

CHAPTER 3

ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE TEA GARDEN LABOURERS IN THE EARLY
PHASE AND ABSENCE OF TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

The history of tea garden industry unfolds the 160-year-old history of Darjeeling, The whole part of the dominion of Raja of Sikkim upto the beginning of the 18th Century. Prior to 1816, the whole of the territory belonged to Nepal, which had won it by conquest from the Sikkimise. When the war broke out between Nepal and the company, Sikkim a sufferer at the Nepalese hands sided with the British, 'Nagri' in Darjeeling became the eastern theatre of the Anglo-Nepal war. When Nepal lost the war, the British had not been able to dislodge the Gorkhalese from Darjeeling areas. In pursuance of the treaty of Sugauli in 1815, Nepal had to cede in perpetuity many territories to the East India Company. The British kept the area under them till 1817, when by a separate treaty with Sikkim, the treaty of Titaliya (Art.1) they handed it over to Sikkim on 10th Feb 1817.

In the year 1827, a border dispute arose between Sikkim and Nepal, and Sikkim referred the matter, in accordance with the Treaty of Titaliya, to the Company. Two officers, Captain Lloyd and the then Commercial Resident G.W Grant were deputed in 1828 to deal with the disputes and they penetrated into the hills as far as Rinchinpong, and was deeply attracted by its advantages as a site for sanatorium and also from military viewpoint. The East India Company became confident of "acquiring Darjeeling in 1833". Ultimately in 1835, they succeeded in obtaining the execution of a deed of grant by the Raja of Sikkim.

The land 'presented' to the East India Company in 1835 did not comprise the whole of Darjeeling. It was a narrow enclave of 138 sq miles about 30 miles long and 6

miles wide. It was entirely surrounded by the Sikkim ruler's dominions, entry and exit being restricted to a narrow path, which included sites of Darjeeling and Kurseong towns and touched the plains near Pankhabari.

'Damsang' the name by which Kalimpong was known then, had been wrested by Bhutan in 1806. Kalimpong sub-division was ceded to the British after the Anglo-Bhutan war 1864-65. The Darjeeling district can be said to have assumed its present shape and size in 1866. The British occupied 138 square miles in 1835, 640 sq. miles more in 1851, now the district has a total of 1234 sq. miles.

The establishment of tea industry in Darjeeling is due to the enterprise of Dr. Campbell in 1839. A huge investment was made for bringing tea plants and seeds from China. Chinese experts were also imported to teach the local resident for imparting teachings on the methods of tea planting. By 1856, tea industry was firmly established in the district on a commercial basis.

The Alubari Tea Garden was opened by the Kurseong and Darjeeling Tea Company in 1856 the 'Dhotre' garden was started by Dr. Brougham in 1859 and in 1860, Mrs. H.C. Taylor and Dr. Roberts started Rangmuk-Cedars. Gardens like Ging, Ambote, Takdah, Phubsering, Tukvar, Badamtam by 1864. By 1861 the number of gardens had reached 22, which increased to 148 by 1905. There were maximum number of gardens in 1895, when the number had reached 186. Tea was lately introduced in Kalimpong sub-division. According to report of C.A. Bell (1901-1903), there were total of 4 gardens, namely Ambiyok, Fagu, Kumai and Mission Hill. During 1940, the number of gardens were 142.

The Britishers found Darjeeling as virgin soil for exploitation where starvation and deficiency had been the characteristics of the hills. Tea cultivation was 'Green gold

'for the Britishers and Darjeeling "Gold Mine". The workers used to get fairly low wages, which were also at times deducted under the dictates of management. The wages were fixed as 5 annas, 4 annas and 1 annas 6pies(approx) for an adult male, female and child respectively.

The various acts, namely, Trade Union Act 1926, Workmen's Compensation Act were never enforced in the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills.

When compared to other industries, trade union in the tea plantations of North East India has been late starters. The growth of trade unions here is mainly a post-independence phenomenon. Whereas in other sections of the working class, trade unions were mainly responsible for retarding this process. Plantations were isolated from the rest of the country and from each other; hence it was difficult for plantation workers to form organizations for collective bargaining. The planters had the full support of the colonial government and they were effectively able to keep their workers unorganized by stalling any attempts of outside trade union organizer in influencing plantation worker. (1)

Samir Roy, General Secretary of Cha 'Mazdoor Sabha has traced the nature of labour problems in the past. His remarks give us idea about the poverty of the tea garden labourers during the British Raj'. The British set up the tea plantations with an objective of enriching their exchequer through the sale of tea, which had a good market in England. They deliberately brought the bulk of labourers from out side and kept them isolated from agricultural areas. They deprived them of fair wages and education and many other basic amenities.

Poverty, large-scale illiteracy ignorance and many other social evils were prevalent amongst the labourers. It is seen that the distribution of income was always in favour of capital at the expense of labour. This was a part of the colonial philosophy in

which the economic features of the plantation industry was created. The workers were denied social and natural justice and were treated as door-mates, and inflicted upon them untold suffering and pain. (2)

The planters extorted a fabulous fortune through brutal exploitation of the labourers. (3) It is observed that the planters or their 'Sardars' resorted to all sorts of heinous method in securing torturing and exploiting the labourers – whether male, female or tender aged child. As a matter of fact they did not show any sense of exploitation was excessive in spheres of wage, working hours, education, employment of child labour, housing, maternity benefits and others social security measures.

Since wages are directly related to the economic condition of worker, an insight into the wage structure of the workers in tea gardens of Darjeeling hills would highlight the poor living conditions of workers during the British raj. The policy of *Laissez – Faire* adopted by the government greatly influenced the British planters in fixing wages of the workers, wage fixation was left to the dictates of the Planters' Association in Darjeeling. The effect of this irrational wage policy had an adverse effect on the revision of wages at later stages in absence of wage fixing criterion. "The *Laissez – Faire* policy of the British Government and the Royal Commissions specific colonial labour policy had their indirect effect on the fixation of wages for tea plantation labourers in hill areas without due consideration of any principle of criterion". (4)

It was only in 1948, the labourers came to know for the first time about 'minimum wages' through the Minimum wages Act 1948.

Table III .01: The increment in wages of tea garden labours from 1939 to 1954

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	CHILD
1934	0-5-0	0-4-0	0-2-6
1941	0-5-6	0-4-6	0-2-9
1944	0-6-0	0-5-0	0-3-0
1946	0-9-0	0-8-0	0-4-0
1947	0-10-0	0-9-0	0-5-0
1948	0-13-0	0-12-0	0-7-0
1951	0-15-0	0-14-0	0-8-0
1954	1-2-6	1-1-6	0-10-0

(1 ANNA = 6 PIES)

SOURCE (WEST BENGAL – FORTNIGHTLY – SAT 1/5/54 – CAL)

The following table shows the increase in dearness allowance from 1941 to 1948. It is seen that the basic wages were left unaltered but dearness allowance was raised from 2 annas to 5 annas per day for adults during 47 – 48.

Table III .02: Increase in dearness allowance from 1941 to 1948

	1941	1944	1947	1948
ADULT MALE	0-0-6	0-1-0	0-2-0	0-5-0
ADULT FEMALE	0-0-6	0-1-0	0-2-0	0-5-0
CHILDREN	0-0-3	0-0-6	0-1-0	0-3-0

Source (Mazdoor Haru Ko Tai Yatra – Pub. By W.B. Government 1951)

The figures of Basic wages and dearness allowance of different categories of workers in the hill areas of Darjeeling district during 1951.

Table III. 03: The figures of Basic wages and dearness allowance

	MALE		FEMALE		CHILD	
	Field	Factory	Field	Factory	Field	Factory
Basic Wages	0.50	0.56	0.44	0.50	0.25	0.31
D.A	0.44	0.44	0.44	0.44	0.25	0.25
Total	0.94	1.00	0.88	0.94	0.50	0.56

(Source: West Bengal District Gazetteer-1950)

The abnormally low wage rates and the consequential economic miseries ultimately encumbered the workers with recurring debts, and appallingly degraded living condition of the workers. The workers were in the grip of vicious circle of poverty. Poverty was not only acute but a chronic malady. Rural indebtedness was another factor, which the workers had to face – as a matter of fact, the figures revealed that the tea garden labourers were born in debt, they lived in debt, and also died in debt. The burden was further aggravated out of all proportions by the high rate of interest, which had to be paid by the labourers on loans taken to make their both ends meet.

Many folk poems, folk songs and other literary works tell about the high interest rates on which businessmen gave loans to labourers “Hazairmam Rai’s poem written in 1990 gives us an idea about the object poverty of labourers in tea gardens of Darjeeling hills. Describing the poor economic condition of the workers and burden of loans he has thus written: - (5)

दाजु सर्दार बैनी कुल्ली टुपी सम्म रिन

कठैबरी कान्छी नानी कैलै खायो घिन।

The lines explain about the absolute poverty and the extent of their loan. They were neck – deep in loan, which was very difficult for them to repay with their meager wages. (Author’s own translation).

‘The problem was so chronic that in the year 1902. 808 cases of loan repayment were registered in Darjeeling Kutchery. The following table will clearly show the number of cases with corresponding rates of interest charged on the poor labourers. (6)

Table III .04: Interest charged on the poor labourers

Sl. No	No. Of Cases	Interest Rate
1	97	30%
2	458	36% - 37%
3	93	48%
4	38	60%
5	113	108%
6	3	150%
7	1	300%

The moneylenders or the Mahajans have been termed as ‘the Shylock of the hill by O. Malley. (7) “These mahajans used to charge 75% interest which was compounded annually. They used to destroy the original hand-notes on loans taken and made them afresh and compelled the ignorant, illiterate labourers to sign on the fresh hand notes, so that they could be produced as evidence whenever cases were field for non-repayment. (8) The Nepali tea garden labourers were known for their extravagance – they used to

indulge in gambling and the women – folk used to spend on the clothings – as a result of which they were in the grip of money – lenders. During 1920 – 30 Swami Sachidananda, an Arya Samajist came forward to save the innocent labourers from the clutches of moneylenders. He did his best to make the labourers socially and politically conscious about this practice of and educated them about the evils of such practices. (9)

The wages earned by the workers were not sufficient to meet even the minimum needs of life and so to take out a bare existence, the children and female members had also to work. The tea pluckers had to pluck tea leaves completely soaked in rainwater. The labourers were not given anything to protect themselves from the rain. There was no minimum hour fixed for their works. The workers used to work 9 hours or even 10 hours at a stretch in one day. The workers were treated as human machines, and there were virtually no social securities for the labourers.

“Dharam Singh Chamling Rai, of Dilaram T.E. wrote another folk poem in 1919 describing the poor economic condition of the tea garden labourers. An extract of his poem is reproduced below which would explain the poverty and unhold suffering inflicted upon the tea garden labourers arising out of low wages paid to the workers and the inhuman conditions under which the labourers had to work. (10)

“ हनुमान बिर त लंकामा गयो सीताको खोजैमा
रूझी र भिजी पत्ती र टिप्छ्यौ दशू पैसा रोजैमा
सिरिलाई सिरी बतासै चल्यो सिरीको थुर भाँची
पाँच पैसा खायौ, तिन पैसा लायौ दुई पैसा फुर्मासी ”

The gist of the poem is that out of 10 paise as a daily wage, 5 paise is spent on food, 3 paise on clothing, and 2 paise on other necessities-which meant that the workers could not save anything for the future-(another's own translation) hence in case of any emergency like-death, marriage in the family, the workers had to look upon the mahajans for loans-which they could never repay during their life time-under the circumstances-they were reduced to the status of beggars.

During the pre-independence period, the amenities (social, economic and health) made available to the workers were kept at the bare minimum level such as housing, medical facilities, food grain subsidy etc.

The payment of wages in tea plantation in hill areas is based on pieces rates-the 'hazira' and 'thika'-The hazira is the daily wage paid to each worker on completion of a particular task which has been allotted to him for the day.'Thika' refers to overtime work as well as to extra plantation work given on contract.

During the British period, payment was made by the garden sardar who usually received a commission from the tea estate. Later on this method was curtailed as sardars indulged in corruption by making those commissions compulsory.

It must be mentioned here that wages were arbitrarily fixed by the planters through their organization i.e. Darjeeling Planters' Association. This is the reason why the Royal Commission strongly recommended, that a wage fixing machinery be established in the tea industry. Later on in 1946, 'The Rege Commission also made a similar recommendation, keeping in view that the workers had developed a spirit of collective bargaining and hence they could not take a unified stand in bargaining for fair wages. (11)

Besides wages, the workers were given Rs.6/- as 'Cloths Bonus' as Puja allowance, during Dasain- (Dusshera).

With regard to the daily average earning to the tea garden workers the Royal Commission on Labour 1931 reports that there were no statistics available prior to 1931, hence, knowledge of wage movements in the tea industry can be obtained only since 1931.

O Malley has written about the wages of tea garden workers in 1907. He stated that 'the wages paid to the tea coolies are considerably higher than such labour would obtain in many plains districts. The average rate is Rs 6/- a month for men, Rs.4.50 for women, and Rs.3/- for children but in addition to the actual sum paid as wages; they received substantial extra in shape of free housing, fuel, medical attendance etc. (12)

Four decades later, Dash gave elaborate information on the wage pattern of different categories of tea plantation labour. He noted that "the basic rates for the Hazira" system of wage payment prevailing then were 31 paise for men, 25 paise for women and 19 paise for children in the hills. He added further that 'these basic rates have been prevalent for a long time and are really task rates. They are split in some hill gardens so that part is paid as bonus for attendance 5 days a week. In other gardens there is a sliding scale of bonus for upwards of 14 days attendance in the month.

Cultivation or winter operations are often paid for on a bigha or piece rate system, in which the task for sickling, pruning hoeing or deep forking is so, arranged that basic hazira can be earned by 5 or 6 hours' work. Since 1939 this daily task has been reduced. In the plucking season, there are two method, of payment --the piece rate and the 'bigha' or task rate. Piece rates are 3 paise per seer of leaf plucked, the task is so fixed that by doing it the worker gets the basic wage. (13)

‘Wages were static in Darjeeling from 1939-1950. The hazira rate in Darjeeling was 0-5-0 for men, 0-4-0 for women and 0-1-6 for children .The Rege Committee has pointed out that in some gardens in Darjeeling, the normal hazira rates were reduced by 0-0-6 but 6 pies a day were given to workers if they were present for at least 5 days a week. (14)

Wages form the pivot around which most labour problems revolve. The questions related to standards of living, the economic well being of the workers, in general –all pertain to this problem. In the early days the managers were the rulers of the land . There was no scope for ventilation of their grievances as the workers were denied to form trade unions for proper channelisation of the interest of the workers. In contrast, the planters were organized into Darjeeling Branch Indian Tea Association since 1873. Labour welfare programmes like Maternity allowance, welfare housing, sanitation, safe drinking water supply, sick haziras were nil in existence upon 1934.The International Labour Organization passed one recommendation and two conventions regarding sickness allowance. This had no impact on tea gardens. ‘In the absence of collective bargaining agency the labourers could not dictate their terms and hence they failed to get even a portion of large profits which the tea companies annually earned in those days. The British Government was found apparently sympathetic to the cause of the garden labourers. But in practice enacted special laws, one after another, protecting the financial interest of the employers pressurized by influential members having vested of the interests in the tea enterprise. (15)

The Royal Commission on labour in 1931 recommended the establishment of wage fixing machinery in the tea industry .It recognised that it would be impossible to lay down piece rates or to specify tasks in view of the variation of tasks from one season to

another and from garden to garden. Wage fixation as envisaged by the Royal Commission meant that “the employers themselves would fix the rate for the tasks after determining the capacity to yield a worker of ordinary skill and diligence at least the amount determined by the wage fixing body. In other words such a worker, as opposed to slow or inexperienced workers should be sure of a minimum amount for the performance of a given task. (16)

The recommendation of the Royal Commission meant that ‘reasonable’s should be defined by an outside body, which should include the representatives of employees as well as of the Government. It was however difficult to set upon as the labourers were an unorganized and the Royal Commission’s advice to the Government to invite proposals from tea industries remained in paper only.

Rege, made a brief reference to the subjects in his report as Chairman of the Labour Investigation Committee in 1932. He remarked thus as the labourers are not likely to develop a spirit of collective bargaining for sometimes, the establishment of wage board is essential on plantations .The Rege Committee never dwelt on detail and the machineries for affecting the same. (17)

Hence, it is evident that there was practically no serious attempt to promote the cause of the labourers.

The British planters even maintained their own army, the North Bengal Mounted Rifles which was unceremoniously disbanded on 14th August 1947. The planters maintained this regiment mainly to keep law and order in the tea gardens and to prevent the workers from forming any associations, which would go against the interest of planters. Through this regiment the planters succeeded in achieving their objectives of obstructing any organized movement or agitation by garden workers. During the time of

labour crises, mainly before independence period, this army kept strong vigilance on the movement of garden workers from one garden to another. Hence, out of fear of punishment, workers could not leave the gardens without prior approval of the planters.

In the absence of any organization of workers, the relationship between workers and the management was like that of master and servant. As the workers were kept isolated from the town, there was a communication gap and as such the workers were not politically conscious.' The tea gardens were legally the private properties of the planters. Without their permission no outsider was allowed to enter the garden. It would amount to 'Criminal Trespass' and he was arrested. The 'Trespasser' was granted bail on the condition that he would not further enter into the garden until the case was settled. Hence it was very difficult to organize the workers. The workers were separated from the organizers by filing cases against them. But this difficulty, somewhat, was removed with the judgements in two cases coming in favour of the union shortly after. Then the subdivisional Judicial Magistrate of Kurseong, Shri Ashok Mitra I.C.S. in his judgement pointed out that any person entering the garden for forming a union was not considered an act of Criminal Trespass.'(18)

The tea industry bears the testimony of unimaginable torture, inhuman treatment and victimization of the workers. 'The most inhuman weapon of the planters 'known as Hattabahar' was in force even after independence. They used this weapon against any worker in case of violation of rules of the gardens and this order led the worker to discontinue his service and expulsion of the whole family from his hereditary land. Once a worker was issued the notice of 'Hattabahar' there was no question of remaining in vogue till April 1959.

The workers were completely at the mercy of the managers. They were treated as commodities, which could be purchased and sold. They had to work hard and were treated as human machines. Even after a hard day's work, the workers were deprived of fair wages. The practice of Pro-rata was in practice in the case of weightment of leaves. This was against the interest of workers as the system seriously affected their earnings. The planters used to deduct from the actual weights of tea leaves, moisture content in it. These deductions variations from 5 percent to 15 percents and such variations were in the discretion of the managers.

“During the period 1939 and 1955, in some gardens in Darjeeling, payment was made for plucking at a flat rate of 3 pies per pound. While they use to pay on the hazira basis. The task was usually 20 to 40 pounds, for men, and 16 to 20 pounds for women, and 12 to 16 pounds for children. For the extra leaf plucked over and above the task, payment was made at the rate of 3 pies per pounds. Plucking was largely done by women and it was in plucking and it plucking that high wages were earned. (20)

The tea garden labourers usually purchased their necessary items from the shops of ‘Kaiyas’ or ‘Mahajans’, situated within the garden at exorbitant rates. At the time of weekly payments, usually Saturday, market of the peddlers took place. These peddlers cheated the poor labourers as much as the ‘kaiyas’ did.

A major portion of the wages earned by the labourers was spent on the purchase of food grains to the labourers on the basis of ration quota was much less.

Table III. 05: The following tables gives an idea of the foodgrains supplied to the labourers and to their dependents during (1951)

WORKERS				NON-WORKERS			
ADULTS		MINORS		ADULTS		MINORS	
SCALE	RATE	SCALE	RATE	SCALE	RATE	SCALE	RATE
3-0	0-9-9	3-0	0-9-9	2-0	0-6-6	1-0	0-3-0
0-12	0-2-3	0-12	0-2-3	0-12	0-2-3	1-0	0-1-6

(Source – Mazdoor Haru Ko Jaiyatra – (Nepali))

PAGE 3 – (Government of West Bengal – Publication 1951)

The workers in the tea gardens of Darjeeling hill used to get only these two items of food grains, whereas in Dooars and Terai areas, the workers used to get more number of food grains items such as salt, Mustard oil, Grains, Paddy, Jaggery etc. 'The price of subsidized rice was increased with effect from 1953, on the recommendation of the Minimum wage, Advisory Committee keeping in view the deteriorating financial condition of tea gardens. The price of rice was raised from Rs. 8/- to Rs. 17 ½ /-per maund. As partial compensation for the abolition of the concession, the labourers were given an increase of 1 ½ anna per day in D.A.'(21)

3.1. WAGES AND EARNINGS

Wages and earning are the two important factors for bringing peace in any industrial undertaking – for they are mainly responsible to a large extent to industrial unrest. 'Wages refer to (a) the settled wages rate per day, week or month (b) the gross earnings for the days worked or (c) take – home wages. Gross earnings may differ from the wage rate. A casual worker may get more or less earning in tea plantations. A gap is

created between the wage rate for a week and the actual earnings in the week, by the extent of absenteeism in the case of permanent workers'. (22) The Indian Tea Association gave the following percentages of absenteeism in the case of 33 tea gardens in Darjeeling for the period between 1938 and 1944.

Men	34.0 %
Women	24.7 %
Children	24.9 %
Total	27.6 %

Rege Committee Report on an enquiry into conditions of Labour in Plantations in India has given the following figures of average monthly earnings, Availability of concessions and average per capita monthly concessions in some gardens in Darjeeling.

Table III.06: Average monthly earning in 5 selected gardens in Darjeeling 1939 and 1944

Estates	1939			1944		
	Men	Women	Children	Men	Women	Children
A	8-5-1	6-1-0	4-5-0	10-9-5	7-6-1	5-4-4
B	8-2-1	6-8-0	3-4-0	9-12-0	8-2-1	4-1-0
C	8-9-5	6-9-3	3-5-9	13-6-1	11-8-0	6-8-0
D	8-7-0	6-12-0	2-12-10	13-8-0	10-2-1	5-1-0
E	6-13-9	5-7-6	3-5-9	8-12-0	6-14-7	3-13-9

Table III .07: Concessions available to the tea garden workers in Darjeeling – 1942 – 1950

COMMODITY	CATEGORIES	QNTY	PRICE
RICE	MEN	6 Seers	Rs. 8/-per Maund
	WOMEN	4 Seers	
	CHILDREN	3 Seers	

Table III .08: Average per capita monthly cost of concessions in certain tea gardens in Darjeeling – 1942 – 1944

YEAR	DARJEELING
1942	0 – 0 – 6
1943	1 – 12 – 2
1944	1 – 12 – 8

It is inferred from the Table A that the weighted average for Darjeeling hills in 1944 were 12 – 4 – 8, 9 – 12 – 10 and 4 – 9 – 1 for men, women and children respectively, For several years, the average earnings of the labour force increased even when there has been no change either in the wage rates for particular jobs or in the volume of work handled. (23)

In 1952, for the first time, statutory minimum wages were fixed for the plantation workers in West Bengal. The daily wage rate at that time was Rs. 1.9 paise for male, Rs.1.06 paise for female and Rs. 0.62 paise for children. Low wages have always been the distinctive feature of the plantation industry. The West Bengal Government set up the Minimum Wages Advisory Committee for Tea Plantation in March 1950, known as the Modak Committee. The Modak Committee recommended that the minimum wage must not be merely a subsistence wage. Besides providing for his food, it should also help the worker preserve his efficiency by education, medical, and other amenities. (24) In other

words, the concept of minimum wage should not be restricted to just a cash wage but should also cover certain welfare benefits. Even the Committee fixed the minimum wages at a fairly low level which can be considered as 'subsistence' wage on the basis of 1952 Consumer Price Index level.

3.2. SUMMARY

The entire pre-independence period can be called the 'unregulated' period. Where the relation between the planters and the workers were not formalized. The post-independence period formalized the relationship between the two, with the passing of various laws.

Serious discontent had already been brewing among the workers on the long standing and unsettled problems, insufficiency of wages, rejection of the demands for minimum wages and above all humiliation of the workers by the British planters and their managers.' This unbearable condition of the workers aggravated by the colonial labour policy of the imperialist government caused among the workers a smouldering discontent which in no time blazed out in massive strikes and struggles.

The emergence of the tea garden workers organization in the Darjeeling hills took place at a period when India was under the absolute colonial rule. The wave of non-co-operation movement of 1920-21 also touched the hills of Darjeeling district. Many Gorkhas under the leadership of Dal Bahadur Giri and Jangbir Sepkota of Kalimpong took active part in it. Dal Bahadur Giri had a tremendous influence on the labourers. The workers had to confront two basic antagonistic forces –imperialist political rule and economic exploitation both by native and foreign capitalist classes. Thus the trade union movement in the district became intertwined with political movement for independence.

The settlement of wage rate is indicators of change in the working class in this area. An analysis of the wage structure explains that the trend is from subsistence wage to a living wage. Living wage means a wage, which enables the workers to obtain something slightly more than his day-to-day existence. A change in the working class has brought about a change in the wage – rate structure. Coercion, which was one of the important component of plantation system, decreased during the post – independence period. A qualitative change is witnessed as collective bargaining took shape as the workers become organized with the passing of laws safe - guarding the interest of the workers.

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