

## CHAPTER 2

RECRUITMENT OF LABOURERS FOR THE TEA GARDENSTHE SARDARI SYSTEM AND ITS IMPACT OF DARJEELING ECONOMY:

The tea industry is the largest organised industry of Darjeeling. Most of the workers who were employed in the tea gardens in the early phase of expansion were immigrants from Nepal. The special feature of this industry is that it not only employs the male member of the family but also women members and children above the age of 12 years. Women are considered to be superior in the field operation because they are better pluckers.

Before going into the details of recruitment, the present paper seeks to answer some of the causes of migration, which are important 'push' factors from Nepal and 'pull' factors from India. 'The cession of Darjeeling to the British from the Raja of Sikkim in 1834 was an invitation to the Nepalese immigration into India. The British started deforestation and plantation of tea simultaneously'. (1) 'It brought in its train two large immigration in the hills, of Nepalese who were more useful as labourers in tea gardens and thrifty as cultivators than the aboriginal Lepcha. (2) After the annexations of Kalimpong to British India, the hillmen from Nepal flocked in large numbers, much to the displeasure of the earlier settlers. 'The population of Kalimpong area at the time of annexation in 1865 was estimated to be 3536, which reached to 12683 in the year 1881. Thus immigration was maximum between 1865 and 1881'. (3) The heavy influx of immigrants from Nepal who had cleared and brought into cultivation the waste lands, especially on the hillside between the Teesta and Relli, brought them into direct confrontations with the Bhutias and Lepchas, who were early inhabitants of the tract.'

They complained of intrusion of the Nepalese immigrants and feared that the immigrants would soon outnumber them. Mr. Edgar, Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling said in 1874, ‘There has been in the interval a very large influx of Pahariya immigrants from Nepal who have cleared and brought into cultivation a great deal of land, especially on the hill side between the Teesta and Relli. He further added, ‘... there is a struggle between the Bhutia and Lepcha races going on, which would require very careful attention when a settlement was being made. (4)

C.F. Magarth’s District Compilation of Darjeeling in 1872 states that ‘the total number of persons in the district were 94712’. (5) Dr. Campbell noted that ‘by the year 1850, the number of inhabitants reached 10,000. Hooker noted the rapid influx when he visited Darjeeling about that time. When a rough census was taken of the inhabitants of this tract, the total was found to be over 22,000. (6) “The population had rapidly increased” to 94712 by the time of First Census of India. However it is revealed that the census of 1872 was considered defective. There was an immense concealment of females in 1881. Many of them fled on the census night over the frontier into Nepal. Labourers absconded from tea gardens from panic and other causes. (7) The inaccuracy and incompleteness of the First Census led to a large increase of population in 1881. It was believed that the Census of 1891 for the first time took a satisfactory turn (8) and by the turn of the century in 1901 it was 249117. This increase “was mainly connected with the development of tea industry, improvement in communication due to the building of railways and roads, and last, but not the least the importance of Darjeeling as a centre of educational activity for Europeans. ‘The missionaries have been the pioneers of education among the native population’. (9) Between 1870 and 1895, the number of gardens increased from 56 to 186 and the area under tea cultivation was 48,692 acres (10), which led to a labour crisis in

the Darjeeling Hills. This indicated that gardens had an important role to play in changing the demographic structure of Darjeeling hills.<sup>11</sup> The census of 1911, 1921, and 1931 reported Nepalese immigrants into India as 200217, 273932 and 327828 respectively. (11)

'Between 1872 and 1881, the population had increased by 63.8% and during the next decade by 43.9%. The growth rate registered a drop to 11.6% during 1891-1901 and a further drop to 6.5% during 1901-11, which remained almost the same in the following decade. During 1901-11 most of the population growth took place in Kalimpong Sub-division, which recorded a 19.3% rise in population. It appears that during this decade, the growth of population by immigration was caused more by bringing wastelands into cultivation than by expansion of industry'. (12) During 1941-51, the district population increased by 18.3%.

'Indo-Nepal migration is a unique type of international migration, not to be found elsewhere in the world, notes Dr. V. B. Singh Kansakar'. He goes on further to add that 'such migration are comparable neither with the migration of Tamils to Sri Lanka, nor with that of Bangladesh to India : (13)

'A.J. Dash has noted that actual population on tea gardens according to 1941 census was 1, 46508. (14) Distribution of population is given as follows:

Table II.01: Distribution of population in tea gardens according to 1941 census

Sub-Division	Thana	Number
Sardar Sub-Division	Darjeeling Thana	24,048
	Jorebunglow Thana	21,594
	Sukhia Pokhari Thana	14,358
	Pulbazar Thana	3321
	Rangle Rangliot Thana	13,202
Kurseong Sub-Division	Kurseong Thana	20,596
	Mirik Thana	14,710
Kalimpong Sub-Division	Kalimpong Thana	0
	Gorubathan Thana	6,094
Siliguri Sub-Division	Siliguri Thana	13,867
	Kharibari Thana	5,999
	Phansidewa Thana	8,719

Prof. M. Dasgupta and A. Samad have given a tabular picture of composition different ethnic groups in Darjeeling Hill area from 1901-1951. (15)

Table II.02. Composition of different ethnic groups in Darjeeling hill areas

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
Kiratis (Rais, Subba, Limbus)	32.50	34.70	32.41	33.87	32.57
Tamang	18.68	17.07	17.80	20.34	21.61
Gurungs, Mangars	5.84	6.05	5.67	5.85	6.67
Newars	3.86	4.34	5.11	5.40	5.28
Khamis, Damais, Sarkis	10.96	10.90	11.46	10.13	11.75
Upper Caste Bhahmins	4.33	3.88	4.78	4.61	2.88
Other Nepali groups	10.93	10.23	10.89	10.67	9.58
Lepchas	6.67	6.08	5.65	6.34	5.38
Bhutias	6.33	6.75	6.23	2.79	3.28
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

(Other Nepali Groups: - 1) Sunwars, 2) Thapas 3) Yakhias and other smaller groups like Giri)

They have pointed out that 'almost all the migrants were of Nepalese origin, and belonged to the diverse ethnic groups, and a very few belonged to the upper Hindu castes like Brahmins. (16) The Kiratis formed the bulk of the migrants. The percentage of such migrants being 32 percent in 1901, which reached to 33 percent in 1951.

Magarth's compilation of Darjeeling District has shown ethnical division of 'Nepalese' under 41 different heads, and they numbered 25,781 in 1872. (17) The classification has not included Murmis or Tamangs, who numbered 6570. The Murmis were placed among the aboriginal tribes. (18) 'Hunter has noted that including the Murmis; the number of Nepalese in Darjeeling would be raised to 32,338. When we add Syangden Moktan and Tamang, numbering 3, 3, and 4 respectively the figure is raised to 32348. (19)

The Compilation of Magarth does not include Brahmins and Chettris under the ethnical division of 'Nepalese'.(20) Hunter has noted that out of 1002 Brahmins 98 were from Terai, and 904 were shown as high caste Brahmins who were mainly cultivators'.(21) Similarly out of 145 shown as 'Kshatriyas' 117 were from the hills and 1754 hill Rajputs out of a total of 8972 Rajputs.(22) 'The Kirats (shown under different heads) including the Dewan, Dilpali, Yakha, Jimdar, Khambu and other of Rai-Limbu group number 13692. In fact Darjeeling alone had 20 percent of Nepal's Kirat population in 1870. If the bulk of that population emigrated during 1840-60, as the British records suggested, about 12 to 15 percent of the Kirats moved out of their land to Darjeeling. (23)

## 2.1. CAUSES OF MIGRATION

Tea cultivation in Darjeeling was made possible with the large-scale migration of Nepalese from Eastern Nepal. Dr. Campbell of the Indian Medical services was

transferred from Kathmandu to Darjeeling as Superintendent of the new territory acquired under negotiations with government of Sikkim in 1835. His foremost task was to attract settlers and in this he was successful. It is said that at this time, Sri Dakman Rai had come to Darjeeling with a caravan of twenty pack ponies with foodstuffs and other essentials and few servants for a pilgrimage to 'Mahakal Baba' a very important shrine. Dr.Campbell on hearing about the visitor requested him for help by indenting labourers from Nepal to develop Darjeeling. By the end of the year, Sri Dakman Rai came back to Darjeeling with thousand of immigrants. In recognition of the helpful work done, he was given the grants of Freehold lands presently known as Soureni, Phuguri and Samirpani.

(24) By 1849, about 10,000 immigrants had come from Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. Sir Joseph Hooker visited Darjeeling about that time and he also noted the rapid influx of population from outside. A rough census taken in 1869 showed the inhabitants of the area to be over 22,000. (25)

Few question arise as to a) why was this high rate of immigration from Nepal into India b) why the district of Darjeeling became the centre of highest concentration of such migrants c) why most of them were non-Brahmins non-upper caste groups?

Economic reasons assisted by certain other conditions are perhaps very important in explaining this phenomenon. Nepal's economy was stagnant and offered little scope of employment to its population.

Before the establishment of Shah kingdom all ethnic groups in Nepal held land under a system known as 'Kipat', in which the ownership of land was vested collectively in the entire ethnic group.(26) This system was later converted to 'Raikar' by the Shah rulers with an objective of consolidating their political power. The peasants were subjected to heavy taxation and impositions. 'They were forced to pay 'Saune-Fagu' tax,

payable in cash or kind and collected in June-July and February-March. At the time of marriage of Princes, taxes such as 'Goddhuwa' and 'Gadimubarak' collected at the time of coronation, or 'godan' collected to finance the royal gifts of cows to the Brahmins added considerably to the high incidence of rural indebtedness'. (27) Failure to repay loans led to slavery and bondage. (28) The political unification had a negative impact on the tribals as this completely derailed their socio-economic structure. (29)

Through Prithvinarayan Shah's Gorkha conquest succeeded in creating a 'unified kingdom' it failed to create a unified society, (30) as unification meant the control of the state power by high caste families. The unification of Eastern Nepal gave birth to a feudal class of 'jagir' and 'birta' owners. (31) Thus Caplan's remark is worth noting. He has remarked 'Kipat' was nibbled at, not swallowed whole. (32)

The continued slavery in Nepal was an important 'push factor' causing Nepalese immigration into British India. Slavery, as an institution continued till the second decade of the present century. G.B.Fraser has reported that during Gorkha rule, a total of 20,000 people had been enslaved. (33)

Raper, has given an account of slaves at a Gorkhali post in a pass leading to Har-ka-Pir. He has focused on the slave trade that prevailed during 1808. Even the children of three years old were not spared and were sold for Rs. 10/- (Ten) to settle loans advanced to their parents. (34) These slaves were treated as cattles and exported to India through Hardwar. These slaves were left with no other alternatives but to migrate to other places. The hilly areas of Darjeeling offered to the immigrants an agreeable and cultural environment. People escaped from feudal exploitation in Nepal to the colonial exploitation in British India. Thus we find that the Kiratis from Eastern Nepal were the

first immigrants to Darjeeling, who in due courses, i.e. from 1901 to 1951 formed the major ethnic group in the composition of hill population.

Darjeeling district became a great recruiting centre for the British army, by the middle of the last century. The British Army was impressed by the sterling quality of the Gorkhas in the Anglo-Gorkha war (1814-16) and was looking forward for opportunities of picking up the Gorkhas with the prospect of strengthening the British Indian Army. The raising of the Gorkha forces into His Majesty's Gorkha Regiment Rifles, Kashmir Imperial Service Troops, Assam Rifles, Burma Rifles, and Eastern Frontier Rifles. The Military Police Battalions, the armed section of the Police Forces, Kumaon Regiment speaks itself of the immense immigration of the Nepalese into India. 'According to Major Nicolay of the Gorkha Rifles, in January 1913, there were 18142 Gorkhas in the Indian Army, 1028 in the Imperial Service troops, 5135 in the Military Police of Assam, Bengal and Burma making a total of 24,305. Out of this, 22,348 men were from Nepal. (35) 'In addition, there was a reserve of 100 men per Battalion of the Gorkha Regiments of Indian Army, sanctioned after the experimental Reserve Training at Gorakhpur in 1909-10.(36) It is noted that a total of 27428 men from Nepal were recruited during the period 1886-87 to 1903-04.(37)

Many of the Gorkhas, even after their retirement settled in India, and their generation too, never thought of going back to their homeland. This added to the already preponderant Gorkha population. The large-scale emigration of Nepalese to India for recruitment in the Indian Army was the result of feudal social and political structure and the deteriorating economic condition of the people.

The historical processes have played dominant role in shaping the economy of the hill areas of Darjeeling. Apart from tea industry and the recruitment of Nepalese in the

British Indian Army, the migrants were employed in cinchona plantations, which was introduced at Mungpoo region of Darjeeling hills in 1862. Many cinchona plantations came up at later stages at Munsong in 1901, Rongo in 1938. There was rapid demand for manual labour as the work grew considerably. Beside cinchona plantations, the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, the Public Works Department work of construction and maintenance of roads, management of forests opened up many avenues of employment to the immigrants.

Agriculture too played an important role in encouraging large-scale immigration besides tea Dr.Campbell gave the early settlers every encouragement to reclaim forestlands and settle there. ‘Kalimpong’ or ‘Daling Cote’ had a very nominal population of Bhutia and Lepcha races at the time of annexation. (1865). In the ensuing decades, there was a pretty large immigration from Nepal into Kalimpong area. In the western side of Teesta, i.e. Darjeeling and Kurseong sub-division, most of the tea gardens are located and attracted most of the immigrants. The eastern side of Teesta had a different type of land - tenure system and considered as a ‘Khasmahal’ area having cultivation as the main economy. Thus Darjeeling district having similar ecological background produced dualistic economy - the unorganized sector and organised sector. The Organised sector represented by tea cultivation and unorganized sector by agriculture. The migration pattern was influenced by the dualistic economy.

Land was withheld from development under tea in the Kalimpong areas, because of Government policy to reserve the areas for forest and ordinary cultivation. ‘According to the Settlement Report of C.A. Bell.I.C.S. (1901-03) There were only four tea estates in the sub-division, 1) Sama Beong 2) Ambiok 3) Fagu 4) Kumai. (38) The Nepalese immigrants who flocked into Kalimpong were the pioneers of agriculture J.A.Graham has

described Dhanbir Gurung Mandal as one of the early such pioneers. Dhanbir Gurung was popularly known as 'Bheriwala Mandal'. (39)

It is rather strange that despite obvious avenues of prosperity, the British did not find the areas worth settling down. Thus the British exploitation was mainly in the development of tea, trade and education and did not result in any appreciable permanent British population.

'The large scale emigration of the Nepalese from hill areas to India and the preference for employment in activities requiring no skill at all , such as army and police services, watchman, household servants, and security guards have been governed by availability of these jobs in Indian cities and towns to a greater extent'.(40) Nepalese migration to India, permanent as well as seasonal, has virtually stopped since 1951, which had reached about 70% in the same year.

## **2.2. THE SARDARI SYSTEM**

The Nepalese who flocked to Darjeeling in considerable numbers were offered many jobs opportunities in the expanding tea industry and the British Indian Army. Many of these immigrants cleared and brought under cultivation lands that remained waste or were covered by forest. The land between Teesta and Relli, were reclaimed and brought under cultivation.

Tea plantation being an agro-based industry, industrial and agricultural working environment co-exists. The striking feature of all tea plantations is the employment of women and children in large numbers. The British advocated the employment of families rather than individuals. 'The Royal Commission recognised that the system of recruiting families rather than individuals and the practice of granting lands for spare-time

cultivation meant that the life of a tea-garden labourer resembled that of the villager and avoided the worst features of town life.(41)

Individual gardens sent 'Sardars' annually to recruit labourers and were paid a commission for bringing people from his own village. Recruitment through garden sardars proved to be the best and cheapest way of importing labourers for they brought the whole families. The women and children could supplement the incomes of the family by plucking excess leaf, more than double their pay. The women folk were employs for plucking leaves as they were considered to be better pluckers. In Darjeeling hills, no recruitment problem existed. The economic pressure in Nepal compelled the people to find an outlet.

The sardars were sent to their villages in Eastern Nepal in the recruiting season, which generally began in October and November, and ended in February. The Nepalese flocked in large numbers as they were lured by the garden sardars of better work and money they come to the Darjeeling hills with a hope of plucking 'money' from 'two leaves and a bud'. The sardars were given the responsibility of maintaining peace and harmony in their respective inhabitation but also to ensure that there was regular turnover of the labour of his group for work in the tea estates. The welfare of the workers were entrusted upon respective sardar- the workers under a 'sardar' developed a feeling of closeness.

A list of 'garden sardars' along with their recruits is appended below, for Nagri Farm Tea Estate. Information gathered from their office records revealed that the descendants of these sardars still receive a 'commission' from the garden.

Table II.03: List of garden sardars of Nagri Farm Tea Estate

Sl.No.	Name of Sardar	Labourers (Male/Female)
1.	Akardhoj Gurung	42
2.	Bahadur Mangar	53
3.	Biroo Pradhan	14
4.	Chandralal Sanyasi	57
5.	Dharamlal Giri	22
6.	Dhandrabir Sunwar	07
7.	Dikbir Tamang	27
8.	Dalamardhan Rai	30
9.	Gakul	36
10.	Jitman Moktan	154
11.	Kaziman Pradhan	12
12.	Kaloo Rai	87
13.	Lachhuman Tamang	24
14.	Lal Bahadur Chettri	27
15.	Gopilal Khawas	14
16.	Setu Chettri	N.A.
17.	Tiring Lepcha	23
18.	Woozir Singh Khawas	53

Source: Office records - Nagri Farm T.E.

The sardars were instrumental in the recruitment of workers, and enjoyed a hereditary leadership among the tea garden workers. The Labourers in Darjeeling tea gardens were always 'free' in the sense that the labourers were not placed under any kind

of contract and could leave whenever they pleased. The reasons for the difference between Darjeeling and Assam systems are nowhere explicitly stated, but it was perhaps mainly due to the fact that Darjeeling hills was much nearer than Assam to its principal recruiting ground. The labourers who went from other parts of India to Assam were indeed going to foreign parts, only too anxious to run back home if he felt homesick. But the labourers who migrated from Sikkim and Nepal into Darjeeling found close affinities in religion, culture and language. The migrant labourers, thus never thought of returning back home.

Expansion of tea industry has been found to be the potent factor contributing to the growth of population. This is evident from the fact that 'according to 1901 census, the tea gardens labourers and their dependents accounted for more than two thirds of total population of the district'.(42) The number of gardens increased from 74 in 1872 to 153 in 1881.<sup>43</sup> The area under tea increased form 14,000 acres to 30,000 acres during the corresponding period. Ten years later, the number of gardens reached 177 and the area under tea considerably increased to 45,000 acres. This rapid expansion made the supply of local labour unequal - the result was an unexampled immigration.(43)

From later accounts based on census from 1869 onwards it appears that in the tea gardens nine-tenths of the Labourers were Nepalese in origin.(44)

(With the passing of Tea District Emigrant Labour Act in 1933, the 'Sardari' system was abolished subjecting all recruitment to official review. The tea industry in Darjeeling district was expanding till 1950s. After 1950s, The industry stopped employment of migrants. The passing of Plantation Labour Act 1951 formalised the relationship between planter and plantation worker.)

### 2.3. IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY

The growth of Darjeeling District is mainly due to the growth of tea plantation. It is an interesting job to study the changing plantation situation and its impact on agrarian environment. Tea gardens remained isolated from the neighbourhood despite social, cultural, ethnic similarities. The neighbourhood in Darjeeling initially represented what Munsi called 'coolie settlements'. (45) 'The neighbourhood' in its real sense is referred to the sub-divisions of Darjeeling Sardar and Kurseong. 'Most of the neighbourhood developed chiefly out of the coolie settlement partly after the labour needs of the gardens reached the saturation point and partly because the people found other sources of livelihood more lucrative and gave up the garden work. The plantation system had no direct economic relationship with the agricultural sector but had significant economic and social relationship with the coolie settlements. (46)

The economy of Darjeeling has a dualistic structure - plantation in Darjeeling - Kurseong area, and agriculture in Kalimpong - Gorubathan areas. River Teesta is the dividing line between two types of structure. This type of 'dualism' is found everywhere in most of the underdeveloped areas but now there are certain characteristics, which are not easily found everywhere. (47)

It is pointed out in some of the writings on plantation economy it has no impact on the surrounding areas. One aspect of the 'enclave theory' is that growth of tea or coffee plantations result in pauperisation of agriculture, Nawaz Dawood, in his paper 'Pauperisation of the peasantry' argues that in Sri Lanka the growth of plantation economy result in lack of growth of agriculture. (48) Certain features of plantation economy become clear to us from the study of above paper. They can be summarized as follows:

1. With the growth of plantation agriculture suffered in Sri Lanka.
2. Plantation labourers were ethnically and culturally different from the agriculturist.
3. There is hardly any interconnection between agriculture and plantation and plantation remained an 'enclave' economy in Sri Lanka.

The 'enclave' theory needs modification in the context of Darjeeling hill area. 'There are various 'forward' links between plantation and agriculture in Darjeeling hill areas. The tea plantations led to growth of agriculture, rural settlements and other small scale ancillary industries the growth of populations with a heavy dose of migration led to certain 'demographic transformation. The growth of monetisation of the economy and opening up of Darjeeling to the demand of international trade and commerce led to new type of relations of production. (49)

It may be mentioned here that though some tea gardens had started falling sick even before the Independence, occupational diversification was significantly a post independence phenomenon.

There are some significant differences in the above relationship in this region and elsewhere. Firstly, while in the plains and terais of India the neighbourhood did already exist and the plantations were imposed on them, while in Darjeeling hills, both these sectors developed almost simultaneously. Secondly, while in the former case the neighbourhood represented the local or former settlers and plantation by the immigrants from far off places in Darjeeling, almost all the people in both the sectors consisted of the immigrants. Thirdly, the plantation system represented a heterogeneity of caste and ethnicity drawn from different places, the same in Darjeeling hills had a homogeneity of population with same background of place and occupations. Finally, Darjeeling being a tourist resort since the very beginning was more urbanised and the spread of education

and urbanisation was also more extensive than the plains, terais of India where such plantation took place. All these differences led to a slightly different mode of relationship between the tea gardens and neighbourhood in Darjeeling hills from the same existing elsewhere. As such, going for a theorisation of such a relationship is rather difficult until further studies are conducted in this field.

In this context, the “enclave” theory of Asim Choudhari may be briefly analysed. An “enclave” is understood here to mean a small area of prosperity surrounded by a vast area of backwardness in all respects—wage, levels of productivity literacy, attitude to life and labour etc. or a capitalist nucleus in a subsistence sector. Choudhari has taken the tea plantations as the nucleus and the agricultural sector as the hinterland with pre-capitalist features, in the context of Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal. He notes that this nucleus has not spread its prosperity over the hinterland or rather, has kept it undeveloped.

One may ask here, “are the tea plantations really more prosperous than the agricultural sector”? In any case, are they the capitalist nuclei—supposed to bring about any development in the subsistence sector?

The idea that tea plantations have not spread development around or kept the agricultural sector undeveloped is based on the belief that the farmers are more developed. But if ‘development’ is taken here, as he has accepted, to mean higher wages, higher productivity, higher levels of literacy and modern attitude to life and labour then his belief is misfounded. It is well known that the labourers were brought from far-off places and paid wages much lower than their counterparts in the agricultural sector. Moreover, about ‘wage’ one must take into account the various non-wage factors such as the hour and nature of work, working conditions and facilities, etc. About ‘productivity’ one cannot really compare the plantation and non-plantation areas because the mode

of production or the organisation of it is totally different in these two sectors. However, the agricultural production, like tea production, was very high at the initial stage because the land was fertile and soil erosion or infertility had not taken place.

About literacy also, one can fairly assume that the rate of literacy was higher in the agricultural areas than in the plantation system. Since the spread of education was believed to hamper garden work they were virtually denied of any education. In agricultural areas on the other hand, there was no such barrier and the Christian missionaries had started the spread of education soon after the annexation of this region. The attitude to life and labour can be really classified as 'traditional' for the agricultural sector and 'modern' for the plantation sector because these two sectors have totally different organisation of work. The actually prosperous were the planters themselves or the people belonging to the managerial class.

Now, even if one takes it for granted that such 'nuclei' are more advanced, my humble submission is that they are not supposed to bring about development in the surrounding areas. The tea plantations had been set up by British merchant capitalists at various pockets of the country with a narrow, limited objective, i.e. to enrich their exchequer through tea, which was a promising industry and is so even today. To achieve this goal, they deliberately brought the bulk of labourers from outside and kept them isolated from the agricultural area, paid them low wages and deprived them of education. If these were not done, the profit would have thinned down and their purpose would have failed. Therefore, it is probably a mistake to expect the tea plantations to develop the non-plantation areas.

It should be remembered here terrace cultivation, which was introduced in Darjeeling hills at the time when tea plantation started, was a new and improved method

of cultivation for this region in those days. The agricultural implements introduced then were also new to this region and new implements have been introduced after that. Since mechanisation is ecologically not viable it is difficult to expect any new implement to be introduced in future either. Thus, the plantation system had hardly any scope to bring about any innovation in the agricultural sides; even it wanted to do so.

The nucleus-periphery syndrome is still welcome in the geographical context of the relationship between tea gardens and neighbourhood in Darjeeling hills. Moreover, from a sociological perspective, one should not probably make any sweeping generalisation on this relationship. This relationship is very intricate and varies from region to region depending upon its history, ecology and social structure.

Darjeeling Hill area has certain marked differences as compared to Ceylon and other places, where 'enclave' theory has been developed. These can be summarized as follows:

1. The plantation as well as the agrarian sectors represented homogeneity of caste and ethnicity, this background made different experience. There is a continuous social interaction between the plantation workers and agriculturists. This is an important feature, which was not found in Sri Lanka. Moreover, the British policy was to settle excess Nepalese population of plantation in agriculture, hence the relationship between the farmers and a plantation worker was direct.
2. Plantation and agriculture, more or less started simultaneously in Darjeeling Hill areas.
3. Growth of plantation industry and agriculture was supplementary and complementary to each other. There was no evidence to show that with the rapid growth of plantation, agriculture declined in Darjeeling.

However, it may be mentioned that with the heavy influx of plantation labourers from Nepal, the immigrants have outnumbered the Lepchas, who were the aboriginal tribes. But steps were taken to prohibit transfer of Lepchas land to Nepalese.

Hence, the ‘enclave’ theory, which states that with the growth of plantation, agriculture declines, is not borne out by the facts in Darjeeling hills. This is mainly due to the fact that the British adopted a clear policy in the respect. Almost all the tea gardens were set-up in the territories occupied from Sikkim and the agricultural plots in the territories occupied from Bhutan. More than 90% of the tea gardens are found in the western side of Teesta and the areas east of Teesta was reserved mainly for agriculture. Under the circumstances, the ‘enclave’ theory needs substantial modification in the context of Darjeeling hill areas.

#### **2.4. SUMMARY**

From the 1860s, tea plantations in the Dooars and Assam developed as a new opportunity. In 1870, 8,000 labourers were employed in Darjeeling district, and in 1901 this figure had increased to 64,000. Two main streams of migration developed, one from Nepal to Darjeeling, and the other from Chota Nagpur and the Central Provinces to the Dooars. In the first decades of the century, recruitment from Nepal declined comparatively, and was extended into areas further into Central India. The method of recruitment for tea plantations was similar to the indentured system in restraining freedom of movement of the labourers. Indentured recruitment for the plantations started in 1859 with the Workmen’s Breach of Contract Act, which modified but remained in operation till 1926. A labourer was bound by a penal contract, varying from three to five years, and liable to be arrested by the planter if he or she absconded from work. From the

1870s, unregulated migration became more common, but this was again not without meddlers, and the system of sardari recruitment developed. The most important feature is that all the migrants in Darjeeling hill areas were of Nepali origin. Another noteworthy feature is that bulk of these Nepali migrants belonged to diverse ethnic groups, and very small number of migrants belonged to the upper castes like Brahmins. Economic and social conditions were the prime causes that led to large-scale migration. Nepal's economy in the nineteenth century was stagnant and backward and thus could not absorb the rising population in gainful employment. Besides tea, these migrants were offered employment in Gorkha Regiment, Cinchona Plantations, Darjeeling Himalayan Railways, construction and maintenance of roads. It is important to mention that 'Darjeeling Sebundy Corps of Sappers and Miners' was set up in 1839 for the purpose of road construction, which was almost entirely composed of Nepalese.

Thus Darjeeling became the land of attraction. The Waste Land Act regulated the land. This Act and its subsequent modifications made the land abundant. Each acre of land was as cheap as Rs. 10/-. Under the circumstances the growth of tea plantation was fast and remarkable.

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