

Chapter – 2

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

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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 hectares 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.