

INTRODUCTION

Situated in the North of the State of West Bengal, Darjeeling district comprises Darjeeling Sadar and three subdivisions, viz. (1) Kurseong, (2) Kalimpong, and (3) Siliguri. The district has two distinct topographical features. Darjeeling Sadar, Kurseong, and Kalimpong occupy the hilly tracts of the district and Siliguri at the foothills has plain stretches of land. Tea plantations over the hilly tracts of the district are popularly known as Darjeeling plantations, which are within the ambit of the study.

The district Darjeeling lies between $26^{\circ} 31'$ and $27^{\circ} 13'$ North latitude and between $87^{\circ} 59'$ and $88^{\circ} 53'$ East longitude. The shape of the district is triangular surrounded on the East by Bhutan, on the North by Sikkim and on the West by Nepal. The Northwestern boundary commences from a height of 12,000 feet with Nepal.

THE RIVER SYSTEM

Teesta, the most important river of Darjeeling rises in North Sikkim and flows through the district till it reaches Sevoke. River Teesta is often called the "River of Sorrow", as it creates havoc and destruction during the rains. Other rivers of significance are Rungeet, Balasun, Mahanadi and Mechi. Mahanadi has its source near Mahalderam, east of Kurseong. Balasun takes its source near Lepchajagat in the Ghoom-Simana ridge of west of Kurseong. Mechi has its source from the western hill areas.

PHYSIOGRAPHY AND SOIL

The hill areas of Darjeeling district consist of the unaltered sedimentary rocks confined to the hills on the south and different grades of metamorphic rocks over the rest

of the area. The mountains are made of folded rocks piled one over another by a series of north-south horizontal compressions movements and tangential thrusts.

In the hills there are three kinds of soil: white, red, and black. The white is often found among the large rocks and is suitable for dry crops owing to its rich vegetable mould. The greater portion of the hill areas lies on the Darjeeling gneiss, which most often gives stiff red clay. Generally, the soil throughout the district is deficient in lime. Tea is grown along the gentler slopes and terraced surfaces

The origin of Tea is shrouded in the mists of legends and history of doubtful voracity. Tea finds a definite mention in ancient Chinese history as far back as 2700 B.C. In India tea cultivation was introduced initially to meet the demand of the British consumers who had for a long time been obtaining their entire requirement of tea from China. Major Robert Bruce discovered tea bushes in Assam in 1823. Tea cultivation in Darjeeling district commenced on a trial basis in 1840 and now it occupies a place of pride in the economy of the hill areas of Darjeeling.

Darjeeling tea derived its importance from the qualitative excellence and high exportability. In 1972, hill areas of Darjeeling district claimed 21 percent of West Bengal tea hectareage and 10 percent of tea produced with an average per hectare yield measuring half of that for West Bengal. Tea industry makes valuable contribution to both Central and State Government coffers by way of different Central and State taxes like income tax, super tax, Excise Duty, Export duty and agricultural income tax.

Tea industry has played an important role in opening up and developing uninhabited jungles and forests for producing plantation products, commercial crops and inviting human settlements centering on them. Tea plantations and human settlements have used land resources after having denuded of its forest and jungle coverings. What is

then the impact of tea plantations on food supplies and soil erosion?. It is claimed that the land recovered from jungles and forests and developed into thriving tea gardens were not areas where food grains could ordinarily have been grown in those days. Hence there was no question of tea usurping land required for the production of more essential food crops.

Tea is a perennial crop grown under shade trees. Tea bushes touch and completely cover the soil, and their roots fully occupy the available soil. The result is that the replacement of forests and jungles by tea bushes does not result in soil erosion or other evils, which are often associated with the felling of trees and the clearing of jungles. Kurseong, Jore Bunglow and Darjeeling together claim 65 percent of the total number of tea gardens and 70 percent of total area under occupation of tea gardens. Rangli-Rangliot, Sukhiapokhri, and Mirik jointly claim another 22 percent of gardens and 26 percent of area under occupation of tea gardens. Gorubathan, Pulbazar and Kalimpong together claim 13 percent of tea gardens and four percent of total area under occupation of tea gardens. Thus of the total area claimed by Kurseong, Jore Bunglow and Darjeeling together the share of Kurseong alone was 50 percent, which is equivalent to 36.67 percent of the total tea garden land in the hill areas of the district. On the other extreme, Kalimpong Blocks claim only six small gardens covering 0.06 percent of the total area under tea gardens. This is an outcome of Government policy, which reserved Kalimpong for native cultivation. An important reason for the choice of Darjeeling hills for tea plantation was the belief that tea should be planted on slopes. Later experiences have, however, shown that gardens located on flat land have greater competitive advantage than gardens situated on the hills. In spite of the superb tea produced in small quantities in Darjeeling gardens today, the economic conditions of the industry in the district

support the view that tea gardens on the hills with low yield cannot compete with tea gardens on the flat land, where yield is high and cultivation has many other advantages. In present days the possibility of a high yield is becoming a more appropriate criterion in choosing a location for a tea garden. While tea can be grown in almost any place where it is wet and warm, the cost of labour is such that outstanding quality and flavour may not suffice to compensate for the low yield.

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## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The Darjeeling Tea industry has a pride of place in West Bengal in view of its contribution to building state economy. Employing over two and half lakhs workers it has earned a niche in generating employment opportunities and lessening unemployment problems.

The present study deals with following objectives.

1. To study the problems of labour and Management relations in the tea gardens of Darjeeling and Kurseong in the district of Darjeeling.
2. To analyse the efforts of Trade Unions in improving the wage levels, Wage structures, and Employment.
3. To understand the role of Trade Unions in improving the Existing working conditions and arrest labour turn over, and
4. To ascertain the situation regarding workers employed directly through management, and the Sardars and make a comparative analysis in terms of wages and employment.

It is indisputable that the workers will have some impact or the other over the changes in ownership of the gardens. The change in ownership pattern affected the continuity of garden management and the rights of the workers were always denied. A study of such an impact is also within the scope of this thesis. The Gorkha National Liberation Front movement was a movement, which encompassed the entire hills necessitating, if not, enforcing changes big or small in the erstwhile organisations. The

trade union movement also had its share of the impact, so its incorporation in the present study is considered all the more justifiable.

#### SCOPE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY.

The areas selected for the purpose of study in Darjeeling District are Kurseong and Darjeeling subdivisions. There are mainly four unions working in the Tea gardens, and almost all are affiliated to the Central organisations viz, INTUC, CITU, Gorkha League, and Himalayan Plantation Workers' Union. No study had so far been made on the Trade Unions in the Tea Industry. A study on this would therefore help policy makers to understanding the labour management relations in the tea industry. The study would also be helpful to Government and management and other executives to do their best to improve the labour management relations in the Tea industry.

## IDENTIFICATION OF VARIABLES

The main objective of the thesis is to analyse the efforts of union. The dependent variables are wages, employment and independent variables are collective Bargaining power, Union leadership and membership.

## METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE DESIGN

The study is exploratory in nature. The informations will be collected through primary data and secondary data.

For the purposes of collecting primary data, the respondent leaders and union members will be approached either residence, if unions do not have separate office buildings. For collecting primary data, a comprehensive schedule will be prepared and administered to the union members, their leaders and management.

The secondary data will be collected through official records for information relating to the members of unions, the names of office bearers, the size of the membership will be collected. If official records are not sufficient, the same will be collected from the union files and records.

With a view to removing bias, the following gardens are randomly selected from Darjeeling and Kurseong with diverse patterns of ownership, i.e. proprietary, partnership, private limited and public limited companies. The sample pattern is representative of the universe.

### The Name Of The Gardens Selected

1. Makaibari Tea Garden
2. Ambootia T.E.
3. Spring Side T.E.

4. Longview T.E.
5. Singell T.E.
6. Happy Vally T.E.
7. Vah-Tukvar T.E.
8. Singtam T.E.
9. Moondakhoti T.E.
10. Bloomfield T.E.

The size of the sample respondents to be interviewed would be decided on the basis of stratified sampling method which is related to interviewing sample respondent with the help of structured schedules. The number of unions, the size of the membership and the length of the union's existence will be considered for selection of sample.

#### Methods Of Data Processing And Statistical Tools Used

The collected data will be processed by using statistical tools like averages, percentages, ratios, Arithmetic Means, Further, necessary graphs, diagrams, will be used whenever possible and necessary.

#### RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

1. Why it took such a long time to start trade union movements in the hill?
2. How far the Trade Unions have been successful in securing fair wages to the workers?
3. What is the nature and pattern of leadership?
4. Why the 'outsiders' have taken the leaderships?
5. What is the impact of change of ownership on the trade union movement?
6. What is the attitude of the labourers towards their leaders?
7. Whether the unions have been successful in protecting the interests of the members, viz: social security benefits as guaranteed by the Labour laws.

## A BRIEF REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature related to the subject under consideration is virtually non-existent so far as the hill areas of the district of Darjeeling are concerned, barring a few articles in the local journals, manuals, gazetteers and some references in the Committee Reports, no serious studies are available on the subject relating to the hill areas. Some recent studies undertaken by some of the scholars of the North Bengal University relate to the sociological, anthropological and economic aspects. This study, therefore, is a modest attempt to fill the research gap in this regard and could be considered as a path-breaking enterprise in an unexplored field.

Dr. R. L. Sarkar: In his study entitled, "Trade Unions: Origin and early Development, pointed out, Trade unionism in the Darjeeling's tea estates is a recent phenomenon. That there was no organised labour movement till the eve of independence.

Rage Committee 1944: pointed out that the tea garden workers had no organizations at all, they were all unorganised and helpless.

National Commission on Labour 1969: pointed out that the main reason for the lack of trade union movement was that access into the plantation was difficult, it not impossible and attempts to form trade unions before independence was seldom successful (page 65)

Dr. Manas Dasgupta in his study entitled Are Labour Productivity and Cost of Production really to be blamed for Sickness of the Darjeeling Tea industry? Pointed out that 'Very often the workers are not paid properly. At the slightest pretext the gardens are declared closed. The P.F. of the workers is looted. But unfortunately the trade unions have failed to accept the challenge posed by the new owners who do not have any commitment to the gardens.'

Mr. K. A. Khan and Mr. D. Biswas in their paper entitled 'Problems and Prospects of Darjeeling Tea Industry have pointed out that' Change in the ownership of the company has affected the production to a large extent. In fact of a total 97 gardens in the hills, 54 changed hands during 1947 -76, which comprises more than 56% of the total? (Tea International Nov.91-pp.43)

Tushar Kanti Ghosh, in his book Tea Gardens of West Bengal, a critical study has presented details about the history of plantation of tea in West Bengal with special reference to the two main tea centres in the state, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts. The land management policies, rules, regulations etc. and the problems existing therein have been studied in detail.

Dr. Manas Dasgupta in his book Labour in Tea Gardens has focused upon continuity and change in the condition of the labourers of Darjeeling, Duars and Terai tea gardens. The changes of the economic condition have been as important as the continuities in shaping style and substance of the labourers in the 1990s.

Henk Thomas (Editor) in Globalisation and Third World Trade Unions, the challenge of Rapid Economic Change has highlighted the deep crisis in which the organised labour movement in the South is facing. The crisis is the result of several factors; changes in the global economy that have eroded trade union membership, structural adjustment policies that have reduced the capacity of the state to address inequality, and a decline in public acceptance of unions, effectiveness in protecting the interests of working people.

Amalendu Guha in his book Planter Raj to Swaraj, Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1820-1947 has examined the nationalist activities from the early days of tactical collaboration to the later phase of mature anti-imperialism. The

peoples' assemblies, the beginnings of the Pradesh Congress, the revolts in the plantations, the emergence of the Left, the scramble for office and power, the communalism of creed, language and domicile have been discussed, in relation especially to the legislative processes. The question of bonded labour have been analysed with exposing the dominance of planters in the Administration of Assam.

Sukomal Sen in his well documented book titled Working Class of India, History of Emergence and Movement 1830-1970, has depicted the history of labour movement discussing intricacies of the social, economic and political processes beginning from its birth in 1830 to 1947, including a sweeping reference to the events thereafter.

Dr. Kumar Pradhan, in his well-documented book, The Gorkha Conquests the Process and consequences of the unification of Nepal, with particular reference to Eastern Nepal has dwelt on the origins of Gorkha state consolidation in Nepal. The book represents his findings on the historical origins of cultural diversity in the region, and on the way in which the Gorkha political lineage came to rear itself out of this, to create a new political pattern in conflict and compromise with British Indian imperialism, with far reaching consequences of homogenisation for Eastern Nepal. A quite different socio-political, cultural and enclaved plantation economy grew in British Indian Darjeeling. He has focused on the microcosmic aspect of changes in Nepali state and society itself.

Purushottam Bhandari, in his book Freedom Movement and Role of Indian Nepalese 1800-1950, has highlighted the first entry of the Nepalese into India. The Nepali youths were enrolled in the British Army in the name of Gurkha Regiment after the popular Sugowlee Treaty of 1815. The book covers the whole history of the involvement of civilian and military personnel in the National Congress led by Mahatma Gandhi, the contribution of Nepalese in the historical Dandi March and Quit India

Movement, the joining of Gurkhas in the Indian National Army at Singapore led by Subash Chandra Bose and lastly the role of the Nepalese in Royal Indian Mutiny of 1946.

James Riordan in *The Working Class in Socialist Society* (translation from Russian) has described the major trends and issues concerning the development of the working class in socialist society.

Dr. Tanka Bahadur Subba in his book *Ethnicity, State and Development*, 'A case study of Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling has highlighted the Gorkhaland movement for a separate statehood within the Indian Union. He has discussed the political, ethnic and economic histories of Darjeeling with special reference to some of the biggest controversies between the state and the pro-Gorkhaland people. He has also traced the origin and evolution of Gorkha identity, discussing the changing boundaries of this identity. He has discussed briefly the various ethnic movements in Darjeeling in a chronological order beginning in 1907 and ending in the statehood demand of 1980.

Sarath Davala in his article, *Independent Trade Unionism in West Bengal*, in the *Economic and Political Weekly* has discussed the growth of independent trade unions as a reflection of the inability of the political trade unions to meet workers' needs. He has examined the growth of 'independent' trade unionism in West Bengal where centralised party unionism continues to be the dominant form.

Vidya Bir Singh Kansakar in his thought provoking article on *Indo Nepal Migration*, some facets, in *Himalaya Today* has traced the history of Nepalese migration into India, and its impact on the economy of Darjeeling.

Late Dr. C.B.Mamoria and Dr. Satish Mamoria, in their book, *Dynamics of Industrial Relations* have dealt with a highly complex, ever changing and expanding field of industrial relations and is based upon theory, principles and practices developed in

India and elsewhere. It throws a flood of light on different aspects of the subject, which is divided, in six parts. Part I deals with growth of the industrial work force. Part II is devoted to trade unions and covers their organisation, structure, origin, functions, approaches, growth and problems and the role of workers' education in fostering their interest in unions. Part III to VI deals with concept and organisation of industrial relations, to preventive techniques of industrial conflicts, various legislative enactments bearing on industrial disputes.

V.P. Michael in his book *Industrial Relations in India and Workers' involvement in Management* has extensively dealt with the cordial worker-management relations and unveils the relevant areas in which harmonious relations deserve special attention.

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PLAN OF THE STUDY

The study is arranged in seven broad chapters. Each chapter is again divided into several sections covering the specific dimensions of the study.

First chapter deals with the historical background of Darjeeling. Prior to the year 1816 the whole of the territory known as British Sikkim belonged to Nepal, which had won it by conquest from the Sikkimese. By a treaty signed between Nepal and the British at Sugauli at the end of 1816, Nepal ceded the 4000 square miles of territory to the British, which in turn by a treaty signed at Titaliya in 1817, was handed over to the Raja of Sikkim.

Later in 1835, the Sikkim-putti, the aged Raja unconditionally handed over a strip of hill territory to the British. About fifteen years after this the relation between Sikkim and the British Government had been far from satisfactory..

The British Policy regarding the administration of territories of India did not provide a uniform system of administration. The District was made a scheduled District by the Act of 1874. The scheduled districts were not place within the ambit of the general laws and were applied only with modification or in part. The Government of India Act 1919, brought all the scheduled districts under the Backward tract, and as such, Darjeeling District was declared a partially excluded area till the end of British rule in India.

The Administrative history of the district reveals that the rulers never allowed the district to come within the national mainstream and within the purview of general administration. It becomes quite evident that the British government followed a policy of segregating the district from the administrative, legislative, and judicial system of Bengal.

Chapter 2 deals with the recruitment of labourers in tea gardens and its impact on the economy.

Availability of Cheap labour and relatively easy access of land for cultivation have contributed largely to the phenomenal growth of tea industry in Darjeeling.

The Large-scale migration of workers from eastern Nepal provided cheap labour and in the absence of any organization and leaders, the labourers depended completely on the mercy of the garden managers. The liberal land policy also favoured the tea industry to settle and develop.

European settlers like Dr. Grant, the Barnes Brothers, Capt. Mason, Capt. Samler, Mr. Smith, Dr. Brougham, Mr. Martin, Mr. James White, Mr. George Watt Christison, Mr. W.O. Brien Ansell were instrumental in enhancing the growth of Darjeeling tea industry.

Between 1870-1890, the pattern of garden management began changing, which affected the production to a large extent. From the pioneer planters the garden came under the hands of well-organised limited companies or tea "managing agents". This severely affected the management as the gardens changed hands from one set of speculative owners to another set of owners. After the British left most of the new planters came to business by accumulation of profit either in wholesale trade or in speculative business. An analysis of 27 elected joint stock companies of Darjeeling reveals that between 1940 to 1970 while the number of non-Indian directors decline from 112 to only 11, the number Indian directors showed a corresponding increase from 5 to 85 in the period. However, of these Indian directors with a merchant background shot up from 2 in 1940 to 53 in 1965. In any case the directors with this background completely changed the nature of management.

Apart from quick profit tendency there had been a new phenomenon in the area. Very often there is a quick change of gardens from one set of directors to another set of directors. The frequency of change of ownership in Darjeeling hill area is much higher than in Dooars, or in Terai. For example, in between 1965, 55, 67% of Darjeeling tea gardens were affected by this change of owners, whereas in Doors it is 36.54% and in Terai 22.72%. Gardens have changed hands from one set of speculative owners to another set of owners. In the meantime the odd owners have stripped the gardens of leaves and vitality. It is very often stated that Governments, both Central and State, are more interested to take the surplus of the gardens in the form of various taxes. Governments never cared to look to the health of the gardens. The Government for replantation of tea bushes through different schemes of the tea Board took some half hearted measures. But according to its own admission money given to the planters were not used in the gardens and were siphoned off to other speculative industries. The money or subsidies given to the fertilizers were either misused or sold in open markets or not utilised at all. In fact Tea Board is mainly a lobby of the big planters.

The Darjeeling tea industry suffered two major setbacks during and after the two World wars. Most of the experienced British planters enrolled to fight for the crown. The planters from Assam, who were unaware of the peculiar characteristics of the Darjeeling plantations, filled in the void. The Assam planters the China jat plantation too congested and planted out vast areas at all elevations with Assam seeds like Betjan, Khoribari, and Dangri Manipuri. Even in some cases, alternate lines of bushes in the China tea sections were uprooted for easy movement of the pluckers and supervisors. Thus, the Darjeeling Tea plantations suffered considerably at the hands of inexperienced Assam planters.

After the Second World War, the British Ministry of Food Purchases, stopped buying tea, leading to a major marketing problems and barring Calcutta/London auctions, there was no other outlet for Darjeeling tea. The Darjeeling tea industry suffered its second set back with the slump of 1952 when the prices knocked at the London Auctions and could not even cover the chipping costs. In the Calcutta auctions teas were withdrawn, without any bids, resulting in heavy financial losses. Subsequently with the independence of the country, the Parliament and State Legislature passed a number of Labour Welfare Measures, such as Minimum Wages Act, Plantation Labour Act that escalated costs making the condition worst. This had an adverse effect as because a Large section of the British owners felt that their properties were no longer economically viable and by 1956, a large number of gardens changed hands to local Indian entrepreneurs who were inexperienced and had never seen tea bushes previously. They were in dilemma and faced an uphill task in running gardens.

The Nepalese who flocked to Darjeeling in considerable numbers were offered many job 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

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13 DEC 2005

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

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.

Chapter 3 deals with the economic condition of the tea garden labourers in the early phase in the absence of strong trade union. 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.

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.

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.

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. 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. 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.

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 discontentment 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 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.

Chapter 4 deals with the early phase of trade union movement and the role of political parties in the Darjeeling Hills. As the freedom movement gathered momentum and the independence of the country was becoming almost a certainty in the forties, the apprehension of the hill men about their fate in free India was growing. This period saw the formation of the two important political parties, 1) the All India Gorkha League and 2) the Darjeeling District Committee of the Communist Party of India. The policies and activities of these two political parties shaped the politics of the hill areas. Even the Darjeeling Branch of Indian National Congress, which was formed after independence, followed the path taken by these political parties so far as the hill question was concerned.

Despite their difference in ideology and policies, both the All India Gorkha League and Communist Party of India, Darjeeling Unit, shared the common feeling of apprehension regarding the fate of the Indian Gorkhas. The primary concern of the two political parties was to protect the socio-economic and political interests and the survival of the Nepali community as a distinct Indian community. The issue of Indian Nepalese asking for some special attention and treatment had become a sensitive issue in the hill areas by that time that no political parties could ignore it. The survival as viable political parties, and to extend their mass bases, these political parties had to present themselves as representatives of the Gorkha interests.

The origin of hill areas trade unions – the Darjeeling Tea Garden Workers Union, the Darjeeling Chia Kaman Shramik Sangh and National Union of Plantation Workers' has been initiated and their growth and development influenced by three political parties, the Communist Party of India, Gorkha League and the Indian National Congress. All trade unions mentioned are mainly concerned with the Darjeeling Tea Industry.

Communist Party of India mainly dominates the All India Trade Union Congress. This political party was the first to come into the picture of tea estate. The Gorkha League is a regional political party and the Darjeeling Chia Kaman Shramik Sangh is affiliated to it. The National Union of Plantation Workers' affiliated to the Indian National Trade Union Congress was established by Indian National Congress. Political Unionism has been a factor of paramount importance in the historical growth of Trade Unionism in tea estate. They have played a decisive role in the origin, growth and development of trade unions for tea plantation workers'. The division of the trade union movement in hill areas is along ideological lines. Operational strategies of each of trade union a group is determined by the political party it represents.

The trade union movement in the tea gardens of Darjeeling Hills passed through many ups and downs. The evolutionary process was a long – drawn one. 'From 1969 a trend is discernible as because in all important wage negotiations the trade unions jointly met the employers' associations like Indian Tea Association, Indian Tea Planters' Association, and Tea Association of India. The movement achieved its objective in making workers better aware of their intrinsic rights and succeeded in generating an all pervasive class consciousness. The labourers were represented by different associations like Indian National Trade Union Congress, All India Trade Union Congress, United Trade Union Congress, Zilla Cha Bagan Workers' Union, National Union of Plantation Workers, Dooars Cha Bagan Workers' Union, and the West Bengal Cha Sramik Union etc.

The trend which started in 1969, regarding important issues were the holding of Tripartite Conference in Calcutta wherein the important problems of shrinkage of employment, contract labour, extra leaf rate, fixation of Thika and closed gardens were

discussed. It was decided in the conference that the contractors' labour shall not be employed for work of a perennial nature, such as plucking, pruning, sickling, hoeing and plantation of new tea. It was decided that temporary labourers might be employed if permanent labourers are not available for these works. It was also agreed upon not to employ temporary workers for more than six months in a year. Further, these temporary workers would be employed on the same wages and paid variable dearness allowance and given the same task as applicable to the permanent workers. They should be entitled to any national and festival holidays, which might fall during the period of their employment. They were entitled to get the same medical facilities as the permanent workers.

A similar Tripartite Agreement was reached in a conference held in 1970, and rules regarding casual leave, annual leave with pay etc. were discussed. Further quota regarding firewood and fuels was increased.

In 1971, it was decided by the government of India that a uniform scheme of retirement benefit for employees and workers should be enacted. The tea garden employers were not keen to accept the compulsory gratuity Act of 1971. The result was serious disturbances in many gardens. The issue was settled in a tripartite settlement in the year 1971. The trade unions raised issues like building houses in the gardens. With regard to Kutcha houses the employers assured proper and adequate repairs. After a protracted discussion the strike notice served by the coordination committee was withdrawn.

The trade union activities became very important during the whole of the sixties and the seventies. Consequently the planters have been forced to give bonus and fulfill some of the statutory obligations. Bonus issues led to strikes and lock-outs in various

gardens. However in respect to construction of houses, the trade unions in the Darjeeling hills have not shown the aggressiveness that was found in some of the industries in West Bengal.

With the emergence of political unionism in the hill areas, the trade union movement received further fillip. The earlier political parties, the Communist, Gorkha League, and the Congress as of now, discovered in the tea workers their vote bank. Their viewing with one another in the game of political - upmanship through their respective Trade unions and movement - the welfare of the workers being the sole objective, notwithstanding has formed an interesting part of the study. Legislation of Trade Union in the early fifties and the emergence of militant trade unionism from 1955-69 has received due attention forming as they are the inevitable series of the on-going movement. The trade union movement was a movement, which encompassed the entire hills necessitating if not enforcing changes, big or small, in the erstwhile organizations. The leaders of the unions were not of working class origin. These leaders normally came from the political parties as because the workers were not capable of handling trade union activities on their own. The unions negotiated their ways into field of wage fixation, social welfare, bringing innovations and vitality. Leadership will continue to play a dominant role in the future of the labour movement of the tea gardens. Strikes and lockouts in Darjeeling tea gardens have not been alarming in terms of production loss. Such strikes are principally sympathetic response to their political parties. For a healthy environment in Darjeeling hills, management should come forward in motivating the working class and explore participative management to do away with the simmering mistrust of the workers towards the management. Participative management is especially suitable at the sick unit level when existing managerial systems have either disintegrated or collapsed. Trade unions

have important role in preparing the ground for workers' participation in management, as this can lead to development of human potential and the greatest impetus to improvement of quality of life. Trade unions should work for elimination of inter-union rivalry and set up an ideal and act as a model in hill areas.

Chapter 5 deals with the change of ownership of tea gardens and its impact on the health of the tea industry in the hills. The frequent changes of ownership had an adverse effect on the workers too, as the grievances of the workers could not be properly ventilated. The industry received sudden setback during the first world war of 1904. However, the situation changed after the end of the war owing to rapid expansion of export market. The transition from war to peace was marked by a short-lived but serious depression in the tea industry.

The onset of Second World War altered the whole pattern of demand and supply. The transfer of ownership from foreign to Indian companies started during the Second World War. Changes in ownership pattern received further impetus after the termination of II world war, when the government set up a number of reconstruction committees to plan for post war development. After independence, the socialistic concept of mixed came into existence characterised by planning and control of the economy and the gradual Indianisation of foreign investment in the country. The mixed economy also led to a plethora of legislations and controls affecting all aspect of tea industry. The introduction of the government's five year plans led the agency houses to believe that they would no longer be free to pursue their self interests unfettered, rather they would have to abide by the government policies and programmes. The most crippling of regulations came in the form of provisions of Indian Companies Act 1956 and its 1960

amendment, particularly the sections relating to managing agency. The foreign owned tea companies were compelled to sell the gardens to the Indians. The proposed action of Indianisation of sterling companies took into effect from December 1976 onwards. This led to significant changes in structure and organisation of Darjeeling tea industry. There was a smooth switchover from British to Indian management. The frequent changes of ownership resulted in complete stagnation of the industry, and gradually sickness enveloped the entire industry. Sickness in gardens became a common phenomenon owing to a combination of factors like, Old Age of bushes, speculative character of merchant background planters, Bank finance and Liquidity crisis, and labour unrest.

Chapter 6 deals with the recent changes in trade union after the Gorkha National Liberation Front movement and its impact on the tea gardens. The Gorkha National Liberation Front movement in Darjeeling began in April 1986 and continued till September 1988, when it was finally called off after a tripartite agreement between the Centre, West Bengal Government and the Gorkha National Liberation Front, to form the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council. For nearly two years, the Gorkha National Liberation Front movement rocked the hills. The movement affected the life and economy of Darjeeling in various ways. An overwhelming majority of tea garden labourers had joined the Gorkha National Liberation Front from Communist Party of India (Marxist). The Communist Party of India (Marxist) openly admitted that it had ceased to be a political force not only in the towns, but in some of the tea gardens as well, where authority had passed on to the Gorkha National Liberation Front.

The Gorkha National Liberation Front felt the need for an organised trade union to channelise the representations of the majority body of workers in the tea estates.

There have been rapid re-emergence of the Mazdoor union with the return of normalcy, and the glimpse of the rainbow after the storm. Many changes have been witnessed in the Trade Union Front, and new Unions have come in the picture after the agitation. They are 1)Himalayan Plantation workers Union, 2) Darjeeling Terai Dooars Chia kaman Mazdoor Union, 3) Darjeeling Terai Dooars Chia kaman Staff and sub-staff Association, 4) Janashakti Plantation Trade Union, 5) Darjeeling Dooars Shramik Sangathan, 6) Darjeeling Pahari Chiyabari Karmachari Sangathan.

The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, the Planters' Association and the Trade Unions have much in common by way of aspirations of the glory of Darjeeling. It is in transitional phase and definitely moving in the right direction.

The summary of findings of the present study and some concluding observations and futuristic projections are presented in Chapter seven, which is the final and the concluding chapter. Appendices and select Bibliography follow this chapter.

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