

## **CHAPTER – VI**

### **SOCIO - ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF THE PEOPLE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Study of socio- economic structure is urgently necessary for making all round plans of tea gardens. It plays an important role in the areal development and economic upliftment of the people. Physical factors have greatly contributed to a good yield rate and to concentrate the population within a very limited space in tea gardens whereas the socio-economic factors have influenced the development of tea gardens and the standard of living of the people with respect to individual.

#### **6.1 SOCIO- ECONOMIC FUNCTIONS**

This chapter deals with different socio- economic functions their distribution and their availability. Socio – economic functions like health, education, family welfare and planning, house type and sanitation, electricity, market, communication, water supply and recreation.

##### **6.1.1 HEALTH SERVICE**

Health is the positive state of well being of an individual. It involves not only the medical factors but also social and economic factors. Every labourer employed in this industry is given full facilities with regard to their health. A well equipped hospital is there in all the tea gardens. A doctor accompanied by a pharmacist, a nurse and a mid- wife is always there to attend the patients. It has indoor accommodation of around 10 to 20 beds in every tea garden. In severe cases patients are forwarded to North Bengal Medical College Hospital by the garden ambulance.

It is interesting to note that as most of the labourers are tribal, they do not take medicines for minor diseases. They generally use herbal products. At the time of delivery post natal care is remarkable in Santal and Munda society. They make the child bald at the time of birth and wash the child properly. Nepalese have different custom. They put the child in a room and very carefully cover the baby for two to three days. Most of the tribes of the region feed their children with the juice of green tea leaves which has tremendous medicinal value.

##### **6.1.2 EDUCATION**

Education plays an important role in the socio economic development of an area. It is only by providing education that awareness can be created amongst the people. Proper education creates in man the faculty of reasoning to distinguish between right and wrong.

The garden management provides for the education of its workers a primary school, where children from class 1 to class IV are being taught. But for higher school level tea garden people usually goes to the nearby town Bagdogra or Siliguri. Apart from this, there are some adult education centers and night schools which were introduced during 1990 – 1994. There are a large number of school dropouts especially in the case of females. This is due to child employment. These children help their parents in household work as well as do plucking work in the fields rather than going to schools.

It is revealed from study that only 10 to 15 percent of the total people can at least sign their names. Out of these only 20 percent of the total respondent had formal education and the remaining can sign their names. Only 15.65 percent of the total respondents have studied up to primary level and 15.65 percent have crossed the primary level but could not cross the Madhyamik level. Only 0.87 percent of the total respondents passed the Madhyamik level. There was no graduate found in the sub staff labour level.

It is seen that lack of proper educational facilities in most of the tea gardens has greatly influenced the level of literacy of workers. But at the same it is noticed from field study that the planters as well as many NGO's are striving really hard for the betterment of education by opening new schools in these areas. Other than this, adult education centers, type writing, radio, television and watch repairing centers, carpentry shops which impart informal education are also located in these areas.

### **6.1.3 FAMILY SIZE, WELFARE AND PLANNING**

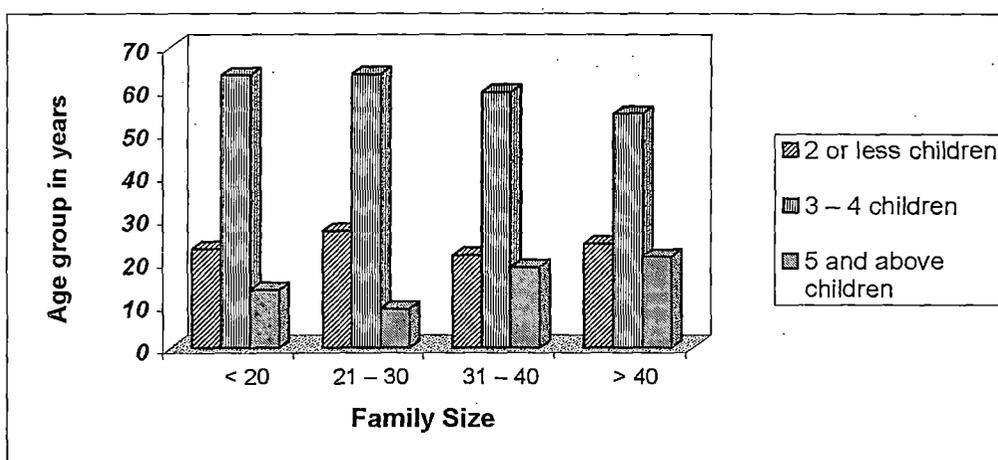
Size of family is important to study economic status of the household, because it influences the number of working force in different economic activities in a family. In rural areas, children are not spared they usually enter the working force at an early age. Females participate in different economic activities in large number. Larger the size of the family, higher is the number of working force and earning members. The size of a family usually depends on various factors like fertility, mortality and migration. It also depends on availability of suitable cultivable lands and job opportunities.

Family welfare and planning are very important for the plantation workers. Analysis of the family planning system in the tea gardens is essential as it reveals the social condition of the workers.

**Table 6.1 Percentage distribution of workers on ideal family size by age of the workers**

Age group (in years)	2 or less children	3 – 4 children	5 and above children	All groups children
< 20	23.08	63.46	13.46	100.00
21 – 30	27.17	63.77	9.06	100.00
31 – 40	21.56	59.63	18.81	100.00
> 40	24.24	54.55	21.21	100.00
Total	24.01	60.35	15.54	100.00

**Graphical Representation showing Family size**



**Fig 6.1**

Analysis of data on what the respondent considers as the ideal family size by the age of the respondent is presented in table 6.1. Only 15.54 percent of the workers in tea gardens indicated that their ideal family size would consist of 5 or more children. About 60.35 percent indicated that 3 or more children would be an ideal and 24.01 percent reported having 2 or less would be ideal. Although there are no significant differences in the responses by the age of the respondents, it is perhaps noteworthy that majority of persons in the age group 21 to 40 years consider smaller number of children as ideal. In other words, their attitude is favourable for the small family norm and further family planning methods to be accepted.

About 75 percent of the couples know about family planning / family welfare. However, only 18 percent of the eligible couples are currently practicing family planning / family welfare methods.

There is a relatively greater prevalence of terminal methods (i.e. vasectomy and tubectomy) than the temporary methods (i.e. use of conventional contraceptives and oral pills).

#### 6.1.4 HOUSE TYPE AND SANITATION

The families of permanent labourers are provided with housing facilities by the management free of cost. There are generally two types of houses pucca and kuchha. Kuchha houses are generally made of local wood and bamboo with thatched roof and the pucca houses are made of cement and tin roof with one storied. These labour quarters have two to three rooms, one kitchen, one dining space and bathroom. The houses are provided with electricity and proper ventilation. Most of the houses in the study area are pucca houses.



**Photo 6.1 : Kutchha House**



**Photo 6.2 : Pucca House**

Sanitation system is not up to the mark in the study area. Most of the latrines are kuccha. Though the Plantation Labour Act plays an important role to improve the latrines and drinking water facilities but the labourers are still deprived of the benefit. The sewerage system is mostly based on conventional water carriage system. But presently sewerage system has been constructed to cover 80 percent of the tea gardens in the study area. The garden people generally use the open air sanitation.

### 6.1.5 ELECTRICITY

Electricity plays an important role in the agricultural production and development of rural economy. Electricity is required in every tea garden for plantation, production as well as for domestic purposes.

It is noticed that most of the power is utilized for plantation and for production very less is allotted for domestic consumption, which indicates that the area is backward. Though electricity is provided in all the gardens but there is need of much more.

**Table 6.2 Power supply in tea gardens**

<b>Types of power Supply in the households</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>No. of tea gardens</b>	<b>Percentage to total</b>
< 25 percent	Poor	10	23.81
25 to 50 percent	Medium	25	59.52
50 to 75 percent	High	4	9.52
75 to 100 percent	Very High	3	7.14
<b>Total</b>		<b>42</b>	<b>100.00</b>

In table 6.2 it has been revealed that all the tea gardens of the study area are more or less electrified. Out of 42 tea gardens 10 (23.82%) has poor electric facilities. These gardens include Lohagarh, Azamabad, Dagapur, Sukna. Most of the gardens are under the medium category and few are in the high to very high category which justifies that all the tea gardens are more or less electrified.

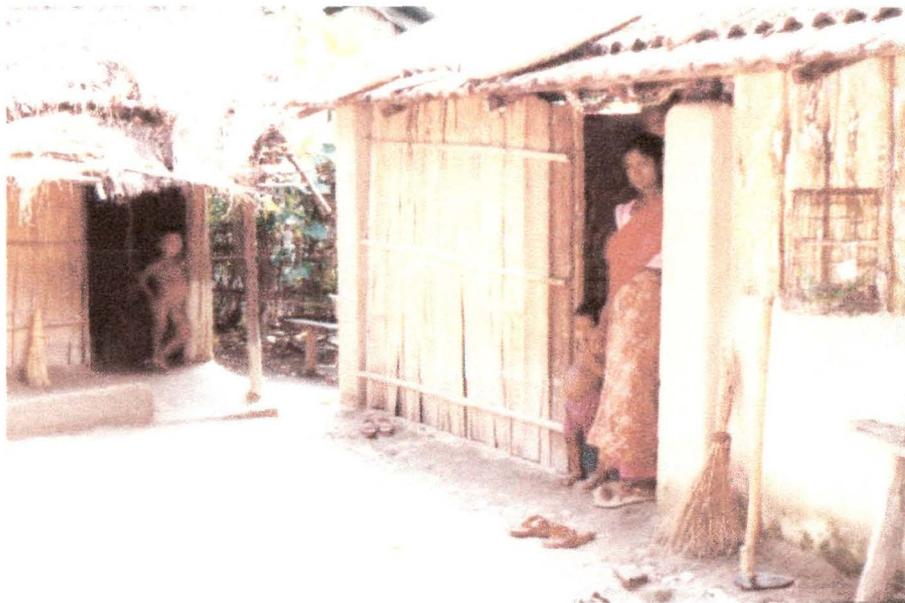


Photo 6.3 : Semi Pucca House

**Graphical Representation showing House Types of the study area**

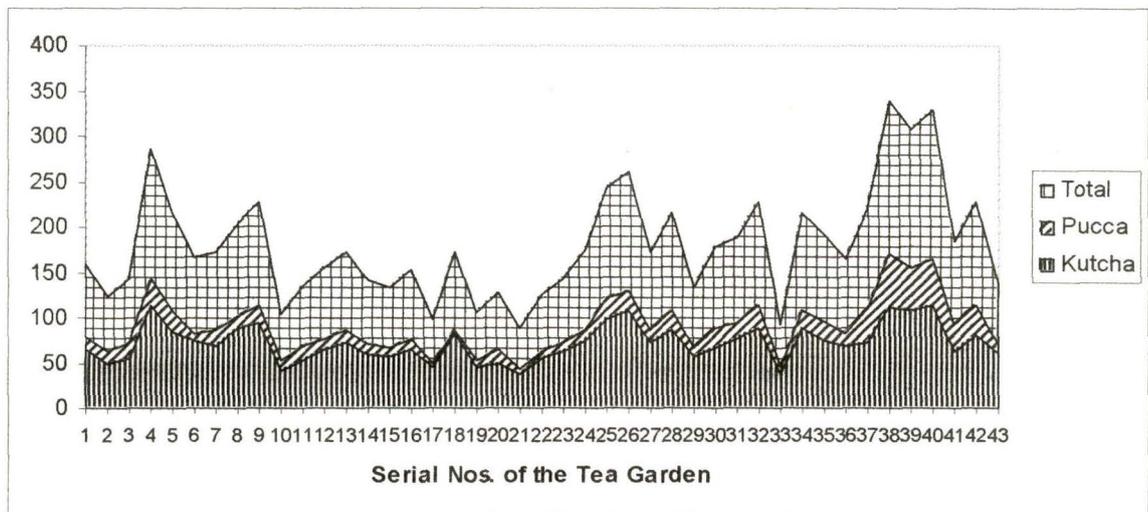


Fig 6.2

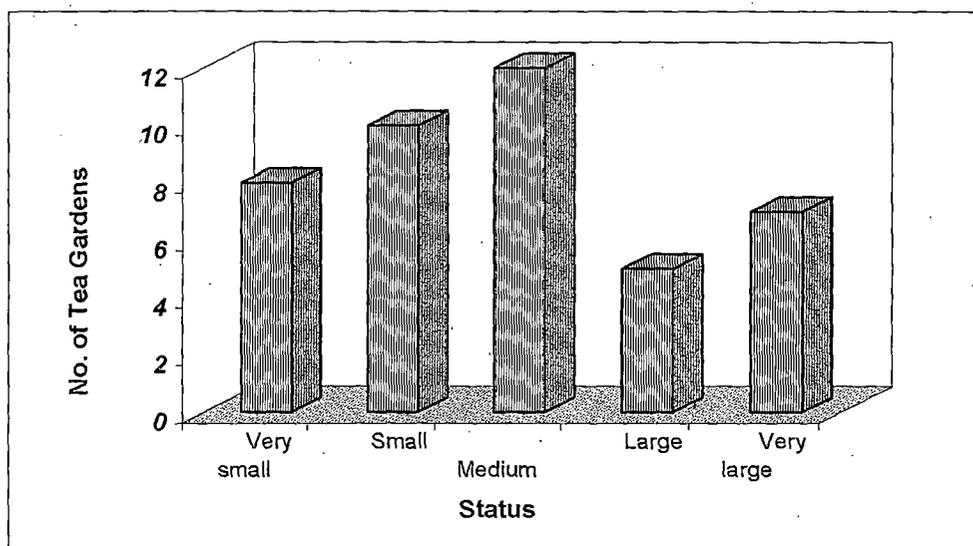
**6.1.6 MARKET**

The market centers play an important role for the people of the tea gardens. Market provides the materials of daily need to the workers. Market center is the lowest service center in the hierarchy of settlements (Haggett 1967). All the markets are based upon time period that is morning, noon and evening. The duration of time fluctuates with market activities. For the field study it is revealed that market centers of the area are poorly developed. Most of the marketing is done by the woman workers.

**Table 6.3 Number of tea gardens and their distance from daily market**

Distance from nearest daily market in km	Category	No. of tea gardens	Percentage of tea gardens to total
< 2	Very small	8	19.02
2 - 4	Small	10	23.82
4 - 6	Medium	12	28.58
6 - 8	Large	5	11.91
> 8	Very large	7	16.67
<b>Total</b>		<b>42</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Graphical Representation showing Distance from daily market**



**Fig 6.3**

It is clear from table 6.3 that 19.02 percent of the tea gardens are within 0-2 km from the daily market which is a very small percentage. These tea gardens are Kiran Chandra, Kamala, Sannyasistan, Merry View. The tea gardens which are by the side of the main road are in a good position availing the modern facility of markets. But gardens that are situated away from the main road do not have proper availability to markets. Though there are weekly or bi-weekly “haat” within or around every tea garden where workers, buy their minimum necessities. But for larger requirements they come to nearby town Bagdogra or Siliguri. It can be seen that majority of the tea garden workers in the study area have to move from medium to very large distance for marketing in the nearest market. (Fig 6.3)

The retail services form an important socio-economic function catering to the daily needs of the people of an area. Easy availability and accessibility of retail services of the users promote the standard of development (Jana, 1986). Grocery stores and tea stalls are some of the common retail services available in the tea gardens. The distribution of retail services in the tea gardens indicates the backwardness of the area.

#### **6.1.7 TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION**

Transport and proper communication facility is an important factor which influences the establishment and development of rural areas to a great extent. A transportation system generally serves two purposes namely accessibility and mobility.

An effective transport system is indispensable for the effective utilization of resources and mobility of people and goods. The social, political and economic development of a region is dependant on quick, easy and smooth transport system. The present day socio-economic structure of the world is largely dependant on the interplay of various transportation system-railways, roadways, airways, waterways and pipelines plus the communication and postal system and publications (Singh 1998).

Roads are the principal communication system in this area. The roads may be divided into three types metalled and unmetalled. The N.H 31 runs through the area. Apart from the national highway the hill cart road runs from Siliguri to Darjiling. A few tea gardens are connected by these metalled roads. The road connection is significantly low in these garden areas. Most of the gardens have unmetalled roads. The people in the tea gardens are dependant primarily on cycle or walking. Though every tea garden have their own vehicle facilities for transporting green leaves to the factory or finished tea to the markets but they do not have for domestic purpose. Bus service is also not up to the mark in the area as compared to the whole district. Second means of communication is the railways. The North Frontier Railways serves the region.

Other means of transport are kucha and temporary roads. The garden people use temporary path through the open fields for saving time and distance to go to the market or schools. The labourers can travel 5 to 10 km. They carry their goods on their head and shoulders from the local market. There is no head post office in the area but there are sub post offices. As a whole it can be said that transport and communication facilities are not satisfactory in the entire area.

### 6.1.8 WATER SUPPLY

Water supply as well as source of water is an urgent need to human being. There is an adequate supply of water in the tea gardens. There are usually three types of source of water available in the tea gardens- surface water, dug wells and deep tube wells.

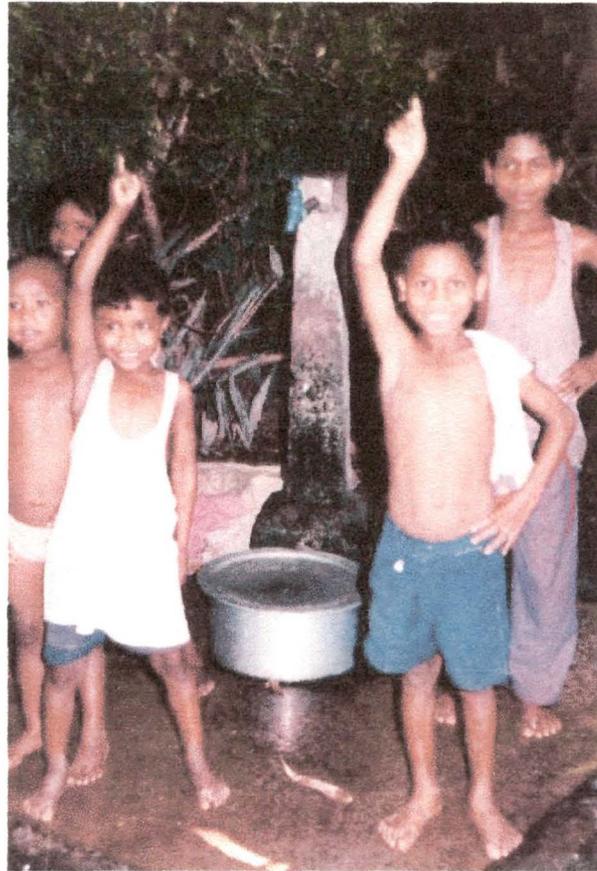
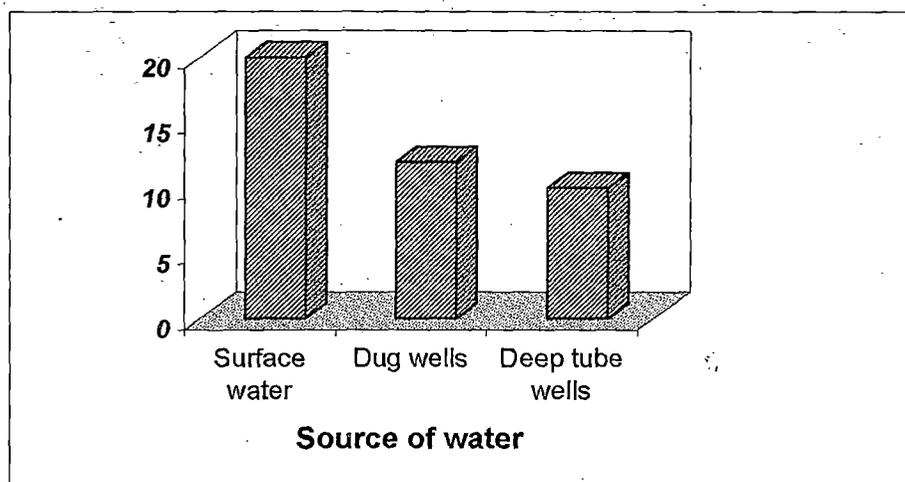


Photo 6.4 : Water Point

Table 6.4 Source of water available in the tea gardens

Source of water	No. of tea gardens	Percentage of tea gardens to total
Surface water	20	47.62
Dug wells	12	28.57
Deep tube wells	10	23.81
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100.00</b>



**Fig 6.3**

Table 6.4 reveals that 47.62 percent of the tea gardens gets tap water, 28.57 uses dug wells and the rest 23.81 % uses deep tube wells. (Fig 6.3)

The tea gardens have running tap water for 24 hours for drinking. The tanks and wells are chlorinated frequently. The labourers use the well water for bathing purposes and washing clothes and utensils. The water from the deep tube wells is generally used for irrigation purpose. Though there is supply of water but it is not sufficient to the demand of the people.

#### **6.1.9 RECREATION AND OTHERS**

The main source of entertainment in the tea gardens is watching films. The workers go to the nearby cinema halls. Football matches are also organized where labourers participate. Holi, Dusshera, Diwali are the main festivals celebrated in the tea gardens. Most of the income of the labourers is spent on drinking and merry making.

Marriage is one of the most important customs of plantation workers and the marriage ceremony is performed in an ethnic tribal manner which is common in the tea gardens of this area. Though educationally backward, Santals have a very advanced attitude towards individuals in a society. They have a free society where girls and boys mix freely before marriage. Pre marital sex is not looked down upon in this community provided it does not result into pregnancy. But even in such cases the child is legitimized by marriage of the girl. Marriage negotiation in a Santal community is organized by Ryabar (mediator) and initiative is taken by groom. Bride price is given to the parent of the bride.

It is also seen in a tribal community that the bride before marriage, comes to the house of the would-be in-laws, and resides with them for 2 to 3 months to adjust herself with her new family. The system of divorce and re marriage is also prevalent in this community.

Although there have been changes in other tribal societies in North Bengal but the plantation workers have still not made any major transformation.

## **6.2 ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF THE TEA WORKERS**

In 1946, the Labour Investigation Committee stated that because of the war, wages have not kept pace with living costs. It recommended improvements in working and living conditions. After independence the Indian government set up the Industrial Committee on Plantations to frame a labour code to regulate the employment conditions of workers. Based on its recommendations, The Plantations Labour Act was enacted on 1st September 1954.

It has been observed that the wages of the tea garden workers were extremely low during the pre independence period. In 1948, the total cash wages of a male worker was one rupee one anna and 6 paise (including basic hazira and other allowances). In 1950, the government of West Bengal had set up a minimum wage advisory Committee for tea plantations.

In 1952, the Committee fixed the minimum wage of a male worker as Rs 1.16 per day. In 1959, it increased to Rs 1.18. In 1960, the central government appointed the Central Wage Board for tea plantation. The Board took about six years and three months to declare its final recommendation. However, during this period the Board declared two interim increments. By the final recommendation of the Wage Board, the daily wage of a male worker increased at a very slow rate either through the recommendations of bipartite meeting or through the demand of the trade union. By June 1973, the daily wage of a male worker increased to Rs 2.94. For the revision of wages, the government of West Bengal set up the second minimum wage fixing Committee in July 1973. A few increments were granted by the Committee during its four years term. But it could not come to any decision regarding the new rate of wage of workers. Ultimately in May 1975, a Consensus was reached. The Committee granted a yearly increment of 45 paise per year in the daily wage of an adult worker for the next two years with effect from July 1975. Finally the Committee recommended that the wage of all daily rated workers would be increased by one rupee annually with effect from July 1975. Thus by June 1979 the daily wage rate of an adult male worker stood at Rs 6.24. Since then the rates of wages of daily rated workers in West Bengal Tea Industry have been fixed by tripartite agreements. The term of every tripartite agreement is three years. Till July 1994 six tripartite agreements had been made on the wage issue. They were in June 1977, May 1980, August 1983, June 1987, August 1990 and July 1994. The tripartite agreement of August 1990 expired in June 1983 but the next agreement was signed in July 1994. During the first two years the wage of daily rated workers would be increased by Rs 2.50 annually and in the third year by Rs 2.00. It was also agreed

that the workers will be provided compensatory settlement money for the period December 1993 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 1994. After this agreement the daily wage of an adult worker stood at Rs 21.80 in July 1994(Labour Gazette 1994).

### **6.3 WAGE PATTERN OF WORKERS**

The Plantation Labour Act gave tea workers the same benefits as industrial labour. The quality of life of the plantation workers is thus far higher than that of their counterparts in other industries in India in terms of wages and other benefits. Social overhead costs, a relevant indicator, are the highest in India at around US \$ 0.75 per kg as against \$ 0.43 in Kenya, \$ 0.15 in Malawi and 0.64 in Sri Lanka.

Most of the workers in tea plantations are daily rated workers. They constitute about 89 percent of the total work force. Daily rated workers (both male and female) are mostly engaged in plucking jobs. Besides plucking they, however, are employed in other types of jobs as paniwallas, mallies, and sweepers. The payment is given on a particular day of the week. The workers are paid about 21.74 per day.

The Bigha workers (casual) are generally paid the same money during the peak season that is May to September. Daily rated workers engaged in other jobs in a garden other than plucking and also those engaged in factories get additional compensation over and above the daily rate of wage. Almost 50 percent of the workforce consists of women who earn the same wages as men.

### **6.4 ECONOMIC FACILITIES PROVIDED BY THE MANAGEMENT**

The Plantation Industry has made it a point to foster its employee's growth. Miles of green tea bushes are noticed in the study area which provides a clean and healthy environment for workers. Within the estates it has been noticed that workers and their families are provided with free housing, medical facilities, education, and transport. Apart from daily wages the daily rated workers are provided with subsidized ration and firewood. Other than this chappals, umbrella, blanket is also given every year. Apart from this 400 gm of tea is supplied to the workers free every month. The workers enjoy the facility of bonus once in a year before Durga Puja.

#### 6.4.1 RATION

**Table 6.5 Ration Calculation Chart / Tea Association**

<b>No. of days work</b>	<b>Charge for permanent worker</b>	<b>Dependents Adults</b>	<b>Minor</b>
	<b>Cost of (Rice+ Wheat)=Total</b>	<b>Cost of (Rice+ Wheat)=Total</b>	<b>Cost of (Rice+ Wheat)=Total</b>
6	0.40+0.91=1.31	0.40+0.58=0.98	0.20+0.29=0.49
5	2.00+3.65=5.65	2.00+2.33=4.33	1.00+1.16=2.16
4	3.60+6.40=10.00	3.60+4.08=7.68	1.80+2.04=3.84
3	5.20+9.15=14.35	5.20+5.83=11.03	2.60+2.91=5.51
2	6.80+11.90=18.70	6.80+7.58=14.38	3.40+3.79=7.19
1	8.40+14.65=23.05	8.40+9.33=17.73	4.20+4.66=8.86
0	10.00+17.40=27.40	10.00+11.08=21.08	5.00+5.54=10.54

Table 6.5 shows the monthly ration chart which the tea garden workers get.

**(i) Permanent Worker gets 6 days ration of 1 kg rice + 2260 gm wheat per head.**

**(ii) Dependants:** Adults above 14 years staying in the garden + going to school gets 1 kg rice + 1440 gm wheat. Minors below 14 years of age and dependant upon parents get 500 gm rice + 720 gm wheat.

**(iii) Temporary Workers:** 1 kg rice + 2260 gm wheat a week per head. Here the dependants are not given ration facility.

#### 6.4.2 FIREWOOD

The labourers get 2 ½ peel firewood in a year. Sub-staffs get 4 peels firewood in a year. Artisans get 6 peels firewood in a year. Staffs get 12 peels firewood in a year or 1 ½ cylinders / month. Management staff gets 1 ½ cylinders / month.

#### 6.4.3 HOLIDAYS

Paid National & Festival Holidays are given to the staff which includes Republic Day, Independence Day, Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Fagua, Id and Christmas. (Table 6.6)

**Table 6.6 Leave to the Staff**

Category of staff	Annual leave	Casual leave	Sick leave
Clerical & medical staff	20 days	15 days with pay. Not more than 5 days at a time but in extenuating circumstances it may be extended up to 10 days.	As per West Bengal Plantation Labour Rule - 1956.
Technician & staff	As per Plantation Labour Act 1951.	10 days as per standing order of which 9 days will be with pay. Not more than 2 days leave can be taken at a time.	As per West Bengal Plantation Labour Rule - 1956.
Monthly rated workers	As per Plantation Labour Act - 1951	10 days as per standing order of which 7 days with pay. Not more than 2 days leave at a time.	As per West Bengal Plantation Labour Rule - 1968.
Daily rated workers	As per Plantation Labour Act 1951.	As per standing order.	As per West Bengal Plantation Labour Rule - 1956.

**6.5 WOMEN IN TEA PLANTATION**

It has been noticed that the tea industry has always depended on women, given their skill in plucking the leaves from the tea bush. Fifty percent of the pluckers in the study area are women. Of a total of 1.1 million workers permanently employed in the industry, women account for about half a million. Under very harsh and taxing climatic and environmental conditions they perform some very important task with great sincerity and application.

A woman plucker has a strenuous working day which begins at 5 am. She first collects water for cooking and washing. She makes tea / lunch for the household by 6.30 am, batches the children and readies them for school, does her morning chore like cleaning the house, feeding the pets and by 8 am she is in the garden for plucking. Normally, by the time she returns it is 4.30 pm. She washes the family's dirty clothes, locks up the cow in its shed, and then settles down to cook the evening meal for the family. By the time dinner is over and she washes the dishes, it is 9 pm. By then she is too exhausted to do anything other than fall asleep instantly for tomorrow is yet another very strenuous day.

The social welfare programmes undertaken by their employers are gradually changing their low status within their community. The wives of tea planters today ensure there is no neglect of the diseased and the distressed. They take personal care of children in the crèches and per-

primary schools, patients in hospitals and homes for the disabled. They are engaged in helping the blind and the spastic community to become self – reliant. The tea ladies also demonstrate a concern for the welfare of the local people.

In earlier days, women were mostly engaged as tea pluckers, but now also work as managers, tea tasters, supervisors and union leaders. M.H Ashraff, former executive director, Tata Tea Ltd, says: ‘the plantation industry was the last bastion of male chauvinism so far as managerial staff was concerned. We decided that we would give an equal opportunity to girls for the post of estate assistant managers...we are not at all surprised to find that they have fitted in perfectly with plantation life and have been able to carry out their duties as efficiently as their male counterpart’. (The Heritage of Indian Tea, 2002)

## **CONCLUSION**

The socio- economic condition of the plantation workers are quite well to do. The image of the hungry, sick and exploited workers belong to history. There is a lot of difference there is a lot of difference between the living conditions of the early workers who laboured on tea plantations and those who work there now. The garden workers along with the staff including the Managers live in the tea gardens itself. The employees in the tea estates, along with their families, are entirely looked after for their housing, education, electricity, medicare, family welfare and entertainment needs.

India is afflicted by an ever-increasing population, which has created socio – economic and environmental problems. Although India cannot follow Chinese way of family planning, it is clear that something must be done to control the population. The Dooars Branch Indian Tea Association has implemented an innovation family welfare programme combining environmental sanitation, parasite control and people’s participation. The Family Welfare Education Programme was started in 1982. At the initial stage managers, trade unions and the medical staff were motivated. A mobile education unit explained the value and methods of family planning to workers and promoted it amongst them. However, workers still opted for terminal methods; contraception did not gather momentum and there was very little community participation. The programme was retailored on the basis of greater feedback.

Traditionally, community welfare was limited to charity or donations. There has now been a shift towards planned change, with the tea industry acting as facilitator. After a thorough discussion of the socio – economic factors, a discussion has been done on the interaction between people and management in the next chapter.