dash – Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling, 1947, P.115.*

2. *Census of India, 1981 Darjeeling District, West Bengal.*

An analysis of the above table reveals a very interesting feature. Within a period of four decades the population in the tea gardens of Darjeeling showed a remarkable increase of above 45,000. However, same cannot be said of the other two gardens. In Kalimpong, the increase in population was about 4,000 in four decade, whereas in Kurseong it has come down by almost 3,000.

It has been observed that the size and growth of population of a tea garden can be correlated with the size and number of the gardens. Darjeeling Sadar has highest number of tea gardens (58) and a growth of 45,000 of population within a period of four decades appears to be quite plausible, in Kalimpong, again there are only 6 tea gardens and accordingly, their population increased by approximately 4,000 whereas in Kurseong we find a decline in the size of population by 3,000 in four decades. The drastic reduction of garden population in Kurseong sub-division is mainly due to the closure of a number of tea gardens. Between 1971-81, out of the total number of 31 tea gardens in the region, 17 were either closed down or

abandoned. They were Moteviate (1977), Edenvale (1977), Mullatar (1982), Nurbong (1979), "Avengrove (1975), Majhua (1976), Sivakhola (1977), Chaityapani (1978), Simpring (1974), Simripani (1977), Downhill (1975), Anselgunj (1976), Springside (1978), Singell (1979), Lizzipur (1979) etc.

2.5 Problems and Prospects of Tea Industry in Darjeeling Himalayas :

In the post-Independence era these tea gardens have been increasingly plagued by various problems. The period after the Independence did not record any addition to the areas under tea nor in the coming up of new gardens. From the Techno-Economic Survey conducted by NCAER it appears that areas under tea plantation have been declining rather steadily since 1961 i.e., in 1973 it was 18,173 hectares as against 18,605 hectares of 1961 (TESDTI: 1979). At present (1991) 18,428 hectares are under tea, this slight increase in area is mainly because of some extension programme undertaken by some FERA companies. A number of factors are responsible for this stagnating or declining trend.

The productivity is also very low in the gardens of Darjeeling hill. The average produce per hectare in this area is only 650 kgs (with the exception of few gardens under FERA company like Badamtam and Rangli-Rangloit which have already received Tea Board award for Excellence for high productivity) whereas the average productivity per hectare of Dooars and Assam tea gardens are 1,750 kgs. and 1,803 kgs. respectively. There are several factors for this kind of situation.

1. The most important is that no modernization worth the name has been undertaken in this area. Moreover, the area of the garden is highly prone to frequent landslide. This affects the area of the garden as well as the quality of the soil due to soil erosion resulting in poor nitrogen content in the soil. The major landslide of 1968 destroyed about 1,750 hectares of land, the market value of which is calculated to be one crore rupees (DBITA: 1984).
2. The prevalence of old and aged plants is another factor which has contributed to the depressing state of affairs in tea industry. It is generally held that tea plants of the hill areas have by and large, crossed the age of full bearing. This can be seen from the following table.

Table – 2.9

Age classification of plant population for Tea Gardens of Darjeeling Hills.

Age of Plants	Below 10 yrs.	10-25	26-50	51-70	71-100	More than 100 yrs.
Area %	3.4	8.0	7.5	21.9	34.6	24.6

Source : *Techno-Economic Survey of Darjeeling Tea Industry by TM and MC Private Ltd. (1979).*

It can be seen from the above table that nearly 60% of the total area under tea for Darjeeling gardens contain plants belonging to the uneconomic age group of more than 70 years. Further, nearly a quarter of the area under tea contains plants, which are more than 100 years old. This is the result of decade of neglect so far as proper in filling, replacement, replanting and extension planting decisions are concerned. The problem therefore, calls for a long term solution (TESDTI: 1979).

3. The high vacancy ratio is another factor for the uneconomic conditions of tea industry. In the Techno-Economic Report of the TM and MC study it has been reported that vacancy ratio for the Darjeeling hill garden is as high as 15% to 20% and infilling as a means for higher production has not come up significantly.

Table – 2.10

Age-mix of the Tea bushes in Darjeeling Hills (figures in % of ages of total number)

Year	Percentage
Below 5 years	1.23
5 – 10 years	3.77
11- 20 years	2.82
21 – 30 years	2.60
31 – 40 years	4.97
41 – 50 years	7.16
Above 50 years	77.95
Total	100

Source : *Dasgupta Article – “Some Aspects of the Economy of North Bengal” in Souvenir 47th Annual Conference of the India Society of Agricultural Economics (1987).*

The above table shows that 77.95% of tea bushes are over 50 years old. From this it can be inferred that most of the tea bushes were planted during the British period.

4. The sickness of Darjeeling Gardens is also due to nature of ownership and management. In 1947, the ownership pattern showed some changes in favour of the Indian community. This new owners do not take any promotional and developmental programme which are basically of long term nature. Tea is a long term crop and requires a long term solution. This has been neglected by the neo-owners of the Darjeeling tea gardens. The quick profit making tendency of the new owners made many gardens either sick or uneconomic (Bedprakash: 1991).

Table – 2.11

Change of ownership after Independence

Ownership Category	1947		1970	
	Indian	Non-Indian	Indian	Non-Indian
1. Proprietary	31	8	32	-
2. Private Ltd.	1	-	12	-
3. Public Ltd. (Rupees)	21	10	41	-
4. Public Ltd.	-	30	-	16
Total	53	48	85	16

Source : Dasgupta, "Sickness of Darjeeling Tea Gardens" in *North Bengal Economics, Vol.I, No.8, 1985*.

The above table shows the increasing rate of Indian participation since 1947 and the gradual disappearance of the Sterling Companies from the Scene. This change of ownership towards private companies affected the gardens adversely as the owners see for immediate profit which is not reinvested in the gardens but in other industries (Dasgupta: 1986).

The performance of Darjeeling garden managers are also off the mark. Neither are they from technical background with adequate knowledge of tea science nor professional people having any exposures to modern management. The unstable

tenure of estate managers affected long term stability of gardens. The problem of unstable tenure of managers is generally acute in the case of proprietary or partnership gardens and the result being that hardly any long-term practices are followed for labour welfare programmes.

According to Dasgupta the productivity is not necessarily a function of the unionization of labour. Productivity of the tea garden is dependent on style of pruning, age-mix of plants, elevation of the gardens, vacancy ratio, terrain and use of chemical fertilizer (Dasgupta: 1986).

It is seen from the above discussion that a combination of factors had brought the instability of the tea gardens in the hill areas. Substandard management, unsound financial policy, inadequacy of finance, diversion of resources, tax burden, rising cost of production, the poor condition of plant and other factors are responsible for the present State of affairs.

The Tea Act of 1953 was amended in 1976 to deal with sickness and closure of tea gardens on the same line as the Industrial Development and Regulation Act 1951. Chapter III, which was inserted in the Act following the Amendment, empowers the union Government to investigate the loss-making tea undertaking which produce lesser than the district average. It also gives the Govt. the power to take over a garden if the results of the investigation demands so under the amended Act, the management of six sick tea gardens was taken over by the Govt. They are *Peshok, Loksan, Vah-Takvar, Pobong* and *Kumai* in West Bengal and *Chargola* in Cachar Assam. The Govt. appointed Tea Trading Corporation of India as its authorized dealer in *Vah-Takvar* and *Peshok* Tea Estates of Darjeeling. *Kumai* Tea Estate was returned to its owner in October 1977 according to the Supreme Court order. In *Pobong* Tea Estate, the Govt. appointed Yule and Co. Ltd. Calcutta as its authorized controller. These three Tea Estates were nationalized in 1985 under the provision of Tea Acquisition and Transfer of Sick Tea unit Act, 1985 (Chakibat: 1991) The Tea Act of 1953 obliges the central Govt. to manage the sick units for a period of 8 years and then with permission of the High Court to invite tenders for sale as a running unit. The Tea Act of 1976 reduced the 8 years period to 5 years.

Takeover has therefore given a disappointing result in tea industry. What is more, even the sick TTCI gardens are finding no takers.

Owing to the non-payment of land revenue and expiry of land-lease the Govt. of West Bengal acquired thirteen tea gardens under the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act. Of these thirteen, three tea gardens, namely *Rungmook-Cedars*, *Pandam* and *Rungneet* tea estates were placed under the ownership of West Bengal Tea Development Corporation Constituted in 1976. The State Govt. was to decide on the ownership or management of the rest of tea gardens which were closed or abandoned, at a later date. (Economic Times: 1981)

2.6 Profile of Tea Gardens under Study

The seven tea gardens taken here for intensive study are : Badamtam, Pandam, Happy Valley and Vah-Tukvar from the Sadar Sub-division of the District of Darjeeling, Singell, Springside and Castleton from the Kurseong Sub-division of the district. The tea gardens of Kalimpong area is deliberately left out as there are only six gardens located in Gorubathan block.

Four Tea Gardens of Sadar Sub-division of Darjeeling District

2.6.1 *Badamtam*

Badamtam Tea Garden was founded in 1862 by the Lebong Tea Company and owned by it till 1969, after which the ownership was passed over to Duncon Agency. In 1976 this garden was again sold to Gooderick Group Ltd., which is a part of the Lowrie Group of U.K. and at present this garden is running very smoothly by this Company. This garden has received Tea Board Awards for Excellence for the highest yield per hectare (i.e., high productivity award by producing 836 kgs and 1015 kgs yield per ha. in 1992 and 1993).

Badamtam is one of the most scenic and picturesque garden in Darjeeling and has a commanding view of the Kanchanganga and the Rangeet River. It is situated at a distance of fourteen Km. away from Sadar Police Station. The nearest railway station is Ghoom in Darjeeling. The garden altitude at Factory level is 3,296 ft. and highest of the garden is section 15 of Lamas Division which is at an altitude

of 5,300 ft. The lowest altitude is almost at Rangeet River level at section JB-2 with 780 ft. altitude. Its boundary is marked on the east by Rungdung Khola and Ging Tea Estate, on the West by Limbu basty and Jhepi Khola and on the South lies the Phubsering tea garden and Ging Bazaar on the north lies the Singla tea garden and Rangeet River. The garden has a total area of 880.10 hectares, of which 321.05 hectares are under tea plantation.

Badamtam does not have any recorded history to show who are the earliest inhabitants. The terminological explanations point to an early Lepcha habitat in the garden. The name Badamtam for instance is Lepcha word which means the bank of the padam bamboo, the giant bamboo which furnishes the Lepchas with their milk jugs, water-vessels etc. There was formally a forest of these bamboos in Badamtam.

As per the garden records, there are, now twenty castes and communities in the garden. They are: Bahun (Brahmin), Chettris, Rai, Limbu, Yakha, Newar, Gurung, Manger, Tamang, Bhujel, Sunwar, Majhi, Sherpa, Kami, Damai, Sarki, Sunar of the Nepali Society and few Lepchas, Bihari and Harijans from non-Nepali communities (detail discussion is given in chapter-3). In this tea garden the Rai or Khambus constitute the single largest population. The numerical dominance of Rai may be due to the inclusion of Yakha/Dewan under the Rai category. There is one village named Yakhadhura, Yakhas of this village do not make any distinction between them and Rai. So I have included all the Yakhas under the Rai category. Rais are followed by Tamang and Newar. Others are numerically less than 10%.

There is a total no. of 845 households in Badamtam. The total number of permanent workers in the garden is 1,289 of which more than half are women. It has a total population of 4,326 according to 1991 census of which 2,297 are males and 2,029 females. In this tea garden about 90% of the houses are of pucca types and the rest 10% are kuccha quarters made up of bamboo, mud and thatch.

About 80% of the population follow Hinduism. Buddhism is another religion in this tea garden which is followed by the tribal groups of Bhutia and Sherpa and Tamangs of Nepali Society. About 10% of Nepali population have become Christians. The conversion of Nepalis into Christianity is recent phenomenon which

was started since 1980. This proselytizing process is going on among middle and lower Caste Nepalis and there is not a single household of Brahmin-Chettri Caste who have become Christian. Most of the Christians from among the Kami, Damai, Sarki, Rai, Limbu are first generation converts. But this is only the official version. In actual relationship such religious distinctions are often ignored. In the Nepali Society, for instance, there are many communities like the Rais, Limbus and Tamangs who maintain a dual religion. Rai and Limbus are still animist. They worship Hindu god and goddesses as well as their traditional deities like rain, air, animals, trees. The Rais and Limbus celebrate the Hindu festivals but during marriage and funerals they do not invite Hindu priest or Brahmin. All the funeral rites are performed by their own traditional priest called *bijuwa*, *manpa* and *phedangma* respectively. The Tamangs also worship both the Hindu and Buddhist deities.

The language spoken by tea garden workers is Nepali. They have forgotten their respective dialects (Newari, Gurung, Manger, Rai and Limbukura). But only few old people (mostly second generation migrants) can speak their respective dialects or *Kura*. Now-a-days their respective languages/dialects are used extensively for kinship term like *nana-babu*, *nana-jyojo*, *tata-daju* are the terms used for elder sister and elder brother by Rai, Tamang and Newars respectively. So the respective dialects are used only for designating various kinds of kins.

This garden is divided into two divisions for administrative convenience, namely Badamtam and Lamas-Lepchekheti division. There are altogether fifteen gaons or villages distributed in these two divisions. Following are the villages distributed in two divisions –

1. Tharoline, Staffline, Yakhadhura, Katahare, Santipur, Shivagram, Bichkaman, Dharegaon, Himaligaon in proper Badamtam.
2. Dhaje, Dhilpung, Chimlidanra, Sanomaidan, in Lapchekheti and Newardhura, Kothidhura in Lamas division.

Some of the names of above gaons or villages reflect the original settlement pattern in the tea garden. To some extent, caste or ethnic factors played an important role in

shaping the settlement pattern. At present, we do not find caste or ethnic segregation in settlement pattern but it was there at the initial stages of tea plantation, example, names of some villages like Yakhadhura, Newardhura reflect this character. In Yakhadhura only the Yakha or Dewan (a Sub-Section of Rai or Kirati stock) used to settle and in Newardhura one could locate the congregations of Newars only. All the Bahuns or Brahmins are concentrated in Katahare gaon. In this gaon, there is not a single household of lower caste group living side by side with Brahmins.

The garden has a branch post office in Chowrastha Bazar. There is one rural library (Chiyabari Pustakalaya) established in 1970 and recognized by the govt. in 1975. The Co-operative (Badamtam China Bagan Bhuktan Sahakari Samiti Ltd.) was established in 1977 by local resident of the garden and registered under the West Bengal Co-operative Societies Act XXVIII of 1973. This Co-operative is run by Committee members, mostly shareholders. At present, there are five males and one females employed in this Co-operative. There is one hospital (Murison Hospital) located in proper Badamtam which was founded by Mr. A.M.C.D. Murison on 3rd Nov. 1959. This hospital has one Medical Officer, one Compounder, one nurse, six midwives, two women cook, one each Mali, Chowkidar, Sweeper and Medicine carrier. Beside this, there are two health centers, one each in Lamas and Lapchekheti division run by Compounder of the center.

Regarding educational institutions, there are five primary school (two are recognized by the Govt. and three are run by the garden). There is one High School (upgraded to class X in 1982 and yet to receive the Govt. recognition for class X). There are three private English medium School. A knitting center for women was established in 1982 by the garden. Any women whether she is workers or student can go to this center to learn knitting. This center is run by one women knitting teacher on a monthly salary from the garden Office. There is one Shiva Mandir in Shivagram village, one Krishna Mandir in Yakhadhura and one Buddhist gumpa or Monastery in Avatarsingdhura. There is one small local market (Chowrastha Bazar) in Badamtam. Every Friday weekly hat is held in this place which is a center of entertainment. Workers sell their surplus products in this hat. There is one club near the Chowrastha Bazar established in 1964. Everybody is allowed to go to this club

and can play Table Tennis and Billiards. This club is also used for the purpose of puja, meetings and cultural activities. There is one Sai Mandir constructed in 2001 at the cost of sixteen lacs. The ninety per cent of the total construction cost is funded by D.G.H.C. The garden has one Cooperative Bank established in 1998 and run by two staffs and managing committees.

This tea garden manufactures tea of various grades namely –

FTGOP I (Fine Top Golden Flowery Orange Pekoe One) FTGFOP I (CH), FTGFOP I (CL), FTGFOP I (S) – all these are leaf grade), TGBOP (TOP Golden Broken Orange Pekoe) FBOP (Fine Broken Orange Pekoe) GOF (Golden Orange Fanning) – all these are broken grade, P.D and Dust is the lowest grade. The total yield of the garden during 1990 was 16,19,006 kg of green leaf and 3,3,714 kg of black tea.

2.6.2 Vah-Tukvar:

This tea garden was founded in 1860 by the Lebong Tea Company along with Badamtam tea garden. Prior to 1860, Captain Masson had planted or sown some tea plants in this garden on experimental basis in his privately owned tea nursery. After 97 years of its existence, Lebong Tea company sold this garden to Sashi Tara Tea Company Private Ltd. in 1959. This tea company remained its sole owner till 1976. The shift in ownership pattern from foreign to Indian community is a post-Independence phenomenon, which is reflected in the ownership pattern of this tea estate as well. Banerjee family of Sashi Tara company ran this garden for nearly two decades. It is alleged that during the 1970s, owner of this garden made large profits but no case was taken to improve the health of the garden. The garden hence, became uneconomic or sick due to the neglect and mismanagement. They failed to reinvest for long-term programme like replanting, rejuvenation and extension planting etc. After 1970 production began to fall due to old age of plant population and lack of proper care. It was taken over by the Union Govt. on 12.10.1976 under the Tea Act of 1953 (as amended in 1976) as an unproductive and sick industry. After taking over this garden from Sashi Tara Tea Company, the Union Govt. appointed Tea Trading Corporation of India as its authorized dealer. This tea garden

was nationalized in 1985 under the provision of Tea (Acquisition and Transfer of Sick Tea Unit) Act 1985. Since 1976, this garden is being run by T.T.C.I., a Govt. of India Enterprise with its Office in Calcutta. But T.T.C.I. also could not run the garden for longer period of time and on account of heavy financial losses in the years 1992-93 and 1993-94 T.T.C.I. had been facing tremendous financial crisis so it decided to sell its five tea gardens (including Vah-Tukvar) located in Assam and West Bengal. Vah-Tukvar had suspended tea production due to labour problems resulting from delay in payment of salary and wages on account of severe financial crisis of the T.T.C.I. Ltd. And finally this situation prompted the corporation to officially abandoned this tea garden in April 1994 and ultimately it decided to officially close the garden in Oct. 1995. Since 1996 this garden is unofficially running and producing green leaves under the guidance and supervision of local committee comprising of few office staff, union leaders and few officials from D.G.H.C. Since the closure, people of this garden are managing the affairs of garden with the help of this local committee which is solely responsible for the supervision of tea production (green leaf) and selling out to other gardens as they have already destroyed the garden factory which is not in a working condition. At present, the green leaves of this garden goes to Makaibari and Arya Tea gardens for manufacture.

As per the Notification No: LC/S500/N2 dated 18th August 1998 issued by the Labour Commissioner Office the financial assistance have been providing to those regular workers who have worked at least for one year before the date of lockout and have not crossed 58 years of age as on 1.04.1998. Now the eligible workers are getting Rs.500/- per month as financial assistance from the government. *Takvar* is the Lepcha word. A corruption of *tak*, a book thread and *vor*, a fish – hook, a name suggested by the curve of the land. The terminological explanations shows the early Lepcha habitat here. (O'Malley: 1907)

This garden is situated at a distance of ten kilometers from Sadar Police Station. On the northern side it is bounded by Chota Rangeet river and Goak busty, on the eastern side by Tukvar Tea Estate, on the western side by Som Tea Estate and on the Southern side, it is bounded by Patlebash and Patabong. The total area of the

garden is 502 hectares of which 197.082 hectares are under tea cultivation. According to 1991 census it has a total population of 3,410 of whom 1,740 are males and 1,670 females. The total working strength of the garden is 740 of whom 395 are females and 345 are males.

The workers live in labourline or villages which are situated in different parts of the garden. The workers are settled in different gaons like *Malidhura*, *Khalingdhura*, *Dhanje*, *Lingeping*, *Dhendhura*, *Birkhedhura*, *Sirobari*, *Jyambire*, *Bajmantar*, *Lamadhura*, *Tindhure*, *Bhuttakheti* etc. Unlike Duars and Terai regions, the same ethnic or caste groups do not cluster together. In Duars and Terai areas the people of same tribe (e.g., Oraon, Munda, Kharia, Santhals) usually cluster together. About seventy percent of the houses are pucca types and the rest thirty percent are kuccha quarters. There is a predominance of simple or nuclear households.

About 85% of the population follow Hinduism. Buddhism is another religion mainly followed by *Tamangs* of Nepali community. *Tamangs* observe some of the rituals of Hinduism and visit both the Buddhist Monastries and Hindu Temple. In this garden, there are few people who are the *Sadhus* or *pranamis* (followers of pranami dharma/Krishna panthi). The followers of Christianity is insignificant in number. The language spoken by tea garden workers is Nepali which is considered as the mother tongue and is also the lingua franca of the region. All the people irrespective of caste/community background interact in Nepali language.

Like in Badamtam, here also *Rais* are numerically dominant followed by *Tamangs* and *Limbus*. Beside this, there is good number of *Chettris* in this garden (detail discussion of Caste/ethnic background is given in chapter-4) Another interesting feature of this tea garden is that unlike in Badamtam, there is not a single workers from *Bahun* Caste.

The infrastructural facilities in this garden is very poor. Unlike in Badamtam, here one does not find rural library, club for entertainment and post office. Here, nearest post office is situated 6 km away at North Point. There is no hospital. The only dispensary that is in existence provides medical facilities to the tea garden workers. This dispensary has the total strength of eight working members of which

two are midwives, two compounders, two sweepers and one mali and one chowkidars.

Regarding educational institutions there are only two primary Schools. Those who complete their primary education go to Darjeeling town for further study. These schools have two and five teaching staff respectively. The total enrolment of students in these schools are 170 and 173 respectively. The total yield of the garden during 1991 was 5,07,156 kgs. of green tea and 1,07,808 kgs of black or finished tea. This garden produces the same variety of tea as in Badamtam.

2.6.3 Pandam

Padam Tea garden is situated on the eastern side of the town of Darjeeling at an elevation of 5,700 feet above sea level. It is situated about 9 km. off the Darjeeling town.

Its boundary is marked on the east by Rangarung tea garden and Rungdong Khola, on the west by Lebong and Harsingh busty, on the north lies the Takdah and Banneck Burn tea gardens and the South lies the Aloobari and Tungsong busty. From this tea garden, one can observe the Tiger Hill and west Senchal at an altitude of 8,515 feet and 8,163 respectively.

The name Pandam is supposed to be a corrupt form of the Lepcha word '*Pandim*' meaning the King's minister. The high peak next to Kinchinjunga (Kanchanjunga) is so called because it is considered to be the attendant of the god of the mountain. It has also been suggested that the name may mean the conical hill with a point like a needle (O'Malley: 1907). This garden was established in 1864 by the Darjeeling Tea Company.

The West Bengal Tea Development Corporation has taken over this garden since 1980 as a sick unit. At present W.B.T.D.C. owns five tea gardens in the hills and the head office of General Manager, W.B.T.D.C. is also located in the garden. Mr. Lama, the eldest Son of the veteran communist leader of the hills, Mr. Dawa Lama (Tamang) is the General Manager.

During the later part of 80s and early 90s this garden faced the problems of decreasing productivity and after this realizing the demands of organic tea in the international market this garden also opted for the production of organic tea since 1994. This tea garden also buys the green leaves from other small growers (mostly proprietors) and manufacture in its own factory for example, green leaves comes to this gardens from *Alubari, Rangarung, Rangneet* etc.

Owing to the non-payment of land revenue and expiry of land-lease the Govt. of West Bengal acquired thirteen tea gardens under the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act. Padam is one of them. This garden was placed under the ownership and control of West Bengal Tea Development Corporation which is a State Govt. undertaking constituted in 1976.

The total population of this garden is 1,500 (as per the 1991 census). Out of which 206 are workers among them males are 72 and females are 134.

The garden has total area of 381.21 hectares of land of which 131.32 ha. is under tea cultivation. The garden annually produce 2,64,138 kgs. of green leaves and 63,968 kgs. of finished or black tea.

There 133 households as per the 1991 census. The people are living in different villages like *Chowkidhanra, Dharikheti, Kulungdanra, Muldanra, Dhobidanra, Saurenidanra, Tindhure, Basbote* etc. The name of some villages reflects the settlement of single community/caste in one village. For example, Kulungdanra, Kulung is a name of *thar* or clan of Rai. There are only 14 caste and communities in the villages : *Bahun, Thakuri, Chhetri, Newar, Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Manger, Gurung, Sunwar, Thami, Kami, Damai, Kusuley* (Newari Lower Caste). Unlike in Badamtam and Vah-Tukvar, Gurungs, Mangers and Newars are Numerically dominant in this garden. Another interesting feature of caste or community composition in this garden is that *Thami* (minority community of Nepali Society) and *Kusuley* (lower caste Newars) are also in significant number. These two communities are totally absent in previous gardens. Furthermore, Lepcha, Bhutia and Sherpa are totally absent in this garden.

2.6.4. Happy Valley

Happy Valley tea garden is about 1 kilometre off the Sadar town. It is also located in the north-west facing slope from where one can have a picturesque view of Darjeeling town and Kanchunga Mountain. The Lloyd Botanic Garden and Birch Hill Park are just half-an-hour walk from here. The altitude of the garden at factory level is 6,010 feet above the sea level. Happy valley is marked on the eastern side by Darjeeling town, Hooker road and Lebong road, on the western side it there is lies Arya tea estate, on the north it shares common boundary with Singtam garden and in the South lies the villages like Bhakthey busty (lower Rajbari), Jail gaon etc.

This garden was established in 1854. Since 1903 garden is owned and managed Banerjee family, now it has registered as Small-Scale industries with a total gross area of 163 hectres of land of which 114 hec. is under tea cultivation. It is a small proprietary garden with only 230 total working force.

The total number of population in this garden is 1,291, of which 629 are males and 662 are females (as per 1991 census). Of the total population 113 belong to scheduled caste and only 14 caste and communities in this garden. They are *Gurung, Tamang, Rai, Limbu, Manger, Sunwar, Jogi, Newar, Thakuri, Chettri, Kami, Darjee, Sarki* and *Lepcha*. The *Gurung, Tamang* and *Rais* are the three major communities in this garden. The percentage of other communities is insignificant, they are less than 10% in the total population.

Like other hill gardens, Happy Valley also produce different grades of tea. The following table shows the total tea made by the garden during 1994-1999.

Table – 2.12

Tea Production In Happy Valley garden during 1994-1999

Year	Total yield of made tea
1994	55380 kgs.
1995	39372 kgs.
1996	46975 kgs.
1997	56502 kgs.
1998	63084 kgs.
1999	40900 kgs.

Source : *Garden Office.*

The above table shows the total yield of black tea (made tea) during 1994-1999. The table indicates the fluctuating trend in tea production. With the exception of 1998 (63,084 kgs. in 1998) the other years shows the average production of tea around 45,000 to 55,000 kgs.

Three tea gardens of Kurseong sub-division of Darjeeling District.**2.6.5 Castleton**

Castleton is the famous tea garden which enjoys the reputation of producing the worlds' best tea with repeated records for the highest auction prices for any tea. Darjeeling Muscatel (FTGFOPI or Fine Top Golden Flowery Orange Pekoe one) produced by Castleton fetched 13,000/- per kg. (110 kg total). In 1992 total 110 kgs. was bought by Harrison Malayalam Ltd. for export to Mitsui Norin and Co., Japan. Castleton also holds the distinction of the first tea factory in the world to win ISO-9002 Certification.

The garden was owned and managed by Gaurisankar Coventry Tea and Engineering Company until July 1984. Tiru Tea Ltd. (a Subsidiary of Gooderick Group Ltd.) took over this garden in July 1984. Again in 1997 Castleton became a wholly owned subsidiary of Goodrick Group Ltd.

Castleton is situated at a distance of only 2 km. away from Kurseong town. Its altitude range is 4,850 feet above sea-level. Its boundary is marked on the east by Kurseong town, on the west by Makaibari tea estate, on the north lies the springside tea garden and Kurseong Railway Station, and the South lies the Mahanadi and Paglajhora. Hill Cart Road (National Highway No.31A) passes through this garden. From this garden one can have a wonderful view of the plains including Balasan river.

This garden has a total population of 765 of which only 266 are working population of the 266 working population 235 belong to workers or coolie category of whom 148 are females and only 87 are males. Workers are spread in different villages namely *Danra gaon*, *School danra*, *Chowkidanra*, *Aathdhurey*, *Panchdhurey*, *Setoline* and *Tallogaon*. Unlike other tea gardens, here the total number of caste/communities are few. There are only nine caste or communities in the garden. They are: *Chhetri*, *Thakuri*, *Rai*, *Tamang*, *Mangers*, *Gurungs*, *Newars*, *Bhujel* and *Kami*. *Tamangs* are the numerically dominant community in this garden followed by *Bhujel* and *Kami* (Biswakarma). It is very interesting to note here that the *Bhujels* are the second numerically dominant community in the garden whereas their percentage in the gardens of Darjeeling Sadar is almost nil. Another interesting feature is that the Caste/Communities like *Bahun* (Brahmin), *Limbu*, *Sunwar*, *Thami*, *Sunar*, *Damai*, *Sarki*, *Sherpa*, *Lepcha* are totally absent in these villages. Out of the total work force of 235, about 104 belong to Tamang community who profess dual religion i.e., both Hinduism and Buddhism. They are the followers of Nygmapa sect of Buddhism. Other religions followed by the population is Hinduism.

The total area of this garden is 254.18 hectares (on the basis of the garden census, 1990) out of which 172.96 hectares of land is under tea cultivation. The total production of green tea is 1,11,334 kgs. and finished tea made is 25,506 kgs. in 1995. The garden produced various grades of tea and Darjeeling Muscatel grade is the world famous most expensive tea of this garden. Castleton Tea factory is actually located in Springside tea garden. It is a Bought Leaf Factory well knowns Castleton Tea Factory which manufacture tea which comes from different gardens

like Nurbong, Rington, Castleton, Springside, Sivitar, Tea Board etc. The following table shows the production of tea at Castleton Tea Factory.

Table – 2.13

The production/manufacture of Tea at Castleton Tea Factory (Bought Leaf Factory) in 1998.

Name of Tea Gardens (Mostly Small Growers)	Total green tea	Total tea made (finished tea)
1. Springside	148690 kgs.	32941 kgs.
2. Castleton	111334 kgs.	25506 kgs.
3. Sivitar	342522 kgs.	71637 kgs.
4. Nurbong	462344 kgs.	93176 kgs.
5. Rington	3103 kgs.	683 kgs.
6. Tea Board	18407 kgs.	4073 kgs.

Source : *Office-Castleton Tea Factory.*

2.6.6 Springside :

Springside Tea garden is located at a distance of 1 kilometre away from Kurseong town. Its altitude at tea factory level is 4,800 feet above sea level. This is a picturesque garden from where one can see the whole Kurseong town. The Pankhabari Road leading westward from the railway station of Kurseong passes through the springside tea garden. During the clear sunny day one can view the Siliguri plains including Balasan and Mahanadi rivers. This garden is surrounded on the four sides by four tea gardens. It is surrounded on the north by the Singell tea garden, on the South by Castleton or Gaurisankar tea garden, on the east lies the Kurseong town and railway station, All India Radio Station, Kurseong and on the west it shares common border with Makaibari tea Estate.

Till March, 1985 this garden was under the sole proprietor of Mr. Jamulal Tosniwal. Since 1985 this tea garden was owned by Tiru Tea Ltd., a Subsidiary of

Gooderick Group Ltd. In 1997 Tiru Tea Ltd. became a wholly owned subsidiary of Gooderick Group Ltd.

The garden has a total area of 146.02 hectares of land of which 142.02 is under tea crop. As per the 1991 census, the garden has a total population of 1,030, of which 311 are males and 350 are females and about 369 are minors (below 10 years of age). Out of 1,030 total population, only 280 belong to working force. Out of 280, 70 males and 170 females belong to workers are coolie category and the rest 50 belong to staff and sub-staff category.

There are 13 caste and communities in the garden. They are: *Tamang, Gurung, Newar, Manger, Sunwar, Thami, Bhujel, Kami, Kusuley, Damai, Sunar, Rai* and *Chettri*. *Tamangs* are the single largest community in the garden. Out of total workers of 240, 161 workers belong to *Tamang* community. The next numerically dominant community is the *Newar*. The number of other caste/communities are very insignificant. Their percentage in the total population is less than 5 percentage. There is total absence of castes like *Limbu, Bahun, Thakuri, Jogi, Sarki* etc. The different caste/communities are spread in the following villages or gaons. They are: *Linedhura, Naya busty, Ujaray gaon* and *Dhar gaon*. Since this garden is adjacent to Kurseong town, many people are working in town area in service sector.

As we have already pointed out in the previous section that the tea factory known as Castleton Tea Factory is located in this garden. As a Bought Leaf Factory, this tea factory manufacture the green tea which comes from various small size garden. Springside produced a total yield of 1,48,690 kgs. of green leaf and 32,941 kgs. of finished tea in 1997.

2.6.7 Singell :

Singel tea estate was established in 1862 by Mr. James White (who had also planted Champta tea estate near Khaprail in Terai) which is still third largest gardens in the district. Till 21st April 1981, it was owned and managed by the Singell Tea and Agricultural Industries Ltd., Mr. Ratan Karnani as its sole proprietor, The Govt. of West Bengal took over this garden in 1981 under the West Bengal Estate

Acquisition Act, 1976 on grounds of the non-payment of land revenue and expiry of land-lease. From 1981 – 1993 this garden was under the ownership and control of West Bengal Tea Development Corporation with its head office in the same garden, now the office has shifted to Pandam. From 1994 – 1996, it was under the control and management of Mr. S.P. Agarwal and in January 1997 this garden was returned to its previous Proprietor, Mr. Ratan Karnani. Now the garden is running very smoothly with its three Nepali assistant managers and one full manager.

Singell is situated at a distance of 2 km. away from the Kurseong Police Station. Its altitude is 4,800 feet above the Sea level. Its northern boundary touches the Dilaram and Margett's Hope tea gardens, on the South lies the Kurseong town and Springside tea garden, on the east it touches the National High Way 31 A and Dow Hill and St. Marry of Kurseong and on the West it shares common boundary with Ambotia garden.

The gross area of the garden is 554.50 hectares of which 282.53 hec. are under tea cultivation. As per the 1991 census, garden has 3879 total populations of which 1962 are males and 1917 are females. The total number of working population is 675 out of which 553 belong to workers or coolie category and the rest 122 belong to staff and sub-staff.

There are 17 castes and communities in the garden: *Bahun, Chettri, Tamang, Rai, Limbu, Manger, Gurung, Newar, Sunwar, Bhujel, Tharu, Kami, Damai, Sarki, Jogi, Sherpa* and *Yakhas*. Of these the *Tamangs* are numerically dominant, followed by *Rai, Newars* and *Mangers*. It is very interesting to note here that the few families (about six) of *Tharu* community are also living in this garden. Every garden maintain the records of Caste/Community background of their workforce. I came across only two labourers from *Tharu* Community but when I had some discussion on some of the rare caste/community title (uncommon subtitles, difficult to identify their actual caste identification) bearing by few workers I came to know that all the titles like *Khawas, Batar, Rana, Majhi* are actually the subtitle (Sub-division) of *Tharu*. We shall have detail discussion of this community who are the aborigines of Nepal Terai from Mechi to Mahakali in the west. There is not a single worker from

other minor caste and communities like *Lepcha, Bhutia, Kusuley, Sunar, Thakuris* etc.

The total yield of the garden is given below :

Table – 2.14

Total yield of Singell tea garden during 1994-1997 (made tea/black tea)

Year	Tea production in Kgs.
1994	55220
1995	65228
1996	59183
1997	49031

Source : *Tea Garden Office.*

The above table shows the total yield of made tea of the garden during 1994 was 55,220 kgs. which rose to 65,228 kgs. in 1995. Again the production of tea is decreasing since 1995. In 1997, the garden produced only 49,031 kgs. of finished tea.

2.6.8 Comparative Profile of the Tea Gardens

In the following paragraphs an attempt has been made to present the comparative profile of various tea gardens under study.

Table – 2.15

Ownership pattern of Seven Tea Gardens under Study.

Name of the Gardens	Nature of Ownership
1. Badamtam	Goodricke Group Ltd.
2. Pandam	West Bengal Tea Development Corporation (Govt. Ltd. Companies)
3. Vah – Tukvar	Tea Trading Corporation of India (Govt. Ltd. Company)
4. Happy Valley	Proprietary (Small Scale Industry)
5. Springside	Gooderick Group Ltd.
6. Castleton	Gooderick Group Ltd.
7. Singell	Proprietary

Source : *Tea Garden Office.*

The above table shows the ownership pattern of Seven Tea Gardens under study. Out of seven tea gardens, three belong to Gooderick Group Ltd., two belong to proprietary gardens and two more belong to Govt. Ltd. Companies. The table (2.16) gives the picture of total area of the various tea gardens and actual area under tea cultivation. Area wise, *Badamtam* is the largest tea garden with the total area of 880.10 hac. of land and Springside is the smallest garden with only 146.02 hac. of land. In terms of actual area under tea cultivation, again Badamtam ranks first with 321.05 hac. of land under tea cultivation while Happy Valley Garden has only 114.00 hac. under tea cultivation.

Table – 2.16

Total area of Seven Tea Gardens and Area under Tea cultivation

Name of the Tea Gardens	Total Area of Tea Gardens (hectare)	Area under Tea cultivation (hectare)
Badamtam	880.10	321.05
Vah-Tukvar	502.00	197.82
Pandam	381.21	131.32
Happy Valley	163.00	114.00
Castleton	254.18	172.96
Springside	146.02	142.02
Singell	554.50	282.53

Source : *Tea Garden Offices.*

Table 2.17 below gives an idea about the annual tea production (finished/black tea) of various tea gardens under study.

Table – 2.17

Annual Tea production in various tea Gardens under study (1995-1996)

Name of the Tea Gardens	Green leaf (kgs.)	Black or made Tea (Kgs.)
Badamtam	1619006	343714
Vah-Tukvar	507156	107808
Pandam	264138	63968
Happy Valley	N.A.	56502
Castleton	111334	25506
Springside	148690	32941
Singell	N.A.	55220

Source : *Tea Garden Offices.*

Table – 2.18

Total number of Workers or Coolie in various Tea Gardens under Study (1995-1996)

Name of the Tea Gardens	Male	Female	Children	Total
Badamtam	459	646	22	1127
Pandam	75	149	-	224
Vah-Tukvar	265	390	14	669
Happy Valley	64	159	-	223
Castleton	87	148	-	235
Springside	70	170	-	240
Singell	165	388	-	555
Total	1185 (36.22%)	2050 (62.67%)	36 (1.10%)	3271 (100%)

Source : *Tea Garden Offices.*

The above table reveals the fact that out of 3,271 total number of work force or *coolie* of seven tea gardens under study, male constitute 1,185 (36.22%), Women and children constitute 2,050 (62.67%) and 36 (1.10%) respectively. In all the seven tea gardens women have outnumbered men as workers or *coolie*. But the percentage of women in staff and sub-staff categories are very low, in some tea gardens their percentage is almost nil which shows the absence of promotional opportunities (upward job mobility) for women. The table 2.19 below gives an idea about the total working strength of various tea gardens under study.

Table – 2.19

Total working strength of Seven Tea Gardens (Excluding of Medical and Teaching Staff and sub-staff) in 1995-96.

Name of the Tea Gardens	Total working strength						Total
	Staff (Clerical)		Sub-Staff (field & Factory)		Workers or Collie		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Badamtam	18	1	52	7	469	658	1205
Pandam	5	1	12	3	75	149	245
Vah-Tukvar	10	-	24	-	269	400	703
Happy Valley	6	1	12	-	64	159	242
Castleton	8	-	16	1	87	148	260
Springside	4	1	18	2	70	170	265
Singell	12	1	46	3	165	388	615

Source: Tea Garden Offices.

FINDINGS

Darjeeling has very interesting history in that it has shifted from one power to another. Initially, it was part of Sikkim, but in 1780, it came under Nepal, and again, in 1816, it was restored to Sikkim by the British for implementing the Seagauli Treaty. Again, on 1st February 1935 the king of Sikkim presented Darjeeling to the British Governor General. However, on the other side, Kalimpong was part of Sikkim, but it was captured by Bhutan in 1706. In 1865, Kalimpong was added to the district of Darjeeling following the signing of the Treaty of Sinchula between the British and the Raja of Bhutan. On the other hand, some Terai areas (Siliguri, Khoribari, Phansidewa) were included in the district in 1880.

Tea plantation was first started in Darjeeling by the British after they took over the control of the area from the kingdom of Sikkim. Dr. Campbell, the first British Superintendent was responsible for establishing first experimental tea nursery at Lebung in Darjeeling in 1845. The year 1856 may be taken as the year in which the tea industry was established as a commercial enterprise. In 1861, there were only 22 tea gardens in Darjeeling hills which rose to 148 in 1905. At present, there are only 78 tea gardens in Darjeeling hills, this was mainly because of the amalgamation of several estates after post-Independence period on the one hand and the permanent closure of many tea gardens on the other.

A vast majority of labour force in the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills consists of Nepali immigrants and their descendents. About 90 per cent labour force belong to Nepali Castes and tribes of whom *Tamang, Rai, Limbu, Newar, Gurung, Manger, Sunwar, Bhujel, Thamis* are numerically dominant. The population of high castes *Bahun* (Brahmin) and *Chhetris* (Kshatriyas) and low caste artisan groups are very few. About 10 per cent labour force composed of local tribes like Lepcha, Bhutia, Sherpa, Yolmos and few groups from Indian plains and Terai Nepal (like Tharus). The actual tea garden population of Darjeeling hills was 1,17,923 in 1941, which rose to 1,65,100 in 1981. In 1960, the total number of working population was 52,000 with 80,000 dependent population. In 1990, the total number of working population is same as before i.e., 52,000 but the total number of dependents has

gone up to 2,08,000. Such a trend shows the growing inability of the tea gardens to absorb the increasing number of labourers.

In the post-Independence era these tea gardens have been increasingly plagued by various problems. The period after the Independence did not record any addition to the areas under tea nor in the coming up of new gardens. The productivity is also very low in the gardens of Darjeeling hills. The average produce per hectare is 650 kgs. only while tea gardens in Dooars (Jalpaiguri) and Assam regions of the country have 1,750 kg. and 1,803 kgs. average production per hectare. There are several factors responsible for this stagnating or declining trend in Darjeeling tea industry. A combination of factors like prevalence of old and aged plants, soil erosion causing landslide, high vacancy ratio, frequent change of ownership and management, unsound financial policy, inadequacy of finance, diversion of resources, tax burden, rising cost of production, and other factors are responsible for the present state of affairs.

In the last section of the present chapter we have presented a short profile of seven tea gardens under study. Considering the high number of tea gardens in Darjeeling as compared to Kurseong area, we have taken four tea gardens from Sadar Sub-division of Darjeeling District. They are – Badamtam, Pandam, Vah-Tukvar, Happy Valley. The three gardens from Kurseong Sub-division are Singell, Springside and Gaurishanker (Castleton). These seven tea gardens have been purposively sampled or taken for case studies. Badamtam of Darjeeling and Castleton and Springside of Kurseong represent Gooderick Group Ltd. While Pandam and Vah-Tukvar tea garden represent West Bengal Tea Development Corporation and Tea Trading Corporation of India respectively. Happy Valley of Darjeeling and Singell tea garden of Kurseong represent proprietary gardens. In all the seven tea gardens entire labour force composed of Nepali castes and tribes of whom Tamangs, Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Manger, Newar, Sunuwar, Bhujel and Thamis are numerically dominant. Women have outnumbered men as workers or *coolie* in all the seven tea gardens.

Chapter – 3
WOMEN, WORK AND WORK
ORGANIZATION

Chapter – 3

WOMEN, WORK, AND WORK ORGANIZATION

3.1 Work organization in Tea Plantation

In this chapter we shall attempt to describe and analyse the organization of work in the tea gardens. We shall also discuss about the position and place of women in it. In order to understand the role of women in the plantation economy it is necessary to study the work organization which gives an idea of the salient features of the social structure and system underlying a society. We have discussed in details the position of women in plantation work hierarchy and tried to explore the reasons behind the overwhelming majority of women as workers or *coolies*.

First of all, it is very important to know about the meaning of organization. According to Dimock and Koenig, organization is a systematic bringing together of inter dependent parts to form a unified whole through which authority, coordination, and control may be exercised to achieve a given purpose. Because the interdependent parts are made up also of people who must be directed and motivated and whose work must be coordinated in order to achieve the objectives of the enterprise, organization is both structure and human beings. (Dimock and Koenig: 1961). They have concluded that organization affects the people who work for it in five different ways :

1. An organization divides work among its members by giving each employee a particular task.
2. The organization established standard practices by working out detailed procedures.
3. The organization transmits authoritative decisions by dispatching such decisions downward, upward, it provides employees with the signals they need in the course of their work.
4. The organization provides a communications system by providing a network of formal and informal communications.

5. The organization trains its members by providing for the internalization of influence relative to knowledge, skills and loyalties. (Dimock and Koenig: 1961)

There are five elements of organization, namely objectives, specialization, hierarchy, coordination and authority. All these elements are visible in the formal organization of tea gardens. For instance, tea garden or tea industry as an organization consists of group of persons who cooperate in the accomplishment of objective. The main objective for them is to run the garden smoothly. There is a distribution of work among the management, staff, sub-staff and workers who may specialize in particular work. The assignment of specialized tasks to each member of an enterprise is an important element. However, specialization alone is not sufficient for an organization unless there is co-ordination of various segments of work. In the tea garden all employees specializing in various tasks are interrelated. In the tea gardens, four-tier system of work hierarchy exist, starting from workers, sub-staff and staff to management at the top. We see the vertical lines of responsibility within an organization. Workers and supervisors or sub-staff clearly understand from whom they should take orders and to whom they report. Finally, an organization fixed authority. Here, authority refers to someone who gives direction to others, solve differences among individuals working on related tasks. In the tea gardens, head manager (*barra sahib*) has the authority to give direction to each individuals working in different sections. There are two distinct approaches used in the organizational studies. The first approach followed by students of administration deals primarily with the structure of organization, allocation of functions and authority, specialization, coordination, overhead direction and control. They focus their attention on the formal structure of organization. The second approach is that of sociologists and social psychologist, they focus their attention on the individual and human behaviour in organization and also inquire into role of informal organization. Both these approaches are essential for the understanding of an organization and the motivation of individual within an organization because an organization does not refer to structure (routine, chart, manual, instruction etc.) alone, but also human beings which constitutes an important component of an

organization. Its success and failure is determined by the proper handling of these two elements.

In the following section, we have tried to analyse the organization of work in the tea gardens and try to find out in the process the position of women in the work hierarchy. The different tiers in the hierarchy of tea garden begin with the managers or skilled supervisors at the top and end with the daily rated worker or unskilled workers at the bottom.

The work organization of the tea garden can be understood properly from the following table.

Table – 3.1

The work organization in the Tea Gardens of Darjeeling Hills.

<u>Management</u>		
<u>Garden work</u>	<u>Factory</u>	<u>Office</u>
1. Field Assistant/Senior garden supervisor	1. Factory-in-Charge	1. Head Clerk
2. Head Munshi/Bara Munshi	2. Senior Factory Clerk	2. Second Clerk
3. Second Munshi/Chota Munshi	3. Junior Factory Clerk	3. P.F. Clerk(Sr.)
4. Head Chaprasi	4. Tea House Sardar	4. P.F. Clerk (Jr.)
5. Second Chaprasi	5. Supervisors/Sub-staff	5. Store Clerk (Sr.)
6. Head Bahidar	6. Factory workers	6. Store Clerk (Jr.)
7. Senior Bahidar		7. Excise, Transport Clerk
8. Senior Daffadar/foreman		8. Wage Bill Clerk
9. Junior Daffadar		9. Typist/Clerks
10. Chowkidars		
11. Workers/Coolie		

Source : *Tea Garden Offices.*

Above table shows the organization of work into field, factory and office. There are different kinds of field work. For instance, plucking, pruning, manuring, weeding, hoeing, skiffing, nursery work etc. are the important task in the plantation. The highest position in the field is occupied by senior field Assistant or garden supervisor. He has to supervise the work performed by persons below him like Muni, Chaprasi, Bahidars, Daffadars etc.

In factory or manufacturing process, factory-in-charge occupies the highest rank and he is responsible for the entire work in the factory. There are different kinds of work in the factory. For instance, withering, rolling, fermentation, sorting, packing etc. The tea house Sardars supervises the work done by workers in all these processes. Factory-in-charge gives the direction to the Sardars while he is supervising the different stages of manufacturing.

In office, head clerk or *bara babu* occupies the highest rank. There are different kinds of office work. For instance, keeping the records of provident fund, gratuity, ration, wage bill, excise, transport etc.

There are broadly four categories of employees in the tea garden hierarchy. They are 1. Management, 2. Staff, 3. Sub-staff and 4. Workers or *coolie*.

3.2 Management: Women in Management

Tea gardens have a complex and highly stratified managerial structure. This structure evolved during the colonial period by the British planters has continued without significant changes to the present. The manager of tea garden (Head Manager/*Bara Sahib*) occupies the highest rank in the garden hierarchy. Some companies (FERA, Public Ltd. Co. and Govt. Ltd. Co. like WBTDC) have superintending managers over and above the managers, to supervise a group of gardens. Legally, the manager is the representative of the company, or the employers, in the garden. He is responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the tea garden, supervision of the factory and the production of tea. He is assisted by a few assistant managers who fall in the second rank of the management category.

This second rank consists of the assistant managers known as *Chhota Sahib*. The number of assistant managers varies with the size of the garden. Each assistant managers is in charge of the division in the garden. Divisions are further divided into blocks. The *Chhota Sahib* has to supervise the work of the labourers. He must keep a check on the quality of work.

It is interesting to note that the managerial hierarchy also involves ethnic divisions. Prior to independence almost all the gardens were managed by British managers. But during the post Independence period, ownership and management

have shifted to Indian communities hailing from plains like Marwaris, Bengalis and Punjabis. So far as the appointment to the management position is concerned only a few local people have been so far recruited. Recruitment through promotion from staff category is also rare. Out of seven tea gardens under study, six gardens have full manager or *bara sahib* hailing from the plains and belonging to Punjabi and Marwari Communities. Pandam, owned by W.B.T.D.C. is the only tea garden where all the positions in the managerial hierarchy are occupied by local Nepalis. In the rest six tea gardens, the local Nepalis have been appointed as *chhota sahibs* or assistant managers. So far as the women in management is concerned, we did not get a single women manager in these seven tea gardens under study. But during the field work, it was known through the official record of DPA that Ms. Luxmi Limbu, daughter of Mr. P.R. Limbu of Kalimpong is the first women manager in the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills. Ms. Luxmi Limbu, is a science graduate who did her Post Graduate Diploma in Tea Management from National Institute of Tea Management and started her career as an assistant manager in Seok Tea Garden (Mirik region) in the year 1997. Presently she is working as an assistant manager under Gooderick Group Ltd.

3.3 Staff : Women in Staff Category

There are a number of intermediaries between the *Chhota Sahib* and the daily rated worker. Just below the Chhota Sahib comes the garden assistant and factory-in-charge. They are commonly known as the *bagan babu* and *factory-babu* respectively. They fall in the second category i.e., staff. The *bagan babu*'s primary job is to assist the *chhota sahib* in the field work. The *factory babu* assists the factory's head (tea maker sahib), supervises the workers' work and maintains an account of tea production. In the office section, there are number of clerks, whose duty is to keep the records or accounts of provident fund, gratuity, wage bill, transport, excise etc. The head clerk or *bara babu* is the senior most staff. He supervises the work in the office.

After Independence, when laws were passed regulating employment conditions of workers, office organization had to change. The increased work load

called for more staff and for division of work. The clerk is no longer a jack-of-all trades as he was formerly. He is given charge of specific section. In the factory too such changes have taken place. The various provisions of the factory Acts have to be observed. For instance, women workers are forbidden to work in factory after 7 pm.

In this staff category, majority of staff belong to the Nepali community and other local people. Besides they are directly recruited from among the garden residents through written examination and interview conducted by the Management.

In the following section we shall try to present the picture of women's participation in this category in the seven tea gardens under study.

It is very interesting to note that a good number of tea gardens have appointed women as a clerical staff in the office section. The office management in a tea estate is kept under control of the managers. Head clerk in the office has to keep full supervision of the office matters and must always be ready to explain to the manager, the matter which requires clarification to him. The appointment of additional clerks depends upon the load of the work which generally depends upon the size of the tea garden. More clerks are appointed in the non-Indian tea companies than the Indian tea companies. In some of the gardens owned by Indians (small proprietary gardens), accountants acts as a manager who is actually in charge of the whole estate.

It is clear from the following table that out of seven tea gardens under study five tea gardens have appointed women in staff category (clerical grade). Out of five tea gardens, four gardens are having women staff belonging to middle caste Nepalis. In one tea garden (Happy Valley owned by Banerjee family) there is one woman staff who is a Bengali hailing from Kolkata.

Table – 3.2

Women as staff (clerical) in various Tea gardens under study (1998-99)

Name of the Tea Gardens	Name of the Women	Ethnic/Caste background	Clerical Grade
1. Badamtam	Poonam	Gurung	III (Wage Bill)
2. Pandam	Manju	Newar (Pradhan)	II (Factory Clerk)
3. Singell	Alka	Rai	I (Second Clerk)
4. Vah-Tukvar	--	--	--
5. Happy Valley	Amita	Chowdhury (Bengali)	II (P.F. Clerk)
6. castleton (Gaurisanker)	--	--	--
7. Springside	Vidhya	Rai	I (Head Clerk)

Source : *Tea Gardens Office.*

3.4 Sub-Staff : Women in Sub-Staff Category

Subordinate to the staff is a category of personnel known as 'Sub-Staff' and they consist mainly of the supervisory staff. They go by a number of designations related largely to the tasks they perform. These people have been promoted from the lower ranks. The basic distinction between them and the ordinary workers is that, besides the nature of work, these people earn slightly higher wages and are paid on a monthly basis.

The highest rank in this category is the *Munshi* in the field section. Below him comes the *Chaprasi* who carry the orders from the top and keep an eye on the sub-staff below them.

The *Bahidars* is next to the *Chaprasi*. He takes the attendance of the workers and sub-staff in the field from the various melos or place of work.

Below *Bahidar* is the *Daffadars*. The daffadar is a sort of supervisor or a group leader. He is given charge of a group of workers and he has to supervise the activities of the workers. He has a very important role in the tea garden. He has to guide the workers at every step. All those above him, i.e., *chaprasi*, *bahidar*, *munsi*, *chhota sahib* are there to direct the daffadar as to what work the workers should perform. In this sub-staff category, a number of women have been appointed in different gardens since 1980s which shall be discussed later.

The hierarchy in the factory is not as elaborate as in the field. There are generally three posts above the worker viz., factory sardar, factory babu and factory sahib. There are very few sub-staff personnel in factory section.

The *Chowkidar* and the *Paniwala* are also sub-staff. The chowkidar is the watchman or guard. Each garden has a number of chowkidars in different positions such as factory chowkidars, garden chowkidars, hospital chowkidars etc.

The *Paniwala* or chowkidar of water has to look after the proper or adequate supply of water in each lines or villages. The sub-staff are generally promotees from the Class IV category i.e., worker/*coolie*.

Recruitment, Qualification

Recruitment of women in the sub-staff or supervisory category has been rare. They are mostly appointed in the *coolie* or workers category. It was for the first time in the history of tea plantation of Darjeeling hills that women were appointed as *daffadar* or foreman (supervisory category) in 1981. For more than hundred year women have been recruited only in the coolie category.

There is no direct recruitment of women to this sub-staff category. They are promoted from the worker or coolie category after passing written test to be conducted in the respective gardens. Other requirements are that she should be a permanent worker of the garden with a minimum educational qualification of class V passed. At present, there are 76 tea gardens in Darjeeling hill, out of which only about twenty gardens have appointed women to this category.

Function of a Daffadar (Supervisory Staff)

The daffadar is a kind of supervisor or rather a group-leader. She is the link between workers and the Management. She is given charge of a group of workers (around 30 to 50) and she has to supervise their activities. The daffadar has a very important role in the tea garden. She has to guide the workers at every step. She explains to them the type of work to be performed, at what place it should be done and how much work each worker must do. She generally works under the supervision and direction of her superiors. The daffadar transmits these directions to

her group of workers and sees that they are followed. During the plucking season she has to direct and teach the workers the right way of plucking leaves so that the bush is not damaged.

In cultivation work, the daffadar is there to check the quality of the work. Cultivation work in winter is regarded very important for the future of the garden. The daffadar's responsibility in guiding the workers along the correct lines is therefore an important one.

Table – 3.3

**Women as a Sub-staff (Supervisory staff) in various Tea Gardens under study
(1998-99)**

Name of the Tea Gardens	Name of the Sub-Staff	Ethnic or caste background
Badamtam	Manrupa Vishma Shyam Kumari Damber Kumari Shailamani Chandramati Pawitra	Gurung Sharma Rai Sunuwar Rai Manger Sharma
Pandam	Maya Chandra Fulmati	Rai Manger Kusuley (Newari low caste)
Singell	Renuka Jethi Maya Munna	Tamang Gurung Manger
Springside	Thulo Kanchi Madhu	Rai Pradhan (newar)
Happy Valley	--	--
Vah-Tukvar	--	--
Castleton (Gourisankar)	Bimala	Bhujel

Source : *Various Tea Garden Offices.*

It is clear from the above table that out of seven tea gardens under study five gardens have appointed women as sub-staff or supervisory staff though their percentage is very few as compared to male sub-staff. The two tea gardens namely Vah-Tukvar and Happy Valley have not appointed any women in this category. The majority of sub-staff women belong to middle caste groups. Out of 16 sub-staff women, only two women belong to upper caste and there is not a single sub-staff women from lower castes.

3.5 Coolie or Worker : Women Workers

The last category in the hierarchy is the *coolie* or worker category. By worker we mean those people who are directly involved in the production process. The factory worker and the daily rated worker are known as coolies.

The daily-rated workers are of four types- there are adult workers of either sex i.e., adult male (*marad*) and adult female (*aurat*). These are workers above the age of eighteen. Then there are the adolescents and the children (*chokra*). Each type can be either male or female. The former are those between the ages of sixteen and eighteen and the later are those between the ages of 14 and 16.

Majority of women are employed in worker or coolie category. It is important to note here that they are the ones who are directly involved in the process of production. They have to do all the physical labour in the garden.

As stated earlier, tea is the only industry where the participation of women workers is in the maximum. In the plantation of Darjeeling hills, they have outnumber men workers. The nature of plantation or nature of job-allocation may be cited as one of the reasons for the predominance of female labourers in the tea plantation of Darjeeling hills.

Table – 3.4

Nature of Job-Allocation Among Labourers (in percentage)

Nature of Job	Percentage
1. Plucking of tea leaf	59.25
2. Cultivation work including extension	23.36
3. Factory and Manufacturing	5.87
4. Establishment	1.43
5. Miscellaneous work including vegetative propagation	12.00
Total	100.00

Source : *Govt. of India, Report of the Central wage Board for Tea plantation India, 1982, p.37.*

The above mentioned activities of tea gardens may be grouped under two main heads (i) plucking and cultivation, (ii) processing which includes works in the factory and the office as well. From the percentage of labourers engaged in different categories we can understand that plucking and cultivation occupy an important position engaging 80% of its work force.

Although the activities connected with growing or cultivation work of tea leaves are undertaken by both male and female labourers, more than 80% women labourers are employed in this section. Processing is done in the factory. In the processing stage, women are engaged only in sorting section.

In the following section we shall discuss about the participation of women as a coolie or workers in various tea gardens under study. We shall also focus our attention on the nature and type of work performed by women labourers. Plucking (collection), pruning (cultivation work) and processing (manufacturing) are three main activities in tea plantation where the women have been employed.

Table – 3.5

Women as a worker or coolie in various Tea Gardens under study (1998-99)

Name of Gardens	Male	Female	Children	Total
Badamtam	459	646	22	1127
Pandam	75	149	--	224
Vah-Tukvar	265	390	14	669
Happy Valley	64	159	--	223
Castleton	87	148	--	235
Springside	70	170	--	240
Singell	165	388	--	553
Total	1185	2050	36	3271
%	36.22%	62.67%	0.03%	100%

Source : *Tea Garden Offices.*

3.5.1 WOMEN AS FACTORY WORKERS

There are six processes of manufacturing tea. The are withering, rolling, fermentation, drying, sorting and packing, out of these six process women are engaged only in sorting process. In sorting process 90% workers involved are women workers. In other processes of manufacturing only male are employed because of the physical intensive character of the work.

A very interesting feature came to light during the field study so far as factory workers are concerned. Generally there are not many permanent workers appointed solely for the factory work but whenever there is a necessity of employing more workers they are taken away from the field operation and employed in factory. Once in the factory they get better wages and other facilities. Women are employed in factory only during the peak plucking season i.e., from April to October-November. The number of women factory workers employed in each garden depends on the production of tea. In some tea gardens women are employed during the peak plucking season on temporary or casual basis. The management preference

for employing women workers on casual basis may be due to the fact that they need not incur extra-expenses in providing other facilities to these workers like housing, medical facilities etc.

Table – 3.6

Women Factory Workers of Badamtam and Springside (Castleton) Tea Gardens (1998-99)

Name of tea Garden	Name of the Women	Caste or Ethnic background of Nepali Workers
Badamtam	Sabita	Rai
	Bishnumaya	Rai
	Krishna Kumari	Rai
	Lilamaya	Rai
	Kaloomaya	Rai
	Anju	Rai
	Panchamala	Rai
	Lilu	Rai
	Jaimaya	Limbu (Subba)
	Dhanmaya	Newar (Pradhan)
	Latchi Maya	Newar (Pradhan)
Bishnumaya	Newar (Pradhan)	
Springside (Castleton)	Minu	Rai
	Thulo Kanchi	Rai
	Sumitra	Lama (Tamang)
	Pushpa	Sundas (Darjee)
	Sabita	Chhetri

Source : *Tea Garden Offices (Badamtam and Springside)*

Table 3.6 shows the total number of factory women workers employed in Badamtam and Springside Tea Garden during 1998-99. Out of these seventeen, only two women (one women for each garden) are employed as permanent worker of the factory. The remaining fifteen women are employed as temporary factory workers

during manufacturing season and in off season (November to March) they work as permanent field workers and these same women are employed every year in the factory. Twelve women out of fifteen have been working in factory (during peak season) since 1978-79. All of them are living in nearby villages or in close proximity to the factory. As long as they remain in the factory, they are covered by the Factory Act of 1948 and they get the same facilities and benefits as the permanent workers of the factory. While they are in field operation. Factory Act does not cover them. Community wise, *Rai* women are numerically dominant followed by *Newars*. Out of seventeen factory women workers of these two tea gardens, one each belong to *Limbu*, *Tamang*, *Darjee* and *Chettri*.

3.6 Recruitment Policy and Women Tea Garden Workers

The tea industry is agro-based and labour-intensive industry. This is the only organized industry where women have outnumbered men as a working force. The predominance of female labour over the male workers is a distinctive feature in tea gardens of Darjeeling hill areas. As estimated by CMPO (Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization) in its Techno-Economic Survey of Darjeeling hill, out of total work force of 40,172 on roll in the tea gardens of the hill areas in 1971, the adult females constituted 58 percent. If the figures of adolescent females are considered this would be more than 62%. In 1987, there was a total of 46,390 workers in the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills, out of which 27,005 (58.2%) were women (Tea Statistics: 1988).

The following two tables show the number of women workers in seven gardens under study.

Table – 3.7

Working strength of the seven Tea Gardens in 1995 (permanent workers or coolies excluding staff and Sub-staff)

Name of Tea Gardens	No. of working strength		
	Male	Female	Children
Badamtam	459	646	22
Pandam	75	149	-
Vah-Tukvar	265	390	14
Happy Valley	64	159	-
Castleton	87	148	-
Springside	70	170	-
Singell	165	388	-
Total	185	2050	36

Source : *Tea Garden Office.*

Table – 3.8

Working Strength of Seven Tea Gardens in 1995 (Total permanent work force) excluding Medical and Teaching Staff.

Name of Tea Gardens	Workers or Coolie			Staff (Clerical)		Sub-Staff	
	Male	Female	Children	Male	Female	Male	Female
Badamtam	459	646	22	18	1	52	7
Pandam	75	149	-	5	1	12	3
Vah-Tukvar	265	390	14	10	-	24	-
Happy Valley	64	159	-	6	1	12	-
Castleton	87	148	-	8	-	16	1
Springside	70	170	-	4	1	18	2
Singell	165	388	-	12	1	46	3
Total	1185	2050	36	63	5	190	16

Source : *Tea Garden Office.*

3.7 Recruitment of Workers in the Tea Garden of Darjeeling Hills :

The tea industry in Darjeeling hills was started later than in Assam (1839). The recruitment system in the tea plantation of the former was different from that of the latter as the labourers were never placed under any contract and in that sense they were free. The workmen's Breach of Contract Act of 1859 (No. VII) which was applicable in case of Assam and Annamalai Hills was never applied to the tea plantation of Darjeeling hills.

In Darjeeling hill, tea industry has been commercialized since 1856. The recruitment of workers, during the initial period were made mainly from the rural areas of Nepal through the recruitment agents known as *Sardars*. Unlike the recruitment policy which had adopted in the tea regions of India (Assam, Nilgiri and Annamalai Hills) by following the various acts of the British Govt. the tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalaya had quite a different system of labour recruitment policy. The Inland Emigration Act III of 1863 which provided that all the labour recruiters should be licensed and that every intending emigrants should be closely supervised by this Act was not applicable in Darjeeling hills. Unlike the *Arkatis* of Assam and *Kanganies* or *maistries* of Annamalai Hills, *Sardars* of Darjeeling were not a licensed recruiters. As per the recommendations of Labour Enquiry Commission of 1868, which advocated for the recruitment of labourers by the plantation themselves through the agency of the plantation *Sardars*, the Nepali *Sardars* were appointed to recruit the *coolies* into the plantation. (O'Malley: 1907)

Labour was one of the most essential elements in the factors of production of the planter. This was an industry which was highly labour intensive and which did not have scope for technical innovation beyond a point in the production process. Whether it was coffee or tea, it had to be picked or plucked from the plants manually and the planters could never hope to replace this manual process by a mechanical one. One of the chronic problems that the planters faced was the shortage of labour supplied to the tea estates. The nature of the tea industry demanded that the planter to be able to maintain a stable and regular workforce. The planters, in their search for a permanent labour force recruited or imported coolies on the basis of family and

not individuals, so this type of recruitment of whole family speaks of the Britishers well-planned design. This would mean less of labour mobility from one place to another and the scope to employ even the children at less than half of the wage of an adult.

The planters in Darjeeling hills preferred *Sardari* system for labour recruitment. Sardars were not local recruiters like the *arkatis* and *Kanganies*. More often than not, the Sardars were themselves a part of the factory or plantation labour occupying supervisory positions. Unlike tea plantations of Assam and Dooars or Terai regions of West Bengal where the labourers were indentured from the various tribal belts of Chotanagpur, Santhal Pargana of Bihar and Orrisa, the question of labour recruitment in Darjeeling gardens was little difficult as the workers were to be enticed from across the Indian border i.e., Nepal. The Sardars had to face lot of troubles in enticing the people in Nepal. During the dull season, generally after the rains in October or November to February, these people (Sardars and their assistants known as Gallawalas) used to go mainly to Nepal to recruit labour. Here, the caste or community backgrounds of the recruits played an important role as it was easier for these people to induce new recruits of their own caste or community fellows by enticing or showing all the advantages of work and the prospects of ultimate settlement on independent holdings. The Sardars used to entice workers to come with their whole families as in the case they were likely to stay permanently in the plantation. The Sardars used to get commission from the management for recruiting workers. At the initial stage, labour was a far more scarce commodity than land. The workers who came from elsewhere had to be bound to the workplace by coercive means. To start with, this was done by advance at the time of recruitment. But the receipt of an advance did not necessarily ensure that the workers would remain permanently on the estates. The intolerable working and living conditions often led to what was called desertions. The rigid regimentation of the workforce was one of the most striking features of plantation life. The plantation system was arranged along military lines, and the confinement of the coolies to their own premises befitted such a disciplinary system. In the early periods coolies were housed in

barracks and split up into groups headed by *foreman* or Sardars who after working hour, acted as Wardens entrusted with maintaining discipline.

As a result of the initial recruitment policy mostly through the Nepali Sardars, entire labour force (90%) is composed of Nepali people. Only about 10% labourers come from tribal groups (Lepchas, Bhutias and Sherpa), people from Terai Nepal and Plainsmen. The Sardars were also Nepalis who were responsible for the supervision of labour while at work. He was not merely responsible for the new recruits, the service, facilities, job prospect as well as transfer to a better position dependent on the pleasure of these Sardars.

Now the entire labour force of tea gardens composed of Nepali caste and communities of whom Rai, Limbu, Tamangs, Manger, Gurungs and Newars, form more than half of the garden population.

The working population who have settled in the plantation and in the neighbouring villages in the tea gardens has grown considerably with the result that at present plantation have surplus labour. Hence, at present instead of the problem of labour shortage, the problem of surplus plantation labour is most insistent in these tea gardens. The problems of surplus population was felt as early as 1915. To meet the situation, the planters started implementing 'Contract Clause' of Bengal Act III of 1915 which provided not only for the recruitment of labourers but also incorporated provisions for labour retrenchment. Thus, from onwards, many workers were retrenched. This system was locally known as *Hatta bahira* System.

To find a permanent work in the tea plantation is very difficult now-a-days. Every tea garden in the hills are facing the problem of surplus labour population. DPA report shows that in 1990-91 there were 52,000 workers and 2,08,000 dependents in the tea gardens of hill area. In most of the tea gardens of Darjeeling hill, working force has remained constant since 1970 onwards. The recruitment of new workers is absent in almost all the tea gardens of hill areas.

3.8 Recruitment System in Seven Tea Gardens under study :

In all the tea gardens which have been taken for case study the recruitment of workers during the pre-Independence period was done through the *Sardari* system. The Sardars used to entice the men of their own caste and communities to leave their natal villages in Nepal and to come and settle in plantation. As a result, in the early periods of tea industry we had a number of unicast or unicommunity villages in the gardens. The labourers belonging to the same caste or community preferred to cluster in their own *caste dhuras*. The researcher found a good number of uni caste gaons or dhuras in different tea gardens like *Yakha dhura* (Yakha or Dewan, a Sub-section of Kirati race), *Khaling dhura* (Khaling is sub-section of Rai) *Newar dhura*, *Gurung gaon*, *Manger gaon* etc. Migration to these gardens were primarily family-based. Till 1920, when there was labour scarcity in these gardens both husband and wife were together as workers beside some individual labourer who would come in the quest of plantation job. While recruiting the workers the policy of the management was to give preference to the dependents of its workers whether they are wife, children or relatives.

The recruitment system through *Sardars* continued till 1950, after which the perceptible changes could be observed. With the passing of the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 and the emergence of wage Board, the workers had been started to be recruited from among the local garden population. After Independence we have seen the emergence of various workers union affiliated with different political parties. Particularly after 1960, we find, workers union playing significant role. The management could recruit the workers only in consultation with the existing labour unions. The recruitment was made either to fill the vacant post or to absorb the bonafide dependents of the workers in place of the deceased or retired relatives.

The present recruitment system in all the tea gardens under study is the same which is as follows :

1. *Badli* or Substitute Workers

- i) When a worker is retire after a completion of 55 years of age or, she/he has reached the retirement age, the son or daughter (Bonafide dependent) gets the job of his/her parents.
- ii) If a worker who is no longer fit for work, he may take voluntary retirement and in his place his family members get the job.
- iii) In case of death of a permanent worker one of his family members get the job of the deceased. In the absence of any issue or bonafide dependent of the deceased or person who is going to retire, or disablement of worker, his or her close relatives will get the job.

2. Hardship System:

Another unique system of recruitment prevalent in these gardens is locally known as 'hardship system'. The criterion for such appointment is the economic hardship faced by a workers family due to the existence of a large number of dependents. This practice of filling up vacancies on the basis of hardship is contrary to family planning programme because only the large size household with the largest number of dependents will have the chance to get the job. This practice was very much in use till 1960. Now-a-days only few gardens recruit labourers through this method.

During the peak plucking season (from May to October), garden management recruit temporary or casual labourers. They prefer female workers for this purpose because they are considered as better plucker than male workers. This casual or temporary workers are provided by the unemployed dependent of the garden resident. The need for employing outside workers (workers residing in another tea garden or nearby forest villages) is necessary in case of big or large size tea gardens which produce more quantity of tea. In small size tea garden temporary workers is provided by surplus population of the garden.

3.9 Women and Types of Work:

The daily-wage women perform the following manual work.

3.9.1. Plucking of tea leaves (*Patti tipai*)

The harvesting of tea leaves from the bushes in the plantation is called plucking. It is an important operation because the quality of manufactured tea depends upon the care and attention with which plucking is done. The accepted formula for normal plucking is “two leaves and a bud”. Anything lesser than this is considered as fine plucking and the inclusion of more leaves as “Coarse plucking”. Plucking is done by hand. Women are mostly employed in this operation due to their smooth plucking without injuring the plant. Plucking is the most preferred job of women. They are believed to be better pluckers and their efficiency in this task is rated higher than that of males. According to the Managers of some of the tea gardens under study men also pluck leaves, but it is generally found that the quality and quantity of leaves plucked by them are not as high as those of women.

Plucking season in the Darjeeling hills begins with the early rains in March and ends in late November or early December. It reaches its peak, i.e., highest yield, during the months of July and August when the rainfall is heavy. The bushes are usually plucked once in every 7 or 8 days during the peak plucking season. The first crop of leaves (known as the first flush) in the early monsoon showers is supposed to produce the best quality of tea. The leaves must be plucked in such a way that the bush is not damaged. The leaves plucked should be roughly of the same length. Randomly plucked leaves, which come in various sizes would not only lower the quality of the tea produced but would also damage the plucking points of the bush and consequently reduce its yield.

For nine months of the year most of the women (90%) are engaged in plucking tea leaves while the male workers (30%) are employed for plucking only for four to five months during the peak season.

3.9.2. Pruning (*Kalam Katai*)

Pruning is an important operation. It is essential in order to induce a vigorous vegetative growth and to ensure continuous supply of green flushed for the manufacture of tea. The main objects of pruning are to maintain the plant permanently in the vegetative phase and to keep the height of the bush within the bounds of easy and efficient plucking.

After the plucking seasons is over the bushes are pruned. Such pruning is made from six inches to eighteen inches. This work goes on till late January. The pruning is divided into light, medium or slope and deep or heavy on the basis of the height of the pruning. Women perform only light and medium pruning. The yield of the oncoming season depends on how the bushes are pruned. When allowed to grow naturally without pruning, the China plant grows to a height of about 15 feet. The Assam variety is more like a tree in form and grows to a height of 25 and even 30 feet. It must be kept in the form of a low bush, not higher than 3 feet, although 2 feet is considered the most appropriate height.

In case of new plant, pruning begins one year after its planting. A young plant is cut to a height of 6 or 8 inches, and sometimes even lower as a bushy growth from the root is desirable. A year later, pruning is carried to a height of about 12 or 14 inches, and thereafter a little higher year by year. About once in fifteen or twenty years, the bushes require heavy pruning in order to remove the snags and knots formed by successive light pruning. Great care has to be taken in pruning. If this is done in a haphazard manner the branches may be damaged which will in turn damage the oncoming crop. It is generally believed that pruning determines the yield of the following year.

3.9.3. Weeding

It is an important task performed by women. If there is low plant population, there are greater chances of weed growth in the vacant spaces leading to high cost of weed control. Weeding is done either manually or by herbicides. The disposal of weeds is necessary to improve soil conditions as soil from lower layers is mixed with that of the upper layers. Clean hand-weeding is largely resorted to during the

rains, while the faces of the terraces and the space between the lines are kept free of weeds by sickling (rough weeding). Women perform clean weeding manually by hand or with the help of small forks if the soil is very dry. In order to get the *hazri* or *hazira* or daily wage, women have to complete given task or piece-rate of sixty to eighty tangas (1 tangas = 12 feet) in weeding.

Weeds are unwanted plants in the land used for cultivation. Weed control is an expensive input in tea cultivation. Weed control in tea plantation areas has become much more effective by introducing herbicide in the 1980s requiring less workforce but ensuring complete control of weeds for more length of time than manual weeding. Now the tea gardens are using herbicides like Oxyfloufen, Glycel, Paraquate etc. and at the same time they have planted semi-permanent shade trees like Arhar, Croton, Boga Medeloa, Indigofera etc. to suppress weed growth.

3.9.4. Manuring and Fertilizing:

It is an important task in tea plantation. The object of manuring is to maintain in the soil a sufficiency of materials necessary to maintain the growth required to produce a certain level of crop, without detriment to the plant itself. High yield or production of tea also depend on manuring. The application of more nitrogenous fertilizers is necessary to increase yield or productivity. There is positive correlation between low yields and consumption of nitrogenous fertilizers. 90 to 94 kgs. of nitrogenous fertilizer is necessary for one hectare.

In Darjeeling hill, more than 60% of tea bushes have become old which can give neither good quality nor higher quantity. It is also equally true, as mentioned in earlier chapters owners of the tea garden (small proprietary gardens) are also not interested in replanting by replacing the old tea bushes which have crossed their economic life. Hence, in order to increase the productivity, manuring is considered an important activity. Women are basically involve in manual manuring or application of chemical fertilizers. In order to complete the *thika* or task women workers are required to apply 75 kgs. of manure per day. The different types of manures given to tea bushes are urea, sulphate of ammonia, super phosphate, rock phosphate, Dolomite, Heptachlore etc.

3.9.5. Nursery Work

Women are equally involved along with men in the different stages of nursery work. Nurseries are made at different points, taking into consideration the easy availability of water and proximity to the garden proper. A good rich virgin soil is generally preferred as a nursery site, and plants normally do much better on such soils. The soil in these nurseries had to be thoroughly pulverized, and all jungle, roots and stones removed. The germinating beds are formed for seed.

Sometimes the seeds are sown directly into the nursery beds. Good seed is usually sown about one inch deep and at a distance of 4 inches apart. As soon as the plants have sprung up, and their individual character indicated, the unsatisfactory ones are uprooted, including all those of an inferior class and all blighted seedling. Only the fittest being allowed to occupy the ground. The seedlings are transplanted in the field after one to two years. One finds majority of women workers involved in every step of nursery work like preparation of nursery beds, sowing of seeds, watering the seedlings, filling up of tube etc. In order to complete *hazira* or task women have to fill up about 200 polythene tubes per day.

3.9.6. Chilling and Colon Thully

These are the two important activities done by women workers.

Besides these, women are also involved in various miscellaneous activities. The number of women employed in such activities are very few (10% approx.). The activities like collection of seeds of the shade trees, removing parasite growth from the bushes, watering to newly planted tea seedling in vacant place etc.

From the above discussions it is clear that the women workers are involved in all types of plantation work. They are considered more efficient in plucking of tea leaves. They are equally efficient in medium and light pruning, hoeing, skiffing etc. All these agricultural operations are still highly labour-intensive and these could not be mechanized so far in India.

3.10 Thika System and Women

It is important to mention here the practice of Task or *Thika* system. Under this system a worker is allotted a certain piece of work to be completed within a given period of time. The *Thika* or task system is applicable only in those activities which can be measured (in terms of kgs, feet etc.) work-load is the determining factor in wage calculation of a worker.

Table – 3.9

Task or Thika system of work in Darjeeling Tea Gardens during 1998-99

Types of work (field operation)	Two varieties of tea bushes	
	China	Assam
Plucking (patti tipai) (Men and Women)	a. 4 kgs. (in down or off season) b. 9 kgs (in peak season)	5 kgs. (in down or off season) 11 kgs (in peak season)
Pruning (Kalam Katai)		
b) Rejuvenation or heavy pruning (Men only)	2 ½ tanga	3 ½ tanga
c) Medium/Slope pruning (Women)	4 tanga	5 tanga
d) Light pruning (Women)	7 tanga	8 tanga
Chilling (Tachai) (Women)	17 tanga	17 tanga
Skiffing		
a) Deep (Men)	9 tanga	14 tanga
b) Medium (Men)	10 tanga	15 tanga
c) Light (Women)	50 tanga	60 tanga
Weeding (Women)	60 tanga	80 tanga
Colon Thully (Women)	25 tanga	30 tanga
Manuring (Women & Men)	75 tanga	75 kgs.
Filling tubes in the nursery (Women)	Fill up 250 tubes a day	

Source : Files consulted at different Tea garden Offices.

1 tanga = 12 feet.

The above table 3.9 shows the *thika* or task system of work in different tea gardens under study during 1998-99. there are different types of work which are performed on the basis of *thika*. *Thika* system is more prevalent during plucking season. In different tea gardens under study two varieties of tea bushes have been sown. The amount of tea leaves to be plucked vary in these two types of tea bushes. During the dull or slack season of plucking (March to May and October-November), women have to pluck 4 kgs. of tea leaves in case of China bushes and 5 kgs. in case of Assam variety. During the peak plucking season (June to September) they have to pluck 9 kgs. in China variety and 11 kgs. in case of Assam variety. They will get additional incentive of money (doubly or *bakshis* or extra tea leaf price) for every kilogram of leaves plucked in addition to the quantity agreed upon as per the *thika* system (extra tea leaf price or doubly see Table 3.12). In case of pruning tea bushes, women do only medium and light pruning. In case of medium they have to prune 4 tanga (China variety) of tea bushes and in Assam variety, it is 5 tanga, whereas in case of light pruning it is 7 tanga and 8 tanga in case of China and Assam variety respectively. In Chilling, the quantity agreed upon is 17 tanga in both cases of China and Assam variety. In rough weeding they have to complete 60 (China) and 80 (Assam) tangas. Women also perform light skiff in which they have to complete 50 tangas (China) and 60 tangas (Assam). Filling up of tubes in the plant nursery is another work performed by women in which they have to complete or fill up 250 tubes a day. Manuring is another work which is done by women. They have to manure (application of urea etc.) 75 kgs. per day. During the slack season (mostly in winter) some of the women workers are engaged in miscellaneous works which can not easily be measured on the piece-rate basis. Such work are (i) collection of shade tree's seeds (ii) Watering to newly planted tea sapling or bushes (sown in vacant place) for which they are paid on time basis.

3.11 Amenities for Tea Garden Workers

During the pre-Independence period, the amenities (social, economic and health) made available to the workers were kept at the bare minimum level such as housing, medical facilities, food grain subsidy etc. After independence, various Acts were passed regulating the conditions of workers. The owners or the management of

the garden were forced to provide amenities to the workers. Now the owners are bound by Statutory obligations.

The following are the different amenities or fringe benefits available to the women employees under different statutes.

1. Statutory items under plantation Labour Act 1951 (amended in 1960 and again in 1981).
 - a) Housing
 - b) Children's Education
 - c) Medical attention
 - d) Sickness benefit
 - e) Welfare
 - f) Earned leave
2. Common statutory items:
 - a) Provident Fund (According to Employees Provident Fund Act, 1952)
 - b) Bonus (According to the Payments of Bonus Act, 1965).
 - c) Gratuity (According to the payment of Gratuity Act, 1972).
3. Non-Statutory items:
 - a) Food-grains subsidy or ration.
 - b) Dry tea
 - c) Fuel
 - d) Electricity.

Almost all the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills implement these rules. In some tea gardens (small gardens under individual ownership) facilities or amenities are not provided properly due to the low level of literacy among the working population, or lack of awareness or consciousness, failure on the part of Government to look after its proper implementation and give penalties in case of non-implementation.

Non-Statutory Items

- i) **Foodgrain Subsidy or ration** : Like the male workers women (worker, sub-staff and staff) too, get subsidized ration of 1 kg. Rice and 2.300 kgs. wheat every week. The concessional rate for both rice and wheat is 0.60 paise per kg. The bonafide dependents of the permanent workers are also entitled to

get ration. Adult dependents (upto the age of 16, in case of school or college going children upto the age of 18) get 1 kg. Rice and 1.500 kgs. wheat every week. Minor dependents get ½ kg. Rice and 700 gms. Wheat per week. Absence from work on account of certified sickness, authorized maternity leave and authorized holidays will not be penalized. There will be reduction in quantity if a worker remains absent from work.

- ii) **Dry tea:** Women workers get 350 gms. of dry tea per month. Sub-staff and staff get 500 gms. and 800 gms. respectively.
- iii) **Fuel or firewood:** The women workers get 8 mds. of firewood per year (2.99 quintals). Female children (minor workers or *chokra* get 4 mds. of firewood or 1.49 quintals per year. Sub-staff women (the women daffadars/Sub-staff belonging to Other Monthly Rated Employees (OMRE) are further categorized into three grades like grade I, II and III. Most of the women sub-staff belong to grade III and get 12 mds. or 4.48 quintals of firewood. Staff women grade III get 60 mds of firewood (22.39 quintal) per year. In the recent years (since 1998) with a view to conserving the forest and protecting environment, the garden management have started giving coal briquette in lieu of firewood. Some gardens are providing cash compensation in lieu of coal briquette or firewood.
- iv) **Electricity:** The free electricity is provided only to the staff women.

Statutory items under Plantation Labour Act, 1952

- a) **Free Quarters or housing:** Free quarters or housing are provided to the workers, sub-staff and staff women as per the Plantation Labour Housing Schemes Rules 1958. In this case, Central Government used to subsidized Housing Scheme for workers which has been closed since 1986.
- b) **Medical facilities:** Free use of Medical facilities are provided to them by the management in accordance with the West Bengal Plantation Labour Rules for herself and her family residing on the garden.

- c) **Annual leave:** They get 1 day for every 20 days worked. Leave will be exclusive of all holidays, occurring during at either end of the period of leave.
- d) **Casual leave:** 12 days with or without pay at the management's discretion, as laid down in the standing orders of these 12 days, 9 days with pay may be claimed by them under the following conditions:- (i) Death within the family or (ii) Marriage within the family.
- e) **Sickness Allowances:** In the case of sick or illness, they get sickness allowance for the total period of 14 days in a year at the rate of her daily wage.
- f) **Welfare or miscellaneous:** Women workers get canvas aprons, cotton or woolen blankets, umbrellas etc. Staff and Sub-staff women also get umbrellas and blankets annually. Management also provide free educational facilities upto the primary level to the workers children.
- g) **Maternity benefits:** As per the Maternity Benefits Act, 1961, all the women employees get maternity benefits i.e., women employees get maximum period of 12 weeks of which not more than 6 weeks shall precede the date of delivery. Entitlement to Maternity benefit will be given to women who have actually worked in the establishment for not less than 80 days in the 12 months immediately preceding the date of her expected delivery.
- h) **Holidays:**
- (i) **Festival Holidays:** They get following festival holidays-
 Durga Puja (Dasain) – days (2 days festival holidays plus 2 days annual leave)
 Diwali or Laxmipuja – 4 days (2 days festivals plus 2 days annual leave)
- Those who have worked for less than 120 days during the period of 1st April to 30th September will not be granted these paid festival holidays pro-rate. Those who have not qualified but wish to take advantage of the festival leave may at their own request, have the days in question counted against their earned leave, otherwise such leave will be treated as without pay.

(ii) National and Regional Holidays

They get the following holidays-

- a) New year (1st January)
- b) Republic Day (26th January)
- c) Independence Day (15th August)
- d) Maghe Sankranti
- e) Sawan or Shrawan Sankranti

Leave Traveling Allowance: Only the staff women get an annual leave travel allowance. The reimbursement of travel expense is done subject to a maximum of Rs.800/- in case of married employees and Rs.400/- in case of single person.

Bonus: As per the Payment of Bonus Act, 1965, women employees get bonus annually, In Darjeeling hill, tea gardens which are under DPA (members of Darjeeling Planters Association) are categorized into three grades (i.e., I, II, III) on the basis of their profitability and bonus is given or allotted at different rates to each grade ranging from 8.5 percent, 14.5 percent to 20 percent.

Gratuity: As per the payment of Gratuity Act, 1972, women employees get their gratuity under this Act, gratuity shall be payable to an employee on the termination of her employment after rendering continuous service for not less than five years, on retirement or resignation or death or disablement provided that (i) the completion of five years continuous service shall not be necessary in case of death or disablement, and (ii) in case of death of the employee gratuity payable shall be paid to the nominee or to the heirs.

Provident Fund: Women employees also get provident fund as per the Employees Provident Fund Act, 1952 which was extended to tea plantation from 30th April, 1957.

3.12 Women Workers and their Wages

In the pre-Independence period the workers were paid very low wages as they were, then unorganized and had a very little scope for interest articulation. The Government too did nothing to protect them. In the post-1947 period the situation

was more favourable towards the workers. Though the wages in tea plantation continued to remain low as compared to other industries e.g. jute, cotton textiles etc.

Tea gardens operate on a system of daily wages. The daily wage workers are paid on the basis of time-rate as well as piece-rate. Under the former, a workers is paid according to the time for which he or she works, usually on an hourly basis, under the latter category or *thika* system, payment is made on the basis of the output of work. For this to be possible the work must be easily measurable, consisting of standard prices which can be counted or output can be measured by length or by weight etc.

The tea industry has in the main been very closely knit and employers give "Standardised wage". The standarised wages are wage agreements among the employers in order to secure uniformity in the matter or wages and to prevent any employer from paying substantially higher wages than his neighbours. There is thus none of the attraction of higher wages to tempt the workers to transfer his services from one garden to another.

In 1952, for the first time statutory minimum wages were fixed for tea plantation workers in West Bengal. The daily wage rate at that time was 1.19 paise for male, 1.06 paise for female and 0.62 paise for children. Low wages have always been the distinctive feature of the plantation industry. The Minimum Wages Advisory Committee for Tea plantation was set up by the West Bengal Govt. in March 1950, known as the Modak Committee, after its chairman. The Modak Committee recommended that the minimum wage must not be merely a subsistence wage. Besides providing for his food, it should also help the workers preserve his efficiency by providing for education, medical and other amenities. Finally, they fixed the minimum wages as mentioned above i.e., a daily wage of Rs.1.19 paise for men and 1.06 for women (Modak Committee Report: 1951)

Tea gardens labour wages have generally been lower than the average wages for agricultural labour in north-east India. The management have attempted to justify the difference on the grounds that the tea gardens employees enjoy additional benefits like subsidized foodgrains and supply of firewood, tea etc. This has been a

contentious issue between management and labour union for decades. Wage differentials between men and women existed in the tea plantation from their inception. Before India's independence in 1947 women generally earned a wage which was three-fourth of the wage paid to men. This difference was gradually reduced during the post-Independence period because wage discrimination on the basis of sex was thought illegal and unjust.

The following table shows the wage discrimination in tea plantation of Darjeeling hills 1952-1980.

Table – 3.10

Daily wages of labourers in Tea Gardens of Darjeeling Hills since 1952-1980

Field Workers		Rupees per day	
Year	Male	Female	Children
1952	1.19	1.06	0.62
1962	1.54	1.47	0.84
1964	1.60	1.52	0.87
1965	1.73	1.62	0.94
1966	2.11	1.94	0.98
1971	2.73	2.23	1.26
1973	3.00	2.83	1.35
1978	6.50	6.30	1.30
1980	7.50	7.43	3.85

Source: *Calculated from the Tea statistics published by Tea Board of India.*

The progress to equality in wages has an interesting history. Labour unions had long demanded equal wages. But tea plantation managements was in favour of maintaining the wage differences between men and women workers on the grounds that the women are given a lower volume of work than men or the work-load for women workers is always lesser than that of men. The *thika* (task work) assigned to women workers is always less than that of men. In 1976 the Government of India passed the Equal Remuneration Act abolishing wage differences among sexes in all industries. Even after the enactment was in force, many managements, refused to

implement its mandates. In fact the Indian Tea Planters Association stated that giving women the same wages as men while maintaining unequal work loads would result in discrimination against men (Bhowmik: 1981)

In December 1976 the Ministry of Labour of the Government of India clarified that the Equal Remuneration Act applied to 'equal nature of work' and not to the volume of work (Bhowmik: 1981)

The equal remuneration was not enforced everywhere in the tea industry as late as 1980 despite clear statutory provisions. But after 1980, almost all the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills implemented this Act. The gardens under study also implemented the Act from 1980 onwards. The following table shows the rate of wages for men and women from 1980-1996.

Table – 3.11
Daily wages of women workers since 1980-1996

Wages (Rupees per day)

Year	Rupees Paise
1980	7.72
1981	8.62
1982	8.62
1983	9.37
1984	9.37
1985	10.87
1986	11.72
1987	12.57
1988	13.42
1989	16.22
1990	16.22
1991	17.77
1992	19.37
1993	19.37
1994	21.80
1995	24.30
1996	26.30

Source : *Tea Garden Offices*

There is no discrimination regarding the payment between male and female workers; but during plucking season it was found from official records that women earn more money than men on the merit of their efficiency. Women are considered more efficient in plucking of tea leave. For plucking more tea leaves during the peak plucking season workers are given *doubly* or *bakshis* (extra tea leaf price) which acts as an incentive for plucking more tea leaves. In the following table the rate of extra tea leaf price is given-

Table – 3.12

Extra tea leaf price given in the tea gardens of Darjeeling Hills (1990-1996)

Year	Types of tea leaf plucked			
	Assam		China	
	Rs.	Ps.	Rs.	Ps.
1990	1.15		1.40	
1991	1.20		1.50	
1992	1.20		1.50	
1993	1.30		1.60	
1994	1.55		1.85	
1995	1.90		2.20	
1996	1.90		2.20	

Source: *Tea Garden Offices*.

The concept of a need-based minimum wage was put forth by the 50th Indian Labour Conference in 1957. According to the guidelines set up by the conference, a need-based minimum wage must take into account the minimum needs of food, clothing, fuel and housing of three units of consumption subsequently in 1958 the central wage Board for the Tea Plantation Industry was formed to decide on the need-based minimum wage for tea plantation workers.

The employers' representatives on the wage board strongly objected to the formula accepted by the Indian Labour Conference. They argued that since employment in the plantations was family-based, three units of consumption was too

high as every family had at least two workers. Hence they suggested that only 1.5 units of consumption should be taken for determining the need-based minimum wage. The wage board found this argument baseless and commented: The family system of employment cannot be considered as unique to the tea plantation industry and even if it had been so it is a matter of consideration whether it is justified for employers to claim benefit of it by low wages for male wage earners. Earlier, in 1930, the Royal Commission on Labour in India had also put forth a similar argument against the low wages paid by the planters (Bhowmik: 1981)

The employers however obstinately stuck to their concept of wage determination. Finally the wage board had to concede their view as a result of which tea plantation workers are the lowest paid in the organized sector. The fact remains that the planters have used the existence of the high employment of women workers to keep wages low.

FINDINGS

Like any other full-fledged industry Tea Plantation has an organization of work and a hierarchy of staff. This hierarchy includes the Manager, Deputy Manager, Assistant Managers, Labour Welfare Officer and Doctor who form the top management category. They are locally known as *Sahibs*. Below the managerial category is the staff category which includes the Supervisory and Clerical Staff. They are locally called as *babus*. Below the Staff category is sub-Staff category which includes the sub-staff like Chaprasi, Boidar, Daffadar, Chowkidars etc. At the bottom of the work hierarchy there is worker or *coolie* category. They are divided into two categories. One is factory worker and another is garden or field worker. The daily-rated garden worker is further divided into three types: Firstly, there are adult workers of either sex i.e., adult male or *marad* and adult female or *aurat* who are above the age of eighteen. Secondly, there are adolescent of either sex who are between the age group of sixteen and eighteen and lastly, there are children or *chokra* between the ages of fourteen and sixteen.

The field data of seven tea gardens under study reveals the fact that excepting a few *sahibs* and a Doctor, all the management cadres, supervisory and office *Babus* are Nepalis by ethnic background. Regarding women's participation in management category. We did not get a single women employed as manager in these seven tea gardens under study. It is known from the official record of DPA that so far only one woman has been appointed as assistant manager in hill tea gardens. It is also known that a few women have been working as labour welfare officer in various tea gardens of Darjeeling hills. It is equally interesting to note that out of seven tea gardens under study, five tea gardens have already appointed women in staff and sub-staff category. Except one tea garden (Happy Valley) all the tea gardens have women staff belonging to middle caste Nepalis. Some women have already been working as head clerk or *bari amma* and second clerk (next to head clerk) in grade I category. Out of seven tea gardens, five tea gardens have appointed women in sub-staff category. In some tea gardens like Badamtam and Singell,

women have been working as sub-staff (mostly in *daffadar* category) since 1981 and some women have been promoted to *chaprasi* who holds superior position than the *daffadars*. It was found that the sub-staff women are generally promoted from the workers or coolie category provided they are eligible for the post and this is perhaps the only promotional opportunity provided to the women coolie or workers. The sub-staff women draw better pay and facilities than the ordinary workers. At the bottom of the work hierarchy, we have daily-rated workers or *coolie*. Among the daily rated workers, factory workers are considered superior in comparison to the garden or field workers as the former category is regulated by the Factory Act of 1948 and the later by the PLA of 1951. In the workers or *coolie* category, women are in overwhelming majority. About 80% women workers belong to middle caste Nepalis like *Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Gurung, Manger, Newar, Sunuwar, Bhujel, Thamis* etc. The percentage of high castes (Brahmin and Chhetris) and lower caste Nepalis (Kami, Damai or Darjee, Sunar, Sarki, Majhi etc.) are very few. Among the middle caste groups *Tamang* and *Rais* are numerically dominant followed by *Newars, Gurungs, Limbus, Mangers* etc. It shows that *Matwalis* or middle caste groups form the dominant majority in the working force of the industry in Darjeeling Himalaya.

It has already been mentioned earlier that plantation industry employs more women in proportion to men than in any other organized industry. In the seven tea gardens under study the women workers constitute 62.67 per cent of the total work force. There are number of factors which are responsible for the overwhelming majority of women in the tea industry. They are: (i) the labour recruitment policy followed by the colonial planters during the early phase of plantation industry; (ii) agro-industrial nature of plantation industry; (iii) residential labour force in tea industry where women can also seek employment in the tea plantation without causing serious disruption in their domestic life.

In Darjeeling hills, tea industry has been commercialized since 1856. the recruitment of workers, during the initial period were made mainly from the rural areas of Nepal (mostly eastern and central hills of Nepal) and Sikkim through the recruitment agents locally known as *Sardars*. The Workmen's Breach of Contract

Act of 1859 (No.VII) and The Inland Emigration Act III of 1863, which were applicable in case of other tea regions like Assam, Nilgiri and Annamalai Hills, were never applied to the tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas. Unlike the *arkatis* of Assam and *Kanganies* or *maistries* of Nilgiri and Annamalai Hills, Sardars of Darjeeling were not a licensed recruiters. Sardars were themselves a part of the factory or plantation labour occupying supervisory positions. In all the tea gardens, which have been taken for case study, the recruitment of workers during the pre-Independence period was done through the Sardari System. The Sardars used to entice the men and women of their own caste and communities to leave their natal villages in Nepal and to come and settle in tea plantation. The planters, in their search for a permanent labour force recruited or imported coolies on the basis of family and not individuals, so this type of recruitment of whole family speaks of the Britishers well-planned design. This would mean less of labour mobility and scope to employ even the women and children by paying them less wages than the men. The Sardari system of recruitment continued till 1950. With the passing of the PLA, 1951 and the emergence of Wage Board, the workers had been started to be recruited from among the dependent members of the retiring workers, this is locally known as *badli* or substitute recruitment.

The tea plantation being agro-based industry the women labourers have to perform different types of work which are similar to agricultural operations. They perform different types of work like plucking of tea leaves or *patti tipai*, pruning or *kalam katai*, weeding, manuring, nursery work, chilling etc. Plucking is the most preferred job of women. It is an important operation because the quality of manufactured tea depends upon the care and attention with which plucking is done. Women are mostly employed in this operation due to their smooth plucking without injuring the plant. Plucking requires patience and dexterity of fingers which the women can provide better than men. During the peak plucking season, men are also employed in plucking tea leaves but they are mainly engaged in heavy pruning, deep and medium skiffing, spraying pesticides, rough weeding, etc. Besides plucking women do perform other activities like light and medium pruning, light skiffing, hand weeding, colon thully, manuring, filling of tubes in the nursery etc. In some tea

gardens women have also been employed in tea factory as factory workers. It was very interesting to note that the tea gardens like Badamtam and Singell (Castleton Tea Factory) have employed a number of women as factory workers and once in the factory they get better wages and other facilities but they work in the factory only during the peak plucking season. During the slack or winter season, these factory women join the winter cultivation work along with other workers.

During the pre-Independence period, the amenities made available to the workers were kept at the bare minimum level such as housing, medical facilities, food grain subsidy etc. After independence, various Acts were passed regulating the condition of workers. Now the owners are bound by statutory obligations. The plantation owners offer several facilities for them but all these seem to be inadequate. Under the statutory items of plantation labour Act, 1951, management provide housing, sickness benefits, maternity benefits, education, crèche, welfare or recreation etc. Under non-statutory items, workers get foodgrain subsidy, dry tea, fuel, electricity etc. In every week each worker is provided with 1 kg. Rice and 2.300 kgs. wheat every week. The bonafide dependents of the permanent workers are also entitled to get ration. Women workers get 350 gms. of dry tea per month. Sub-staff and staff get 500 gms. and 800 gms. respectively. Women workers used to get 8 mds. (2.99 quintals) of firewood per year whereas sub-staff and staff women used to get 12 mds. (4.48 quintals) and 60 mds. (22.39 quintal) of firewood per year. In the recent years particularly after 1998 the garden management have started giving coal briquette in lieu of firewood. In case of sick or illness, women workers get sickness allowance for the total period of 14 days in a year at the rate of her daily wage. They also get woolen blankets, umbrellas, canvas aprons, etc. Every year 12 days casual leave, six week pre-natal and six week post-natal maternity leave are also granted to the women workers.

Tea gardens operate on a system of daily wages. The daily wage workers are paid on the basis of time-rate as well as piece-rate. Under the former a worker is paid according to the time for which he or she works, usually on an hourly basis, under the latter category or *thika* system, payment is made on the basis of the output of work.

Tea gardens labour wages have generally been lower than the average wages for agricultural labour in north-east India. The management have attempted to justify the difference on the grounds that the tea gardens employees enjoy additional benefits like subsidized foodgrains and supply of firewood, tea etc. This has been a contentious issue between management and labour union for decades. Wage differentials between men and women existed in the tea plantation from their inception and it was continued upto 1980. In 1976 the Govt. of India passed the Equal Remuneration Act abolishing wage differences among sexes in all industries. The equal remuneration was not enforced everywhere in the tea industry as late as 1980 despite clear statutory provisions. But after 1980, almost all the tea gardens Darjeeling hills implemented this Act. Now, there is no discrimination regarding the payment between male and female workers; but during plucking season it was found from official records that women earn more money than men on the merit of their efficiency. Women are considered more efficient in plucking of tea leave. For plucking more tea leaves during the peak plucking season workers are given *doubly* or *bakshis* (extra payment for plucking more tea leaves), which acts as an incentive for plucking more tea leaves.

Chapter – 4

**ETHNIC, SOCIAL, OCCUPATIONAL
AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF
THE WOMEN TEA PLANTATION
WORKERS**

Chapter – 4

ETHNIC, SOCIAL , OCCUPATIONAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE WOMEN TEA PLANTATION WORKERS.

4.1 Migration History :

Migration is a special process, associated with the redistribution of population. Movement of an individual or groups which involves a permanent or Semi-permanent change of usual residence is migration (Wilson: 1985)

The more authentic history of Nepalis migration to Darjeeling hills begins in the middle of the nineteenth century only when the East India company's trade interest had been focused on this region. The first large scale cultivation of tea for commercial purpose took place in 1852 and we have already discussed in the previous chapters about the close interrelations between the growth of tea gardens and rapid increase of the population of Darjeeling mainly due to the migration of Nepalis from the hills of Nepal. The growth of tea gardens as a major factor in the migration of the Nepalis to this region has been duly emphasized by various scholars like L.S.S.O' Mally (1907) and later by Sunil Munsri (1980). Besides tea industry, the recruitment of Nepalis to British army is another important factor for the migration (Kansakar: 1980). As the old historical records shows the establishment of cantonments and barracks and a battalion of British infantry and Artillery stationed at Lebong (in 1847), Katapahar and Jalapahar in 1848.

The Anglo-Nepalis Peace Treaty 1816 better known as the Segauli Treaty empowered the British Govt. to raise three regiments of Nepalis hill people in the British army. But the Govt of Nepal, later on began to discourage the recruitment of its subjects to the British army. To overcome this problems the British began to settle the Nepalis in the northern hills of India (Darjeeling, Dehradun, Simla etc.). The Nepali Govt.'s policy on this issue was relaxed later by the Prime Minister, Bir Shamsheer. This was followed by the steady recruitment of soldiers from Nepal. The soldiers settled down in this region after retirement, though a few went back to Nepal. It is also evident that Nepal had invaded Sikkim many times after the establishment of the Gorkha kingdom in Nepal. It had even succeeded to occupy it

up to the Teesta River for thirty seven-years since 1780. Nepal ruled this area until the Treaty of Titaliya signed in 1817 after which the land occupied by the Gorkhas were restored by the British to Sikkim. Many Nepalis are known to have come and settled in this region during this period (Subba: 1989)

The many scholars have analysed the main reasons behind the coming of Nepalis to this region. One of the main reasons for the migration has been identified as economic. Forinstance, Haimendorf (1977) brings out the 'push' factors such as pressure on land and resultant impoverishment of the peasants in Nepal being responsible for the migration of the Nepalis. Similarly, Caplan (1970) considered the increase pressure on land and over population forced some families of Rais and Limbus to leave panther and Limbuan area of eastern Nepal. Kansakar (1980) considered the fact that the conquest of the Kathmandu Valley and the later unification of Nepal in 1769 by Prithivi Narayan Shah were responsible for the initial migration of the Nepalis. Yet another reason he presents is the recruitment of Nepalis into the British army since as early as 1815. He also considered the large-scale migration of Nepalis from eastern part of Nepal to work in newly established tea plantation of Darjeeling as the people in the eastern Nepal prepared to immigrate into the Indian hills like Darjeeling, Dehradun, Simla due to the similar ecological niche. On the other hand, many scholars (Pradhan: 1991, Hofer: 1978) stated that the two castes i.e., Rais and Limbus along with other middle castes emigrated from eastern Nepal due to religious reasons. They were beef eaters which was directly against the Brahmanical rites of Nepal and it was strongly prohibited by the laws of the land but I do not think this factor is important one because the numerically dominant communities in Darjeeling plantations are Rai, Limbus, Tamangs, Gurungs, Mangers, Newars and other middle caste groups. Among the Rais and Limbus only the people belonging to Lhasa *gotra* or clan are beef-eaters and the *Kashi* gotra Rais and Limbus do not take beef. Among the Newari caste, only few lower caste Newars take beef. All the Mangers and Gurungs do not take beef as we know these two communities of Western Nepal were the first to adopt hindu way of life in Nepal. With the exception of Tamangs, other numerically dominant caste groups do not usually take beef. For many middle caste Nepali, to eat or not to eat

beef is determined by his or her *gotra* or clan affiliation. The scholars like Caplan (1970) and Hofer (1978) considered the fact that the introduction of new land tenure system known as *Raiker* as against the traditional type known as *kipat* system is one of the reasons for migration of Nepalis. *Kipat* system of land tenure was very famous, particularly among the Rais and Limbus of eastern Nepal. *Kipat* land was a sort of communal land holding jointly owned by a group of families (consanguineous kins), which they used to get following the law of primogeniture. This type of *Kipat* land used to pass from one generation to the next on the male line, usually the eldest senior male members were considered eligible for the inheritance of *kipat* land, which they could not sell out to others. The introduction of new land tenure known as *Raiker* replaced the old one known as *Kipat* and with the break up of traditional *kipat* holding the whole socio-economic life of the Rais and Limbus might have disturbed. They did not like the new *Raiker* system in place of their traditionally inherited system of land holding. For the Rais and Limbus, *Kipat* was not only a land management system but it was their way of life, core of their socio-cultural life. This might be one of the reasons behind the migration of Rais and Limbus of eastern Nepal bordering Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalaya. Overburden by the various taxes imposed by the Rana (Hindu) Rulers, the Rais and Limbus crossed the border of Nepal in search of jobs. In this context, I would like to cite an example of the imposition of tax known as *Megchan*. This tax was imposed by the Gorkha rulers for the collection of money to buy or raise the arms and ammunitions during the wars. The Gorkhas, after entering and conquering the Kirat Pradesh (eastern Nepal including the Khambuan and Limbuan of Rais and Limbus respectively) imposed this tax on the Rais and Limbus (Sharma: 1982). Hudgson also stated that this tax was imposed on every households in eastern Nepal. According to Sharma, this tax which was imposed during the war periods were continued in existence till 1949. Dutta (1981) considers the following developments as important for the coming of the Nepalis to the region in particular: increasing population, fragmented landholding, indebtedness, ecological crisis, and food deficiency in Nepal as indigenous and the Anglo-Nepalese Friendship Treaty of 1850, the Tripartite Delhi Agreement of 1851, and the revised Indo-Nepal Agreement of 1956 as exogenous

factors. According to Regmi (1971) a large-scale emigration of people from hill areas of Nepal to Bengal and elsewhere was due to the proletarianization for small peasants in Nepal. Pradhan (1991) has mentioned that the real cause of outmigration was economic hardship and social discrimination suffered by middle and lower castes as a result of political, social and economic domination of high caste *Tagadharies* (Bahun and Chetris) over the middle caste people of Mongoloid origin and untouchable low castes who constituted the overwhelming majority of the humble toiling fold.

It is quite plain from various writings of the British and Indian administrators that the Nepalis were the most sought after people by the British not only as soldiers but also as agriculturists. For instance, Hodgson (1874) considered them to be the best soldiers in Asia. The unwillingness of the Nepal govt. to allow the British to recruit its subjects for a considerable length of time had compelled the latter to adopt certain measures for getting them into their army. They sent agents for bringing them from Nepal and encouraged them to settle in the hill areas of Darjeeling, Shillong and Dehradun.

From the field study it is seen that in the tea plantation of Darjeeling hills, the middle and lower caste groups have migrated more than higher castes. The studies of Lionel Caplan (1970) and Patricia Caplan (1972) also shows that the lower castes of Nepalis have immigrated in larger numbers than the upper castes. Now the question may arise here as to why the *Bahun* and *Chhetris* (Upper castes) did not immigrate to the Plantation though there were a lot of small peasants among them in Nepal. One of the plausible reasons may be that they were successful agriculturists in Nepal Himalayas. The large-scale migration of lower and middle castes Nepalis is quite natural when the upper castes (Bahun and Chetris) have appropriated most of the local resources of Nepal including land, leaving the lower castes with the only option to leave. The upper castes themselves may not have felt it necessary to migrate as they had the most satisfactory socio-economic and political status there. Another reasons behind the insignificant numbers of upper castes in tea plantation is that the very number of high castes is only three (Bahun, Thakuri and Chhetris) while the lower castes Nepalis including untouchables are

more than fifteen. Obviously, the upper castes make a small percentage compared to the lower castes in Nepal too. Thus, it is quite clear that the lower castes had immigrated in large numbers than the upper castes. My own census of seven tea gardens of Darjeeling hills supports this view. The caste distribution in tea gardens of Darjeeling – Kurseong areas, the middle castes are numerically dominant. The majority of them belonged to castes like *Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Gurungs, Newars* etc. the upper castes very few. In some tea gardens percentage of *Bahun* is nil. There are good number of lower castes (untouchables) Nepalis like *Kami, Damai* and *Sarki*. The high castes generally had a satisfactory position in Nepal. It is also true that they began to immigrate in significant number only in the beginning of the twentieth century. For the first time the census of India, 1931 has put the figure of the *Tagadharis* (*Bahun* and *Chhetris*) at 8,299.

The foregoing discussion shows that multiplicity of factors, following Lee's (1966) model of 'Push' and 'Pull' have worked hand in hand in building a viable Nepali (plantation) society in Darjeeling hills. But the 'pull' factors are perhaps more important in this regard. All over the world, bringing of labourers from outside, preferably from very far-off places, and employ them in plantations has been a concomitant feature of the colonial rule. (Cotton plantation in North America, Sugar plantations in British Guyana, Fiji and Cuba, Rubber plantation of Malaysia, Coffee plantation of Brazil, tea plantation of India and Sri Lanka, sugercane plantation of Java and Tobacco plantation in Sumatra's East Coast). The main rationale behind all this is that the employers can afford to pay such labourers a very low wage, and ensure a steady labour supply by keeping them tied to an invisible chain from which it is difficult for them to come out.

4.2 Population Structure in Tea Plantations :

As stated earlier the district of Darjeeling was taken over by the East India company from the Raja of Sikkim in 1835 and the first tea plantation was started in 1839. Soon after the introduction of tea plantation in Darjeeling, a large-scale migration took place from Nepal (particularly eastern Nepal). In 1931 there was 59,018 people who had come from Nepal. According to 1941 census, Nepal

provided 45 percent of migrants to India. Petterson (1963) suggests that there are 3 million people of Nepalis origin as the regular resident in North Bengal and North Assam alone.

The following table shows the caste/communitywise distribution of Nepalis population in Darjeeling hills.

Table – 4.1

The Caste/Community wise Distribution of Nepalis population in Darjeeling in 1901.

Name of caste or community	Total number of Population
Khambus or Rai	33000
Limbu or Subba	14300
Tamang or Murmi	25400
Mangars	11900
Chettri or Khas	11600
Gurungs	8700
Newars or Pradhan	5880
Bahun or Brahmin	5000
Yakha or Dewan	1143
Kamis	9800
Damai	4600
Sarki	1800
Gharti or Bhujel	3450

Source : *LSO' Malley, Darjeeling District Gazetteer (1907).*

The above table indicates that the most numerous groups are the *Rai* or *Khambus* and *Tamang* or *Murmis*. The other numerically dominant groups were *Limbus*, *Mangers*, *Gurungs* and *Chhetris*. From the lower caste, *Kamis* or blacksmiths were numerically dominant. But the figures given by O'Malley did not include other groups or castes like *Jogi*, *Sunuwars*, *Sunars*, *Thamis*, *Majhi* etc. These communities also constitute sizeable number of Darjeeling's population.

Till the late 30's migrants constituted the bulk of tea plantation workers, after which the process stopped to a great extent. When we correlate the nature of population structure in the plantation with the above premise, we find the majority of such workers belonged to the middle and lower caste group as it is also evident from the following table.

Table – 4.2

Composition of Different Ethnic groups in Darjeeling Hill Areas (1901-1941)

Caste/Ethnic groups	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
Kiratis (Rai, Limbu and Yakha)	32.50	34.70	32.41	33.87	32.57
Tamang (Murmi)	18.68	17.07	17.80	20.34	21.61
Gurung/Mangers	5.84	6.05	5.67	5.85	6.67
Newars	3.86	4.34	5.11	5.40	5.28
Kami, Damai and Sarki (artisan Castes)	10.96	10.90	11.46	10.13	11.75
Brahmin other Nepali Group	10.93	10.23	10.89	10.67	9.58
Lepchas	6.67	6.08	5.65	6.34	5.38
Bhutias	6.23	6.75	6.23	2.79	3.28
%	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source : *Dasgupta and Samad, North Bengal Review, June, 1980.*

In the above table the population growth of different castes of Nepalis has been shown though the table does not include all the Nepali Castes, it can still throw some light on the caste or ethnic-wise population growth of the Nepalis in Darjeeling Himalayas.

It is clear from the above table that the middle caste groups (Rai, Limbu, Manger, Gurung, Tamang, Newars etc.) Constituted more than 62% whereas the lower castes (Kami, Damai, Sarki, Sunar) and the upper caste (Bahun and Chettris)

groups constituted very few percentage. Among the middle caste migrants the Kiratis (Rai and Limbu) were the majority. Next to Kiratis are the Tamangs. My field investigation also shows the same picture of caste distribution and numerical strength of caste groups.

4.3 Ethnic and Caste Structure in the Tea Plantation :

The Nepali caste system in the tea plantation is quite different from that of the traditional Nepal. Here, the immigrant Nepalis had to adjust in a completely new agro-industrial environment of the plantation society. We have already discussed in the previous chapters that unlike in Nepal, all the castes and tribes have to live in the plantation as a homogenous groups though they belong to diverse linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds. Moreover, we have already seen that in each tea gardens about 12 to 15 different castes and communities are living harmoniously and engaged in homogeneous economic activity. Under such circumstances they can not follow the strict rules regarding commensal relations, pollution and purity (concept of untouchability) etc. However, in certain situations, such as the customs in relation to marriage and death rituals, worship of ancestors (patrilineage) or *kul puja*, celebration of community festivals etc., one can see the distinct social status of a caste.

The following table shows the type of caste structure that have emerged in the region under study. It is evident from the Table that how the caste structure have changed considerably under the new agro-industrial setting.

Table – 4.3

**Caste Hierarchy of the Nepalis in Darjeeling Tea Gardens and their
Traditional Occupations**

Caste status	Caste	Traditional Occupations
High (Upper) caste	Bahun (Brahmin)	
	Upadhya	Priests
	Jaisi	Astrologers
	Chettris (Kshatriya)	
	Thakuri	Aristocrats
	Chettri	Warriers
Middle Caste	Newars	Businessmen
	Rai	Agriculturist
	Limbu	Agriculturist
	Yakha	Agriculturist
	Mangar	Agriculturist
	Thami	Agriculturist
	Sunwar	Agriculturist
	Gurung	Shepherds
	Tamang	Horse traders/cavaliers
	Bhujel	Beaten Rice makers/palanquin bearers
	Jogi	Ascetics
	Yolmo	Paper – makers
	Sherpa	Porters
Low caste (untouchables) or artisans castes	Sunar	Goldsmiths
	Kami	Ironsmiths
	Sarki	Cobblers
	Damai/Darjee	Musician/Tailors

Source: *Field work.*

The above table makes it clear that so far as the caste hierarchy is concerned there are three broad groups high, middle and low – which may also be described as upper, lower and untouchable castes. In the high caste group, the *Bahun*s are at the top who are followed by the *Thakuris* and *Chhetris*. However, according to the

Varna order, *Thakuri* and *Chhetris* belong to the Kshatriya order. These three groups are collectively known as *tagadhari* jat who wear sacred threads or *janai*. The *tagadhari* is further divided into two types namely *Jharra Tagadhari* (pure) and *Thimala* (mixed) *Tagadhari*.

The *Rais*, *Limbus*, *Tamangs*, *Newars*, *Mangars*, *Gurungs*, *Sunuwars*, *Thami*, *Newars*, *Bhujels* are corporately known as *matwali jat* or drinking castes. They widely use wine (*Jnar* and *rakshi*) and sacrifice animals in practicing their rituals and majority of them still continue their animistic religion. They occupy the middle status in the Nepalis caste hierarchy. It is very interesting to note that the internal caste hierarchy of the Newars (started during the period of Jayasthiti malla, a Malla King) which managed to survive in Kathmandu valley even after the unification of Nepal by king Prithivinarayan Shah in 1769 could not longer sustain itself in the region under study. In the tea plantation society of Darjeeling himalaya all the Newars are considered as one of the middle castes like *Rai*, *Limbu* and others. It is found that the majority of the Newars in tea plantation use the title of 'Pradhan' or 'Srestha' and few among them still use the caste titles like *Jogi*, *Kusuley*, *Kasai* etc. (untouchable Newars).

The *Kamis*, *Sunars*, *Sarki* and *Damai* or *Darjee* are collectively known as the lower caste untouchables. All of them are artisan castes specialized in different trades. They are also known as *pani-na-chalne jat* (jat from whom water cannot be taken) or Achhut jat. Of the four groups, *kamis* are numerically dominant in the tea plantation.

4.4 Nepali Caste Groups in Tea Plantation :

***Bahun*s or Brahmin**

The Brahmins locally known as *Bahun*s are of Indian origin. They had emigrated to Nepal via the western Himalaya during the twelfth century when the Muslims made their life uneasy in India. According to Bista (1976) the Brahmins and Rajputs who are said to have come from Kannauj and Chittore first met the *Khas*, a predominant race of Kumaon, Garhwal and the western districts of Nepal. Besides *Bahun*s had also emigrated to Nepal from places other than Kannauj and

Chittore. This is clear from the five major groups of Nepali Bahuns namely *Saraswat, Gaud, Kanyakubja, Maithili* and *Utkal Bahuns*. These names are adopted after the places of origin. *Saraswat Bahuns* were emigrated from the banks of the Saraswati River; *Kanyakubja* were emigrated from Kannauj, *Gaud Bahuns* from Bengal, *Maithil bahuns* were from Mithila and the *Utkal Bahuns* from Orissa. (Sharma: 1982) Bahuns were of two types, viz., *purbiya* and *paschimey*. The former were the residents of the eastern side of the Mahakali River and the latter were the residents of its western side.

Some of the clans of the *purbiya Bahuns* are: *Acharya, Adhikari, Aryal, Baral, Baskota, Bastola, Bhandari, Bhatta, Bhattarai, Chamlagain, Chapagain, Dahal, Debkota, Dhakal, Dhital, Dhungel, Ghimire, Gotame, Guragain, Kharel, Khanal, Lamichhane, Nepal, Neupane, Ojha, Parajuli, Paudel, Pokhrel, Purtel, Regmi, Rimal, Risal, Sigdel, Silwal, Subedi* and *Timisina* etc. The *Kumain* or *Paschimey Bahuns* are; *Bista, Bhatta, Dotel, Joshi, Khatiwada, Lohini, Pandey, Pant, Upreti* etc.

The Bahuns are further divided into two hierarchical groups – *Upadhyaya* and *Jaisi*. The *Upadhyaa Bahuns* are ritually superior than the *Jaisis* or *Joshi*. The former can perform priestly occupation whereas the latter can not. The *Joshi* or *Jaisi* are mainly astrologers.

Bahuns were first recorded by the census of India in 1881 but their exact number was not given. O'Malley (1907) has recorded their number around 5,000 in 1907. The population figure of *Bahuns* in Darjeeling was 8,299 in 1931 census.

Thakuris

The term '*thakuri*' is derived from '*Thakur*' which refers to the ruling chiefs under a common king. Nepal had many such chiefs until Prithivi Narayan Shah consolidated it in 1769. So anyone could become *Thakuri*. According to Bista (1979) '*Thakuri*' is "a generic term describing a group that developed into the highest social and political order out of the select people from *Khas* (Chettri), *Manger* and possibly a few Rajput immigrants from India. Most *Thakuris* have

Mongoloid features and it was likely that they represented a race indigenous to the Nepal hills (example, Manger).

There are mainly two hierarchical divisions among the Thakuris. The first and the superior group includes Shah, Sahi, Khan, Sen and Malla and the second or the inferior group comprises of *Man, Pokhrail, Kalyan, Newakotya, Hamal, Chand, Bansi, Bam, Reuka, Ruchali, Singh, Suryabansi* and *Uchai*. There was a group among the Mallas locally known as Thakuris. By the term '*Malla*' meant 'expertise in warfare'. This term gradually assumed the meaning of a 'title' which is only next to the Bahuns in Status.

The children of a union between a slave girl and a Thakuri boy are called '*Khawas*'. They adopt Thakuri kindred but can not marry with other Thakuris. The *Bhujels* who were once a slave caste in Nepal also have '*Khawas*' as one of its clan names. Besides, *Tharu* tribe living in terai Nepal also have '*Khawas*' as one of its clan names.

The Thakuris have an illustrious military background. They were considered the best recruits in the army. According to Morris (1985) in the 2nd Battalion of 9th Gurkha Rifles in 1929, the Thakuris were over 33 percent out of which 66 percent were Subedars, 75 percent Jemadars and 70 percent Havildars. In Darjeeling they were first recorded in 1901 but we do not have any information on their population figures. There are very few Thakuris in Darjeeling Tea gardens. As per my field record, there are only two Thakuri women workers one each in Pandam and Castleton tea gardens.

Chhetris or Khas

The word 'Chhetri' is a corrupt form of the Sanskrit word 'Kshatriya' and in Nepal they are known as khasas (HMSO: 1965) This necessitated for the origin of the word 'Khas' which meant 'Khasnu' or 'to fall' or fallen caste from Bahuns. It is generally agreed that the Chhetris have one of the most varied origins. There are three probable sources of such origin: 1. progeny of the Brahmins with the local women; 2. Converts or descendents from the hill tribes in the process of Sanskritization of the local inhabitants; and 3. Ekharis or descendants of the

Rajputs and other Kharia of the Plains who had sought refuge in Nepal and served as 'military adventures'.

The Chettris or Khas are divided into several clans such as Bist, Basnet, Baniya, Bohra, Burathoki, Adhikari, Gharti, Karki, Khadka, Khatri, Khulal, Mahal, Raut, Rana, Roka, Thapa etc. They have Aryan features like the Bahuns and some Thakuris. They are Hindus and wear sacred threads. Ritually they are just below Thakuris. Along with Bahuns and Thakuris, Chettris are collectively known as *Tagadhari jat*.

In Darjeeling, their total population was 11,597 in 1901, 12,599 in 191 and 30,463 in 1941. My field record shows that out of total women workers of 2,097 (in seven tea gardens) only 105 were Chettri women. They are spread or found in all the tea gardens under study though their number is very few in each gardens.

Kiratas

There is some controversy about who exactly represent the Kiratas. According to Chatterjee (1951) the term Kirata in Sanskrit indicates the wild non-Aryan tribes living in the mountains, particularly the Himalayas and in the North-eastern areas of India, who were Mongoloid in origin. On the other hand, scholars like Regmi (1969) considers only the Khamboos (Rais) and the Limboos (Subbas) of eastern Nepal (East no.2 district) and Darjeeling as the kirata tribe. Chemjong (1966) who is a Limboo himself includes many people like Mech, Lepcha, Yakha, Limboo, Mangar, Gurung, Rai Sunuwar etc. under the Kiratas category. The writers like Northey (1974) and Morris consider only the Rais (Kamboos) as Kiratas.

Now there is a general consensus among the scholars to regard only the Rais (Kamboos), Subbas (Limboos) and Yakhas (Dewan) as Kiratas. During my field work many respondents belonging to these three groups also expressed the similar views as these groups share similar socio-cultural and religious life. They have very close emotional ties between themselves and the marriage between them is not considered as an inter-caste marriage or '*ajat biha*'.

Rais (Kamboos)

The Rais or Kamboos is the single largest dominant caste group of Darjeeling hills. The term 'Rai' is known to be a title given to the Kamboos by Prithivi Narayan Shah after capturing their land in and around 1774 and the title 'Rai' amounts to the status of a chief or village head who was responsible for administering 'Kipat' land (communal land ownership). (Hermanns: 1954). The original home land of the Kamboos is Khambuan i.e., the areas between Sunkosi and Arun river of eastern Nepal. At present, Rais are mainly concentrated in the eastern portion of Nepal between Sunkosi river and the Singalila range and Mechi river, Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas.

The Rais are divided into more than a hundred *thars* or *pachha* (clans). Each thar or clan is residential clan associated with a locality. The following are some of the important thars or clans of Rais: *Chamling, Khaling, Kulung, Thulung, Namahang, Sangpang, Lohorong, Sotang, Runchenbong, Ruchnebong, Rupahang, Rodong, Bahing, Runghang, Yangdarang, Balung, Phaling, Phlemung, Nakchong, Natsereng, Namlung, Newahang, Tubihang, Dalhang, Tsetang, Tamchang, Khukkhang, Gaudong, Ochhonghang, Dumi, Dungmali, Nechali, Bangdel, Bagale, Bantawa, Rumdali, Athapre, Salten, Ombole, Ketra, Koya, Khamla, Ghume, Chowrasia, Dewaraja, Deusa, Naika, Batu, Balali, Bolna, Bhola, Mangharnu, Yamphu, Yangtongpa, Lengmuk, Saom, Subarja, Sokap, Sedengal, Sabhara, Dasingsamang* etc. Of these numerous thars, more than half belong to the Lhasa gotra (clan) and are supposed to have migrated from Lhasa, Tibet. The remaining other half thars belong to the Kashi gotra and believe to have come from Banares. In day-to day life, Kashi gotra Rais and Lhasa gotra Rais do not maintain any distinction between them and has nothing to do with marriage alliance. But the Lhasa gotra Rais are beef-eaters whereas the Kashi gotra Rais do not take beef. Each thar of Rai has a dialect of their own. But today they use Nepali as their mother tongue. Their respective dialects are used in designating Kins only or even today kinship terminology designating various kinds of affinal and consanguineous kins are based on respective dialects.

Traditionally, Rais were animists. But today their religious practices is influenced by both the Hinduism and Lamaistic form of Buddhism. Even today, the majority of the Rais use '*Bijuwa*' or '*Mangpa*' (priest) for the performance of various rites and rituals. One of the most important rituals performed by the Rais is the worship of patrilineage (male ancestors) known as *khamang* or *pitra* which is performed annually by the lineage members who are the descendents of the common male ancestor. All the Rais (except Christian Rais) still perform this rituals annually.

As we have already said that the Rais is the single largest population of the Darjeeling hills. In Darjeeling there were 33,133 of them in 1901, which increased to 64,745 in 1951. My study reveals that out of 2,097 women employees of the seven tea gardens, the number of Rai women is 504 which is the second largest population next to the Tamang women.

Limbus or Subba

The Limbus often use the title '*Subba*' which is supposed to be given to them by Prithivi Narayan Shah, a consolidator of modern Nepal. The Bhutias of Sikkim, Lepchas and Tibetans called them as *Tsong*. It is believed that out of thirteen *thars* or gotra of Limbus five have come from Tsang province of eastern Tibet to the hilly areas of eastern Nepal. This *panch thare* (five clans) Limbus belong to the Lhasa gotra or clan. The other Limbus are Kashi gotra Limbus who are, like Rais, believed to have come via Kashi. Limbus are also referred to as *Chong* by Lepchas of northern Sikkim and *Yakthumgbas* by themselves.

There is controversy regarding the history of their origin. Some scholars consider the eastern part of Nepal as their original homeland and some trace their origin from eastern part of Tibet. Many scholars consider them to have come from Kashi because of the existence of a large number of Limbus belonging to Kashi gotra or clans. Whatever be the exact history of their origin, there are some indications to show their ancient inhabitation in Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas. For instance, the following quotation of O'Malley makes it clear that the Limbus along with Lepchas are the ancient or earlier settlers of Darjeeling hills prior to the introduction of tea plantation. O'Malley (1907) writes: beyond a few Lepchas

and Limbus with their little clearing in the forests, an occasional raid from Nepal, or a stray visitor from the table-lands of Tibet, the Darjeeling Hills were practically uninhabited. According to Siiger (1967) the earliest inhabitants of Sikkim are Naang, Na-on, the chang, and the Mon. Here 'Chang' also spelt as chong or Tsong refers to the Limbus only. There is another reference by Namgyal and Drolma (1908) who writes that Phuntsog Namgyal and his group had come across the Lepchas, Limbus and Mangars in Sikkim during the Seventeenth Century. All this references makes it clear that the Limbus or Subbas are the earlier settlers of Darjeeling Sikkim Himalayas. Like Khambu or Rai, the Limbus also have a large number of *Thars* or clans such as *Chemjhong, Lingden, Loksom, Tumba, Tambakhole, Phudong, Angbang, Angthupuhang, Chongbang, Chobeguhang, Ektinhang, Fanghang, Fenduwa, Furumbo, Kanga, Mabuhang, Kambang, Swangsabu, Mangyung, Pahing, Pegahang, Pathegimbang, Punglang, Samahang, Heena, Hellock, Phembu, Rupihang, Tamaden, Tumbalamphe, Satihangma, Shelle, Shewan, Shigu, Tamsuhang, Thebe, Singthebe, Thuppoko, Tummyangpa, Ingbadokpa, Linkhim, Mayam, Onchhongbo, Phurumbo* and *Youngya* etc.

As in the case of the Rais, thars of Limbus are further divided into sub-thars which are associated with some locality (for instance, Tambakhole Limbu is associated with Tamakoshi regions of eastern Nepal) and the dialects spoken by the members of one thar is often unintelligible to the members of another thar. The Limbus are officially Hindus but they are still basically animists. As in the case of Rais, the Limbus too still invite their own traditional priest called *phedongma* to perform different rites and rituals. He performs multiple roles as a priest, an astrologer and a medicinemen. '*Mundhum*' is considered as one of the earliest sacred religious text of the Limbus and the phedangma should have a thorough knowledge of it.

The total number of the Limbus in Darjeeling was 14,305 in 1901 but even after fifty years their population are recorded to be 19,835 only. The reason for such a slow growth of population is not known. My field record shows a number of Limbu Women in different gardens like Badamtam, Vah-Takvar and Singell.

Yakhas

The Yakhas are also called 'Dewan', 'Rai' and 'Jimdar'. They are also one of the kirata group who, like the Limbus call themselves '*Yakthumbas*'. According to Chemjong (1966) they are known to have been mentioned in the Mahabansa which is a Buddhist religious text by Mahanam Bhikshu written in pali language in the fifth century. It is believed that the present yakhas are the descendents of the same 'Yakha' described by Bhikshu in the Mahabansa.

Little is known about their history or origin and affiliation with other kirata groups. Some scholars categorize them with the Rais and other with the Limbus. For instance, Scholars like Northey and Morris (1974) believe that they are more inclined to the Rais than the Limbus. I also agree with them because the Yakhas or Dewan have many socio-cultural features which are more similar with the Rais than the Limbus. Though these three Kirata groups (Rais, Limbus, Yakhas) have many things in common e.g., all of them are animistic and bury their dead ones. The negotiated marriage can take place among these three communities or the marriage between Yakhas and Limbus, or Yakhas and Rais is not considered as inter caste or inter community marriage. Racially or physically also it is very difficult to distinguish Yakhas from Rais and Limbus. There is no general consensus among the scholars regarding their actual affiliation with other kirata group but the majority of the Yakhas want to categorize themselves with the Rais than with the Limbus. It is true that in the Limbus dominant areas, Yakhas are considered as Limbus and the Rais dominant areas they are known as Rais. During my field work I interviewed many Yakha women (respondents) and the majority of them use the title 'Rai' and not the Limbus. I also visited one village called Yakhadhura (named after Yakha community who were the earlier settlers of the village) in Badamtam tea garden and the majority of the Yakha respondents (male and female) expressed their views that they are sub-section of Rai and want to categorize themselves with the Rais and not with the Limbus. As we have already pointed out that these three Kirata groups share many things in common. One more interesting feature about Yakhas is that they do not have their own priest like that of Rais and Limbus. So they can invite Rai *Bijuwa* or Limbu *Phedongna* for funeral rites and other rituals. Though officially

they write Hinduism as their religion yet they are still very much animistic and majority of them still perform pitripuja or worship of patrilineage. The only thing which differentiates the Yakhas from Rais and Limbus is their women's dress called 'Mekhling' and their distinct language or dialect which they do not use now-a-days.

For the first time, Yakhas are mentioned in the census of 1901. Their total population in the Darjeeling hills was 1,143 in 1901. Now we do not have separate census figure on Yakhas. Now a days almost all the Yakhas use the Rai title and do not maintain a separate identity of their own. That is why I have not maintain a separate figure on Yakha women and included all of them (about 18) under Rai category.

Newars

The term 'Newar' is supposed to be first used for the inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley during the seventeenth century (before the unification of Nepal by Shah dynasty). According to Regmi (1969) the term Newar does not connote any racial type and it is purely a geographical concept. According to Nepali (1965) the present Newars are drawn from the Abhiras, Kiratas, the Lichhavis, the vaisya Thakuri and the Karnatakes. It is very difficult to say who were the forerunners of the present Newar. Sharma (1982) also holds the similar views that the present Newari society or Newari caste is formed out of acculturation and assimilation of several groups (Lichhavi, Malla, Kirat etc.) who ruled over Nepal prior to the unification of Nepal by Prithivi Narayan Shah in 1769. At present, Newars are numerically dominant in the fertile areas of Kathmandu Valley, Patan and Bhaktapur of Nepal.

Religion wise, they are broadly divided into two groups: *Shivamargis* or Hindu Newars like Rajyopadhyaya, Upadhyaya (Deubhaju), six clans or *Cha thare Shrestha*, *Dhobi*, *Kasai*, *Kusuley*, *Podhe*, *Chyame* etc. *Buddhamargis* or Budhist Newar like *Bajracharya*, *Shakya*, *Tuladhar*, *Tamrakar*, *Kangsakar*, *Amatya*, *Pradhan*, *Rajbhandari*, *Jyapu*, *Kumale*, *Chitrakar*, *Napit* etc. The Newars are internally divided into a number of castes. According to Nepali (1965) King Jayasthiti Malla was solely responsible for the introduction of the Newari caste

system on the basis of Hindu Varna model during the fourteenth century. The Newari caste system existed in and around the Kathmandu valley till 1769 when it received a death blow as the Gorkha conquerors superimposed their own castes on that of the Newars [see Table-4.5].

The Newars have a very important social institution known as '*Guthi*' which is common among all types of Newars. There is hardly any Newars who is not a member of some Guthi. There are three important Guthis among the Newars. They are – *Sanaguthi*, *Siguthi* and *Dewaliguthi*. The *Sanaguthi*, and *Siguthi* are related with death and funeral rites whereas the *Dewaliguthi* is solely responsible for the ancestor worship or the worship of partilineage and its members are the descendants of a common male ancestor. The Newars called their eldest male head of the joint family as *Thakali* and his wife as '*Thakali Naki*'. Bajracharya and Dewbhaju (Deva Brahmin) are the priests of Buddhist and Hindu Newars respectively.

In Darjeeling, the total population of the Newars in 1901 was 5,770 which rose to 14,827 in 1951. The Newars are fairly numerous in Darjeeling hills. Their population is slightly lower than the Rais and Tamangs. My field report reveals that out of 2,097 women workers of seven tea gardens, 180 belong to Newari caste.

Tamangs or Murmis

The *Tamangs* or *Murmis* are a Mongolian group who claim to be among the earliest settlers of Nepal. They are also called *Mulmi*, *Dhamang*, *Ishang* and *Sain*. The word '*Murmi*' or '*Mulmi*' means inhabitants of border areas between Nepal and Tibet. One of their living legends says that they were cavaliers of Srong Tsen Gampo, a Tibetan King. At present, they are mainly concentrated in the hills of Kathmandu valleys viz., Sindhupalchok, Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Dhading, Makwanpur, Kabhrepalchok etc.

The Tamangs have a hierarchical division of their clan or *thar* into groups: *Bara Jat* or 'twelve clans' and *Athara Jat* or 'eighteen clans', the former enjoying a higher status. But this division is hardly seen in actual relationship. Tamangs are divided into numbers of clans such as *Goley*, *Gomden*, *Glan*, *Ghisingh*, *Chyaba*, *Zimba*, *Pakhrin*, *Baja*, *Bamjan*, *Manden*, *Tupa*, *Syangbo*, *Singden*, *Samden*, *Sai*,

Syangden, Waiba, Lho, Lopchan, Londen, Rumba, Yonzon, Moktan, Memsingh, Pain, Dong, Thing, Titung, Darpa, Darden etc. Tamangs are Buddhists. They are the followers of Nyingmapa Sect or Mahayana form of Buddhism who worship Guru Rimborche (Guru Padmasambava).

In Darjeeling hills, they are the second numerically dominant group next to Rai. The Tamangs were first time recorded in 1906, their population at that time was 25,400. According to 1931 census, their total population in Darjeeling himalaya was 43,114 or 16.9 percent of the total Nepali population in the district then. My field record shows that the Tamangs along with Rais form the single largest community in tea gardens.

Jogis

The Jogis are also called '*Sanyasis*' which means ascetics. Many people consider them to be the offsprings of the Bahuns and Chettris. Traditionally, they used to roam about the villages and asked for alms after having blown the conch shells or the shin bone of human body around the houses at night and driving away the evil spirits. Now-a-days Jogis of Darjeeling have totally stopped this profesion. But in Nepal they still practice this profesion. Every year the Jogis from Nepal terai come to Darjeeling and Sikkim for asking alms. They are the followers of a Hindu sect called '*Gorakhnath*'. This sect has a strong tradition of worshipping the gurus (Nath Jogi) or teachers from whom they learn the mantras. In 1931 census their total population in Darjeeling was 1,789. My field record shows that a small percentage of Jogi women are found in different tea gardens like Singell.

Bhujels or Ghartis

The *Bhujels* are also called '*Gharti*' and '*Khawas*'. But a good number of Tharus (important indigenous tribe of Nepal terai) are also called '*Khawas*'. It is believed that the *Bhujels* or *Ghartis* were the descendants of manumitted slaves. In Nepal, prior to the abolision of slavery in 1824 A.D., the rich people mostly the aristocratic family used to keep number of slaves. The *Bhujels* were treated as one of the untouchable castes and their social status was so low but after the abolision of

slavery they are treated as middle caste group. Even in Nepal, their position is much better now. They are also Hindus. They do not have language of their own.

In Darjeeling hills, they were first time recorded in 1906 and at that time their population was 3,450. According to 1931 census, the total population of Bhujels in Darjeeling was 6,312. My field record reveals a good number of Bhujel women in Castleton and Singell tea gardens of Kurseong areas.

Mangars

Like many other Nepali community they also belong to Tibeto-Burmese ethnic group. Regarding the origin of Manger tribe, Chemjong (1966) writes: The origin of Mangar tribe as mentioned in kirat chronology is a place in the north called Shin. When they came to Sikkim they settled there permanently. They built *Jongs* or Forts, wherever they settled and called them *Mangar Jong*, or the fort of Mangers, Perhaps the name of Mangar Jong Tea Garden in Darjeeling is named after the *Mangar Jong* or the fort of Mangars as we know the fact of Darjeeling which was a part of Sikkim before 1835. Namgyal and Drolma (1908) also accepted the fact of Mangars living in Sikkim since the 17th centuries. All these facts shows that along with the Limbus and Rais, Mangers were the early settlers of Darjeeling himalayas.

Some writers believed that they are the degenerates of Thakuris (Kshatriyas). According to Dahal (1991) Mangars were given the status of Kshatriyas during the reign of Gorkha dynasty (Shah dynasty) in Nepal. It is believed that they are one of the first tribe to be Hinduised by the Brahmins. Their socio-cultural features are similar to that of Brahmans and Kshatriyas.

Mangars are divided into three important *thars* or clans namely *Thapa*, *Rana* and *Aley*. The total number of sub-clans of these three clans is about 400 which is supposed to be the highest in the Nepali society. It is believed that they are among the earlier settlers in the Sikkim, Darjeeling and Nepal Himalayas.

In Darjeeling, their population was 11,900 in 1906 which rose to 19,413 in 1951. According to my field survey, out of 2,097 women workers in seven tea gardens only 115 women belong to Mangar caste.

Gurungs

Like Mangars, Gurungs also belong to Mongoloid physical stock and speak their own dialect based on Tibeto-Burman group. It is believed that the Gurungs along with Mangars are the first indigenous tribes of Nepal to receive the Hindu Brahmanic influence as the Brahmans of Indian origin had first contact with the Mangar and Gurung tribe of Western Nepal.

Regarding the origin of Gurung Chemjong (1966) writes: they were one of the seven tribes of Northern Tibet who had migrated from there to Kham province of Eastern Tibet and from there to Unan province of Southern China where they mixed up with Tai shan tribes and spread towards South and Western direction under their leaders Sai-ik-Shan and Segop Shan. At present Gurungs are mainly concentrated in Western Nepal particularly in the areas of Buragandaki, Kaligandaki and Gandaki. A good number of Gurungs are also found in eastern Nepal particularly in the areas of Rumjatar where they speak in Nepal language but the Gurungs of Western Nepal speak in their own language. Gurungs are traditionally known to be 'animists' but they were later Hinduised. But we also find a good number of Buddhist Gurungs who use Buddhist Lamas for ceremonial purposes.

Gurungs are divided into two hierarchical strata or divisions called the 'four clans' or *Char Jat* and the 'sixteen clans' or the *solah Jat*. The former holding superior status than the latter. The history witnessed the bitter or inimical relationship between these two groupings. But the difference between '*Char Jat*' and '*Solha Jat*' is no longer maintained today. The conflicting or bitter relationship between these two broad clans was put to an end in 1867 (during the reign of Jangabhadur Rana) by colonel Lachaman Gurung by signing a bond of friendship. (Sharma: 1982) Now-a-days even the Gurungs of Darjeeling – Sikkim hills do not make any distinction between *Char Jat* and *Solha Jat*. The '*Char Jat*' or four clans of Gurungs are Ghaley, Ghodane, Lama and Lamichane and Sixteen Jat or *Solaha thare* (clans) Gurungs are Dhyabre, Kyawche, Dorjee, Kurumchejigre, Dorjalo, Rimali, Fouj, Chormikom, Yi, Migi, Paygi, Khatra, Yoj, Kholali, Sogun, Thormaji etc. The Gurung dormitory or *rodi ghar* is an interesting institution like many tribals

of north-east India, Gurung had their youth hostel or *rodi ghar* for both boys and girls who had crossed the age of Sixteen. Rodi ghar used to perform so many functions. The selection of future marital partner was one of the important function of the dormitory. Now this is dead institution even in Nepal.

According to O' Malley (1907) their population in the Darjeeling district was about 8,700 in 1901 Darjeeling which was slightly less than the population of Mangars. In 1951, their population in the district rose to 17,864. My survey record shows a good number of Gurung women workers in different gardens like Pandam, Badamtam and Vah-Tukvar. As per my field data they are the fifth numerically dominant community in the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills.

Sunuwars or Mukhias

Sunuwars are also called 'Mukhias' which is a title equivalent to 'Rai' or 'Subba'. Regarding their early history, origin and migration, Chemjong (1966) writes that they are supposed to have migrated to different places in three groups. The first group, the *Jirel* and *Sirel Sunuwars* traveled from Tibet to Kashmir, Punjab and Bihar and finally reached Simangarh from where they went further and ultimately settled in Jirikhola and Siri Khola areas of central Nepal. Hence, they are named after two Kholas or rivers as *Jirel* and *Sirel*. The second group, called Sunuwars proper, also came from Tibet, following the routes of changpo and Brahmaputra rivers, and finally reached the side of Sunkoshi River in eastern Nepal. The third group migrated from Simanggarh to eastern Nepal, settled with the Rais and became one of the Rais. At present Sunuwars are densely inhabited in the hilly areas of eastern Nepal (Particularly in the areas between Likhu Khola and Khunti Khola), Sikkim and Darjeeling Himalayas.

Sunuwars are traditionally divided into two hierarchical groups of clans called *Bara Thar* or 'twelve clans' and *Das Thar* or 'ten clans'. The former group of clans practise Hinduism and the latter, mainly the Jirels, practise lamaistic Buddhism. But in day to day life they do not maintain any socio-cultural difference and the intermarriage between these two groups is also permitted. The Sunuwars

have their own language '*Koincho*' which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group and their script is called '*Koinch brehs*'.

The total population of the Sunuwars in Darjeeling was 4,822 in 1931. My field record shows about 52 women workers belonging to Sunuwar castes mainly in Badamtam and Vah-Tukvar tea gardens of Darjeeling hills.

Thami

The history of origin and migration of Thami is obscure. There are different contradictory views on their linguistic and racial affinity with the neighbouring groups. Scholars like Sharma (1982) holds the view that the Thamis shows close linguistic affinity with the Khambus or Rais and claims that they can be considered as one of the Rai group. He says the linguistic variation may be attributable to the ecological variation. On the other hand, Bista (1979) writes that they are predominantly found in Tamang areas and practise Socio-economic and religious customs similar to that of Tamangs. It is true that the physical features of the Thamis show a closer affinity with the Tamangs than with the Rais. The majority of the scholars believed that they are more akin to the Tamangs. At present, they are densely inhabiting or populated in the Dolakha district of eastern Nepal. They are traditionally Buddhists like that of Tamangs. But now-a-days Thamis profess both the Hindu and Buddhist religion.

The Thamis are also divided into a number of *thars* or clans like Dolakhe, Dumpali, Ishirishmi, Dangurishmi, Rishmi, Angkami, Shirishmi etc. The population of Thami is very few in Darjeeling district. As my field records shows a very few (10 only) women workers belonging to Thami caste who are working mainly in Pandam and Springside tea gardens.

Yolmus

The Yolmus or Kagatey who used to be treated as one of the Tamang groups but today they are given the status of a scheduled tribe and treated as one of the Bhutia groups. Like Tamangs they are also Buddhist but they have closer socio-cultural ties with the Nepalis. The population of this tribe is very few in Darjeeling hills.

Sherpas

The word '*Sherpa*' is supposed to be a corrupt form of the word '*Sharpa*' which means people 'living in the east'. Like Tamangs they are also believed to have come from the eastern part of Tibet. At present, Sherpas are mainly concentrated in the northern areas of eastern Nepal particularly in the Helumbu and Solukhumbu areas. A good number of Sherpas are also living in Darjeeling, Sikkim and Bhutan Himalayas. The Sherpas are well known all over the world as porters and guides in mountain expedition.

Like other tribals, they are also divided into number of exogamous clans, viz., Dawa, Goley, Thaktu, Goparma, Garja, Chiyawa, Mopa, Mendey, Shagup, Sherba, Salaka, Lama, Pangdorjee, Paldorjee, Pangkarma etc. Like many Tibetans, they practise adelphic or fraternal polyandry. The practice of partilateral cross-cousin marriage (marriage between mother's brother's son and father's sister's daughter) is also widely prevalent. They are all Buddhists and recognized as scheduled tribe in West Bengal and Sikkim.

The population of Sherpa was first time recorded in Darjeeling and it was around 3,450 in 1906. Again in 1931 census they were recorded as 6,929.

Majhi

The Majhis (boatmen or fishermen) who are declared as Scheduled Castes in West Bengal and Sikkim. Their population is very few in Darjeeling Hills. But in Sikkim, a good number of Majhis are living in the Majhi gaon near Jorethang in South Sikkim and Majhitar near Rangpo in the east. In Darjeeling hills, some of the oldest living families now live near Pedong and Algarah (Kalimpong sub-division of Darjeeling District) near the ruins and remnants of old forts. Traditionally they lived in caves, river beds, or in huts of bamboo and wood. Though they have their own dialect Majhi, they speak Nepali.

There are legends associated with the Majhis. It is believed that Majhis emerged when boatmen had to ply men to earth through a vast mass of water. Even today if a boat capsizes, it is usually the Majhis who take out their diving equipment and rescue the victims (Lama: 2001)

The Majhis worship the river god, the moon god and lord shiva. They have their own *thankari*, the exorcist. Families are mainly patrilineal and property is always inherited by the eldest male.

Kamis, Damais, Sunar and Sarkis

The Kamis (ironsmith), Damais or Darjees (Musician or tailors), Sunars (goldsmith) and Sarkis (Cobbler) are 'untouchables' or *pani-na-chal-ne Jat* (achhut Jat) and they occupy the lowest rank in the Nepali caste hierarchy.

Like many other Indian (Hindu) occupational castes they must have derived their caste name or titles from their occupation or profession. For instance, the word 'Kami' derived its meaning from the word *Kamaunu*. It connotes to manufacture. The Kamis are artisans who manufacture varieties of utensils and domestic implements. The word '*Damai*' is similarly derived from the word *Damaha* which is the chief musical instrument used in the marriage ceremony. Among the Damais those who practice tailoring are called *Darjees*. The word *Sunar* is also derives its meaning from 'Sun or gold'. The Sunars are goldsmith.

The exact history of origin of these castes is obscure but many scholars still hold the view that they are the progeny of Brahmans and Chhetris of Nepal. It is true that these artisan castes have Aryan features and culturally they are more closer to Brahmans and Chhetris rather than to other middle castes groups who are Mongoloids. Besides common physical and cultural properties one can find the untouchables and twice-born castes bearing the common family names or caste titles. For instance, there are number of titles like *Khati, Ghimire, Singh* which are equally present in both the untouchables and twice-born e.g., in Nepali society, one can get Biswakarma Khati (untouchables), Neogi Khati and Tuwar Khati (Kshatriya Khati). Like wise, we get Ghimire (untouchables) and Buripola Ghimire and Chipokhala Ghimire who are Brahmans.

The untouchables themselves too have strong arguments that they are the descendents of Bahun and Chettris. For instance, writers like Pradhan (1978) also holds the same view that the Nepali untouchables seem to be the progeny of Brahmans and Chhetris of Nepal but seem to have been relegated by them for some

unsocial behaviour. This system was known as *Pani Bara Katnu* means to boycott them stating *Achhut Jats* or untouchables castes. The fact that the population of the untouchable is not more than ten percent of the total Nepali population in Darjeeling as well as in Nepal shows the possibility that they could have been the offsprings of the 'fallen' people. Of the three main untouchables castes, the Kamis seem to be the most numerically dominant. The Kamis are for the first time recorded in the census of 1901. Their total population in that year was around 9,800 which rose to 16,272 in 1931 and again in 1961, their population increase to 19,851 forming 26.5 percent of the total scheduled castes population of the Darjeeling hills. My field records also reveals the same fact that they are the most numerous group among the untouchables. (see table 4.6) As per the census of 1901, the population of Damais is 4,600 in Darjeeling which rose to 8,162 in 1931. The population of Sarki (shoemakers) was 1,800 in 1901 which rose to 2,778 in 1931.

4.5 Nepali Caste System in Tea Plantation: Caste hierarchy and Caste Structure :

The Nepali society did not have any caste system until the beginning of the fourteenth century. According to Hamilton (1819) there were only 'tribes in the Nepali society, who were gradually brought under the caste system by immigrant Hindus from India namely Rajputs and Brahmans. He further writes that before the arrival of the Rajputs, the whole nation i.e., Nepal consisted of twelve *thums* or clans and each thum was governed by a chief who was considered as the head of a common family.

It is a historical fact that the tribes like *Gurungs* and *Mangars* of western Nepal were the first to be converted into Hindus as they lived along the path of the Indian emigrants. It is true that these two groups are more sanskritised than the other kirata tribes like Rais, Limbu and Yakhas and some Gurungs and Mangars gotras or thars are similar like that of the Brahmans (e.g., char thare or four clans Gurungs have Bhardwaj gotra). Prior to the unification of Nepal by the king Prithivinarayan Shah in 1769, there was a separate caste system among the *Newars*. It was king Jayasthiti Malla who was responsible for the introduction of caste system on the

basis of Indian varna model during the fourteenth century. This king organized the Nepali society in the framework of *varna* and castes with the help of some Indian Brahmans. The criteria taken for social ranking were hereditary occupation, marriage circles and ceremonial purity. (Nepali: 1965)

The following table shows that the Newari caste hierarchy was broadly composed of six layers and the distinction between Hindus and Buddhists did not exist below the unclean castes. Nepali (1965) however, says that such caste hierarchy is only tentative and may be disputed from a particular castes point of view. For instance, it is believed that the *Udas* held the highest rank in the Kathmandu valley while *vanra* were ascetics. It is clear from the following table that the newars had their own priests, artisans and untouchable castes.

Table – 4.4
Newari Caste Hierarchy until 1769.

Caste Status	Hindu Newars	Buddhist Newars
Priestly castes	Deva Brahmin	Gubhaju or Bajracharya
High Castes	Chhatharia Shrestha Panchatharia Shrestha	Vanra or Bare Udas
Upper lower Caste	Pahari, Jyapoo	Hale or Guala
Lower Castes	Gathu-Chitrakar or Nankhoosa pu(n) or Mali	Cheepa Manandhar kow or Ranjitkar Salmi
Unclean Castes	du(n), Yeeya (n) Bha, Kasai Kusle or Jogi	Balami Sanga or Sangal
Untouchable Castes	Pore-Kullu, Chyame, Hare Haru	

* Castes put horizontally have equal ritual status

Source : *Nepali: 1965:150.*

This Newari caste hierarchy existed in the valley for about four centuries. It was only around 1769 that it received a death blow as the Gorkha conquerors (Kshatriyas) superimposed their own castes on that of the Newars. After 1769, a new

caste society emerged in Nepal on the sub-structure of the Mongoloid and other tribes who were relegated to the status of sudras. Hence, prior to 1769, except in case of Hindus and Buddhist Newars, the basis of caste hierarchy was totally absent among the Mongoloid tribes such as *Rai*, *Limbu*, *Tamang*, *Sunuwars*, *Gurung* and *Mangars*. The new caste system or caste hierarchy which was established after the arrival of Brahmans and Kshatriyas had one very important features i.e., the creation of vertical as well as horizontal groups and the inclusion of many tribes (particularly Kiratas and Mongoloids) in the vaisya and sudra category. It is also important to mention here that the Mongoloid tribes like *Gurungs* and *Mangars* of western Nepal received a special status in between the Kshatriyas and Vaisyas. It was already pointed out in the previous section that the Gurungs and Mangars were the first to be converted into Hindus and it was king Prithivinarayan Shah who with the help of the Mangars and Gurungs unified and created modern Nepal. The new caste hierarchy that emerged in Nepal after 1769 is shown below :

Table – 4.5
Caste Hierarchy after 1769

Varna	Caste
Brahmin	- Upadhyaya, Kumai, Jaisi and Deva Bhaju (Newar)
Kshatriya	- Thakuri, Chhetri, Khatri
Double Order	- Mangar and Gurung
Vaisya	- Newar high Caste
Shudra	- Limbu, Rai, Low caste Newars, Sunuwars, Murmis, Thamis, etc.
Untouchables	- Nepali (Kami, Sarki, Damai) - Newar (Chyame, Pore etc.)

Source: *Nepali 1965: 148.*

Thus, the new caste structure introduced or established by king Prithivinarayan Shah was strictly guarded in Nepal as it received government patronage. But the existence of Buddhists among the Newars is never an obstacle to

the smooth functioning of caste system in Nepal. (Rosser: 1966) The internal caste hierarchy ;of the Newars, at least in the Kathmandu valley, persists even today.

According to the new caste hierarchy Brahmans (Upadhyay, Jaisi, Dev Bhanju or Newari Brahmans) and Kshatriyas (thakuris, Khatri, Rajputs, Chettris) are collectively known as '*Tagadhari*' *Jats* means those who wear sacred threads or *janai*. The Rai, Limbu, Tamangs, Sunuwars, Thamis, mangers and Gurungs are known as *Matwali jats* which means drinking castes. But here the expression *Matwali jat* is a misnomer in the sense that there are many drinking castes members who do not drink while many who are not do it. Those who are known as *Matwali jats* are the Tibeto-Burman speaking groups and they are indigenous tribes of Nepal. Many of these tribes do not strictly follow the caste principles. For examples, Murmis or Tamangs and Thamis have given the status of Shudra and they are also known as *Matwali jats* but they do not follow caste principles and still profess their indigeneous religion i.e., Buddhism. Another example is Rais and Limbus. They are officially Hindus but their Socio-cultural features (rites and rituals) reveals their tribal animistic religion. The writers like Northey and Morris (1974) also hold the same view that most of the Rais and Limbus accepted Hinduism and its caste principles as a fashion only to get the ruling class favour (Hindu Shah rulers).

This is perhaps one of the main reason why the middle caste groups (Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Mangar, Gurung, Newars, Sunuwars) who were the indigenous tribes of Nepal migrated in larger number from there (see chapters 3 & 4). In the following section we shall focus our attention on the caste structure or hierarchy and the traditional caste occupations of the women workers in tea plantation. We shall also try to find out the reasons behind the overwhelming majority of women from indigenous tribes of Nepal in the tea plantation of Darjeeling hills.

4.6 Ethnic/Caste Background of the Women Workers :

It goes without saying that the bulk of the workers in Darjeeling hills are descendants of the immigrant Nepali from rural Nepal. In the plantation society they form a homogenous group or an organic whole despite their different place of origin and heterogenous socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

In the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills the majority of the working population are of Mongolion origin belonging chiefly to various Nepalese Castes. In the following section we have shown the caste/ethnic background of the women workers in different tea gardens under study.

Table – 4.6

Caste or Ethnjic Background of Women workers in Seven Tea Gardens.

Caste/Ethnic Groups		Name of Tea Gardens							Total
		Badamtam	Pandam	Vah-Tukvar	Happy Valley	Springside	Singell	Castleton	
Brahmin (Bahun)	Upper Caste	13	12	--	01	--	04	03	33
Thakuri		--	01	--	--	--	--	01	02
Chettri		19	13	27	02	06	31	07	105
Rai	Middle Caste	250	13	134	32	02	63	06	504
Limbu		17	01	4	04	--	21	01	88
Manger		20	32	04	04	04	45	06	115
Tamang		117	09	124	37	107	137	72	603
Newar		85	15	04	04	23	46	03	180
Sunwar		25	02	16	03	01	05	--	52
Gurung		49	22	11	48	07	06	01	144
Thami		--	07	--	--	03	--	--	10
Bhujel		03	--	08	--	02	13	27	53
Kami (Biswakarma)	Lower Caste	52	06	12	07	07	28	20	132
Damai (Darjee)		17	01	06	04	04	06	01	39
Sarki		--	--	--	03	--	04	01	08
Sunar		--	--	--	--	02	--	--	02
Jogi		--	02	--	--	02	--	--	04
Kusuley		02	--	--	--	--	--	--	02
Majhi		--	--	--	02	--	--	--	02
Lepcha		Tribe and other community	02	--	02	--	--	--	--
Bhutia	03		--	01	--	--	01	--	05
Sherpa Plainsmen	03		--	03	--	--	--	--	06
Total Women Workers		680 (32%)	134 (6%)	396 (19%)	159 (7%)	170 (8%)	414 (20%)	149 (8%)	2097

Source : Field Studies on Various Tea Garden Offices.

4.7 Occupational Background of Women Tea Plantation Workers :

The plantation workers of Darjeeling hills differ from the Assam, Terai and Dooar's plantation workers where 80 per cent labourers are recruited from Tribal people of Chotangapur. (Jharkhand), Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh whereas in Darjeeling hills about 95% of workers are from Nepali caste groups. They are the descendants of the immigrant Nepali from rural Nepal particularly from Eastern and western hills. They form a homogenous group and engaged in

homogenous activity in plantation despite their diverse occupational background and the place of origin.

In the tea plantation of Darjeeling hills, the middle caste groups are numerically dominant. Among the middle caste groups Rais and Tamang are in majority. Rais and Tamangs together with the Mangars, Gurungs, Limbus, Sunuwar etc. form about 70 percent of the total workforce. There are very few workers from upper and lower caste groups. A brief discussion of their traditional caste or community occupation is necessary for understanding the numerical dominance of the middle caste groups and their better adaptation and adjustment in the agro-industrial setting of the tea plantation.

Table – 4.6 shows that in the Nepal society the Brahmin (Bahun) occupy the highest position in the caste hierarchy and along with the Thakuri and Chettri they form an upper caste group. The traditional occupation of the Bahun (Upadhyaya) is priesthood while that of Jaisi or Joshi Bahun is astrologers and farming. They are not entitled to practise priesthood as they are ritually inferior than the pure Upadhaya Bahun. The traditional occupation of Thakuri and chettri are aristocrats and warriors respectively. The Thakuris were the ruling caste of Nepal. The Thakuris and chhetris are mainly found in the 9th Gorkha Regiment of the Indian army. Like all other agriculturists, the Chettris also live in rural areas of Nepal and majority of them are also engaged in farming. Gurungs were mainly found in the western and central Nepal. Traditionally they were chiefly the pastoral community (shepherd) of the high Himalayas. (Bista: 1976) This Gurungs along with the Mangars of Western Nepal were sought in the British and Indian army for their martial superiority. The Indian government still maintains 3rd, 4th, 5th and 8th Gorkha Regiment comprising mainly of Gurungs and Mangars of Western Nepal and Darjeeling hills. These different battalions are collectively known as '*paschimey palton*'. The traditional occupation of Mangars was agriculture and some skilled works such as craftsmen in masonry, carpentry, stonecutting, quarrying etc. The works on mines and state quarries are still found to have been done by the Mangars in the villages of eastern Nepal today. Like Gurungs, they also had a pastoral economy. Rais were mainly agriculturists. In eastern Nepal, they had traditional

ownership of land known as Kipat system. It was a sort of communal land ownership jointly owned by an extended family consisting of the members of fifth and sixth generation. The eldest male head of a particular lineage (large joint family) was responsible for the administration and management of this communal land. Rais also use to practice shifting cultivation or *Bhasme Kheti*. Both male and female could equally participate in the field to cultivate crops for domestic needs as well as for the markets. The Rais were mainly concentrated in eastern Nepal (Majh-Kirat) right upto the Arun and Tamar rivers near Dharan. Morris and Northey (1974) puts that bordering the Indian subcontinent which helped themselves to be enrolled in the services of British and Indian Gorkha regiments. Even today, Rais along with Limbus comprise the 11th Gorkha Regiment of the Indian army. This regiment is also known as '*Purbiya Palton*'.

Like Rais, the Limbus are also agriculturists. They were mainly concentrated in eastern most areas (pallo-kirot) of Nepal known as 'Limbuan' which shares the common boundary with western Sikkim and Darjeeling hills. Like the Rais or Khambus of Khambuan, the Limbus of Limbuan also had an interesting history of their communal land ownership known as Kipat system. The private ownership or individual right of landownership was totally absent in the Limbuan. Like Rai women, women in Limbu community also use to take part actively in the agricultural field. Besides farming as their primary occupation, a good number of Limbus are working in both the British and the Indian army.

Another numerically dominant caste in tea gardens is Newars. The traditional occupation of the Newars is said to be 'business' but actually they had a wide distribution of occupations. So it would be better to discuss their internal caste structure and associated caste-based traditional occupations as a numbers of women workers still use their respective Newari caste titles like Kusuley, Jogi, Kasai etc. and do not enjoy middle caste status as other Newars.

It is already shown in table 4.4 that the Newars had internal caste structure associated with a particular occupation or profession till 1769 (during the Mall regime) but after 1769 Hindu Shah rulers imposed their own caste system and all the

Newars were relegated to the position of vaisya and given them middle caste status. (see Table-4.5). But even today one can find the continuation of the internal caste structure at least in and around Kathmandu valley.

Table – 4.7

Newari Caste and Occupational Hierarchy upto 1769

Caste	Traditional Occupation
Deo Brahmin	Family Priests
Bhatta Brahmin	Temple Priests
Jha Brahmin	Temple Priests
Gubhaju Brahmin	Family Priests
Bare	Gold and Silver Smiths
Shrestha/Sheshya	Merchants
Urya/Udas	Merchants/Craftsmen
Jayapu	Farmers
Kuma	Potters
Sayami	Oil Pressers
Khusa	Palanquin Bearers
Nau/Napith	Barbers
Kau	Blacksmiths
Bha	Funeral Duties
Gathu	Gardeners
Tepe	Cultivators
Pum/Pu	Painters
Duhim	Carriers
Balami	Field workers
Pulu	Funeral Torch Bearers
Cipa	Duyers
Jogi	Musician/Tailors
Nay	Butchers
Kulu	Fisherman, Drum makers and Sweepers
Pore	Sweepers
Chyame	Fishermen and Sweepers
Halahul	Sweepers

Source: Rosser, 1966: 85-86

The above Table makes it clear that the Newars had their own temple and family priest, gold, silver and black-smiths, merchants, craftsmen, farmers, potters, oil pressers, palanquin bearers, barbers, dyers, musician, tailors, butchers, fishermen, sweepers and many mores.

Now coming back to the tea plantation, it is clear from the field data as well as personal interviews with the Newari women that all Newars irrespective of their different caste titles designate themselves as 'Pradhan'. With the exception of few people who still write their respective Newari titles like Kasai, Jogi, Kusuley, almost all the Newar women use the title of 'Pradhan'. Today except a few business families of Darjeeling and Kalimpong towns, all are engaged in the various works of the tea plantation.

The *Tamangs* or *Murmis* is the single largest dominant group in the tea plantation. In Nepal group they were found around the hills of Kathmandu valley and east of it. They were traditionally horse-traders and cavaliers. Many Tamangs are also engaged in hewings of woods, coolies in different towns of Darjeeling and Sikkim but the majority of them are now engaged in tea plantation. The *Bhujels* (Gharti) were traditionally slaves in Nepal. After the abolision of slavery in Nepal in 1926 they have migrated to the regions of Darjeeling and Sikkim. Now a number of Bhujels are working in tea gardens of Darjeeling hills. At present, they have totally abandoned their traditional occupation of beaten rice making, palanquin bearing and working as slaves of big land holders and bureaucrats of Nepal.

Like *Bhujels*, *Thamis* are also found in different tea gardens but numerically they are insignificant in number. In Nepal, they are mainly concentrated in Dolakha district in western Nepal. They are mainly agriculturists. The *Sunuwars* are also found equally participating in an agricultural operation. According to Bista (1976) a good number of Sunuwars have been recruited into the Gorkha regiments of the British and Indian armies and later on into the Royal Nepal Army.

The *Jogis* were ascetics but today they rarely engage themselves in this occupation. The *Sherpas* are one of the most dominant tribes of North-East Nepal and they have spread upto Sikkim Himalayas and enjoying the status of schedule

tribe both in West Bengal and Sikkim. Their population in the tea gardens is almost nil. They were traditionally trans-Himalayan traders and cattle bearers. They *Yolmos* were paper makers, *Lepchas* were shifting cultivators who are no more cling to their traditional occupation. At the bottom of the Nepali caste hierarchy we have a number of occupational castes or artisans like *Kami* or *Biswakarma* (Blacksmiths), *Sunars* (goldsmiths), *Sarki* (Shoe-makers or cobblers) and *Damai* or *Darjee* (Musicians or tailors) etc. Today a very few among them continue their traditional occupation. Of these four groups, *Kamis* or blacksmiths are numerically dominant in the tea plantation (see Table....). One of the possible reasons behind this may be their nature of occupation who use to manufacture utensils, iron tools and agricultural implements needed for the agro-industrial nature of plantation.

From the above table it can be concluded that the majority of tea garden women workers hail from agricultural background of rural Nepal and the numerical dominance of the middle caste groups like *Rais*, *Limbus Tamangs*, *mangers*, *Gurungs*, *Newars*, *Sunuwars*, *Thamis*, *Bhujels* etc. is certainly due to their poor peasant economy at the place of origin and the domination and exploitation of the immigrant Hindu rulers from India.

4.8 State of Education of Women Tea Plantation Workers :

Literacy rate is a key factor that determines the social and economic status of women. Literacy is an indication of exposure to modern ideas and is therefore crucial for an overall analysis of women's status. The movement for improving women's status all over the world has always emphasized education as the most significant instrument for changing women's subjugated position in society. It adds to women's earning capacity and organizes them for claiming their rights.

The following table indicates the level of literacy among the women workers of tea plantations. It was found that out of total number of 300 respondents, 174 i.e. 58% women were literate. It was very interesting to note that out of these literate women, 4 were Madhyamik or class ten passed but the majority of them (about 45%) have studied only upto primary level i.e., upto class IV level. A very few women have studied upto class VIII (10%). There were only 8 women who of IX to X

standard of which 4 were Madhyamik passed. The illiterate women mostly belonged to older generation and most them have already crossed forty years of age. Most of the younger generation women workers were educated at least upto primary level and this shows the successful implementation of the provision of the plantation Labour Act, 1951 which made it mandatory for all tea plantations to provide for primary education to the children of workers.

Table – 4.8

Level of Literacy of Women Workers

Standard	Number	% (Percentage)
Illiterate	126	42.00
Class I-IV	135	45.00
Class V – VIII	31	10.00
Class IX – X	8	3.00
Above X	Nil	-
Total	300	100%

Source : *Field studies on various Tea Gardens.*

As we have already said that education is one of the important indicator of development. This indicator amongst the women workers is gradually improving. Even though education is free upto primary level, all the working parents can not send their children to schools due to household responsibilities, specially looking after the younger siblings and assisting the mother in domestic chores. In many cases the girls do not go to schools or have to drop out because they had to take care of the younger children. This again was due to violation of the Plantation Labour Act. The Act provides for crèches in all plantation employing 30 or more women but this was hardly enforced. Though some well-run tea gardens have established crèches but the stable crèches do not serve the purpose because the workers complained that they have to walk long distances to feed their babies and it is not possible for lactating mother to visit the crèches at short intervals. To overcome this problems many gardens are having mobile crèches (shifting according to the place

of work) but the problems is not altogether solved. With the result, daughters are sometimes drop out from the schools mainly to look after their younger ones. There are a number of reasons for the low level of literacy among the plantation women. In the majority of the tea gardens, the only source of education for most of the workers' children was the primary school in the plantation. These schools were badly maintained in many tea gardens. They do not have adequate infrastructure or teachers. The general apathy of the employers and government towards the educational needs of the workers and their families was mainly responsible for this situation.

4.9 Marriage and Family Life of the Women Tea Workers.

4.9.1 Women and Rules of Marriage

As we have already pointed out in the previous sections that the Nepali society is caste based society but with the exception of high caste *Tagadhari jats* and untouchables, most of the middle caste groups like Rai, Limbu, Yakha, Tamangs, Sunuwars etc. do not follow strict Hindu marriage rituals and rules. This middle caste groups who were the indigenous tribes of Nepal have their own marital rules and regulations which still reflects their tribal characteristics.

Let us first discuss the marital rules among the high caste *Tagadhari jats* including the Bahun and Kshatriyas. Generally, this groups strictly adhere to the principle of endogamy or intra-caste marriage or *Jat Bibaha*. This is perhaps why many scholars regarded castes as basically an endogamous groups (Karve: 1965) It is seen that as far as possible they prefer to marry within the same caste group but they should avoid 'Pinda' (Seventh generation from the father side) and Sapinda (Fifth generation from the mother's side). Among the high caste groups the practice of hypergamy (Anuloma) and hypogamy. (Pratiloma) were equally present since the ancient times. It is very interesting to note the emergence or origin of different caste titles among the Brahmins out of hypergamous and hypogamous unions. This may be illustrated in the following table.

Table – 4.9

Hypergamy (Anuloma) and Hypogamy (Pratiloma) among the Bahuns.**Hypergamy (Anuloma) :**

1. Upadhyaya Bahun (Male) $\triangle = \circ$ Jaisi or Joshi Bahun (Female)
 \triangle Jaisi Bahun (Child)
2. Upadhyay Bahun (Male) $\triangle = \circ$ Thakuri (Female)
 \triangle Hamal Chhetri (Child)
3. Upadhyaya Bahun (Male) $\triangle = \circ$ Chhetri
 \triangle Khatri Chhetri
4. Upadhyaya Bahun (Male) $\triangle = \circ$ Matwali jats (Middle Castes)
 \triangle Chhetri (Degraded)

Hypogamy (Pratiloma)

1. Upadhyaa Brahmin
 or Bahun (Female) $\triangle = \circ$ Kshatriya (Male) (Thakuri or Chhetri)
 \triangle Bhat (Sut) Chhetri
2. Upadhyaya Bahun (Female) $\triangle = \circ$ Kshatriya (Male) (Thakuri or Chhetri)
 \triangle Khati (Rathkar) Chhetri

Source : 1. *Field studies conducted on various tea gardens.*

2. *Sharma: 1982, p.68.*

The above table shows that traditionally if an Upadhyaya Bahun marries a Jaisi, Chhetri, or a Matwali girl, the children could not retain their father's descent and thereby the caste status of their father. Such children would in most cases be given the different (midway) titles which is ritually superior than his mother's title

and inferior than his father's title. Such a principle (anuloma or hypergamy) is however, no longer in vogue in tea plantation. The children of a Bahun remain a Bahun, no matter which caste their mothers belong to. But even today, the caste status of the mother largely determines the social status in the family. Traditionally, the Bahuns also had the practice of hypogamous marriage or pratiloma i.e., a high caste females marrying with low caste males. In Nepal, we still get titles like Bhat Chetri (low category Kshatriyas) and Khati Chhetri (low category Kshatriyas). The title like Bhat Chhetri was used by the offsprings of Upadhyaya Bahun female and Thakuri male out of socially approved relationship (title like Bhat Chhetri). The title like Khati Chhetri or Rathkar was used by the offspring of Bahun female and Thakuri male who was born outside of socially approved relationship or in case of couple who did not follow the Hindu marriage rites like kanyadan or giving alm of girl etc. Coming back to the tea plantation it is seen that the population of Bahun is almost nil. But few tea garden have Bahun population though their percentage is very negligible. Though endogamy is still a major principle of the caste system but it has totally broken down in plantation as most of the Brahmin women say that getting partners from ones own caste is very difficult on the one hand, and getting partners from far off places like Nepal and Sikkim is too costly for them, on the other. Under such circumstances, inter-caste marriage or '*Ajat Bihah*' (both hypergamous as well as hypogamous) is also on the increase. The concept of caste endogamy and sapinda and pinda exogamy has little relevance in the tea gardens. With the exception of few *Jharra* or pure Bahun families most of the other *Timaha Tagadharis* groups like Thakuris and Chhetris do not strictly adhere to the principle of endogamy. On the other hand, the question of avoiding the seventh generation from the father's side (pinda) and fifth generation from the mother's side (Sapinda) does not arise in the tea plantation as the plantation society is consisting of immigrant families having not more than third and fourth generation members. The Field data revealed that the number of Tagadharis women were very few. Out of the total working women of 2,097 in seven gardens under study, the number of Bahun, Thakuri and Chhetris women were 33 (1.5%) 2 (0.09%), and 105 (5.0%) respectively. It is known from the personal interviews with the Kshatriyas that the

inter-caste marriage is increasing at the faster rate but unlike the Bahuns, they do not have to loose their caste status (even traditionally) in case of hypergamous marriage i.e., marrying with lower caste (*pani-chalne jat*) women. But in case of hypogamous marriage i.e., Chhetris women marrying with other *pani-chalne jats* like Rai, Limbu, Tamang, manger, Gurungs etc., the offspring of Chhetri women would get the caste status of his or her father. But rising and falling from the previous caste rank is purely an individual phenomenon.

Before discussing the marital rules among the Matwali jats it would be necessary to have a clear meaning of the various terms (marriage rules) like *jat biha*, *ajat biha*, *Kujat biha*, and *Chori biha* or *gandharva biha* etc. *Jat biha* means an intracaste marriage or endogamous marriage. An *ajat biha* means inter-caste marriage and the marriage between a touchable and an untouchable is never formalized and is locally called *Kujat biha*. Hierarchically put, the *jat biha* stands on the top, followed by *ajat biha* in the middle, and the *Kujat biha* at the bottom of the hierarchy. Lastly, the *chori biha* means marriage by elopement, which is one of the important features of the Kirata tribes like Rais, Limbus, Yakhas etc.

Let us discuss the marriage rules among the Rais, Limbus, and Yakhas (Dewan). These kirata tribes also follow the rule of endogamy and as far as possible they try to take partner from their own group or caste. But at the same time, a marriage between Rai, Limbu and Yakha is not considered as *ajat biha* or an intercaste marriage. These castes can have negotiated marriage among themselves and this is perhaps due to a long history of ethnic affinity that they belong to the same kirata stock living side by side in the eastern hills of Nepal (Limbuan and Khambuan) since the ancient times. These castes are called '*rit-vatey jat*' meaning a formal ceremony can take place in a marriage between these castes. If they take partners from outside of these three castes (but only with the touchable castes) than such marriage is called as *Ajat biha* or intercaste marriage. The ritual ceremony of the Limbus in case of an *ajat biha* is very interesting. They have a ceremony called *dalbhat* (boiled lentil and rice) which is offered to the relatives and neighbours. The girl after that day becomes a Limbu or a member of the family's *kul* or patrilineage. It is very interesting to note the practice of *jat danda* among the middle caste group

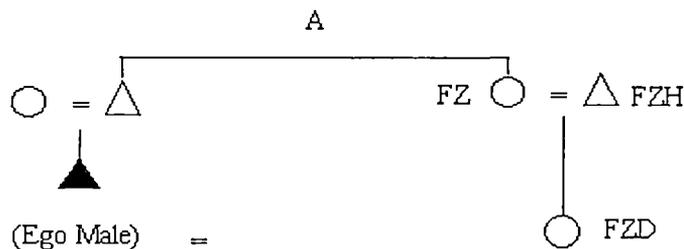
or *setho Matwalis*. Generally, the caste endogamy is strengthened with the help of *jat danda* or penalty for breach of caste endogamy. If a male member of the high caste marries a female, of the middle castes, the former has to pay *jat danda* to the latter. But if the otherwise happens then no *jat danda* is taken. But this system is totally absent among the *Tagadhari jats*. Among the middle castes, the *jat danda* is taken by all but only in case of *ajat biha* or intercaste marriage and never in a *kujat biha* or marriage with the untouchables. An inter caste marriage between two touchable castes (*Tagadharis* and *Setho Matwalis*) is not a big offence but it is certainly so if it is between a touchable and an untouchable. Even today, a marriage between touchable and untouchable is not approved by the society.

It is also observed that the middle caste groups or *Setho Matwali jats* are numerically dominant in the tea plantation of Darjeeling hills who are horizontally organized occupying the middle status in the ritual caste hierarchy. These middle castes groups like Tamangs, Gurungs and Mangers traditionally used to practice Matrilateral and patrilateral cross-cousin marriage (see table 4.10). This institution is almost dead or vanished in the agro-industrial setting of plantation society. Like other caste groups, they have also adopted the rules of *sapinda* (*matrikins*) and *pinda* (*patrikins*) exogamy i.e., avoiding the consanguineous and uterine kins for marriage alliances.

Table – 4.10

Patrilateral and Matrilateral cross-cousin marriage among Tamangs, Gurungs and Mangers.

a) Patrilateral cross-cousin Marriage or Marriage between mother's brother's son and father's sister's daughter (*Mama chela* and *Phupu Cheli ko bibah*)



According to Chemjong (1966) until 1769, the children of a Tamang women and a Khasaman (Tagadhari jats) used to be called *Gothar* or *Godar* Tamang, the offsprings of Newar men and Tamang women were called *Ngarba* Tamang and the children of Tamang women and Rai, Limbu, Sunuwar, Gurung and Manger were called *Sangri* Tamang. At present, they do not follow such rules instead the offsprings of Tamang women would automatically get the caste status of fathers.

The majority of the middle castes Nepalis (Seto Matwali jats) practice *aja bibah* or intercaste marriage but it is of isogamous type as the different castes occupy the horizontal caste status in the ritual hierarchy. On the other hand, in case of *Tagadhari* and *Kalo Matwali* jats (untouchables), intercaste or *ajat bibah* is either hypergamous or hypogamous type as they are vertically arranged in the ritual hierarchy. One of the most important features of Matwali marriage is *chori bibah* or marriage by elopement. For instance, it is very interesting to note among the Rais that even in the case of jat bibah or intracaste marriage (negotiated) as a custom the couple have to elope before the formal ceremony takes place. Now, in the tea plantation even the *Tagadharis* (with the exception of few Jharra or pure Bahun) are adopting this practice of elopement in case of *ajat bibah*. One of the important factor behind this trend may be due to their numerical insignificance in the plantation as they are the latter immigrants and they have often no scope of finding a spouse of their own caste from within the tea plantation and adjacent areas. Unlike in Nepal, their living with the lower caste members over a long time in tea plantation has also minimized the actual distance between castes and marrying with a lower castes (Setho Matwali jats) people has almost become social.

Like the upper caste Tagadharis, the Kami, Sarki, Sunar, Damai or Darjee also follow Hindu marriage rituals. The principle of caste endogamy is strictly followed by them. They also have the system of *jat danda* or penalty for the breach of caste endogamy. Among these untouchables, the *jat danda* is taken only if a Kami marries a Sarki girl or vice-versa. If a Damai marries a Kami or Sarki girl no *jat danda* is taken from the former as Damais belong to the ritually inferior group and no *jat danda* is taken from such inferior groups. As we have already pointed out above that the *jat danda* is taken only in case of *ajat bibah* or inter-caste marriage

and never in case of *Kujat bibah* or marriage of touchable with untouchables. So, if the untouchables men marry with touchable women, no *jat danda* is taken from the former. The field data indicates that the Kamis or blacksmiths are numerically dominant among the untouchables in the tea plantation. This numerical dominance is perhaps one of the important factor for the predominance of *jat bibah* among the kamis.

There are very few women workers from tribal communities like Sherpa, Bhutia and Lepcha. Traditionally they use to practice fraternal polyandry or adelphic polyandry in which a single woman was regarded as a common wife of several brothers. Besides polyandry, Sherpas also had an institution of patrilateral cross-cousin marriage in case of negotiated one. Now these institutions have almost vanished among the sherpas of tea plantation. Like other castes, they have also become monogamous.

It is observed that the most preferred marriage in the plantation is monogamy but the several cases of polygeny also came to notice. Few cases of polygeny have emerged out of sorrorate marriage (marriage between Sali and bhena) which is widely prevalent among all castes and tribes. Levirate marriage (marriage between dewar and bhauju) is also equally practise by all people.

4.9.2 Marital Status and Age at Marriage.

Regarding the marital status 90% women was found to enter love marriage or *chori bibah* (marriage by elopement). Only few Tagadharis women of Badamtam and Pandam were married from outside (mostly Terai areas of Nepal) through the negotiated marriage arranged by their elders. Tea garden women get freedom to select their partner. The marriage among Nepalis is not a sacramental affairs but contractual which does not bind the couple through religious constraints. They are equally free to divorce their husbands on the ground of maltreatment, drunkenness, adultery etc. Women are free to contract second marriage as their menfolk would do. No social stigma is attached in the divorced women, they easily get another husbands. So far as the custody of children is concerned, women are also allowed to

take the custody if they desire and the legal procedure of custody is totally ignored by them as they are absolutely unaware about them.

Widowhood does not attach any special social stigma to a women. A widow is permitted to marry anytime. If she is willing to stay in the same family, without remarriage, she is accorded due respect by the members. They freely participate in all the social functions of the family and society.

The following table reveals the age at marriage of women workers taken from different gardens under study.

Table – 4.12

Age at marriage of women in tea gardens

Age group	No. of women	% (Percentage)
12 below 14	Nil	-
14 below 16	30	10.00
16 below 18	49	16.33
18 below 20	72	24.00
20 below 22	66	22.00
22 below 24	46	15.33
24 below 26	29	9.66
26 below 28	06	2.00
28 and above.	02	0.66
Total	300	100

Source : *Field Survey.*

Table – 4.12 reveals that the number of women entered marriage before 18 is 79 (26.3%). There is not a single women married before puberty. The number of women married at the age of 16 to 24 years is very high (233 or 77.6%). All this shows that the marital status of plantation women is no doubt high but at the same time, the fact like a good number of women entered marriage before legally stipulated figure of 18 years shows the unawareness of the legality involved in early marriages. This trend should be checked.

4.9.3 Widowhood and Remarriage

Widowhood among the Nepalis is not an acute problem as widow remarriage is socially permitted. Among many Hinduised Nepali tribes like Rai, Limbu, Yakha, Gurung, Mangeri etc. there had been a social custom of marrying widowed sister-in-law by the brother-in-law. According to this system in case the elder brother died the younger brother used to keep his sister-in-law as his wife. This type of levirate marriage is still practice by many Nepali caste and tribal groups. On the other hand, the problem of widowhood hardly arose among the non Hindu communities like Sherpa, Lepcha, Bhutias as they had the system of polyandry.

Social pathologies i.e., dowry, bride burning, rape, prostitution and other crimes against women are hardly heard in the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills. Divorce is yet another important factor in the context of studying status. The marriage among Nepalis is not a sacramental affairs but contractual which does not bind the couple through religious constraints. Women are free to contract second marriage as their menfolk would do. No social stigma is attached to the divorced women and widow women. A widow is permitted to marry anytime as she likes. On the other hand, through the system of *jarikal* (fine or compensation) a married woman is permitted to secure release from one husband to marry another, by making payment of compensation by later husband.

4.9.4 Household Composition and Family Types Among Plantation Women

There is considerable overlapping between the concepts of family and household. The Indian census defines a household as a group of persons normally living together and taking food from a common kitchen. The household members might or might not be related to one another. On the other hand, the family may be broadly perceived as a unit of two or more persons united by the ties of marriage, blood, adoption or consensual unions. It is considered as the basic unit of society and is a link between continuity and change.

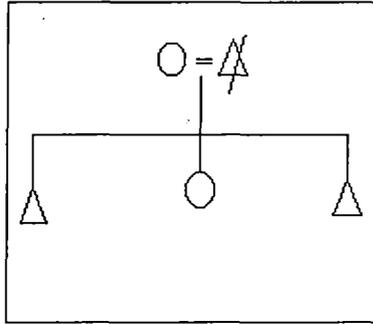
Based on the field data, we have divided the households into two types, 'A' and 'B'. Out of the 300 total households of women respondents, around 47% belong to Type 'A' consisting of simple households comprising whole or a part of a

parental family. The data revealed five major compositions of simple households. They are as follows :-

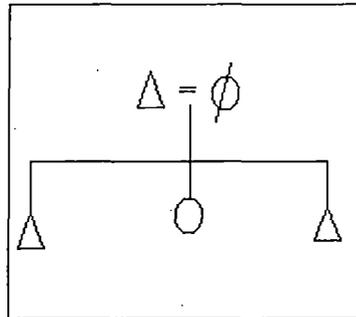
(i) A household composed of single man or women.



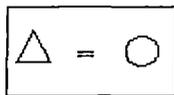
(ii) Household of widow mother and unmarried children.



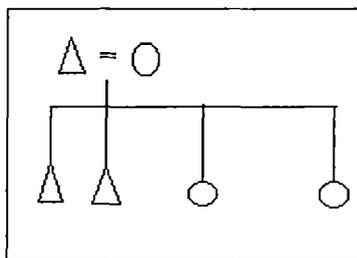
(iii) Household of widower father and unmarried children



(iv) household of husband and wife



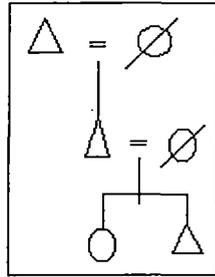
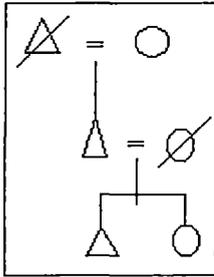
(v) Household of husband, wife and unmarried children



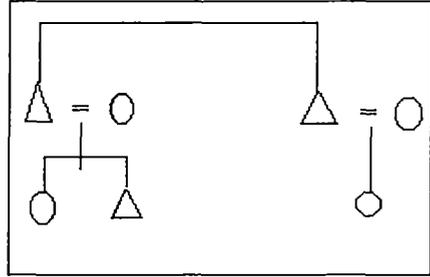
On the other hand, Type 'B' household is complex household which is composed of more than one parental family, or parts of more than one parental family or of one or more than parental family. We have come across following different types of complex households among the plantation women. They are –

(i) household of a typical composition

a)

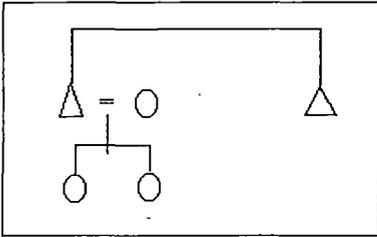


b)

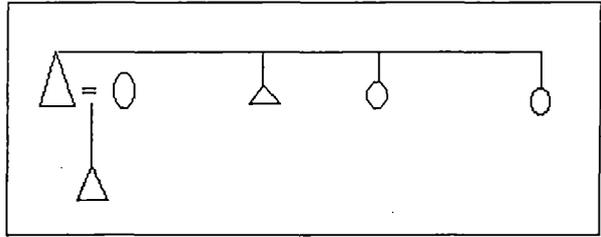


(ii) Household of one married man and one or more unmarried sibling

a)

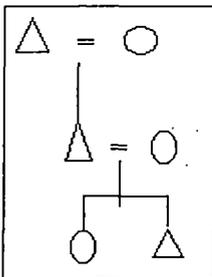


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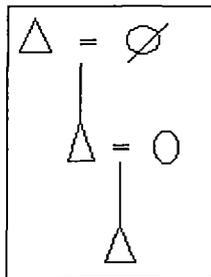


(iii) Household of parental unit and one married son.

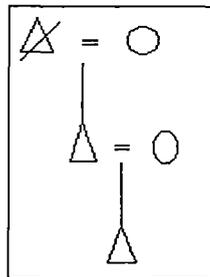
a)



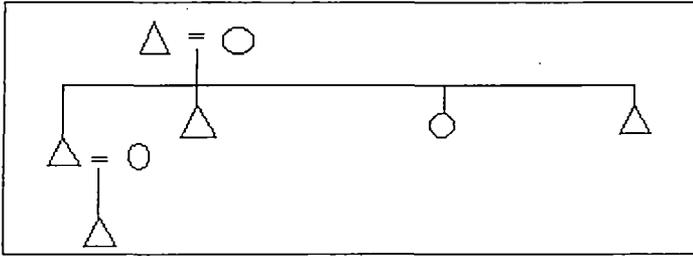
b)



c)

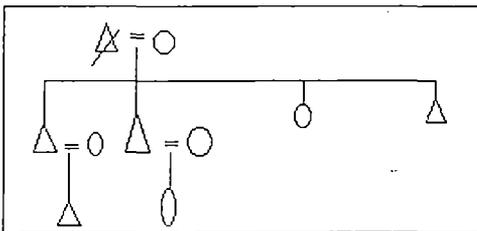


(iv) Household of parental unit, one married son and other unmarried children.

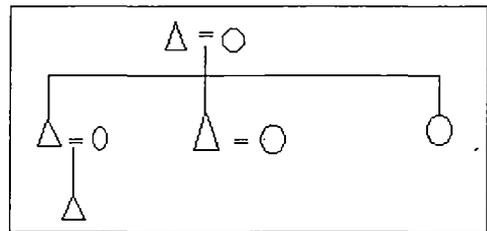


(v) Household of parental unit and two or more married son.

a)



b)



Index :-

-  = Male
-  = Female
-  = Dead Male
-  = Dead Female
-  = Marriage
-  = Descent
-  = Siblings

The following table gives an idea about the size (number of members) of the two types of households among the plantation women.

Table – 4.13

Size of Households of Women Workers

Size (number of members)	Type 'A' (Simple)	%	Type 'B' (Complex)	%
1-3	31	21.98	8	5.03
4-5	39	27.65	44	27.67
6-7	51	36.17	58	36.47
8-10	11	7.80	38	23.89
11-14	9	6.38	11	6.91
Total	141	100	159	100

The above table reveals an interesting feature of household composition among the plantation women. Out of the total number of 141 simple households, the majority of them i.e., around 63 percent households are having 4-7 members and only around 14 percent households have 8-14 members. On the other hand, number of complex households are slightly higher than the simple household i.e., around 53 percent. Out of the total number of 159 complex households, around 60 per cent households have 1-5 members and only around 7 per cent households have 11-14 members in the households.

4.9.5 Structure and Organisation of Family

After analyzing the household which is one of the dimensions of family, we can have some idea about changing pattern of family system in plantation society. Family is slightly different than household. The relation of blood among its members is very important in case of family. For our purpose, we have understood family as a social and economic unit consisting minimally of one or more parents and their children. Members of a family always have certain reciprocal rights and obligations, particularly economic ones. Family members usually live in one household, but common residence is not a defining feature of families. The same factors which are responsible for the increasing number of simple households having single member worker are responsible for the nuclearisation process of the family

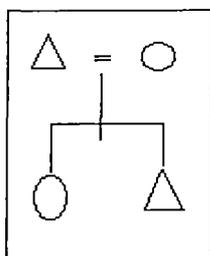
system. Traditionally, many Nepali Castes or hinduised tribes like Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Mangers including Newars and high castes Brahmin and Kshatriyas used to live in joint family system. As we have already discussed the existence of communal land ownership (*Kipat* land) held by Joint families among the Rais and Limbus of eastern Nepal bordering Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas. But after entering into the agro-industrial setting of tea plantations, their family system have undergone changes. Like in the household composition the size of the family have tended to be micro in tea plantations as each individual has begun to live with his spouse and children separately for the sake of convenience.

As our field record reveals the following different types of families which are found in the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills. For instance, we have come across following types of families classified on the basis of size, composition and relations. They are :

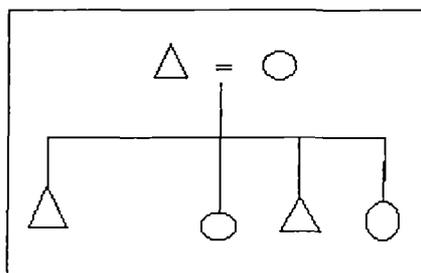
a) Nuclear Family

i) Nuclear family consisting of parents and their unmarried children-

a)

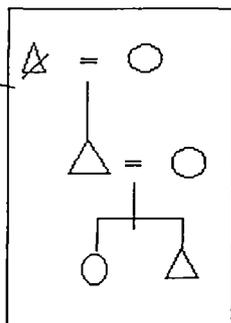


b)

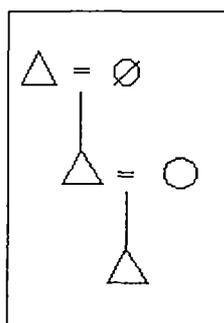


ii) Supplemented nuclear family consisting of widower or widow with his or her married son and their children.

a)

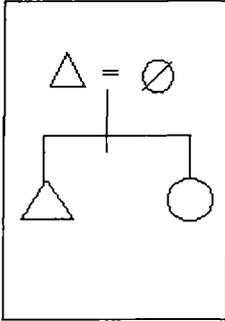


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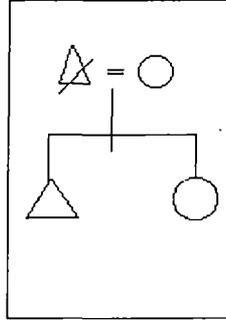


iii) Minimal nuclear family consisting of widower or widow with his or her unmarried children.

a)

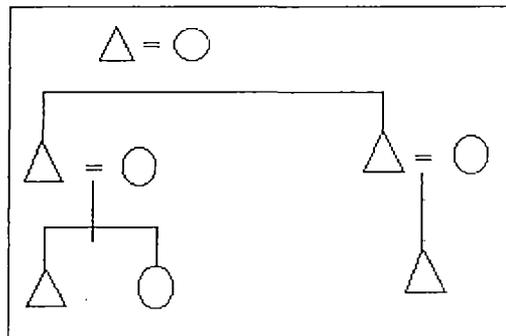


b)

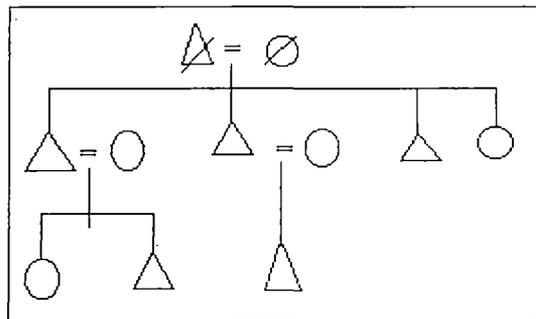


b) Joint or extended family

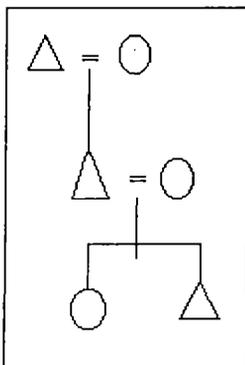
i) A typical joint or extended family consisting of two or more nuclear families affiliated to or extension of parent-child relationship rather than husband-wife relationship i.e., by joining the nuclear family of a married adult to that of his parents.



ii) Collateral or horizontal joint family consisting of two or more married brothers and their wives, children and unmarried brothers and sisters.



iii) Lineal or vertical joint family consisting of parents and their married son and grand sons and daughters.



There are three types of nuclear families and among these three, nuclear family consisting of 5-7 members is more numerous. More than 50 per cent families are of nuclear type but their size is not small as in the case of industrial urban centers where most of the nuclear family have not more than two children. Here, though the nuclear families are found in majority yet their size is not small. About sixty per cent of the nuclear families are having four to six children. This is mainly due to the lack of knowledge or reluctance on the part of couple to adopt family planning programme. There are a number of joint or extended families though their number is less than nuclear family. The lineal or vertical joint family consisting of parents and their married son and their children is more numerous than collateral or horizontal joint family consisting of two or more married brothers, their wives and children. This type of family exists soon after the death of their parents and after few years, they again split into nuclear families. We have also come across a few cases of polygynous families consisting of married man and his two wives and children. In four cases of polygynous families, married man had taken two sisters from the same family. This type of sororal polygyny is common practice by many communities in tea plantations of Darjeeling hills. On the other hand, polyandrous family is totally absent among the plantation women. Traditionally the system of polyandrous family was in vogue among the Sherpas who were the people of Tibetan origin. But now-a-days, Sherpas have also become monogamous in tea plantations.

The policy of Management has also strengthened the nuclearisation of family system in tea plantations. The plantation offer equal opportunity to the women along with their husbands in the job market and consider a nuclear family (Simple household) as a basic unit to receive work facilities and other benefits. Certain facilities such as free quarter, free firewood, cultivation land, ration at subsidized rates are given to each family. This naturally encouraged the workers to form nuclear families. The joint-living to some extent deprives the workers of some of their due benefits from the garden authorities. Thus, joint living, except under special circumstances is disfavoured. Though there is a predominance of nuclear family a close kinship interdependence is seen among them. They maintain close kin ties with their relatives. Here, the kinsmen or relative who live side by side often help one another in times of need.

4.10 Religious practices of the Women Tea Plantation Workers :

The plantation women belong to various religious background such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity etc. Traditionally, excepting high caste Bahun and Kshatriyas (who were Hindu Indian emigrants), all other Nepali Castes and tribes were animists and Shamanists having full of tribal rituals and festivals. Later on, these indigeneous tribes of Nepal have converted to Hinduism after the establishment of an independent Shah Kingdom by king Drabya Shah at Gorkha in 1459. We have already discussed about the Mangars and Gurungs of western Nepal who were the first two tribes to be converted into Hindus but it is interesting to note about some castes or ethnic groups like Tamangs, Yolmos, Thamis and Sherpas who could retain their indigeneous religion namely Buddhism. Among the other tribes like Rai, Limbu, Sunuwars, Newar, Bhujels the influence of both the Hinduism and Buddhism is visible. Table – 4.14 gives the idea about the traditional religious background of the Nepalis castes and tribes and practice of using their own caste priests in performing different rituals and festivals.

Table – 4.14

**Traditional Religions of the Nepalis castes and Tribes and their respective
Traditional Priests.**

Nepali castes	Traditional Religion	Traditional Caste priests
Bahun (Upadhyaya and Jaisi)	Hinduism	Upadhyaa Bahun
Kshatriyas (Thakuris and Chhetri)	Hinduism	Upadhyaa Bahun / Ojha
Newars (Buddhist)	Buddhism	Gubhaju or Bajracharya
Newars (Hindu)	Hinduism	Devabhaju or Devabramin
Rai	Animism	Bijuwa /Manpa
Limbu	Animism	Phedangma
Gurung (Buddhist)	Buddhism	Lama
Gurung (Hindu)	Hinduism	Dyabre/Jhankri/Pajuy
Sunuwar (Hindu)	Hinduism	Poinbo
Sunuwar (Buddhist)	Buddhism	Natso/Nagami
Manger	Hinduism	Bhusal
Tamang	Buddhism	Lama
Thami	Buddhism	Lama
Sherpa	Buddhism	Lama
Lepcha	Buddhism/Animism	Lama/Bongthing
Kami, Sarki, Damai	Hinduism	Dhami/Jhankri
Majhi	Hinduism	Thankari

Source : *Field Studies conducted in various Tea Gardens.*

The above table indicates the different religious faiths professed by various Nepali caste and tribes in their traditional society. But after migrating to an agro-industrial environment of tea plantation and forming a homogeneous society despite their heterogeous socio-cultural background, now they have not been able to retain some of their traditional rituals and festivals. It is known from the interviews with the old women respondents that in the beginning, plantation had unicast village or caste Dhuras (such as Yakha dhura, Newar dhura, chamling dhura etc.) which had its own dialects and used to practice their own traditional rituals and festivals. But with the emigration of the Tagadharis and lower caste untouchables, the practice of (celebration of) Hindu festivals became famous among all the population where all

the workers irrespective of caste or tribal background participate actively. However, the basic procedure of performing the rituals and festivals remained predominantly tribal in character involving animal sacrifices and use of liquor. It is already observed that after migrating to the plantation the majority of people designated themselves as Hindus in various census records. This was perhaps due to the process of Sanskritization under the influence of later immigrants Hindu Tagadharis. However, the Hinduism professed in the plantation was not like typical Hinduism followed elsewhere by Tagadharis. Writing in 1906, O'Malley says "the Hinduism professed in the district is nothing more than a thin veneer over animistic beliefs. Beneath this veneer the real popular religion can be seen in the worship paid to a host of spiritual beings The religion prevalent is in fact demonolatry, of which exorcism and bloody sacrifices are the most prominent feature." (O'Malley: 1907) This demonolatry or the fear and worship of evil spirits among the Nepalis has been aptly described by Graham as he says, "the little offering in the middle of the path to bar the progress of an evil spirit or the living sacrifice being offered to propitiate another, or the burning of a rag before the door, over which the friends step when they return from burying a relative, to prevent any accompanying spirits from entering with them." (Graham:1906) It is clear from the above quotations that to the Nepalis, the religious rites were chiefly valuable in averting the anger of an evil spirit, as it was thought that all sickness was caused by such possession and different castes or tribes use to employ their own sacrificial priests like Bijuwa, Phedangma, Bongthing, Jhankri, Dhami etc. who use to indicate the offended demon, and prescribe the proper sacrifice of pig or goat or fowl to appease the spirit.

With this traditional religious background of different Nepali castes, let us see the religious background of plantation women and their role in various rituals and festivals.

The following table indicates the religious background of the women workers in seven tea gardens under study. From the data it is revealed that the majority of women profess Hinduism which is a predominant form of religion. This is perhaps due to the fact that the numerically dominant castes like Rais, Newars, Limbu, manger, Gurungs (with the exception of Tamangs) have designated

themselves as Hindus. For instance, Animists like Rais and Limbus officially designate themselves as Hindus but their ritual practices still reflect animistic belief. Unlike in Nepal, all the Newars of plantation have designated themselves as Hindus. We do not get a single Newari Buddhist in the plantation. Like Newars, the majority of Gurungs and Sunuwars women also designated themselves as Hindus. Interviews with the respondents revealed the fact that the population of Buddhist Gurungs (Gurungs bearing the title of Lama) and the Buddhist Sunuwars (Dasthare-Jirel Sunuwars) are very few in the tea gardens. Buddhism is the second dominant religion in the plantation. Tamangs, one of the numerically dominant Nepali caste in the tea plantation (in the whole district as well) profess Mahayana (Nygmapa Sect) form of Buddhism and worship Guru Padma Sambhawa and use Lamas as priest at their weddings, birth, funerals etc. Beside Tamangs the other castes and tribes like Yolmo, Sherpa, Thami, Lepchas also profess Buddhism though their percentage is very few in the tea plantation. Like Tamangs, they are also the followers of Mahayana Buddhism. A good number of women belonging to Rai, Limbu and untouchables (Kami, Damai) have converted to Christians. The conversion into Christianity emerged as a new phenomenon among the workers which was not there in the traditional Society. It is very interesting to note that a good number of Kami or Biswakarma women have been converted to Christians and perhaps one of the main reasons behind this proselytizing process is the absence of concepts like pollution and purity (Chuwa-Chhut) in Christianity where even the Kami women belonging to *pani-na-chalne jat* or untouchables caste can have equal religious status with other women and they do not have to face degraded positions unlike in Hinduism.

Table – 4.15
Women and their Religious backgrounds

Caste/Ethnic Groups	No. of women from different castes in seven Tea Gardens under study	Hindu	Buddhist	Christian
1. Bahun (Brahmins)	33	33	--	--
2. Thakuri	02	02	--	--
3. Chhetris	105	105	--	--
4. Rai	504	495	--	09
5. Limbu	88	86	--	02
6. Mangar	115	115	--	--
7. Tamang	603	--	603	--
8. Newar	180	180	--	--
9. Sunuwar	50	52	--	--
10. Gurung	144	140	04	--
11. Thami	10	02	08	--
12. Bhujel	53	51	--	02
13. Kami (Biswakarma)	132	120	--	12
14. Damai or Darjee	39	31	--	08
15. Sarki	08	08	--	--
16. Sunar	02	02	--	--
17. Jogi	04	04	--	--
18. Kusuley	04	04	--	--
19. Majhi	02	02	--	--
20. Lepcha	02	--	02	--
21. Bhutia	04	--	04	--
22. Sherpa	05	--	05	--
23. Plainsmen (Bihari Sharma, Rajak etc.)	06	06	--	--
Total (%)	2097	1438 (68.57%)	626 (29.85%)	33 (1.57%)

Source : *Field Studies conducted in various Tea Gardens.*

All the women irrespective of their castes and religious background equally participate with males in performing or celebrating Hindu rituals or festivals like Maha Sivaratri, Ram Nawami, Saraswati Puja (Basant Panchami), Durga Puja, Krishna Janmashami, Biswakarma Puja, Rakhi Purnima, Nag Panchami, etc. In these rituals or festivals only the Nepali Bahun Priests are invited to perform the Puja. Besides Hindu festivals, Buddhist festivals like Buddha purnima or Buddha Jayanti is celebrated in different monasteries or gumpas where one can see both the Hindus and Buddhist women participating equally in the ritual as the Hindus also consider Buddha as the ninth incarnation of Lord Vishnu, but in such ritual only the Buddhist Lamas are invited if it is performed in the gumpas. Dasain (Dussera) and Tihar (Tyohar) are the very important festivals of Hindu Nepalis which are celebrated at community level by all the castes and tribes including Buddhist Tamangs, Thami, Yolmos and Sherpas but since the last two decades, Tamangs are more inclined towards their own traditional festival namely Lhoshar or Losar.

It is very interesting to note the continuation or persistence of traditional family rituals among the Matwali jats. For instance, the Kirata tribes like Rai (Khambu), Limbu and Yakhas still practice ancestor worship (Kulpuja or Worship of patrilineage) annually. Such rituals are performed at family level, usually at the house of eldest male member of a particular *thar* or lineage. Whether it is a *Khamang* of Rais, *Mangena* of Limbus or *Bhimsen puja* of Newars, in all such ancestor worships, animal sacrifices (mostly hens) and use of liquor or *jnar* are used in performing these rituals. It is true that women do participate in all such ancestor worships but they are often excluded from direct participation as only the male members are directly involved in such *Kulpuja*. The Nepali society, being a partilineal one, the role of women have been minimized as far as their direct participation in ancestor worship (worship of patrilineage) is concerned.

It is observed that a number of community festivals are celebrated in tea plantation irrespective of their caste and tribal backgrounds. One such example is *Sansari puja* which is performed by all villagers for a good rain. On such occasion, all the villagers go to the top of hill and throw down grains, pigeon, stones of all sizes. So that the rumbling of their fall may resemble the rumbling of thunder, as

they believe that rains would thus follow. Another example is the celebration of fecundity festivals which is performed on the day of Basant Panchami (Saraswati Puja) by consecrating the seed on the day of panchami would lead to good harvest in future. Beside these, almost in every one or two month's, they celebrate SAGRANTIS like Chaite SAGRANTI, Maghe SAGRANTI, Asar SAGRANTI, Saune SAGRANTI etc.

It is also observed that some typical Hindu rituals or festivals are performed or observed by only the tagadhari females. For instance, the rituals like Tij Brata, tulsi Brata, Yakadashi (Aakadashi), Swasthani Brata etc. These Bratas or fasts are rarely observed by middle caste Matwali women.

FINDINGS

It goes without saying that the bulk of the tea plantation workers in Darjeeling Himalayas are descendants of the immigrant Nepalis from rural Nepal. In the plantation society they form a homogenous group or an organic whole despite their different place of origin and heterogenous socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It is also seen that the middle and lower castes women have migrated more than the higher castes women. Among the middle castes, Kiratas (Rai, Limbu and Yakha) women are numerically dominant followed by Tamangs, Gurungs, Manger, Newars etc. The discussion on migration process shows that multiplicity of factors, following Lee's model of 'Push' and 'Pull' have worked hand in hand in building a viable Nepali (Plantation) Society in Darjeeling Himalayas. But the 'pull' factors are perhaps more important in this regard. All over the world, bringing of labourers from outside, preferably from very far-off places, and employ them in plantations has been a concomitant feature of the colonial rule. The main rationale behind all this is that the employers can afford to pay such labourers a very low wage, and ensure a steady supply by keeping them tied to an invisible chain from which it is difficult for them to come out.

The plantation workers of Darjeeling Himalayas differ from the Asam, Terai and Dooars plantation workers where 80 per cent labourers are recruited from Tribal belts of Chotonagpur (Jharkhand), Chhatisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh whereas in Darjeeling Himalayas about 95% of workers are from Nepali castes and tribal groups who have entered into agro-industrial setting of tea plantations with their diverse traditions and castes occupations.

The Nepali caste system in the tea plantation is quite different from that of the traditional Nepal. Here, the immigrant Nepalis had to adjust in a completely new agro-industrial environment of the plantation society. Unlike in Nepal, all the castes and tribes have to live in the plantation as a homogeneous groups though they belong to diverse linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds. Moreover, we have

already seen that in each tea gardens about 12 to 15 different castes and communities are living harmoniously and engaged in homogeneous economic activity under such circumstances they cannot follow the strict rules regarding commensal relations, pollution and purity etc. however, in certain situations, such as the customs in relation to marriage and death rituals, worship of ancestors or Kul puja, celebration of community festivals etc., one can see the distinct social status of a caste. One of the important feature of caste sytem is the traditional hereditary occupation or caste callings. An analysis of the occupational backgrounds of the women workers helped a lot in understanding the numerical dominance of the middle caste Nepalis and their better adaptation and adjustment in the agro-industrial environment of the tea plantation. It is observed that the majority of women tea workers hail from agricultural background of rural Nepal and the numerical dominance of the middle caste groups like Rai, Limbus, Tamang, Gurung, Manger, Newar, Sunuwars, Thamis, Bhujels etc. is certain due to their poor peasant economy at the place of origin and the domination and exploitation of the immigrant Hindu rulers from India. The traditional agrarian background of these middle castes women have helped them to accept plantation works as the plantation industry is agro-based and is not heavily mechanised. Moreover, the field operations (like weeding, pruning, manuring, hoeing, nursery work etc.) in the tea plantation are very much similar to those of the agriculture. Therefore, the Nepalis women are not strangers to the new environment. Unlike typical industrial society, in tea industry we do not get a strict separation between home and place of work. Here, both the residential and working sectors are within the same area which have helped the women to adjust better in the plantation work than in any other industry.

Literacy rate is a key factor that determines the social and economic status of women. Literacy is an indication of exposure to modern ideas and is therefore crucial for an overall analysis of women's status. This indicator amongst the women workers is gradually improving. Which shows the successful implementation of the provision of the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 which made it mandatory for all tea plantations to provide for primary education to the children of workers.

Regarding the marital status 90 percent Nepalis women were found to enter love marriage and marriage by elopement (*Chori bibah*). Only few Tagadharis women (Bahun and Chhetris) were married from outside through the negotiated marriage arranged by their elders. It is also observed that the Nepali society is caste based society but with the exception of high caste *Tagadhari jats* (Bahun and Chhetris) and some untouchables, most of the middle caste groups like Rai, Limbu, Yakha, Tamang, Sunuwar, Gurung, Manger etc. do not follow strict Hindu marriage rituals and rules. This middle caste Nepalis who were the indigenous tribes of Nepal have their own marital rules and rituals which still reflects their tribal characteristics. It is observed that the most preferred marriage in the plantation is monogamy but the several cases of polygamy also came to notice. Few cases of polygamy have emerged out of sororate marriage is also equally practise by all people. It has been observed that the structure of the family has undergone remarkable changes. The joint family system has broken down resulting into nuclear families. Traditionally, the agrarian economy required joint living, whereas in the tea plantations this system deprives the workers of some of their due benefits from the plantation authority. Certain facilities such as free quarter, free firewood, cultivation land, ration at subsidized rates are given to each family unit.

It is observed that the Nepali women belong to various religious backgrounds such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Animism etc. Traditionally, excepting high caste Bahun and Chhetris, all other Nepali Castes and tribes were animists and Shamanists having full of tribal rituals and festivals. Later on, these indigenous tribes of Nepal have converted to Hinduism after the establishment of Hindu kingdom (Shah dynasty) in Nepal. After immigrating to the tea plantation and forming as a homogeneous Nepali speaking community they accepted Hinduism as the predominant religious. However, the basic procedure of performing the rituals and festivals remained predominantly tribal in character involving animal sacrifices and use of liquor.

Chapter – 5

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC ROLE AND
STATUS OF WOMEN TEA
PLANTATION WORKERS**

Chapter – 5

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN TEA PLANTATION WORKERS

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to study the status and role of Nepali women in tea plantation of Darjeeling hills in terms of various roles they perform in society. As we know the women's role and status all over the world are generally determined by social institutions and norms, religious ideologies, economic system and so on. The role and status of women are the outcome of the age-long tradition of the cultural groups where they are born and brought up. Thus to understand the nature and extent of women folk in relation to any society the concerned cultural patterns are needed to be focussed accurately.

Lowie (1912) has pointed out four determinants for the status of women. They are: actual treatment, legal status, opportunity for social participation and character and extent of work. A study by the U.N. (1975) on the "Status of Women and Family Planning" views that the best measure of status is the extent of control that a person has over his or her own life, derived from the access to knowledge, economic resources and political power and the degree of autonomy enjoyed in the process of decision making. Thus high status of women refers to their economic independence, access to education and power and low status implies the lack of them.

For the purpose of our study we have defined social status as the position a woman has in society by virtue of having to perform certain roles. Her social position includes position in the family, occupational hierarchy, trade unions, religion, socio-cultural organisations etc. In this chapter an attempt has been made to study to what extent the employment of women had changed their standing in the family or how domestic responsibilities affected working women, how she spends her day and other related factors. Further, we have tried to focus our discussion on women's role in decision-making processes, their participation in the socio-cultural organisations, leisure time activities etc. as these aspects are very vital for the assessment of women's status in society.

5.1 Women and Economic Activities :

It is seen that the Nepali women are employed in various occupations of the tea plantation including daily-rated worker or *coolie*, sub-staff like *daffadars* and *chaprasis* and staff including clerical, medical and teaching. However, the appointment or recruitment of Nepali women in the last two categories (staff and sub-staff) is recent phenomenon. It was only after 1980 that the management started recruiting women in staff and sub-staff categories but their percentage is negligible. It is interesting to note that women are numerically dominant as workers or *coolie*. It was revealed from the field record that in all the seven tea gardens under study women have outnumbered men as daily rated workers and one can get the same picture in rest of the tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas. Women workers are basically involve in plucking of tea leaves which starts from early February and continues up to the month of October – November. We have already seen in chapter three that besides plucking women also do light and medium pruning, skiffing, hoeing, manuring, and weeding and rough weeding (sickling) nursery work etc.

Women's participation in economic activities is very high. Their work-schedule is very hectic. Along with their normal plantation work, women are involved in agricultural operations from sowing to harvesting. Along with men folk they equally participate in various agricultural activities in their *khetland* and individual owned land. Unlike in the past whatever they produce in their land is sold out to the local market or weekly hat of payment. During the winter season when there is no plucking in the tea plantation, women have to do winter cultivation work like skiffing (light and medium), pruning, manuring, filling of tubes in nursery etc. for which they were given task or *thika* (see table no.). Many women are seen busy in their agricultural land after completing their *thika* within four to five hours. They produce many crops and vegetables like maize, rice, millet, ginger, tomatoes, bean, chilli etc. whatever surplus they have after consuming at family level, they sale in the nearest market or local *hat* within the garden itself. It is therefore observed that tradition of peasant economy having rural agricultural background has helped the Nepali women to accumulate money rather than spending as in the past for family consumption only.

It is interesting to note that with the exception of few *Darjee* (Tailor) and *Kami* or *Biswakarma* (Ironsmith) families no other caste groups are following their traditional occupations. In the new agro-industrial setting of plantation society there is no correlation between caste and traditional occupation among the Nepalis. Nepali women from various caste and tribal backgrounds have engaged in plantation work irrespective of their traditional occupational backgrounds.

It is seen that the women workers although live on the income from agro-industrial plantation works still they cling to their traditional practices of cultivation of land. So one can see the combination of industrial and agricultural occupations in an unique form.

Along with their normal duties of plantation work, plantation women also domesticate cattle stock as part and parcel of their economy. The common livestock among the middle caste Nepalis having tribal background is pig. Particularly among the *Kirata* tribes like *Rai*, *Limbu*, *Yakha*, *Sunuwar*, domestication of pigs are very famous while the *tagadhari jats* like Brahmin (Bahun) and Kshatriya (Chhetris) along with some *Newars* and *Gurungs* usually do not domesticate pigs. It shows that pork eating as taboo has still found among the *Tagadharis* and some higher caste *Newars*. Among the *Tagadharis*, cows are common livestock while all the Nepalis caste except some *Kashi gottre* (Clan) *Kirata* tribes like *Rais* and *Yakha* domesticate goat. So the collection of fodder for the animals is also one of the important activities of the plantation women.

As in all societies the economic roles of men and women in plantation society are distinguished. The daily routine of a plantation women is extremely hectic. It has been their responsibility, traditionally to collect fuelwood and fodder for the family, and fetch water from *dharas* (springs) in vessels which they carry in a *doko* (bamboo basket) on their backs. The Nepali women are responsible for all domestic tasks like preparing meals for the family, caring of children, cleaning the house, washing clothes including the caring for domestic animals.

Given the geographical conditions of nagged steep terrain, heavy rainfall etc, the plantation women have to directly bear the brunt of all climatic hazards. The

heavy load of work in the daily lives of plantation women has serious implications for their health. This is more so because the families are large in tea plantation society with more than six members on an average. Heavy workload coupled with early marriages between 16-20 years, take their toll on women's health.

As women labour contributes more in terms of time, output and income, they need a fair deal both in socio-economic planning and in decision-making. The social security measures for women and legal protection should also be substantially expanded keeping in view with their role in the economy.

5.2 Women's Economic Contribution and Position in the Family :

In the view of many writers economic status is crucial to the overall status of women in the society (Boserup: 1970; Martin and Vorties: 1970; Stoller: 1975). The most important variable that is closely related to the status of women is the work-role, particularly their employment outside the home. It is maintained, that gainful employment holds the key to improvement in Women's status. Sociologists hold that the women's status outside the home completely changes her status role in the family and in the larger society. But our analysis of field data revealed that the work status of a woman does not lead to a change in the work patterns at home. The culturally defined role of a female as a home-maker has not undergone any change in spite of the new or additional role of the women as a wage-earner in the family.

Nepali women play a crucial role in the hill plantation society. However, their low socio-economic status is largely based on the myth that women are inferior as agents of production. This was based on the prevailing concept of relative inferiority of women as labour input which led to the wage discrimination in tea industry for more than one century. Since the inception of tea industry, women were paid lower wage than males for the same work done. Ultimately wage-discrimination was abolished after the passing of the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976. Contrary to this general belief of low labour input of women, empirical evidence show that the participation of female labour in tea plantation is much higher than the males. Their contribution towards work output and family income is very significant.

As we have already seen in the previous chapters that women are numerically dominant as a worker in the tea plantation of Darjeeling hills. As the field record revealed that about 90 percent working women in Darjeeling tea industry belong to middle caste Nepalis and many of whom like *Limbu* (Subba) and *Tamang* (Murmis) have become scheduled tribes in the recent years. This status of women earning their living and also helping the family economically have given some freedom to them. These working women were paid lower wages than men for more than a century. It was only after the passing of the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 that the women started getting equal remuneration. Though the Act was passed in 1976, in several tea gardens women used to receive lesser wages till 1980-81 due to the reluctance of owners or managers to implement the provision of the Act. This unequal wage rate in the tea plantations had also helped in maintaining the unequal status. Unequal wage-rate along with unequal opportunity in the occupational hierarchy of plantation rendered women a lower status vis-à-vis men. For more than hundred years, women were kept or recruited only in the daily-rated workers or *coolie* category. They were never promoted or recruited in the staff and sub-staff category. In Darjeeling hills, tea plantations was started in 1843 and commercialised since 1856, but it is sad to notice that only in recent years i.e., particularly since 1980s that some tea gardens have been recruiting women to staff and sub-staff category though their percentage is very few.

As we have seen that women's contribution to the family's income is significant. But it is sad to note that besides their regular or routine contribution as wage earner, much of the labour contributed by them specially in the domestic chore and also outside are not usually considered as productive. Even though women contribute substantially to the labour force and thereby to family income norms governing the traditional patrilineal framework still continue. Women do not enjoy independent property rights. However, a widow may enjoy her husband's property if she does not have an issue or her children are minors. In the absence of a son, property may be enjoyed by the daughter.

During the field work it was observed that in many tea gardens like Badamtam, Pandam, Vah-Tukvar and Singell, a good number of families are headed

by female workers as their husbands are working outside in Indian army, police and other government and private organisations. As we have already discussed in Chapter two that the tea industry in Darjeeling Himalayas have been stagnating particularly since 1980s. Many tea gardens have already been closed down and around twenty have been declared as sick unit which forced many male members to migrate outside in search of jobs leaving their families behind.

It cannot be disputed that absence of the emigrant (male head) from the household can have serious implications for the women left behind, both socially and economically. Some studies have shown that women in emigrant households seem to be emerging as independent persons with more authority and power in family decision-making than ever before (Gogate: 1986; Gulati: 1987). At the same time, some also suggest that there has not been any major role revisions in the emigrant families and that the women's position within the family structure continue to be, more or less, the same as it was prior to the impact of emigration (Shaheed: 1981; Gilani: 1986). Then again, few others have also indicated that, although improving the women's position still remain below that of men (Findley and William: 1991). So far as the position of plantation women in the emigrant families is concerned we can say that they are economically better off than the women whose husbands are working in the same garden. As compared to other women, women from emigrant households are more exposed to outside world as they occasionally get chance to visit and see different places where their husbands are working. One very noticeable trend in the emigrant families is the importance given to children's education including the girl child. It was revealed from the field record that a good number of female headed households particularly from Badamtam, Pandam and Singell tea gardens have children studying in good English medium I.C.S.E. and C.B.S.E. Schools as their husbands are regularly sending money for the education of their children.

5.3 Women and Domestic Responsibilities.

To get an idea of the extent to which women's participation in plantation work had affected their domestic responsibilities, the respondents were asked to

specify the domestic chores that they had to do regularly. They could specify up to four chores. An overwhelming majority of the respondents did domestic chores regularly. In the absence of labor saving devices, sharing of work by the different family members is the only available method of lessening the burden.

The major tasks performed by the women workers were cooking, washing clothes for the family, fetching water, collecting fuel and fodder, cleaning the house, taking care of the children, cultivation work in kitchen garden etc. Majority of the women workers expressed no difficulty in performing their domestic tasks. It would seem to be because of the help extended to them by their families that most respondents expressed no difficulty in fulfilling their domestic obligations. In fact, only about 10% women workers said that nobody in the family help them to perform the domestic tasks.

Those being helped were asked to name persons in the family who helped them. About 80% women workers said that they were helped by their female relations like daughter, mother, daughter-in-law etc. About 10% women were helped by husbands or sons in their household. Another 10 per cent said that their husband rendered no help in domestic chores. The main reason given for non-sharing of household work by their husbands was custom and tradition. So, the work status of a woman does not led to a change in the work patterns at home. The culturally defined role of a female as a home-maker has not undergone any change inspite of the new or additional role of the woman as an earner in the family. This shows the division of household labor is clearly inequitable to women. Regardless of their employment status, female perform, on average more than twice as much housework as their males. But only a few male or even female perceive this situation to be unfair to female. Household work is a gendered activity particularly for those in marital relationship. Not only is the bulk of household performed by women, but these tasks are also allocated disproportionately according to gender. As we have pointed out above, in tea plantation, beside attending plantation work, women are chiefly responsible for routine tasks which is time-consuming whereas men tend to be responsible for tasks such as home repair, yard work, grocery shopping, cultivation etc. Following Scholar (1984) we refer to "female typed" tasks as routine and all

other as “Sporadic” to highlight the differences in time commitment that characterize these tasks. As female typed tasks are routine work everyday they have to follow this routine without questioning the sense of justice as prevailing ideology or social norms has defined most household tasks as feminine activities and women have accepted this sexual division of labor without question.

5.4 Women in Decision Making Process :

Women’s role in decision making process is considered as one of the important indicators of her status in the society. Traditionally, the Nepali society was patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal where the father or eldest male head enjoyed a dominant position and exercised the exclusive right of decision making. Tradition and custom imposed a formalized environment in which the women had to operate. The eldest male member was to be the head of the joint family who was responsible for making final decisions which were binding on the part of other members of the family. Normally, the nature of decision was related to the matters like allocating land, crops, sharing of ancestral property, performing ancestor worships or arranging marriages.

In the plantations too, the society is patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal. Theoretically men as the head of the family enjoy a prime position in decision-making. However, unlike in Nepal, the male authority in tea plantation is somewhat different from their traditional society. The nature of decision making process is different in case of the tea plantations where a good number of earning members are females as we have already mentioned that females are numerically dominant as a workers and a number of families have female heads as their males (father or husband) are staying away in connection with their jobs or employment. It was revealed from the field data that a good number of female headed households particularly in Badamtam, Vah-Tukvar and Singell Tea gardens have their males working outside and many of them are serving in Indian Gorkha Regiment, Border Security Force, Territorial Army etc. Out field record revealed that with the exception of few female headed households in all other households women equally participate in the decision making process in matters like children’s education or

admission in schools, expenditure on children's marriages, running the households or buying household articles, the observance of ritual and social ceremonies etc. and whatever, the decision is to be taken it is discussed by husband and wife first but the males would be final decision makers. But in case of households headed by widow mothers and female-headed households woman take independent decisions on many matters related with day-today affairs. But even in such households, males are ultimate decision-makers. For instance, even in households headed by widow mother, it is always the eldest son who exercise authority and takes the final decisions. In female-headed households too, the important decisions are taken by males during their annual or biannual visit to the home.

It is also observed that the women from nuclear family enjoy greater participation in decision-making in family matters than those women who are from joint family. In joint family female have to accept the decision already reached by husband and in-laws. About sixty percent of women interviewed emphasised their role in decision-making.

In the past, one of the important agencies of social control in the tea gardens was *jati samaj* or caste panchayat. This panchayat was not a statutory one but was a non-official body consisting of male village elders. In the early years of plantation history, villagers were mostly unicast or unitribe type. Women were excluded from such panchayats. These *jati Samaj* or Panchayats dealt with matters concerning inter caste marriage or *a jat bibah*, payment of *jat danda* or penalty for the breach of caste endogamy, thefts, quarrels etc. Since such panchayats consisted of elderly male members of the society and women were excluded from such body, they had minimum role to perform. They were allowed to attend the meeting but their voice was not counted in the decision-making process. In most of the meeting, they used to remain as silent spectators and they had to accept the decision taken at the panchayats.

Now, the social importance of the *jati* panchayat have relegated to the background with the formation of trade unions after 1950s. The trade union leaders started to solve village dispute as well. The influence of the trade unions was felt on

the panchayat in the garden. In recent years, the local or garden level committee also includes women as their executive members and these garden level leaders were often asked to mediate in the affairs of the panchayat. Women in trade union body have some voice in decision-making process. The fact that the social life of the workers is closely associated with their workplace have given them encouragement to this process. The growth of trade union movement has minimised the role played by the elder members in the village panchayat and at the same time it has given women the power to raise their voice and participate in the decision-making process. Recently, particularly since 2000, all the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills have brought under the Panchayat Raj System and the provision for the reservation of seats for women has further encouraged them to take active part in the political processes.

On the whole, it can be concluded that the decision-making practices of the plantation families are not very traditional. Now, women do participate in all domestic, and non-domestic decisions.

5.5 Women's Participation in Social Organisations :

Participation in Social Organisation broadens one's outlook and contributes to the development of one's personality. Participation outside the home rather than confining oneself to the narrow boundaries of the home and family provides an opportunity to influence others and to be influenced by others. This promotes self-confidence and awakening particularly among women. Thus participation in organization particularly social organisations will have a bearing in shaping one's attitudes and behaviour.

In order to know the membership and participation of women in various social organisations, women respondents were asked to name the different kinds of socio-cultural organisations existing in their locality. About 32 per cent women respondent replied that they were the members of various socio-cultural and religious organisations like Sai Samiti, Satsangh, Mahila Samiti, Samaj Bikash Samiti, Bhajan Mandali, etc. It is very interesting to note that women in many tea gardens have become the member of caste associations or *jati samaj* such as Akhil Bharatiya Tamang Buddha Sangh, Akhil Kirati Khambu (Rai) Association, etc.

When asked how the men in the family reacted to the women's participation in such organisations, more than half said that they are encouraged by their male members, but only a few women reported a negative attitude of men towards their participation in community life.

Though the social system is still dominated by men, women do participate in all socio-cultural organisations which is undoubtedly to a high degree when compared to the case in plains. But their high degree of membership and participation does not reflect their high position in the social organisations as the high posts like President and Secretary are occupied by males. More than mere membership, holding a position in an organisations confers greater opportunities for the individual to put forth their best and to develop self-confidence and personality. Such individuals are likely to assert their position in the home front and will have broader horizon even in matters of family relationships but such opportunities for holding higher positions in various organisations have been denied to women.

5.6 Leisure and Recreational Activities of the Women :

Despite the progress towards a greater sharing of parental responsibilities in the home, and of domestic tasks by other family members, the heaviest burden continues to remain with women almost everywhere and the plantation women of Darjeeling himalaya is no exception.

The women respondents were asked if in their view working women required a special leisure hour. Almost all the respondents said that working women did need leisure time. In order to know how the women workers of different tea gardens utilise their leisure time, each respondents was asked to specify upto four activities and which she spent her free time. A considerable number said that they spent time listening to radio or tape-recorder (32%), watching television (24.66%), sewing and knitting (16.33%), visiting friends and relatives (26.33%), and a very few (0.66%) spent time on reading.

Table – 5.1

How Respondents utilised their free time on their hobbies

Hobbies	No. of Respondents	
Sewing/Knitting	49	16.33
Reading	02	0.66
Listening to Radio or Tape-Recorder	96	32.00
Watching Television	74	24.66
Visiting Friends/Relatives	79	26.33
Total	300	100%

Source: *Field Work.*

5.7 Patriarchy and Women's Self Perceive Status :

Though the Nepali women in tea plantation enjoy not much subordinate status to men so far their roles and positions are concerned yet they are not free from the forces of patriarchal control i.e., domination of men in the society. In Nepali society also patrilineal social structure governs or determines the actual role and status of women in the society. Patriarchy is one of the main features of the Indian family and family organisation among the Nepalis is no exception. Patriarchy generally leads to patrilocality which separates the women from her natal family home after marriage. Among the Nepalis also post-marital residence is patrilocal or virilocal where a girl is expected to stay at the natal home of her husband soon after marriage. A woman often does not have the title to the matrimonial home in which she concentrates all her time and energy. In the case of death of her husband or desertion or divorce, she is often rendered destitute as she neither has a home in her family of marriage, nor in her natal family which has given her away. The patrilineal setup of social structure provides male an upper hand in most of the life ways including residence, succession, inheritance factor that determines the legal status of women. But the Nepali women do not enjoy more legal rights to properties. Only the males are considered eligible for family or ancestral properties, but by access Nepali women enjoy certain better privileges.

It is true that there exists a tremendous cultural diversity among the various Nepali castes and tribes and there are variations in degree of patriarchy among them.

We have already discussed in the earlier chapters that among certain communities like Tamang, Yolmos and Sherpas (Nepali, Buddhist tribes) there is an immense influence of Tibetan culture. Traditionally, they were near matriarchal communities but they are also not free from the influence of the forces of patriarchy of dominant Hindu Nepalis (particularly Brahmin and Kshatriyas) who ruled over the indigenous tribes. Traditionally, with the exception of higher castes *Bahun* (Brahmin) and *Chhetris* (Kshatriyas) almost all the middle castes Nepalis were hinduised tribes (indigenous tribes being hinduised by Hindu Gorkha rulers). Among these hinduised tribes particularly those who follow animist and Buddhist traditions, women do not acutely suffer from low self esteem and low self image. But the prevalence of predominating values of upper caste Hindu Nepalis have a profound impact in their lives and activities.

5.8 Adaptation and Adjustment of Women Plantation Workers :

Let us now discuss the nature of adaptation and adjustment of Nepali women workers to the semi-industrial way of plantation system after migration from a poor agricultural background of rural Nepal.

According to Parson, adaptation does not mean an adjustment to a new environment alone but also an improvement on the previous condition by exploitation of the new resources. He called it an adaptative upgrading. In this sense adaptation means not just a passive process of social adjustment but an active and innovative process as well. (Parson: 1977)

In tea plantation both agricultural and industrial environment exist. As tea industry is agro-based and located in rural areas Nepali Women workers with rural and agricultural background are expected to adapt better with the working environment of the industry with a consequent effect upon lessening the conflicts between home life and working life. Being akin to agriculture, plantation work and its environment seem to be more congenial to women than in a factory or a mine. The field operations or cultivation work in tea plantations like hand weeding, sickling (rough weeding), manuring, hoeing, pruning, nursery work etc. are comparable to that of modern agricultural. So, the women working outside the home

in the field is not new among the Nepalis castes and tribes like Rai (Khambus), Limbu (Subba), Tamang (Murmis), Thamis, Gurung, Manger, Sunuwar, Newar etc. Along with men folk, women of these communities used to participate equally in agricultural operations. These Nepali women do not find any contradiction between female as a worker and female as a housewife. They think that in order to supplement family income they should work. Their wage are required to run the families.

Unlike other industry, tea industry is located in rural areas and management provide workers with a plot of land (khetland or kothebari) which is rent-free. The women workers spend their time in cultivating maize, bean, potatoes, millet, ginger etc. after finishing their plantation work and sometimes during holidays. As mentioned earlier, the majority of Nepali women workers have come from peasant background of rural Nepal and among the rural people there is a tradition of women working in the agricultural field alongwith their menfolk. We have also cited earlier that the women from Kirata tribes like Rai, Limbu, Yakha use to participate actively in the agricultural operations on their *Kipat* holding (communal land holding). In tea plantation, work spot and residential area exist side by size. Women workers can easily reach the work spot after finishing their household chore. The ecological settings also helped them to adjust with the plantation environment because those who have come from Nepal, are mostly from eastern and western hills of Nepal and few communities like Tamangs (Murmis) and Thamis are from hilly areas around Kathmandu valley i.e., Central Nepal. In Darjeeling Himalayas. they found the same geophysical setting as in their place of origin. It is also an accepted fact that many Nepali Communities like Rai including Yakha, Limbu, and Sherpas whose original homeland is hilly regions of eastern Nepal (Khambuan, Limbuan, Solokhombu respectively) have been spread to Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas since ancient times. These Kirata tribes (except Sherpas) are numerically dominant in the tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas.

Plantation society differs to a great extent from typical industrial society. As the tea industry is agro-based and is not heavily mechanised, the Nepali women do not face much difficulties to work within the work routine and discipline of the

plantation. Moreover, the high technology can not be applied to labour-intensive industry such as tea. In tea plantation, plucking is the main activity which is more efficiently done by women workers as it is similar to those of agriculture and women workers mostly hailing from rural areas do not feel any difficulty in this work. Nepali women workers with low level of literacy are well adapted to tea plantation work which is mostly unskilled in nature.

It is very interesting to notice that in tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas Nepali women from middle castes and tribal background have better adapted and adjusted to plantation environment than the women from higher castes *tagadhari jat* (Brahmin and Chhetris) and lower castes.

Adaptation is a more or less universal phenomena. In every society there are some people who have adapted better than the others. The better adapted people form the higher classes, and the less-adapted people the lower rungs of the society. In tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas, Nepali women from middle caste and tribal background have adapted relatively better than the lower and higher castes women which is evident from the occupational mobility in the plantation work hierarchy, numerical dominance of middle castes women in the working force, dominance of middle castes women in the trade union activities etc. In chapter three we have seen that Nepali women from middle castes and tribal backgrounds have been able to rise in the occupational hierarchy better than others. It was revealed from the field record that in all the seven tea gardens under study the women from middle castes backgrounds (mostly indigenous tribes of Nepal Himalayas) have been able to rise in the work hierarchy of tea plantation enjoying the positions as staff (clerical) and sub-staff or supervisory staff like *daffadars* and *chaprasis*. The discussion on trade union movement and women workers also revealed the fact that women from middle castes groups have already assumed leadership position at garden level unit of various trade unions. This fact goes to prove that the women from the upper and lower caste groups have not been able to rise in the occupational hierarchy, they are less active in trade union movement and hence they are relatively less adapted to plantation environment than the women from middle castes groups.

FINDINGS

In the tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalaya about 90 per cent of women workers belong to middle caste Nepalis like Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Gurung, Manger, Newar, Sunuwar, Thami, Bhujels etc. whose socio-cultural life reflects tribal characteristics and number of women belonging to Upper castes *Bahun* (Brahmin) and *Chhettri* (Kshatriya) and lower caste untouchables are very few. In some of the tea gardens under study their percentage is nil. Nepali women of these middle caste groups enjoy very flexible social code of conduct and therefore, have more freedom in society as compared to the women of upper caste groups. These middle caste women are comparatively more free than in traditional Hindu Society. The majority of Nepali women hailing from agricultural background of rural Nepal had the tradition of working in agricultural field along with men. We have already cited the example of women belonging to Kirata tribes like Rai (Khambu), Limbu (Subba), Yakha (Dewan) who use to participate actively on their *Kipat*, holding i.e., land owned by community as a whole.

It is true that the Nepali women workers suffer very few restrictions especially so far as the *institution of marriage* is concerned. Both men and women have a free choice of living with or leaving their respective partners or in other words, they can select their mates and can leave their mates as and when they like. This sort of choice is hardly there in most types of traditional Hindu societies, where the girl generally has no say in the selection of a spouse. Bride price i.e., the practice of giving gift of money or goods from the groom or his kin to the bride's kin is also given to the girl's parents. As a custom, this system is still continuing among the hinduised Nepali tribes like Rai (Khambu), Subba (Limbu) and Yakha (Dewan). The system of bride price or *rit* usually grants the groom the right to marry the bride and the right to her children. Hence women are not viewed as a liability in their society. The son complex or preference for boys which is so predominant in Hindu society is less or almost absent amongst the Nepais mainly because raising of girls and their marriage do not entail much expenditure. There is no system of dowry though there is system of giving *daijo* from the girl's family, which is also not

compulsory. Even when a marriage breaks the custody of the children is taken by either of the parents through mutual agreement. In many cases the children stay with their mother and when she remarries the stepfather accepts her children as his own.

Nepali women in the plantation society enjoy greater freedom and liberty. There is no segregation. Although the conditions of life are hard she enjoys a full and happy life. She can move freely out of the home without male escort. She visits the weekly market and fairs. She is free to choose her marriage mate and get a divorce whenever she likes. She participates in song and dance and takes active part in religious festivals and social ceremonies. It is true that in some religious rituals (ancestor worship or *pitripuja*) she is not directly associated but her indirect participation is always there.

The analysis of the effect of women's employment on the status of women revealed that the employment of women does not necessarily lead to a change in the work pattern at home. The traditional role of a woman as a home-maker and socialiser of the young remains unaltered despite addition by women in her role as a new dimension of an economic earner. Also, the mere fact of women making a financial contribution to the family income does not lead to a change in the existing role structure and ensuring power position within the family as manifested in her role in decision making. As it is customary to perform household work and childcare by women, men did little to reduce increased workload of the women in the family; they helped in areas, which are less demeaning for them. Even during sickness of the child, women rather than man had to absent from the work. Husbands or male members still continue to remain as main decision-maker.

The case of Nepali women reveals that status of women is not a function of her economic role. It is determined by the principle of social structure on which a particular society is based. Even though women contribute substantially to the labour force, norms governing the traditional patrilineal framework still continue. Women do not enjoy independent property rights. However, a widow may enjoy her husband's property if she does not have an issue or her children are minors. In the absence of a son, property may be enjoyed by the daughters.

Chapter – 6

**TRADE UNIONS AND WOMEN TEA
PLANTATIONS WORKERS**

Chapter – 6

TRADE UNIONS AND WOMEN TEA PLANTATION WORKERS

The role of trade unions in the affairs of the garden is one of the important aspects of the tea industry. The main objectives of such union are to improve the socio-economic conditions of the employees, to see that they are not exploited by the Management as also to mobilize the workers for collective action so that these objectives may be achieved. Though the number of women in trade unions forms a small percentage of the total number of working women, yet it is important to study their struggle and their participation in trade union activity.

In this chapter we shall focus on the origin and growth of trade unions in the Tea plantation of Darjeeling hills and in this context, we have tried to show the role played by women in various labour movements organized by different trade unions. The delineation of these trade unions have been done in a chronological order. The origin of trade union activities and women's role in trade union movement of Badamtam tea garden have been discussed in detail. Furthermore, an attempt has been made to study or examine the scope and the actual degree of participation of women in the trade unions. We have also dealt with the factors helping or preventing the women from playing a more effective role in Trade unions. Though women form more than half of the labour force in tea plantations their participation in trade union activities has been low. Based on field data we have tried to examine the reasons for their low level of participation.

6.1 Origin and Growth of Trade Unions in Tea Plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas :

During the pre-Independence days workers were denied to form trade unions for proper channelization of the interests of the workers. They were illiterate, ignorant, and isolated from their place of origin. They were weak and

powerless against the planters. The diversity among the early migrants or workers, such as their ethnic or cultural heterogeneity, speaking different dialects, professing different religions, their division into work gangs under different *Sardars*, their settlement into respective caste or community *dhuras* or *gaons*, the strict control exercise by their own foreman and an excessive contractualization of mutual relations among coolies formed an important barrier to joint action against employers. Planters would not allow outside organizers entering the gardens and at the same time, did not encourage workers in forming their own association. In contrast, the planters were organized into Darjeeling Branch Indian Tea Association (DBITA) since 1873. The British planters even maintained their own army The North Bengal Mounted Rifles with its headquarters at Darjeeling, which was disbanded on August 14, 1947. The British planters maintained this NBMR mainly to keep law and order in the tea gardens and to prevent the workers from forming any associations, which would go against the interest of planters. Through this army planters became successful to prevent any organized movement or agitation by the garden workers. During the time of labour shortage mainly before Independence period this army kept strong vigilance on the movement of workers from one garden to another. (O'Malley: 1907)

The trade union movement was virtually non-existent in the hill areas during the British period. The activities of the trade union, which has its beginning just before independence assumed real meaning and significance after independence. The constitution of free India guaranteed the right to organize and forms association (Art.19).

The idea of organizing labour union in Hill tea gardens was conspicuous by its absence till 1945. It was in 1946, that for the first time, we find labourers uniting together to press the demand for better working conditions. In free India the workers of the tea garden areas were given a right to voice their grievances not as a mark of charity but as a basic right. This encouraged the growth of the trade union. (Dasgupta: 1989)

The 1952 general election offered the trade unions to make inroads into the gardens. The trade union leaders used the opportunity to hold mass meeting in the labour lines and prospect of gaining support in election led to the growth of multiplicity of trade unions with political overtones. The leaders initiated the labourers into several struggles for more wages and for betterment of their condition. (Griffiths: 1972) The various trade unions formed since then is discussed below.

The origin of hill areas trade unions namely the DTGWU, the DDCKMU, the DDCKSS, the NUPW, the HPWU, the JSPWU have been initiated and their growth and development influenced by different political parties, the CPI, CPI(M), Gorkha League, the Indian National Congress, GNLFF, Jana Shakti, respectively. All trade unions mentioned above are mainly concerned with the Darjeeling tea industry. Each group acts as an important pressure group in formulating labour relations policy. For the Darjeeling tea industry as a whole and at the each garden level, their activities have political aspects, besides engaging themselves in an on going struggle with the managements for improving the working and living conditions of tea plantation workers.

In the following section, formation of different unions in the tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalaya have been dealt in a chronological order.

6.2 Trade Unions in The Tea Gardens of Darjeeling Himalaya :

(i) Darjeeling Tea Garden Workers Union (Affiliated to All India Trade Union Congress)

The date 15th September 1945 is of historical importance as this day witnessed the formation of the first trade union in the hill gardens namely Darjeeling Tea Garden Workers' Union affiliated to the Communist Party of India. Late Sushil Chatterjee, a veteran trade union leader of the CPI was chiefly responsible for historical organization of Tea Plantation Workers. This trade union had Ratanlal Brahmin and Debaprasad Ghosh as the first President and Secretary respectively (Lama and Sarkar: 1986). This union played a dominant role in hill gardens during the later part of 1940 and 1950s particularly during the

long term and widespread workers agitations in Moondakhottee and Margaret's Hope tea gardens. This union did commendable work under the able leadership of Ratanlal Brahmin, Ganeshlal Subba, B.B. Hamal, D.B. Chhetri etc.

(ii) Darjeeling Chia Kaman Shramik Sangha (Affiliated to Gorkha League)

Darjeeling Chia Kaman Shramik Sangha was registered on 3rd December 1959 as an independent organization and it had membership of 4,644 as on 31.3.1967 (Banerjee: 1973). This union is affiliated to Gorkha League, a regional political party. Late Shiva Kumar Rai, MLA was its first Secretary. The next two Secretaries Late Deo Prakash Rai and J.D.S. Rai gave a new direction to the trade union movement in the hill tea garden and played an important role during the Bonus agitation of 1955. During the whole of seventies, this union did a commendable work under the leadership of J.D.S. Rai and Santosh Gurung. At present, this union is operating under the leadership of Santosh Gurung, Amar Lama, Narayan Chhetri, Rajen Banerjee etc.

(iii) National Union of Plantation Workers (Affiliated to Indian National Trade Union Congress)

This union, affiliated to INTUC was formed in 1960 with Mrs. Maitree Bose, a veteran trade union leader and L.M. Pradhan as its first President and General Secretary respectively. This union is sponsored or nursed by the Congress (I). The NUPW in its formative stage had the benefits of leadership from two Congress MPs and P.P. Rai, the then Municipal Commissioner. During the whole of 80s and 90s NUPW was functioning under the leadership of Dawa Norbula, P.T. Lama, M.K. Rai, Ratan Kr. Mothey, Nukul Chhetri etc.

(iv) Darjeeling Chia Kaman Mazdoor Union (Affiliated to CITU)

At the time when Darjeeling District Chia Kaman Workers' Union was emerging as a major force in the hill gardens under the leadership of Ratanlal Brahmin, there came a split in the Communist movement, resulting in the formation of Communist Party of India (Marxist) i.e. CPI(M) in 1964. In 1971 a section of the AITUC members backing the CPI (M) decided to break away from the AITUC and formed a separate organization known as the Centre of Indian

Trade Union (CITU). The Darjeeling District Chia Kaman Workers' Union also split and a rival CITU affiliated union i.e., Darjeeling Chia Kaman Mazdoor union was formed.

This union had always made greater and better inroads into the grassroot level. CPI (M) leaders like Tamang Dawa Lama, Anand Pathak, Sangopal Lepcha, R.B. Rai, H.B. RAI, K.B. Subba etc. played a vital role in forming the Mazdoor union in various tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas.

From the mid-seventies to the start of GNLF movement in 1985-86, Mazdoor union could establish its union in almost all the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills. However, the emergence of GNLF movement eclipsed its position as the dominant trade union in majority of tea gardens and its activities were confined to four gardens only viz., Maribong, Chongtong, Lingia and Singtam which are incidentally CPI(M) strongholds. With NUPW (INTUC) and other unions like Shramik Sangha virtually becoming non-existent, the control of all other gardens had gone into the hands of the GNLF. (Amrita Bazar Patrika: 1988) During the Movement workers irrespective of union affiliation unitedly fought for the demand of separate State except in few tea gardens mentioned above.

(v) Himalayan Plantation Workers union (Affiliated to GNLF)

The GNLF Movement gave birth to a new trade union in the hill areas namely Himalayan Plantation Workers Union (HPWU) affiliated to the GNLF in 1990 with N.K. Kumai (MLA) and K.B. Gurung (Councilor) as its first President and the General Secretary respectively.

At present, out of Seventy-Six tea gardens in the hills, HPWU is playing a dominant role in more than fifty tea gardens. In the rest of the tea gardens though the GNLF was able to form the HPWU garden wing it has not been able to muster the majority support of the workers. HPWU is very active or dominant in the tea gardens which belong to the Sadar Sub-division of Darjeeling district. At present, HPWU is playing a vital role in the affairs of the gardens under the

leadership of N.K. Kumai, K.B. Gurung, P.T. Sherpa, S.K. Chauhan, A.B. Thapa, Saran Dewan, Dipak Gurung, N.K. Thakuri etc.

(vi) Darjeeling, Terai, Dooars Chia Kaman Mazdoor Union (Affiliated to Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxist – CPRM)

Darjeeling, Terai, Dooars Chia Kaman Mazdoor Union emerged in 1996 after the split in CPIM leaders in the hill areas which led to the formation of the Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxist in 15th Dec. 1996. At present, this union is actively organizing labour unions in various tea gardens under the able leadership of Mr. K.B. Subba and Mr. S.P. Lepcha who are the Secretary and president respectively. Now the DTDCCKMU has its former active CPIM leaders like H.B. Rai, R.B. Rai, D.S. Bomzon, T.N. Rai, A.B. Subba etc.

(vii) Jan Shakti Plantation Trade Union (Affiliated to Bharatiya Gorkha Jana Shakti)

The Jana Shakti Plantation Trade Union affiliated to Bharatiya Gorkha Jana Shakti is a new trade union in Darjeeling hills emerged in 1998 with P.K. Syangbo as its first President and other leaders like G.M. Moktan, Ghanashyam Rai, J.N. Moktan, S.K. Rai etc. Now this union is actively involved in organizing labour union in various tea gardens. It has already been able to form garden level unit in many tea gardens like North-Tukvar, Kalej Valley, Pandam, Dhotre, Samrikpani etc.

The growth and importance of various trade unions is closely linked to the importance of respective parties in the political arena. Table – 6.1 shows the present trade unions and their leaders in the tea plantation of Darjeeling Hills.

Table – 6.1
Present Trade Unions in Darjeeling Tea Gardens (1999-2000)

Name of the Trade Union	Political Party affiliation	Names of Secretary or President
1. National Union of Plantation Workers	Congress (I)	Nakul Chhetri
2. Darjeeling Chia Kaman Shramik Sangha	Gorkha League	Santosh Gurung
3. Himalayan Plantation Workers Union	G.N.L.F.	N.K. Kumai
4. Darjeeling, Terai, Dooars, Chia Kaman Mazdoor Union	C.P.R.M.	K.B. Subba
5. Darjeeling, Terai, Dooars Staff and Sub-staff Association	C.P.R.M.	T.N. Rai
6. Jana Shakti Plantation Trade Union	Bharatiya Gorkha Jana Shakti	P.K. Syangbo

Source : *Labour Office, Darjeeling, 2000.*

It is so interesting to observe from the above table that none of the above functionaries is directly associated with tea garden work. Their function is to influence and mobilize the workers under their guidance. Furthermore, the table clearly reveals the political involvement of the major political parties. They have played a decisive role in the origin, growth and development of trade unions for tea plantation workers. The divisions of the trade union movement in hill areas is along ideological lines. Operational strategies of each of the trade union groups are determined by the political party it represent. These political dimensions of trade unionism in hill areas has both negative as well as positive aspect. Those who are holding top executive posts in central trade unions are, at the same time holding high positions in their respective political parties. They do not encourage the development of worker leadership. There is continued dependence of wage workers on outside leadership. Women in tea gardens who constitute the overwhelming majority of labour force have passive roles to play in the trade unions.

6.3 Trade Union Activities in Tea Plantations of Darjeeling Himalaya :

In the history of labour movement in Darjeeling hills the year 1955 is very important. The first united action of the workers, under the leadership of the

important trade union organizations took place in 1955 over the issue of bonus. The movement was jointly organized by Darjeeling Chia Kaman Mazdoor Union and Darjeeling Chia Kaman Shramik Sangha under the leadership of Ratanlal Brahmin of Mazdoor union and Deo Prakash Rai of Shramik Sangha. The total period of the strike was eighteen days. During this Bonus agitation, in Margaret's Hope Tea Estate Six persons or labourers died in police firing in 25th June 1955. Among them two were women.

The final agreement was reached on January 1956 between the bonus sub-committee of the Industrial Committee on Plantations, the labour minister and Commerce and Industry minister. The agreement to give a bonus to plantation workers created a record in the plantation industry, for India became the first country to accept the principle of payment of bonus to plantation workers out of profits. (Bhowmick: 1981).

Inspite of the inter-union rivalry there was a move to have a forum where common issues facing the workers were taken up. Consequently, in 1962 the Coordination Committee of Tea Plantation workers was set up which consisted of representatives from nearly all the major unions. Trade unions of all political shades including INTUC, AITUC and later CITU and Gorkha League were members of this Committee. This committee served as a forum for discussing problems such a wages, bonus and benefits under the plantation labour Act of 1951. The main objective behind the formation of coordination committee was to prevent inter-union rivalry.

The second indefinite general strike took place in 1969. As the employers or the Management refused to concede the demands placed by co-ordination Committee, all the major trade unions (e.g. Darjeeling Chia Kaman Workers Union, Darjeeling Chia Kaman Shramik Sangha, NUPW etc.) gave the call of an indefinite general strike that began on 18th August, 1969. The strike Completely paralysed work on the tea estates. Finally, an agreement was reached on 2nd September, 1969. (Sen: 1985)

According to the Memorandum of Agreement, all vacancies in the tea gardens which were caused by either death or retirement of permanent workers were to be filled up. It also provided for recruitment of new workers, their numbers to be determined by the size of the garden. Secondly, *bigha* workers (those employed temporarily during peak seasons) resident within the garden, would be given subsidized rations while non-resident *bigha* workers would be given only cash compensation. Thirdly, wage would be revised after a machinery was set up but extra leaf price would be raised 5.5 paise per kilogram to 7 paise per kilogram. (ITPA: 1975)

There seems to be a decrease in the number of strikes held in the tea gardens, in recent past as the emphasis is on negotiations for achieving their demand.

In the following section we shall try to present the role of women in the union activities from the historical perspective and also try to examine their level of participation in the various union activities in the present context of Darjeeling gardens.

6.4 Participation of Women Plantation Workers in Trade Unions :

From the very beginning, women workers have been actively involved in the trade union activity. They have participated in agitational activity like strikes organized by the trade unions. In several cases, trade unions have deliberately kept women in the frontline while confronting the managerial staff and police. While adopting the tactics or tool known as '*gherao*' or wrongful confinement, union leaders always kept women in the frontline.

Among the early women activists was *Mailee Chettri*, a Nepali labourer, who worked in Denguajhar Tea Garden – a strong hold of Communist Party, was drawn in the labour movement in 1946. As an activist of the Union (Darjeeling Tea Garden Workers Union) she mobilized men and women labourers, for demonstration march that came to Darjeeling town. When the Communist Party of India was banned in 1948, she went underground and died at an early age. There was Amrita Thapa, a Nepali labourer, who did not get cold feet when her

husband was killed by the employers and mobilized around 350 female members in her garden union that had 600 members. (Sen: 1985).

Soon after the formation of the Darjeeling Tea Garden Workers Union affiliated to All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) in 1946 under the veteran trade union leader Ratanlal Brahman trouble broke out in Moondekote Tea Estate and a lock-out was declared in April 1947 and it remained so until January 1948. During the whole period, sacrifice of female labourers remained legendary. During the two years period of lock-out the women labourers continued as casual labourers on the roadside, carried load but did not surrender even when some of their male labourers were willing to compromise.

However, it was from 1955 onwards that unionization of female labourers increased considerably. They participated actively in the 1955 Bonus Agitation. In Margaret's Hope Tea Estate six persons including two women were killed in police firing in 25th June, 1955. They were Sobha Rai (22 years) of Ringtang Tea Estate and Amrita Kumari Biswakarma (18 years) of Margaret's Hope Tea Estate. Many female workers were arrested on charges of Sabotage. (Swadhinta: 1955) The improvement of their living standard could be related to the labour movement that has made considerable progress since the 1955 Bonus Agitation. There has been an influx of young women workers in the unions during the 1970s.

The various trade unions have women wing. The CPI dominated Mahila Samiti which grew out of the MARS (Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti) in 1959, continued to work among the working women in cooperation with the NFIW (National Federation of Indian women). After the split in the CPI, the CPI(M) formed Paschim Banga Ganatantrik Mahila Samiti in 1971. (Sen: 1985) Its membership leaped from 82,552 in 1974 to 2,36,991 in 1978-79 and to 600,000 in 1981-82.

Recently they have been organized into Gorkha National Women's Organization (GNWO) and Gorkha National Welfare Organization affiliated to GNLF. These organizations extend from State level to village level. At the top,

there is central body or State committee, below it there is District Level Committee and followed by the Valley Committee (comprising of 8 to 12 gardens or bustis) and Garden Level Committee or *Sakha* which has different sub-committees or *Prasakha* Committees in different villages or gaons.

At present, women take keen interest in the activities of all the trade unions of Darjeeling district namely, Darjeeling District Chia Kaman Mazdoor union, Darjeeling Chia Kaman Shramik Sangha, NUPW, Himalayan Plantation Workers Union, DDTCKMU and Janashakti Plantation Trade Union. In all these trade unions, women take a keen interest and are very often active members. The trade unions have secured higher wages, bonus, ration for the labourers. In addition to provisions for housing, recreation and schools, etc. which were made from time to time. The most important point to note in this context is that due to consistent demand from women workers the wage disparity between male and female workers have been abolished by the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976. Maternity benefits were also expanded in 1961. They have fought through various unions for an improvement in their standard of life and condition of work.

In the following section we shall analyse and discuss the nature of women's membership in trade unions, their degree of participation in trade union activity etc. Their membership and participation in trade union have great significance for them particularly because these represent a fundamental shift in their approach to life. It gives a new arena for their activities where they are able to meet and interact with friends in a less formal set-up. It also gives the more active members a forum for developing their leadership qualities.

6.5 Women Membership in Trade Unions of Tea Plantations in Darjeeling Himalayas :

As we have already seen in the previous section that in hill tea gardens of Darjeeling almost all the national trade union federations have their unions. These include AITUC, CITU, INTUC, UTUC. In addition there are a large number of smaller and local or regional trade unions. All these trade unions have

women membership. Our study of the seven tea gardens showed that the women's response to trade unions was high. The following table - will show the nature of trade union membership among the women respondents of various tea gardens under study.

Table – 6.2

Distribution of Respondents According to Membership in Trade Unions

Nature of Membership	No.	Percentage
Committee Member	21	7
Ordinary Member	267	89
No Membership	12	4
Total	300	100%

Source : *Field Studies conducted on various tea gardens.*

It is clear from the above table that about 96% of the respondents are members of one or other trade union. Only 4 percent of the respondents are not members of any union. About 7 percent of them hold responsible positions as executive membership of unions. But none had any of the higher positions as president or secretary. Those women who have become executive members of the garden unit trade unions are from Badamtam, Singell and Springside tea gardens. In all the tea gardens under study multiple trade unions are operating which are hostile to one another. Inter-union rivalry (particularly between GNLFF affiliated HPWU and CPRM affiliated DDTCKMU) had led to violence between the supporters of these unions. This had made a section of women workers indifferent towards trade unions hence they preferred not to join any union. But it is true that multiple unions do not necessarily lead to inter-union rivalry in most cases. As we have seen many tea gardens having peaceful co-existence of more than four unions at the garden level. The general feeling of the respondents was that it is tougher for women than for men to engage in trade union activities. However, a few respondents (about 4%) particularly from Badamtam, Singell and Springside were found to take very active part in trade union activities. Another

36 percent of the respondents took part actively in trade union activities but a majority of the respondents (about 57%) appeared to be passive in their participation in unions (see Table 6.3).

Table – 6.3

Distribution of the Respondents According to the Degree of Participation in Trade Union Activity.

Responses	No.	%
Very actively	10	3.00
Actively	107	35.67
Passively	171	57.00
Not applicable	12	4.00
Total	300	100

Source: *Field Studies conducted on various tea gardens.*

6.6 Reasons for Joining Trade Unions

Table – 6.4

Reasons for Joining Trade Unions

Reasons	No. of Respondent	%
Better Welfare facilities	55	19.0
Wages and bonus	31	10.7
Job promotion	12	4.1
Fear of victimization	38	13.1
Influence of Male members or relatives (husband, father, son, brother etc.)	142	49.3
Women Independent Choice	10	3.4
Total	288	100%

Source: *Field Studies conducted on various Tea Gardens.*

The high rate of membership of trade unions gives the impression that women were actively involved in trade union movement. However, when we came to know the real reasons for joining unions we got a different picture. Out of 288 respondents only 10 women replied that they have joined the unions out of their independent choice but the majority of women replied that they have joined the unions influenced by their male relatives. In the case of married women they became members of the unions their husbands belonged to. Unmarried women were influenced by their father's and brother's decision on the choice of the union. It is clear from the above table that about 19% women have joined unions for better welfare facilities and another 10% to get better wages and bonus. On the other hand, 13% of them have joined unions because of the fear of victimization. It is very interesting to note that 4% of women have become members of unions with the hope to get promotion to sub-staff or supervisory category as the union backing is considered as very important factor at the time of appearing interview for sub-staff category. Out of 300 respondents 12 women were not members of any union. They had become union members in the past but they decided not to join any union as they felt that none of the unions were any good. When asked about the reasons for not joining any union they replied that they do not like multiplicity of unions in the tea plantations as these unions frequently involve in inter-union rivalry and they do nothing for the workers especially for the women workers.

The above discussion shows that despite forming more than half of the working force in the tea plantation women workers have remained marginalized in the trade unions.

The plantation Labour Act (1951) lays down a number of provisions which would directly help to improve their status but unfortunately most of these provisions are not enforced and the women workers are deprived of whatever little scope they have of improving their conditions. Lack of educational facilities keeps them illiterate, the absence of proper crèches at the work place implies that the elder daughter, instead of going to school, have to take care of the younger siblings at home, scarcity as well as lack of proper drinking water facility puts an

additional burden on the women as they have to fetch water from distant water sources. With the result the women have to devote all their available time to work and to the household. Thus they have little time to devote for trade union activities.

Several studies (Mathur: 1992) in India have explored the reasons for low rate or women's participation in trade union activities. Mathur has attributed the low rate of women's participation in trade union activity to apathy on the part of women and he had explained this apathy as due to women being more uneducated and illiterate than men, owing to the bonds of religious and social tradition and to the pressure of domestic responsibilities. (Mathur and Mathur: 1992) Since these reasons are very commonly put forward to explain why women are less active in trade unions than men, it is worthwhile exploring the ideological presuppositions which underlie them. To begin with, illiteracy as a factor inhibiting trade union membership is a contentious one. If its negative effects were strong, there ought to have been maximum unionization and militancy among white-collar women workers such is not however the case. As to the bonds of religion and social traditions, it is true that women because of their role in the family and in the socialization of children do internalize such traditions to a greater degree than men. However, men are not free from such traditions either and if their inhibitions can be broken down by a strong trade union movement, so can those of women that women workers are still bound by such traditions only points to the lesser degree to which the trade union movement has mobilized them. The majority of studies point to domestic responsibilities as constraints to effective participation of women in union activity. Domestic responsibilities certainly inhibit women's participation in union activity, but the effort should be directed at questioning this sexual division of labour. There has, however, been no attempt at such a questioning either by the trade union movement or by any studies of this movement. Women's household responsibilities are often cited as a reason for low trade union participation but never questioned. This is an issue that needs to be addressed by trade unions especially in the context of overwhelming majority of women in tea plantations. It is true that no trade union

organization has seriously taken up the job of preparing a cadre of women leaders. Our study also revealed the fact that about 90 percent of the women workers are ignorant about legislative provisions meant for their welfare. The union leaders do not take any interest to educate their women members about their rights. So the disinterested on the part of trade unions is mainly responsible for the low level of their participation in trade union activities.

The low level of women's participation in trade union activities might lead one to believe that the trade unionism in tea gardens is totally male-dominated where women have to accept the decisions already taken by their male leaders. But this is not entirely correct. As we have already seen many cases of violence or mass movement of trade unions where women took the leading role. All these instances show that women do have the potential for leadership, which needs to be developed. It is further observed that the trade unions leaders are very much interested to increase the wage-rate, bonus and other benefits for the labour. But they do not care much about educating the labourers particularly the women making them politically conscious so that they could change their present position for a better one. Trade unionism does make them more sensitive for taking the share of responsibility of the industry. As a result the labourers make no such positive contribution towards the betterment of the industry. As we all know that the harmonious industrial relations always play a vital role in augmenting production and productivity in tea industry, which is labour-intensive. In this connection it may be mentioned here that the Govt. of India has formed an organization, namely the Central Board for Workers Education (Sponsored by the Ministry of Labour, Govt. of India) which has its branch office at Siliguri also but the result so far have not been at all impressive. But we hope it can play a vital role in educating the workers including women making them responsible workers who could positively contribute for the better future of tea industry.

After a general discussion on the role of trade unions in Darjeeling tea gardens and women's role in various trade union activities, now we shall focus our attention on the women's role in Trade Union Movement of Badamtam Tea

Garden. A detail discussion on the origin and growth of Trade Union activities in Badamtam Tea Garden is also presented. Out of seven tea gardens under study, the researcher has selected this particular garden for intensive case study of movement as it was not possible to have detail discussion of union activities of all the seven tea gardens. We shall first discuss the origin and activities of the trade unions after which our attempt would be to examine the role of women in such unions.

6.7 Women and Trade Union Movement in Badamtam Tea Garden - A Case Study :

In this tea garden, trade union was formed only during the later part of 1960s when the workers were organized into labour union.

The influence of the All India Gorkha League, a regional political party was perceptible even in 1950s, however, it was not formally organized in the tea garden. A small incident agitated the minds of workers which eventually led to the formation of the worker's union. The death of a pet dog of the garden manager Mr. Colension in 1961 created a furore and the two employees (Kishore Bahadur and Akaley Rai) were charge-sheeted. The incident created a feeling of helplessness among the workers and the Gorkha League was approached for help. As per the advice of the party, they filed a suit against the Manager and the judgement was given in favour of the workers. This incidence had a far reaching effect on the tea garden workers. They realized the need to organize themselves to oppose such cases of oppression and exploitation by the employers. Consequently, the garden level unit of the Darjeeling Chia Kaman Shramik Sangha affiliated to the All India Gorkha League came into existence in 1969 with the help of Gorkha League leaders like late Deoprakash Rai, C.K. Khaling, B.B. Ghatraj, J.D.S. Rai etc. Mr. S.S. Rai, N.B. Rai, Loktey Tamang, D.B. Pradhan, I.B. Subba were the leaders of Shramik Sangha at garden level at the initial stage of its formation. These persons took active part in organizing the labour unions and making the people aware of rights and duties.

It is worth mentioning here that the formation of trade union have resulted in better interest articulation and aggregation. They could not set aside the demands made on them and consequently started providing some facilities like firewood, free medical facilities, ration at concessional rates etc.

The Shramik Sangha played an important role in the agitation of 1973. In this year, the Management, through a notification attempted to reduce the facilities provided to the workers. For instance, reduction in the quantity of firewood, medicine, hospital diet (milk supplied to the patient was stopped), sick attendants etc. The implementation of this rule agitated the minds of the workers so much that they did not hesitate to gherao the Management and some office staff whom they thought sided with the Management. On 3rd August 1973 the garden level leaders and ordinary members were charge sheeted on the grounds of indiscipline and violation of industrial peace and harmony. They were suspended from the garden work for more than three years i.e. till Aug. 1977. The local leaders who were suspended were S.S. Rai and Loktey Tamang and other active ordinary members like Fuldhøj Kami, M.B. Pradhan, Pirthi Narayan Pradhan, Kishore Bahadur Pradhan, Budun Kumar Rai, Bal Bahadur Rai, Jarlal Rai, Sambiray Rai, Chengba Tamang, Dawa Tamang, Dhan Kishore Tamang, Dhanraj Tamang, Amrit Tamang, Dal Bahadur Kami, Smt. Sanja Rai, Smt. Manmaya Rai, Smt. Budhimaya Rai and Mahendra Rawat.

The net effect of such action of the Management were two-fold: 1) the workers became leaderless and lost the direction of the Movement. 2) the fear of losing their work became too strong to mobilize them further. During the later half of 70s, the Trade Union had been suffering from a great set back due to the emergence of national emergency on the one hand, and intra-union rivalries on the other. In the absence of strong trade union at garden level, the Indian National Congress under the leadership of P.P. Rai, Madan Thapa, T. Manen, P.S. Lama etc. tried to make an inroad in the garden and organize NUPW but failed to attract the workers. The dissolution of the garden level unit of Shramik Sangha in 1977 helped to emerge another trade union known as Darjeeling Chia Kaman Mazdoor Union with its affiliation to the CITU. The CPI (M) leaders like Tamang Dawa

Lama, S.P. Lepcha, Anand Pathak, R.B. Rai played an important role in the formation of local unit of Mazdoor union in this tea garden. After the formation of Mazdoor union in 1977, the membership of the workers increased manifold within a couple of years. This union had a number of active women leaders who could organized separate women's organization, known as Mahila Samiti affiliated to CPI (M). From the year 1977-78 till the start of Gorkhaland agitation by GNLFF in the year 1984-85, Mazdoor Union played the dominant role in the affairs of tea garden under the leadership of Mr. R.B. Rai, Shamsher Pradhan, Maniraj Subba, Budhiraj Rai, K.R. Pradhan, R.K. Rai, etc. During the Gorkhaland agitation, no Union could work for the plantation workers.

In the year 1986, Gorkha National Liberation Front's garden level unit i.e., *Shakha* Committee was formed with the joint initiative of few office staff, school teacher, ex-armymen of the garden and some workers. Within a short period of time, leaders became successful to unite the workers to fight for the separate state of "Gorkhaland". The local leaders like R.B. Rai, B. Rai, M.B. Pradhan, D.S. Rai, N.T. Lama, Bishnu Rai, S.D.Rai, A. Thapa took very active part to mobilize the garden people. During these periods workers forgot their problems and demands against the employers. About 95 per cent of garden resident became united under the GNLFF banner. The rest 5 per cent who were the staunch supporters of CPI (M) could not surrender to new leaders and did not give their support for the demand of Gorkhaland. Their Union i.e., Mazdoor Union was weakened due to GNLFF movement. There were few others who were also the staunch supporter of CPI (M) but became the active leaders of the GNLFF. They could convince the common workers that the party-politics and fight for 'Gorkhaland' were the two different things and with the achievement of the latter, they could again start their respective trade unions, affiliated with different political parties. There were few leaders who did not support the movement at the initial stage but were forced to surrender their registers, files, flags and stamps etc. Finally, they left the garden under duress and few settled down in Siliguri town of North Bengal. The movement saw the collapse of Mazdoor union in the garden though the old party leaders are trying off and on unsuccessfully though to

start their union again. During these whole periods from 1985 to 1991-92 there was not a single trade union functioning in the garden and all affairs relating to the workers were settled by the garden level unit of GNLF leaders.

Table – 6.5

The Executive Members of the GNLF Garden Level Committee (Sakha Committee) in Badamtam Tea Garden during 1986-1992.

1986 – 1989			1989 - 1992		
Name of the leaders	Caste/Ethnic background	Portfolio	Name of the Leaders	Caste/Ethnic background	Portfolio
Man Bahadur	Pradhan (Newar)	President	Nor Bahadur	Rai	President
Bisnu Kumar	Rai	Vice-president	Ratna Kr.	Rai	Vice-president
Rai Bahadur	Rai	Vice-President	Krishnaram	Pradhan	Vice-President
Bijay	Rai	General	Asoke Kr.	Mukhia (Sunuwar)	General
Subhadhan	Rai	Secretary	Deoprakash	Pradhan	Secretary.
Yong Dorjee	Lama	Joint Secretary	Haridas	Pradhan	Joint Secretary
		Cashier	Yong Dorjee	Lama	Cashier

Source : *Tea Garden Office.*

The above table gives the picture of garden level unit of GNLF leaders during the period between 1986 to 1992, who acted as a mediator between the workers and Management and acted like a labour union solving the problems of workers. This system continued till April, 1992. In May 26th 1992 a garden level unit of Himalayan Plantation Workers Union (HPWU) affiliated to GNLF was formed with the following executive members.

Table – 6.6

The Executive Members of Himalayan Plantation Workers Union in Badamtam Tea Garden (1992).

President	Desh Bahadur Rai (Sub-Staff)
Vice-president	Krishna Ram Pradhan (Co-Operative Salesmen)
General Secretary	Sanjay Mani Pradhan (Office Staff)
Joint Secretary	Ratna Kr. Rai (School Staff)
Cashier	Mrs. Sashikala Rai (Medical Staff)

Source : *Tea Garden Office (Badamtan).*

It is clear from the above table that the executive committee of HPWU incorporated representatives from all the sections of tea garden including one woman as cashier. As there were no rival unions since both Shramik Sangha and Mazdoor union became virtually non-existent in the garden, HPWU could function very smoothly solving various day-to-day problems in the garden. Recently, in 1998, another union known as Darjeeling, Terai and Dooars Chia Kaman Mazdoor Union had been emerged under the political patronage of Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxist (CPRM) – the splinter from State Communist Party of India (Marxist). At present, HPWU and DTDCCKMU are the two rival trade unions in this garden with almost equal number of union membership.

In the following section we shall analyse women's role in trade union movement in this tea garden.

As it is already mentioned that in this tea garden, Shramik Sangha affiliated to Gorkha League was the first and the oldest trade union, which was started during the later parts of 1960s. Although there was no separate women cell in the union, women have actively participated in its activities and along with men folk they took active part in *gheraos* and demonstration against the Management. For instance, in 1973, among the twenty active members of the Shramik Sangh who were charge-sheeted there were three women who played a leading role during the confrontation between management and workers. For more than three years beginning from August 1973 till June 1977 they remained suspended from work. These three women were Smt. Sanja Rai, Manmaya Rai and Budhimaya Rai. All of them were employed as factory women workers at that time. After three and half years they were allowed to resume their work in the garden.

As soon as the Mazdoor Union (affiliated to CITU) was formed in the garden during the later part of the 1970s, they realized the importance of women

in the trade union movement and these leaders along with the few active women supporters took the initiative in the formation of Mahila Samiti affiliated to CPI (M). These garden level women leaders unified the women workers and led them in meetings processions and gheraos jointly organized by Mahila Samiti and Mazdoor Union. Few women like Vishma Sharma, Shyam Kumari Rai and Chandramati Thapa assumed the garden level leadership and played an active role in trade union movement.

During the later part of 1970s and early 80s when the Mazdoor Union was playing a dominant role in this garden, these women leaders raised their voice against the denial of women to promotion from worker to sub-staff (Supervisory Staff) category and demanded that such promotional facilities should be extended to women workers provided they fulfill the condition of required qualifications like education and seniority. They approached the Management to stop the discrimination in matters of promotion and job mobility which was illegal and unjust to women. They repeatedly put their demands before the Management and gave assurance to them that if women were given such a promotional facilities they could equal the ability of men workers. Finally, these local women leaders of Mahila Samiti became successful in achieving their demands. These same women who were the leaders of Mahila Samiti and who fought actively in raising their demands got the chance to become first women sub-staff (Daffadars) in this garden as they fulfilled the requisite qualification. It was the great achievement for women who have been employed only in the *coolie* or worker category for more than a century in Darjeeling tea gardens. The five women workers who have been promoted to sub-staff category on 01.08.1981 were Vishma Sharma, Shyam Kumari Rai, Chandramati Thapa, Manrupa Gurung, and Parvita Sharma. Later on, two more women have been promoted to sub-staff category. They were Dhamber Kumari Sunuwar and Shila Mani Rai. No examination was conducted for the first five women who have been appointed for the first time in 1981. It was through their union support they got the chance to become sub-staff as they were the active members of both the union and Mahila Samiti.

Later on, however, it became a practice or regular feature of the tea garden to recruit the women to sub-staff category but the recruitment is made through written examination and interview, she should also be medically fit for the job. Participation in the union activities hardly affects the promotion pattern.

Another remarkable contribution of Mahila Samiti was the creation of crèche house to look after the infants of the working mother. They were the first one to raise their voice for the demand of crèche house which is provided in the PLA, 1951 but it was not established in the garden till 1980.

As mentioned earlier during the whole period between 1985 to 1991 there was not a single trade union functioning in this tea garden and all the activities of trade union were carried out by the garden level unit of GNLF Committee. During this period, Gorkha National Women's Organisation (GNWO), affiliated to GNLF was formed which gave active support to GNLF Committee which acted as a labour union in the absence of any trade unions. Table below shows the executive members of the garden level (Sakha Committee) unit of GNWO in Badamtam during 1986 – 1992.

Table – 6.7

**Women Leaders of Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNWO) in
Badamtam during 1986 – 1992**

1986 – 1989			1989 – 1992		
Name of the Executive Members	Caste/Ethnic Background	Portfolio	Name	Caste/Ethnic Background	Portfolio
Shaym Kumari	Rai	President	Pushpalata	Gurung	President
Lalita	Subba (Limbu)	Vice-President	Sita	Rai	Vice-President
Reetu	Rai	General	Bindu	Rai	General
Sunita	Pradhan (Newar)	Secretary	Kalpana	Subba (Limbu)	Secretary
Anita	Pradhan (Newar)	Joint Secretary	Anita	Pradhan (Newar)	Joint Secretary
Luxmi	Pradhan (Newar)	Joint Secretary	Nila	Tamang	Joint Secretary
		Cashier	Devika	Gurung	Cashier

Source: *Tea Garden Office (Badamtam)*.

From the above study, it can be concluded that women workers of this tea garden are aware of the advantages of unionsation of workers. It has raised the

level of their political consciousness. They have participated actively in various agitations. However, they seldom rise above the level of floor workers. All the executive positions in various unions are still male dominated. Only in the women wing of different political parties do they exercise effective power.

Findings

From earlier discussion it is evident that women labourers have been quite active in trade union activities and have often participated in strikes, *gheraos* and in other agitational activities. This has been possible mainly due to two reasons – (a) Spread of education among the women labourers. This is a result of the PLA 1951 that made it compulsory for the management to provide primary education to the labourers irrespective of sex. (b) Growth of political consciousness effected through a general spread of trade union activities yet it is true that there are very few women in the top leadership of the trade union movement. Excepting a few cases, most of the important trade union leaders are male. Women are mostly found in the floor level leadership only in the women wing of different political parties, do they exercise effective power. Their role in the decision-making process of the union has still remained at the peripheral level. This is one of the main reasons why there has never been any pressure on the management to fulfil the specific issue of women workers. One could offer at least two or three possible reasons for this State of affairs.

- a) The working women are concerned with dual problems of the work-place as well as of home. Women, even when they work outside the home along with men, are responsible for household chores and childcare. Their idea of childcare and housework take priority over their work outside. They do not have enough time to go through a political career after doing all the household chores and work in the garden. The general feeling is that they are indispensable in their home and to their children while someone else can always take over the charge of trade unions.
- b) Traditionally, the top leadership in the tea gardens is important local politicians without any direct connection with the garden. It is assumed that they can argue on behalf of the labourers, read the balance sheet and raise questions. Added to this is the traditional attitude that men, as the chief bread-winners, are entitled to the best jobs. In the tea plantation, for

more than hundred years women have been employed only in the worker or *coolie* category and hence, they still look up to men for leadership. As a result the phenomenon of male domination in trade union still persists along with the underplaying of the special issues of women.

Male domination in the trade unions is reflected in the nature of the demands that these trade unions raise. The plantation labour Act (1951) lays down a number of welfare measures that the plantation managements are obliged to provide. Among these are permanent housing for the workers, hygienic sanitation, water supply arrangements, provision of crèches for infants, labour canteen etc. Many of the aspects relating to particular gender interests of women labourer are thus covered by the provision in the Act. However, in most plantations these provisions are rarely complied with though trade unions raise issues relating to housing or water supply in their negotiations with the management, it has been seen that the demand for a crèche is never raised. There has not been any instances when crèches have been one of the issues for a strike.

Since industrial relations have become complex, trade union movement to be effective requires a mature leadership and women need to be properly represented in the trade unions. For this female labourers need to come forward with a greater involvement in the movements. For example, female labourers could form cells or committees in each garden to formulate their specific demands e.g., maternity benefits, crèches, labour canteen, light jobs for expecting mothers etc. and these committees could force the male dominated unions to include such demands in the common charter of demands when movements are undertaken. In other words, the problem specific to women workers could be tackled through the formation of separate women's cells within existing trade unions to push for the taking up of women's work place issues, for example, abolition of sex-biased grading, exclusion of women from better jobs, for crèche allowance, maternity benefits etc. and for a full participation of women in the decision-making process of the union as well as for a change in the structure and functioning of unions to make this possible.

To sum up, one could say that women, however peripheral their involvement in trade unions may be, have been considerably influenced by these movements. Despite several odds in forms of their preoccupation with household duties, they joined the unions and continued to take part in meeting and demonstrations designed to improve their standards of living. Thus, the female labourers working for years with male labourers in the same industry have become an integral part of the trade union movement.

Chapter – 7
MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSION
AND RECOMMENDATION

Chapter – 7

MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The sociological study on the status and role of Nepali women from social and cultural perspectives is very rare so far as the tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas is concerned. The basic objective of the present study is to examine the changing role and status of Nepali women in tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas in the context of their culture community and social structure. More specifically, the present piece of research work is designed to examine the changing role and status of Nepali women in agro-industrial setting of tea plantation society of Darjeeling Himalayas after migrating from a poor rural agricultural background. In this section I shall present the major findings of the entire study and the conclusion drawn out of them. Finally, some suggestions shall be made on the basis of this empirical study.

I

The present study have been conducted in seven tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas. They are *Badamtam*, *Pandam*, *Happy Valley*, *Vah-Tukvar*, *Singell*, *Springside* and *Castleton*. The first four tea gardens are located in Sadar Sub-division of Darjeeling district and the rest three tea gardens are located in Kurseong sub-division of Darjeeling district. In all the tea gardens under study Nepali women workers (*coolie*) are numerically dominant in labour force. The high proportion of women workers in the tea industry is contrary to the general trend in the organized sector of industry where the proportion of women workers in the labour force has been declining. But in the tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas, women are numerically dominant as working force. Nearly 95 per cent women workers composed of Nepali castes and tribes and majority of women workers belongs to middle caste Nepalis like Tamang, Rai, Limbu, Manger, Gurung, Sunuwar, Newar, Thami, Bhujel, Jogis, Yakhas etc. Among these middle caste Nepalis Tamang (Murmis), Khambus (Rai), Limbu (Subba), Yakhas (Dewan), Gurung, Manger and Newars are numerically dominant in the tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas.

Similar to modern industrial organization, the tea plantation has also an organization of work and a hierarchy of staff. This hierarchy includes the management at the top, followed by staff, sub-staff and workers or *coolie* at the bottom. In Chapter three we have discussed in detail about the position of women in plantation work hierarchy. It was observed that since the inception of tea industry in Darjeeling Himalayas women have outnumbered men as working force or *coolie*. For more than a century they were denied promotional facilities and always recruited them only in the *coolie* category. It was for the first time in the history of tea industry that the women were given promotional chances during 1980s. The present study revealed that many women of Badamtam, Singell and Springside tea gardens have been promoted to sub-staff or supervisory staff like *Daffadars* and *Chaprasis*, but their numbers are insignificant as compared to male sub-staffs. At the same period during 1980s some tea gardens have appointed women in staff category as *Babus* or clerks. It was found that the tea gardens like Singell, Badamtam, Springside, Happy Valley and Pandam have appointed women as clerical staffs. Some of them are successfully working as Head Clerks. As regards to management category, it was noteworthy that for the first time in the plantation history one lady has been appointed as Assistant Manager who is presently working under Goodrick Group Ltd.

Women's participation in first three categories like management, staff and sub-staff is insignificant as compared to their overwhelming majority as workers or *coolie*. We have also explored the reasons behind the numerical dominance of women as working force. We have found that the family-based employment system or recruitment policy of management and agro-based nature of tea plantation work are mainly responsible for the high employment of women in tea industry. Plucking of tea leaves or *patti tipai* is one of the important activities done by women workers. It is an important operation because the quality of manufactured tea depends upon the care and attention with which plucking is done. Women are considered more efficient in plucking of tea leaves than men. Besides plucking women have to perform different types of agricultural works like pruning, hand weeding, colon thully, skiffing, manuring, nursery work etc. Most of these work are similar to

modern agriculture. In many tea gardens women are also employed as factory workers. There are six processes of manufacturing tea like withering, rolling, fermentation, drying, sorting and packing, out of these six process women are engaged only in last two processes. Generally there are not many permanent workers appointed solely for the factory work but whenever there is a necessity of employing more workers they are taken away from the field operation and employed in factory. Once in the factory they get better wages and other facilities. The present study revealed that a number of women in Badamtam and Castleton have been employed in factory work. Out of 17 factory women workers of these 2 tea gardens only two are employed as permanent factory worker. The rest women are permanent field workers who are employed in the factory only during the peak plucking season i.e. from April to September and October.

The tea industry is agro-based and highly labour-intensive industry. This is the only organized industry where women have outnumbered men as a working force or *coolie*. The predominance of female labour over the male workers is a distinctive feature in tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas. The recruitment policy of the tea planters is also responsible for the numerical majority of women in tea plantation. The tea industry in Darjeeling Himalayas was started later than in Assam (1839). The recruitment system in Darjeeling tea gardens was different from that of Assam and other tea regions of India. The Workmen's Breach of Contract Act of 1859 (No.VII) which was applicable in case of Assam, Nilgiri and Annamalai Hills was never applied to the tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas. The Inland Emigration Act III of 1863 which provided that all the labour recruiters should be licensed and that every intending emigrants should be closely supervised by this Act was not applicable in Darjeeling tea gardens. The planters of Darjeeling tea gardens preferred *Sardari* system for labour recruitment. Unlike the *Arkatis* of Assam and *Kanganies* or *maistries* of Nilgiri and Annamalai Hills, *Sardars* of Darjeeling were not licensed recruiters. More often than not, the *Sardars* were themselves a part of the factory or plantation labour occupying supervisory positions. Unlike tea plantations of Assam and Dooars and Terai regions of West Bengal where the labourers were indentured from the various tribal belts of Chotonagpur and Santhal

Pargana of Bihar (now in Jharkhand) and Orissa, the question of labour recruitment in Darjeeling tea gardens was little difficult as the workers were to be brought from the rural areas of Nepal. Here, the caste or community backgrounds of the recruiters played an important role as it was easier for *Sardars* and his assistant known as *Gallawalas* to induce new recruits of their own caste or community fellows by enticing or showing all the advantages of work and the prospects of ultimate settlement on independent holdings. The Sardars used to motivate workers to come with their whole families as in the case they were likely to stay permanently in the plantation. So the family-based employment policy in the initial stages of plantation history is responsible for large number of women in tea plantation. This type of recruitment of whole family speaks of the Britishers well-planned design. This would mean less of labour mobility from one place to another and the scope of employing even the children at less than half of the wage of an adult. With the passing of Plantation Labour Act 1951, the recruitment procedure also undergone some change. Now-a-days only local Nepalis who are the permanent garden resident are recruited through *Badli* or substitute system. Under *Badli* system the new appointment is to be done from among the dependent members of the retiring workers.

Tea gardens operate on a system of daily wages. The daily wage workers are paid on the basis of time-rate as well as piece-rate. Under the former, a workers is paid according to the time for which he or she works, usually on a hourly basis, under the latter category or *thika* system, payment is made on the basis of the output of work. But the output of work must be easily measurable, consisting of standard prices which can be counted or output can be measured by length or by weight etc.

Wage differentials between men and women existed in the tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas since their inception. Unequal wage rate between men and women was finally abolished by passing the Equal Remuneration Act in 1976. This act finally abolished the wage discrimination on the basis of sex which was in existence for more than a century. With the establishment of Minimum Wages Board, the wages of the workers are revised regularly at the interval of every two years. It was found from the official record that during the plucking season, women

earn more money than men workers on the merit of their efficiency as they are considered more efficient in plucking tea leaves. For plucking more tea leaves during the peak plucking season workers are given *doubly* or *bakshis* (extra tea leaf price) which acts as an incentive for plucking more tea leaves. These days, *Thika* or task system has become more popular than *hazira* or time-rate because former type of work takes less time to accomplish the specific piece of work assigned to a worker. By doing so, they are able to devote rest of their time in agricultural operation.

During the pre-independence period, the amenities (social, economic and health) made available to the workers were kept at the bare minimum level such as housing, medical facilities, food grain subsidy etc. After independence, various Acts were passed regulating the conditions of workers. Now the owners or management are bound by statutory obligations. Now the various Acts like Employees Provident Fund Act, 1952, Payment of Bonus Act, 1965, Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972 cover plantation workers. Under the statutory items of Plantation Labour Act 1951, workers are getting free quarters, sickness benefit, earned leave, maternity benefits etc. Under non-statutory items, workers are provided food-grain subsidy or ration. Women workers get subsidized ration of 1 kg. rice and 2.300 kgs. wheat every week. The bonafide dependents of the permanent workers are also entitled to get ration. Women workers get 350 gms. of dry tea per month whereas staff and sub-staff women get 800 gms. and 500 gms. respectively. The women workers get 8 mds. of firewood per year (2.99 quintals). Sub-staff and staff women get 12 mds. (4.48 quintal) and 60 mds. (22.39 quintal) of firewood per year. In the recent years with a view to conserving the forest and protecting environment, the garden management have started giving coal briquette in lieu of firewood. Every year 14 days casual leave, 14 days medical leave, 6 week pre-natal and 6 week post natal maternity leave are also granted to the women workers.

It was observed that in the tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas majority of Nepali middle caste women are early migrants whereas the higher caste *tagadhari* women like *Bahun*, *Thakuris* and *Chhetris* are later immigrants. We have tried to analyse the main reasons behind the large-scale migration of middle caste Nepalis to

this region. The push factors such as increase pressure on land and resultant impoverishment of the small peasant in rural Nepal, the introduction of new land tenure system known as *Raiker* as against the traditional type known as *Kipat*, religious and social discrimination or the domination of new Hindu rulers, the conquest of the Kathmandu Valley and the later unification of Nepal in 1769 by Prithivi Narayan Shah, a Hindu ruler, over population, fragmented land holding, indebtedness, food deficiency or economic hardship, social discrimination suffered by middle and lower castes as a result of political, social and economic domination of high caste rulers etc. while the 'pull' factors such as introduction of tea industry in Darjeeling Himalayas, the recruitment of Gorkha or Nepalis to British army since as early as 1815 have worked hand in hand in building a viable Nepali society in tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas. But the 'pull' factors are perhaps more important in this regard. All over the world, bringing of labourers from outside, preferably from very far-off places, and employ them in plantations has been a concomitant feature of the colonial rule (cotton plantation in North America, Sugar Plantations in British Guyana, Fiji and Cuba, Rubber Plantation in Malaysia, Coffee Plantation of Brazil, tea plantation in India and Sri Lanka, Sugar cane plantation of Java and Tobacco plantation in Sumatra's East Coast). The main reason behind all this is that the employers can afford to pay such labourers a very low wage, and ensure a steady labour supply by keeping them tied to an invisible chain from which it is difficult for them to come out.

The above factors both push and pull are responsible for the large-scale immigration of middle caste Nepalis who have entered into the labour force since the inception of tea industry in the region. These middle castes working women have a distinct historical and cultural background. Almost all of them were originally 'tribes' brought into the Hindu caste-fold later by the Indian emigrants to Nepal, who represent the forefathers of the present High caste Nepalis (Bahun and Chhetris). But these middle caste groups still bear many tribal characteristics those found among the schedule tribes of India. Since very long time, these groups have been demanding for their enlistment in the ST category. Recently in 2003 only the Tamangs (Murmis) and Limbus (Subba) have been given the status of scheduled

tribe. Most of the middle castes Nepalis had either kingship or chieftainship until the consolidation of Nepal by Prithivinarayan Shah in 1769.

As regards to the caste system among the Nepalis, it has its varied origin. The *tagadhari jats* like *Bahun*s, *Thakuris* and *Chhetris* have Indian origin while *Matwalis jats* like *Tamangs*, *Rais*, *Limbus*, *Mangers*, *Gurungs*, *Sunwars*, *Newars*, *Tamis*, *Bhujels* have tribal background of the Nepal Himalayas. Prior to 1769, excepting among the *Newars*, there was no rigid social hierarchy among the indigenous people of Nepal. Following the Indian model, a caste hierarchy was established for the first time in Nepal after 1769. Hence, prior to 1769, except in case of Hindus and Buddhist *Newars*, the basis of caste hierarchy was totally absent among the Mongoloid groups like *Rais*, *Limbu*, *Tamang*, *Sunwars*, *Gurung*, *Mangers* etc. The new caste hierarchy which was established in Nepal after the arrival of Brahmans and Kshatriyas had some important features i.e., the creation of vertical as well as horizontal division among the various groups and the inclusion of many tribes in the *vaisya* and *sudra* category.

Immigration to the tea plantation in Darjeeling brought about many changes in the Nepali caste hierarchy. The Nepali caste system in the tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas is quite different from that of the traditional Nepal. Here, the immigrant Nepalis had to adjust in a completely new agro-industrial environment of the plantation society. Unlike in Nepal, all the castes and tribes have to live in the tea plantation as a homogeneous group despite their diverse linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds. It was observed that in each tea garden about 12 to 15 different Nepali castes and tribes are living harmoniously and engaged in homogeneous economic activity. Under such circumstances they cannot follow the strict rules regarding commensal relations, pollution and purity etc. However, in certain situations such as the customs in relation to marriage and death rituals, worship of ancestors or *kul* or *pitripuja*, celebration of community festivals etc., one can see the distinct social status of a caste.

One of the important feature of caste system is the traditional hereditary occupation or caste callings. An analysis of the traditional occupational background

of the Nepali women workers helped a lot in understanding the numerical dominance of the middle caste Nepalis and their better adaptation and adjustment in the agro-industrial environment of the tea plantation. It is observed that the middle caste working women are better *adapted* or *adjusted* in the tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas than the higher castes and lower castes women. We have already discussed in chapter four about the communal land ownership or 'kipat' system of land holding among the agricultural communities like Khambus (Rai), Limbus (Subba), Yakhas (Dewan) and Sunuwar (Mukhia) of Eastern Nepal bordering Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas. Among these communities women used to take active participation in agricultural operation along with menfolk. It was revealed from the field studies that the majority of Nepali women workers hail from agricultural background of rural Nepal and the numerical dominance and the large-scale migration of these middle caste women like *Tamangs*, *Gurungs*, *Mangers*, *Rais*, *Limbus*, *Yakhas*, *Newars*, *Sunuwars* etc. is certainly due to their poor peasant economy at the place of origin and the domination and exploitation of the immigrant Hindu rulers. The traditional agrarian background of these middle castes women have helped them to accept plantation works as the tea industry is agro-based and is not heavily mechanized. Moreover, the field operations like weeding, pruning, manuring, hoeing, nursery work etc. in the tea plantation are very much similar to those of the modern agriculture. Therefore, the Nepalis women are not strangers to the new environment. Unlike typical industrial society, in tea industry we do not get a strict separation between home and place of work. Here, both the residential and working sectors are within the same area which have helped the women to adjust better in the plantation work than in any other industry.

The middle caste women have higher percentage of early migrants and it is also observed that the higher and lower castes women being later immigrant settlers and their population being few have not been able to exert dominance in plantation society. But the ritual position of higher caste *tagadhari jats* (Bahun and Chhetris) is still respected and there is virtually no protest against their traditional ritual status but they themselves have not been able to retain their expected purity after they migrated to the tea plantation. This is perhaps due to the overwhelming

majority of middle castes groups in plantation who being earlier settlers have been able to monopolise all the higher position in the plantation work hierarchy i.e. sub-staff, staff and management category. These middle caste Nepali women are by and large in a satisfactory position both economically and ritually, The reason behind this is their early settlement in the region. Some of them like the Limbus (Subba) and Mangers are known to be as old as the Lepchas themselves.

It has been observed that the structure and function of family has undergone remarkable changes in the tea plantation. Traditionally Nepali castes and tribes used to live in joint family due to their agricultural occupation. The joint living was prevalent not only among the higher castes i.e. *Bahun*, *Chhetris* and *Newars* but almost all the Nepali castes and tribes had joint living in their traditional society. In the present agro-industrial setting, joint family system has been breaking down resulting into the emergence of nuclear families. But unlike the typical nuclear family in urban areas, size of nuclear family in tea plantation is still large. Preference for nuclear family emerged more particularly due to the policies of the Management which consider a nuclear family as a basic unit to receive work facilities and other benefits such as free quarter, cultivation land etc. Though there is a predominance of nuclear family a close kinship interdependence is noticed among them. They maintain close kinship ties with their relatives and often help one another in times of need. We have also come across a few cases of polygynous families consisting of married man with two wives and children. In 4 cases of polygynous families, married man had taken two sisters from the same family. This type of polygyny is practiced by many communities in tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalyas. On the other hand, polyandrous family was in vogue among the Sherpas who were the people of Tibetan origin. But now-a-days, Sherpas have also become monogamous in tea plantations.

Traditionally, caste endogamy was restored by intra-caste marriage or *jat bibah* by which the couples were to be selected by parents and elders. There is a remarkable changes in the institution of marriage in the tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas. The marriage patterns are changing under new agro-industrial settings. Marriage by individual choice rather than arranged by the parents or elders is the

most prevalent form in the tea gardens which is gradually increasing among the younger generation. Among the Nepalis marriage is simply a contract rather than a sacrament. Though polygyny is permitted, specially in case of barrenness of the first wife, monogamy is the general practice. Second marriage after death or divorce of the first wife is, however, very common. A boy and a girl can marry according to their own will without prior consent of their parents. Marriage is now a more personal affair than a family one and in the selection of spouse, the role of kins has considerably decreased. The inter-caste marriage or *ajat bebah* is on the increase. The traditional rules of patrilateral and matrilateral cross-cousin marriages among the Tamangs, Gurungs and Sherpas are totally absent now-a-days. Like other Hindu Nepalis castes, they also follow pinda and sapinda exogamy while making marital alliances or choosing partners. Though the system of hypergamy or *anuloma* and hypogamy or *pratiloma* is still prevalent among the *Bahun* and *Chhetris* but they do not follow the strict rules of designating or adopting the caste titles. Now-a-days a new born baby automatically gets the caste title of his or her father irrespective of the high or low caste position. The traditional system of paying *jat danda* or penalty for the breach of caste endogamy is not so popular now-a-days. Traditionally, the system of polyandry was found among the tribes like Sherpas and Lepchas. Now-a-days they do not follow such system in tea plantation. Moreover, their percentage in tea gardens is insignificant in number. The Sororate marriage (i.e., the marriage between a man and his wife's younger sister or *Sali*) and levirate marriage (i.e. marriage between a woman and her husband's younger brother or *dewar*) are widely practiced by the Nepalis.

It is true that the Nepali women workers suffer very few restrictions especially so far as the institution of marriage is concerned. Both men and women have a free choice of living with or leaving their respective partners or in other words, they can select their mates and can leave their mates as and when they like. Bride price i.e. the practice of giving gift of money or goods from the groom's family to the bride's family is also practiced by some Nepali communities. As a custom, this system is still continuing among the Hinduised Nepali tribes like Rai, Limbu, Yakha, Manger, Gurung, Sunuwars etc. The system of bride price or *rit*

usually grants the groom the right to marry the bride and the right to her children. Hence women are not viewed as a liability in Nepali society. The son complex or preference for boys which is so predominant in Hindu society is less or almost absent amongst the Nepalis mainly because raising of girls and their marriage do not entail much expenditure. There is no system of dowry though there is system of giving *daijo* from the girl's family, which is also not compulsory. Even when a marriage breaks the custody of the children is taken by either of the parents through mutual agreement. In many cases the children stay with their mother and when she go for remarriage the stepfather accepts her children-as his own.

Widowhood among the Nepalis is not an acute problem as widow remarriage is socially permitted. Among many Hinduised Nepali tribes like Rai, Limbu, Yakha, Gurung, Manger, Sunuwar etc. there had been a social custom of marrying widowed sister-in-law by the brother-in-law. According to this system in case the elder brother died the younger brother used to keep his sister-in-law as his wife. This type of levirate marriage is still practiced by many Nepali castes and tribal groups. On the other hand, the problem of widowhood hardly arose among the non-Hindu communities like Sherpa, Lepcha, Bhutias as they had the system of fraternal polyandry.

Social pathological characteristics like i.e., dowry, bride burning, rape, prostitution and other crimes against women are hardly heard in the tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas. Divorce is yet another important factor in the context of studying women's status. The marriage among Nepalis is not a sacramental affairs but contractual which does not bind the couple through religious constraints. Women are free to contract second marriage as their menfolk would do. No social stigma is attached to the divorced women and widow women. A widow is permitted to marry anytime as she likes. On the other hand, through the system of *jarikal* (fine or compensation) a married woman is permitted to secure release from one husband to marry another, by making payment of compensation by later husband.

Nepali women in the tea plantation society of Darjeeling Himalayas enjoy greater freedom and liberty as compared to their counterparts in the plains. There is

no segregation of ~~gender~~. Although the conditions of life are hard she enjoys a full and happy life. She can move freely out of the home without male escort. She visits the weekly market and fairs. She participates in songs and dances and take active part in religious festivals and social ceremonies. It is true that in some religious rituals like *kulpuja* or *pitripuja* she is not directly associated but her indirect participation is always there.

As we have already mentioned in the previous chapters that the majority of women workers in the tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas belong to middle caste Nepalis like Tamang, Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Manger, Newar, Sunuwar, Thami, Bhujels etc. whose socio-cultural life reflects tribal characteristics. Nepali women of these middle caste groups enjoy very flexible social code of conduct and therefore, have more freedom in society as compared to the women of upper caste groups. These middle caste women are comparatively more free than in traditional Hindu Society. The majority of Nepali women hailing from agricultural background of rural Nepal had the tradition of working in agricultural field along with men. Women workers belonging to *Kirata* tribes like Khambu (Rai), Limbu (Subba), Yakha (Dewan) have the tradition to participate actively on their *kipat* holding i.e., land owned by community as a whole.

It is observed that the Nepali women workers belong to various religious backgrounds such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Animism etc. Traditionally, excepting high caste Bahun and Chhetris, all other Nepali castes and tribes were Animists and Shamanists having full of tribal rituals and festivals. Later on, these indigenous tribes of Nepal have converted to Hinduism after the establishment of Hindu Kingdom at Gorkha in 1459. After immigrating to the tea plantation and forming as a homogeneous Nepali speaking working community they accepted Hinduism as the predominant religion. However, the basic procedure of performing the rituals and festivals remained predominantly tribal in characters involving animal sacrifices and use of liquor.

It is very interesting to note the continuation or persistence of traditional family rituals among the *Matwali jats*. For instance, the traditional *Kirata* tribes like

Rai (Khambu), Limbu and Yakhas still practice ancestor worship (Kulpuja or Worship of patrilineage) annually. Such rituals are performed at family level, usually at the house of eldest male member of a particular *thar* or lineage. Whether it is a *Khamang* of Rais, *Mangena* of Limbus or *Bhimsen puja* of Newars, in all such ancestor worships, animal sacrifice (mostly hens) and use of liquor or *jnar* are used in performing these rituals. It is true that women do participate in all such ancestor worships but they are often excluded from direct participation as only the male members are directly involved in such *Kulpuja*. The Nepali society, being a partilineal one, the role of women have been minimized as far as their direct participation in ancestor worship (worship of patrilineage) is concerned.

It is also observed that a number of community festivals are celebrated in tea plantation irrespective of their caste and tribal backgrounds. One such example is *Sansari puja* which is performed by all villagers for a good rain. On such occasion, all the villagers go to the top of hill and throw down grains, pigeons and stones of all sizes. So that the rumbling of their fall may resemble the rumbling of thunder, as they believe that rains would thus follow. Another example is the celebration of fecundity festivals which is performed on the day of Basant Panchami (Saraswati Puja) by consecrating the seed on the day of panchami would lead to good harvest in future. Beside these, almost in every one or two month's, they celebrate SAGRANTIS like Chaite SAGRANTI, Maghe SAGRANTI, Asar SAGRANTI, Saune SAGRANTI etc. Women have a very crucial role to play in such celebrations.

The role of trade unions in the affairs of the tea garden is one of the important aspects of the tea industry. Trade unions play an important role to fulfil the demands of workers. Though women form more than half of the labour force in tea plantations of Darjeeling Himalayas yet their participation in trade union activities has been low. It was observed that in all the seven tea gardens under study women workers have become the members of various trade unions like HPWU, DTDCMU, NUPW, DCKSS, JSPTU etc. In some tea gardens like Singell, Springside and Badamtam women are also included in the executive committee of the trade union at garden level. Women workers are also found to have become conscious regarding the fulfillment of their demands through trade unions. I have

also cited the case study of Badamtam tea gardens where the women actively participated in various trade union activities and they became successful in fulfilling many demands specific to the women workers. But the overall picture shows that women's participation in trade union is not so active and significant despite their overwhelming majority in tea plantation. Many factors are responsible for their low level of participation such as low level of literacy as compared to men, pressure of domestic responsibilities, low level of awareness about the aims and objectives of trade union, lack of enthusiasm on the part of women to take up union activities etc. The majority of studies including the present one identified the domestic responsibilities as constraints to effective participation of women in trade union activities. Domestic responsibilities certainly inhibit women's participation in union activities, but the effort should be directed at questioning the sexual division of labour in work place and in home. Women's household responsibilities are often cited as a reason for low trade union participation but never questioned. This is an issue that needs to be addressed by trade unions especially in the context of overwhelming majority of women in tea plantations. It is true that no trade union organization has seriously taken up the job of preparing a cadre of women leaders. Study also revealed the fact that about 90 per cent of the women workers are ignorant about legislative provisions meant for their welfare. The union leaders do not take any interest to educate the women members about their rights. Generally women's lack of interest in power and politics is mainly responsible for the low level of their participation in trade union activities. The low level of women's participation in trade union activities might lead one to believe that the trade unionism in tea gardens is totally male-dominated where women have to accept the decisions already taken by their male leaders. But this is not entirely correct. As we have already seen many cases of violence and mass movement of trade unions where women played the leading role. All these instances show that women do have the potential for leadership, which needs to be developed. One could say that women, however peripheral their involvement in trade unions may be, have been considerably influenced by these movements. Despite several odds in the form of their preoccupation with household duties, they joined the trade unions and

continued to take part in meetings and demonstrations designed to improve their standards of living. Thus, the female labourers working for years with male labourers in the same industry have become an integral part of the trade union movement in tea plantations of Darjeeling Himalayas.

II

The constitution of India provides equal rights and privileges for men and women and makes special provisions for women to help them for improving their status in the society. But, inspite of constitutional provisions there has been a staggering process in ameliorating the working condition and socio-economic status of rural women including working women in tea plantation. Though, the plantation women workers work very hard dawn to dusk but very little attention has been paid on them for their active involvement in plantation system and in social development. Their contributions have not been recorded and considered as much as they deserve. The food and nutrition of family entirely depends upon the activities of the women. The life of plantation women is overburdened of labour for family maintenance. A time has come to unveil the truth and to give due recognition to the plantation women. The over burden of support services of tea plantation women workers as child care, supply of water, collection of fuel and fodder etc. has to be relieved. The household activities or domestic chores are the most important activities from the point of view of human social life. These plantation women workers are engaged not only with the necessity of contributing to household income but also with the reproductive labour consisting of bearing and caring of children, preparing of food, looking after elderly, nursing the sick and multitude of the other tasks that are labeled as "women's work". But very little attention have been paid by management and also by male members of the household to these working women for betterment of their working condition and social life too.

The analysis of the effect of women's employment on the status of women revealed that the employment of women does not necessarily lead to a radical change in the work pattern at home. The traditional role of a women as a home-makers and socialisers of the young children remain unaltered despite their

involvement in employment and earning in tea plantations. No doubt women making a financial contribution to the family income out of their labour but this does not lead to a change in the existing role structure and ensuring power position in the family. The working women in tea plantations are playing some role in decision-making process in the family and they are also obeyed and respected, but gender inequality still exists in day to day family and social life in tea plantations. As it is customary to perform the household work and childcare by women, men did little to reduce the increased workload of the working women of the family men only helped in areas which are less demeaning for them. Even during sickness of the child, women rather than men had to absent from the work. Husbands or male members in the family still continue to remain as main decision-makers. The awareness and participation of plantation women workers in professional organizations or trade union are quite low. Their self-perceived status or self image is also low as they are socialized in such a way to act and behave not according to their will but as per desire of the patriarchal structure of their society. But the hope is that the gender relations in plantation society is changing gradually in recent years.

The study of Nepali women workers in tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas reveals that their status is not much depended on their economic role but it is determined by the principle of social structure on which the respective culture and society is based. Even though women contribute substantially to the labour force, norms governing the traditional patriarchal social framework still continues and which has some impacts on them. Women workers do not enjoy independent property rights. However, a widow may enjoy her husband's property if she does not have an issue or having children of minor age. But in the absence of a son, the parental or husband's property may be enjoyed by the daughters. No doubt the Nepali women workers are enjoying more freedom of movement, economic participation, independent decision-making and respectable status in the society. But the forces of patriarchy and male domination in the society do not allow them to participate fully in all domains of community life say the religion and the politics.

It is crucial for members of plantation communities, men and women, to introspect and debate among themselves on the issues of existing gender inequality

prevalent in tea gardens. A debate is also needed between management and the workers to examine and review the contribution of women workers in plantation system and the status they enjoy in their respective culture and community for the sake of empowerment and equality.

III

A number of remedial steps are needed to be taken to improve the working and living conditions of women workers in tea plantations of Darjeeling Himalayas. But such a strategy has to be in accordance with the needs and interests of the women workers. We may propose the following recommendations as suggested to me by men and women workers, trade union leaders and others during field studies to solve the problems of women workers in tea plantations.

1. First of all the plantation Labour Act of 1951 should be fully implemented.

We see the reluctance on the part of Management or union leaders to implement them. The plantation Managements are not interested to take any initiative to improve the working condition for women workers unless they find there is a correlation between them and the productivity. They have tactfully reduced the provision of the PLA to the mere provision of permanent houses for the workers. Mere provision of housing for the workers is not enough to raise their standard of life. There should be adequate provision for safe drinking water, sanitation, drainage facilities in and around their living quarters. All these facilities will certainly reduce the domestic burdens of women. This will enable them not only to participate more actively in their work place and trade unions, but will also help them to overcome inherent handicap like illiteracy and ignorance.

2. Management should establish crèche houses nearer to work places and these are to be well maintained. In several tea gardens we saw the crèche houses located far off places from the residential areas as well as workplaces. A well maintained crèche house can relieve women temporarily from their continuous pre-occupation with child care. It will also enable them to work freely and if it is a piece-rate or *thika* system they can finish their work in

time. It was observed that all the tea gardens under study have crèche facilities where the working mother can keep their small children below the age of two years but all are poorly maintained. The quality of light food for babies (milk and biscuits) supplied by the garden authority is not good. The inadequate facilities of crèche houses sometimes forced the working mothers to dropout the elder children from school to look after the minors. So the establishment of crèche house with adequate facilities will not only help the working mothers to work freely but it will also help in the retention of children in schools and also to check the school dropouts.

3. In India, there is no dearth of legislation concerning labour welfare. We have noted the importance of legislations like the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 in narrowing the difference of wages in the tea plantation and PLA, 1951, which conferring the welfare facilities to the tea workers. The main problem is the effective enforcement of these laws. There should be strict penalties if the Management fail to implement these provisions which are designed to improve the condition of workers, specially the women workers.
4. To give equal status and prestige to women due importance should be given to literacy programme for women workers. Literacy is essential for enabling women to understand their rights and privileges. In this regard stress should be given on the needs and interests of the women. Literacy would enable them to know the things outside of the four walls of the house, their duties and responsibilities towards the welfare of the family, community and plantation economy. It has become essential to make them conscious about the needs of having a planned family. The government should ensure adequate schooling facilities and also encourage adult literacy campaign. Non-formal education centers may be created for the sake of illiterate women workers. The government has opened an office of the workers' Education Centre in Siliguri in 1975. The main objective of this center is to teach the workers about their various rights and responsibilities given by the various Acts and legislations. The government should start such type of Workers' Education Centre in the hills, particularly in tea gardens. Education is the

door through which people – men and women can enlighten themselves. It was observed that the Adult Education Scheme was not found in tea gardens. The government of India's ambitious scheme of Education For All / Sarvo Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is yet to cover the plantation regions. The problem of wastage and stagnation (drop out and retention) is very acute among the children of plantation labourers. The government is now trying to extend Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) among the workers of the tea gardens. But its success depends upon the commitment and attitude of TLC functionaries. The lack of education is a major cause of backwardness of women in tea gardens. So education for the women workers in tea gardens is an urgent need.

5. Political parties and trade unions can play a vital role in enforcing implementation of legislations relating to plantation workers by building up pressures from below. Though a number of issues, mainly concerning improvement in wages and payment of bonuses have been raised in this manner, but women's issues have been continuously absent from the agenda of the political parties and the trade unions. The provision like crèches has not figured as an issue in any of the major negotiations between trade unions and the managements. The formation of women's cells or committees in each political party and trade unions is very necessary to press the demands specific to women. Their problems can be solved through organized activity by the women themselves. Women need to organize themselves along gender lines so that their concerns are adequately addressed.
6. We have already pointed out that the ill effects of deforestation are visible in the tea plantations all over the Darjeeling hills. The deforestation is caused by increasing population pressure. The forests are continuously under attack from clearing for cultivation, grazing for livestock, firewood extraction etc. Due to large-scale deforestation, water has become a scarce commodity in the hills. Women have been the worst sufferers as a result of uncontrolled degradation of forest and local environment. The fetching of drinking water consume much time of women workers. The deforestation has added more

burden for women to collect fodder and firewood. Plantation women have to travel a vast distance to collect fuel and fodder. Those who are lucky to get money sent by their menfolk (those who are working outside in army, and other services etc.) can afford to buy kerosene oil and LPG which is also not regularly available, wood is still the main source of fuel for the vast number of tea workers. Recently, management is supplying coal briquette in lieu of firewood which is not sufficient for the whole year. Drudgery in work which is increasing owing to distant water fetching and fuel and fodder gathering etc. has to be minimized through appropriate policies. There is an urgent need to start afforestation programme for the survival of tea industry as well as to reduce or lighten the burden of women workers. Afforestation programme should be taken up by the government as well as NGOs to check the environmental degradation in the hilly region of Darjeeling Himalayas. A scheme like social forestry may be implemented in and around garden areas as an effective measures to counter the problems like shortage of fuel wood and fodder.

7. Tea Industry is exclusively labour intensive, hence intensive extra efforts are required to take care of workers health. As we know that the women are numerically dominant in labour force, proper steps should be taken to improve their health status. Here the example or experience of the Mother's Club in the Dooars plantation areas is noteworthy. In 1991, with the support of the UNFPA, UNICEF and the Govt. of India, the DBITA launched an ambitious scheme known as Integrated Parasite Control and Family Welfare Project. The scheme aimed at educating the garden population about health problems and environmental sanitation. Under the scheme each garden has set up a Mother's Club comprising of literate mother and have successfully carried out the drive against alcoholism among workers. Such project or scheme should be carried out in tea gardens of Darjeeling hills also. Workers must be made aware of the fact that *alcoholism*, *absenteeism* etc. contribute to the loss of organisation's wealth due to reduction in production, productivity and quality and ultimately affect their family.

8. Discrimination of employment between men and women must be eliminated or there should not be any discrimination on the basis of sex while recruiting in various plantation jobs. The present study revealed that women constituted a numerically dominant working force since the inception of tea industry in Darjeeling Himalayas but they were denied promotional facilities for more than a century. Their recruitment in sub-staff or supervisory staff and clerical grades is a recent phenomenon. That too limited to few tea gardens only. Women workers stated that both the management and trade union leaders are reluctant to recruit women in supervisory and clerical posts. These people still consider women as incapable or inefficient for holding such positions. So there is an urgent need to bring the attitudinal changes or changing the mind set of male members towards this issue. Women should be given equal chances for upward job mobility. Promotional facilities to be provided if they fulfill the requisite qualifications.

9. As regards the appointment of cadres in management category, local people, specially the women should be given enough opportunity. It was observed that a very few tea gardens have appointed local people in management category and that too limited in the rank of assistant managers. With the exception of very few tea gardens the post of Manager and Deputy Manager are always held by outsiders. In the history of Darjeeling Tea industry, the first lady Assistant Manager of Nepali Community had been appointed in 1997. In this regard the trade unions as well as the managements should play positive role in encouraging the women to take up the responsible jobs as this will positively contribute to the betterment of tea industry where more than half of the working force are females. Though the appointment of Labour Welfare Officer is mandatory under PLA, 1951, only a few tea gardens have appointed Labour Welfare Officer. Out of 7 tea gardens under study only Badamtam tea garden has appointed Labour Welfare Officer. The Official records of Labour offices have shown that out of 78 tea gardens in Darjeeling Himalayas only about ten 10 gardens are having L.W.O. The workers are of the opinion that only the local people (if possible the ladies)

should be appointed as L.W.O. as the people from outside usually do not take interest on the improvement of workers and they always side with the management for their self interest.

10. Management should adopt human relation approach while preventing and settling any industrial dispute. The labour should be treated as the equal partner in the prosperity of the garden and industry. It will encourage the workers to work with interest and efficiency. The management should provide welfare activities in the gardens. Expenditure on these facilities should not be considered as wasteful expenditure rather it should be considered as investment in human resources. The Labour Department should periodically conduct field visits to examine the situation and to acquaint with the functioning of the tea industry, implementation of labour laws and grievances of the workers. The management and the trade unions should cooperate in such situation. The role of Labour Welfare Officer should be treated as very important link between workers and management settling and preventing industrial disputes in the garden . Labour Welfare Office should give a special emphasis on women workers for obvious reasons.
11. The most urgent need is to include women worker's voices in policy formation and intervention relating to their progress and development in plantation social system.

Above all, no legislations and benefits would improve the position of women workers so long they themselves donot try to find out solutions to their problems. This may help them to increase their active participation in profession and so also in social, cultural and community life to which they belongs.

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Abbreviations

AIGL	-	All India Gorkha League
AITUC	-	All India Trade Union Congress
BGJS	-	Bharatiya Gorkha Jana Shakti
CBWE	-	Central Board for Workers Education
CCTPW	-	Co-ordination Committee of Tea Plantation Workers
CITU	-	Centre of Indian Trade Union
CMPO	-	Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization
CPI(M)	-	Communist Party of India Marxist
CPRM	-	Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxist
DBITA	-	Darjeeling Branch of Indian Tea Association
DCKMU	-	Darjeeling Chia Kaman Mazdoor Union
DDCKSS	-	Darjeeling District Chia Kaman Shramik Sangha
DGHC	-	Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council
DPA	-	Darjeeling Planters Association
DTDCKMU	-	Darjeeling, Terai and Dooars Chia Kaman Mazdoor Union
DTGWU	-	Darjeeling Tea Gardens Worker's Union
DTI	-	Darjeeling Tea Industry
ERA	-	Equal Remuneration Act
FBOP	-	Fine Broken Orange Pekoe
FERA	-	Foreign Exchange Regulation Act
FTGOP	-	Fine Top Golden Flowery Orange Pekoe
GNLF	-	Gorkha National Liberation Front
GNWO	-	Gorkha National Women's Organisation
GOF	-	Golden Orange Fanning
HPWU	-	Himalayan Plantation Workers Union
IEA	-	Inland Emigration Act
ILC	-	Indian Labour Conference
INTUC	-	Indian National Trade Union Congress

ITPA	-	Indian Tea Planters Association
JSPWU	-	Jana Shakti Plantation Worker's Union
LCO	-	Labour Commisioner Office
LEC	-	Labour Enquiry Commission
OMRE	-	Other Monthly Rated Employees
NABARD	-	National Bank of Agricultural and Rural Development
NBMR	-	North Bengal Mounted Rifles
NUPW	-	National Union of Plantation Workers
PLA	-	Plantation Labour Act
PLHSR	-	Plantation Labour Housing Schemes Rules
RCL	-	Royal Commision on Labour
TESDTI	-	Techno-Economic Survey of Darjeeling Tea Industry.
TGBOP	-	Top Golden Broken Orange Pekoe
TTCI	-	Tea Trading Corporation of India
UNICEF	-	United Nations International Child Emergency Fund
UTUC	-	United Trade Union Congress
WBCA	-	Workmen's Breach of Contract Act.
WBTDC	-	West Bengal Tea Development Corporation
WLM	-	Women's Liberation Movement

Glossary of some Nepali Terms

Achhut	-	Untouchable; low caste.
Ajat	-	Outside one's caste or of a different caste.
Ajat bibah	-	inter-caste marriage.
Anuloma	-	hypergamy
Aurat	-	adult female
Babu	-	clerk
Badli	-	substitute.
Bakshis	-	extra payment for plucking extra tea leaf.
Bigha	-	temporary workers employed in tea gardens during particular season.
Biha	-	Marriage
Bijuwa (mangpa)	-	Rai medicineman cum priest.
Bongthing	-	Lepcha medicineman cum priest
Chhut	-	touchable (high and middle castes)
Chokra	-	child Labour between the ages of fourteen and sixteen
Chori bibah	-	marriage by elopement.
Coolie	-	Daily rated workers in tea gardens.
Daffadars	-	Supervisory Staff (Sub-staff),
Dharas	-	springs
Doko	-	bambo basket
Dwija	-	twice-born caste like Bahun, Thakuri and Chhetri.
Gallawala	-	assistant of the Sardars for recruitment of labour in tea gardens.
Gotra	-	clan

Gumba	-	monastery
Hat	-	A market place
Hazira	-	daily wage
Janr	-	Millet, wheat, rice etc. boiled and fermented.
Jarikal	-	Fine or compensation paid by the second husband of a woman to her first husband.
Jat bibah	-	intra-caste marriage (caste endogamy).
Jat danda	-	punishment or fine for the breach of caste endogamy.
Jat danda	-	caste
Jati	-	community
Jharra	-	pure, unpolluted
Kalam katai	-	pruning.
Kipat	-	a system of communal land ownership prevalent among the Kambus (Rai), Limbus (Subba), Yakha (Dewan) of Eastern Nepal and other Mongoloid Communities in the hilly region of Nepal.
Kujat	-	low castes (Kami, Damai, Sarki, Sunar, Majhi etc.)
Kujat bibah	-	Marriage of touchables with untouchables.
Kulpuja	-	Worship of patrilineage or ancestor worship.
Marad	-	adult male
Matwali jat	-	Drinking castes or middle castes.
Pani-na-Chalne jat	-	jat or caste from whom water can not be taken.
Patti tipai	-	plucking of tea leaves.
Phedangma	-	Limbu medicineman cum priest.
Poinbo or natso	-	Sunuwar medicineman cum priest.
Pratiloma	-	hypogamy
Rit-vatey-jat	-	Castes among whom formal marriage can take place (e.g., Khambu (Rai), Limbu (Subba) and Yakha (Dewan) are considered as rit-vatey jat.

Rodi Ghar	- Youth dormitory among the Gurungs of western Nepal.
Sahib	- manager
Sardars	- labour recruiters in tea garden who also used to hold supervisory post.
Tagadhari	- twice-born castes (Bahun, Thakuri and Chhetri)
Thankari	- Majhi medicineman-cum-priest.
Thar	- lineage
Thika	- task or Piece-rate system.
Thimaha	- mixed.
Varna	- Classification of Society into four status groups - Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra arranged in a hierarchical order.

2.2 Type of Family : Extended/Nuclear

2.3 Head of the family : Self/Husband/Father/Mother/Others _____

3. Decision Making Power in the Family

3.1 Total Monthly family income (From all sources & Persons) : _____

3.2 In your family who makes the final decisions on the following :

a) Family budgeting : Self/Husband/Father/Mother/Others : _____

b) Purchase of consumer durables : _____

c) Schooling of children : _____

d) Marriage of children : _____

4. Freedom in spending the family income :

4.1 Who spends the family income : Self/Husband/Father/Mother/Others _____

5. Help in Household Responsibility :

5.1 How do you manage your household responsibility

a) Cooking & Serving food : Alone/Sharing with female relations/Sharing with husband or other male members

b) Purchase of grocery :

c) Washing cloths and utensils :

d) Help to children in studies :

6. Observation of Traditional Customs

6.1 Do you observe in your family the following traditional customs : Always / Sometimes / Never

a) Female members eating only after male have eaten :

b) Female members standing in the presence of male members :

c) Preferential treatment for boys over girls (food, education) :

d) Restrictions on the freedom of movement of women outside the family:

7. Employment (Occupational)

- 7.1 Number of years in service :
- 7.2 Which type of plantation work would you like best : Plucking/Pruning/Others
- 7.3 Facing problems in doing work properly : Yes/No
- 7.4 Being given too much work (Over work) : Yes/No
- 7.5 How do you find your job:
 - a) Most satisfactory
 - b) Satisfactory
 - c) Not satisfactory
- 7.6 Are you a member of a Trade Union : Yes/No.
- 7.7 If yes name the Trade Union and nature of membership : Ordinary member / Executive member
- 7.8 Do you participate in Trade Union activities :
 - a) Very actively
 - b) Actively
 - c) Passively
 - d) Never

8. Status of women in the wider society : Membership and participation in socio-cultural organizations

- 8.1 Are you a member of any Social / Cultural Organisations : Yes/No
- 8.2 If yes, nature of membership : Ordinary/Executive member
- 8.3 Do you participate in the activities of the organizations ? Very actively / Actively / Passively / Never
- 8.4 Do you think that your participation in such Organisational activities will increase your status ? Yes/No/Not applicable.

9. Leisure Time Activities

9.1 How do you usually spend your leisure time ?

- a) Listening to music
- b) Reading
- c) Visiting friends or relatives
- d) Going for movies.
- e) Others

9.2 Do you spend some time in traditional hobbies? Yes/No (Sewing, Knitting, Embroidery etc.)

9.3 Do you read Newspaper / Magazines : Daily/Occasionally/Never

10. Attitude towards factors in the Status of Women

10.1 What is the appropriate age at marriage for a girl ?

10.2 What is your attitude towards choice of partner? Parent's selections / Individual's selection

10.3 Do you approve of divorce : Approve / Disapprove

10.4 Do you approve of window marriage ? Approve / Disapprove

10.5 Do you approve of equal right to property for men and women

10.6 What is the ideal number of children for a family? : 1,2,3,4, more than 4.

10.7 What is your attitude towards family planning? Favourable / Unfavourable.

10.8 What is your attitude towards employment of women ? : Favourable / Unfavourable

10.9 Do you think that women should have equal status with men in Society ? : Yes/No.

