

CHAPTER III ; Problems of Recruitment and Organization of
Labour in Tea Industry.

Content :

- 3.1 Recruitment System.
- 3.2 Recruitment Legislation.
- 3.3 Category of Workers.
- 3.4 Organization Hierarchy.
- 3.5 Summary.

In the early days the planters found considerable difficulties in procuring adequate labour force for their gardens. Plantations areas were situated in far-off and unpopulated lands largely in jungles and hilly range with a damp climate and unhealthy surroundings. The places were abodes of snakes, tigers, elephants and other wild animals and were diseases like Malaria and Kala-zar were widely prevalent. People used to tremble in the name of working in the tea gardens situated far away from their villages. There was a feeling in the country that it would be "better to go to Andamans than to a tea garden".¹ Under such a state of working condition the recruitment of labourers presented a serious problem in the beginning of the industry.

3.1 Recruitment System

Recruitment is the first step in the employment of labour and the methods through which labourer is brought into industry has much to do with the ultimate success or failure

of such employment. In the beginning low wages and hazardous conditions of work provided strong disincentives for the local population to work in the tea plantations. Thus the industry had to depend entirely on various sources of agencies for recruitment of workers from outside. There were some recruiting agents in Assam, Sardars were in north-east India and Kanganies were in South India.²

The tea industry in Assam was started by colonial planters in 1839. As local labourers did not like to give up their easy going lives to do regular tea garden work, the bulk of the labour force required for the industry had to be imported. The British planters were aware of the fact that indentured labourers were recruited from the labour surplus areas of India and were sent to the plantations in Malaya, West Indies and other colonies. Thus, they looked for imported labour from the labour surplus areas to keep the industry growing as far as possible.³

The Assam Company recruited the first batch of labourers from Chotonagpur division in Bihar in 1841.⁴ Later bulk of the labour force was also recruited from Raigarh of Madhya Pradesh and from several feudatory States of Orissa. Experienced planters suggested recruitment of aboriginal tribes because such tribals were hardy and the rate of mortality was lower among them. Santals, Mundas, Oroans, Kharias, Gonds, Khonds, Kisang and Nagesians were the important tribals who were recruited.⁵

Tea plantations in Dooars started by 1876 when the population of the Dooars was very thin. The local people had plenty of land and were engaged in cereal food cultivation. They lived an easy life. So local men were not available for the arduous job of tea plantation and these people did not like to experience the life of a labourer in an industry. So like Assam, labour force had to be recruited from outside. Both the European and India tea planters had to do this. Within a short period the number of tribal people from Chotonagpur (Bihar), Madhya Pradesh, Madras began to increase and their number was considerable. Formerly, the labourers were supposed to go home after the expiry of the term of "contract", but mostly they settled in the Dooars permanently and were not in a position to go back to their villages.⁶

Darjeeling plantations was begun in 1835 on experimental basis and by 1856 development had advanced from the experimental to a more extensive and commercial stage.⁷ During the beginning of the industry the only human inhabitants of the District were a few hundred Lepchas and Sherpas. The Lepchas were known as the 'Rongpa' or 'ravine' folk, who are probably of Indo-Chinese in origin. These people lived in small isolated settlements and their main occupation was hunting and fishing. They did not like to give up their easy-going lives to do regular tea garden work. Besides they were not tillers of the soil, and preferred hunting and fishing to cultivation and plucking the tea leaves. Sherpas were not used to

agriculture or settled cultivation. Thus, the solution was in the recruitment of the Nepalese, but they were very shy; besides they had their own villages and land in Eastern Nepal or Southern Sikkim.⁸ But very soon the population of Nepal was rising rapidly and the economic pressure forced them to come out. Thus, a good number of Nepalis were compelled to migrate from Nepal and settled in Darjeeling district, and planters recruited all these labourers without formalities.⁹ Thus, in the hilly regions majority workers were Nepali immigrants.

In the Terai the population was mixed with a low proportion of tribal immigrants from Chotonagpur. The local people like Meches, Rajbansis etc. rarely worked in the tea plantations.

There were no specific legislation under which labourers could be recruited and forced to work in tea gardens until 1859. Recruitment was done in an unsystematic manner. Planters in most cases, have no more connection with recruitment than was involved in paying for the labour.

Before the legalisation of Sardari System of recruitment, the recruitment of labourers in Assam was done mainly through arkatis who employed dubious means to recruit unsuspecting tribals.¹⁰ The arkatis were mainly Baraiks or Ghasis who were landless craftsmen living in the villages, some of them were also Hindus and Muslims.¹¹ They tempted the workers with promises of high wages and other facilities and were taken to

the plantation areas. Some used very questionable methods, like intoxicating the workers or kidnapping the minors. Some wives were kidnapped from their husbands, and husbands from their families, leaving the members destitute and poverty stricken.¹²

The recruited workers were then sent off on a hazardous journey to the tea gardens. There was practically no roads or transport facilities in north-east India. It was about 6 to 10 weeks journey in those days from Calcutta to different regions of Assam and North Bengal where tea plantations had been taken up. In some cases recruits had to be taken by boats and steamers and they had to cover on foot 100 to 150 miles or so from the point of embarkation to reach the plantation areas; some were missing and deaths occurred on the ways.¹³ The mortality of labour in transit was very appalling. Griffiths stated that some 84,915 labourers landed in Assam between 1863 and 1866 of which over 30,000 died by January 1866.¹⁴ Again in tea gardens the recruits suffered from several cruelty and hardship. Housing facilities, medical facilities and food supply in the gardens were utterly inadequate. The result was that labourers died even after reaching the tea gardens. But once the labourers reached there, they were not allowed to return or even to communicate with the members of their families.

In 1962-63 a research was conducted by the Cultural Research Institute under the Ministry of Tribal Welfare of

the Govt. of West Bengal and published a bulletin, "Impact of tea industry on the life of the tribals of West Bengal" in 1964. We get the following description from this bulletin regarding recruitment of labourers and their subsequent settlement in the tea gardens :

"... Since the middle of the 18th Century i.e., at the initial stage of this industry, a huge number of natural labourers from different tribal belts of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa need to be collected every season by simply alluring them with the help of the 'brokers'. Only those tribals who did not have secured economy, e.g. the landless labourers were tempted to participate in this sort of migration although not voluntarily and only very few of them could manage to come back. The rest of them were either forced or tempted to settle down in the tea garden areas thereby keeping the manpower secured for the industry. Some settled voluntarily being very much attracted by the care-free life far away from the binding of their traditional way of life and also by the security of service in the gardens".¹⁵

From the above statement we get two main causes of migration to the tea gardens, viz, economic and noneconomic. Economic causes arised out of inctease of population and consequent pressure on the soil. This leaded Junior member of the families go out to earn when the ancestral holding became insufficient to support all. Besides indebttness was

another great stimulant to migration to the tea gardens. Non economic causes which sometimes operated were love of travel and change, domestic disagreements, hopes of obtaining lucrative employment as sardars.

The recruitment of labourers was very expensive, so the planters forced them to settle down in the tea garden areas for keeping the manpower secured for the industry. The planters also prevented the desertion of workers by Workmen's Breach of Contract Act, 1859. Under this Act the worker had to sign a contract agreeing to work in the tea gardens for a specified number of years. Criminal penalties of imprisonment or fine could be imposed on workers breaking their contract. The Act did not give the workers any protection against the planters. But this act was not applied to Bengal and only reserved for Assam.

In this respect we may mention the Statement of Darokanath Gangopadhaya, a Social Scientist", Tea Cultivation in Assam is a grand industry and it has largely contributed to the material prosperity of the produce If, in securing these advantages the immigrant labourers were subjected to such hardships as were not beyond human endurance, we would probably not have raise our voice ... "16

Recruitment to the Dooars and Terai was mainly done by the garden Sardars, i.e., men employed as labourers in the tea estates and sent back to their country with their employer's certificate countersigned by a magistrate authorising

them to recruit from their own country. The Sardar told his relations and friends of the wages, and life and conditions upon the tea gardens. Everything was discussed in details. The young people, those whom the land cannot support, listen to the accounts of the new life which is to be theirs, and finally they decided to accompany some recruiters, generally a relation or connection to Assam or to Bhutan, as they still called the Dooars. They were taken to adopt where the agent of the recruiting organisation examined them and enquired. No married girl was accepted unless her husband was with her. No minor was accepted without the approval of his parents.

The Sardars were paid Rs. 3/- to Rs. 5/- for every recruit obtained by them who works for a year. Recruits, on being recruited are given a settling allowance of Rs. 5/- to Rs. 10/-.¹⁷ The Sardars were usually accompanied by a garden Supervisor who supervised the recruitment and also kept an eye on the Sardars. This is because that the planters feared that if the Sardar was sent alone he would never return.¹⁸

The recruited workers of Dooars and Terai had always been free and under no contract or agreement.

In Darjeeling hills the vast majority of the present workers were born on the tea estates, and may be regarded as a permanently settled population, engaged in a hereditary and congenial occupation. No organised recruitment in Nepal for

employment in this district was permitted by the Nepal Durbar, and any fresh additions to the labour force employed in tea, for many years past, have consisted of quite Voluntary immigrants of Nepal or Sikkim, generally relations of those already in tea; and such additions from a very small percentage of the numbers employed, which are really kept up by the natural reproduction of the settled labourers. As practically all immigration from Nepal has been by complete families, there has been no disturbance of family life, and families have settled complete on a tea estate, and they are multiplied and prospered and in many cases have been subsequently joined by other families and relations from the same village in Nepal.

Although the Nepal Durbar was opposed to further immigration from that country, there was a certain drift (especially in seasons of scarcity) into the Darjeeling district for work on tea estates. This may be taken to indicate that conditions of life on the tea gardens were considered preferable to those in their native villages. Families once settled in tea very rarely return to Nepal.

Thus it is apparent that the economic hardship in the native land was the prime cause of migration of tea labourers. It is not possible to state the exact number of men and women workers separately during the different stages of migration of tea labourers in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts as no such systematic data are available. However, the total number

of immigration to Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts at different stages is available in 1951 census of Ashoke Mitra. This is presented in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2. This mainly relates to migration in tea estates of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts.

Table 3.1

Immigration to Jalpaiguri 1891-1951

Year	Actual population	Immigrants	% of immigrants to actual population
1891	4,33,334	44,329	10.23
1901	5,44,906	95,899	17.60
1911	6,61,282	1,52,174	23.01
1921	6,94,056	1,63,024	23.48
1931	7,39,160	1,58,757	21.48
1941	8,45,702	1,56,765	18.54
1951	9,14,538	2,78,842	30.49

Source : Mitra, A.K. Census of India, 1951, Vol. VI, Part 1A (West Bengal, Sikkim and Chandernagore), Report, Calcutta, 1953, p.264.

Table 3.1 shows that immigration to Jalpaiguri district increased continuously up to 1921. The figure of immigration increased by 116.34 per cent during 1891 to 1901 and by 58.18 per cent during 1901 to 1911. After 1911 the rate of increase of immigrants considerably decreased. In 1921 the immigrants composed of near about one fourth of the actual

population. Thereafter the composition of immigrants to the actual population decreased.

Table 3.2

Immigration to Darjeeling 1891-1951

Year	Actual population	Immigrants	% of immigrants to actual population
1891	2,23,314	1,19,670	53.59
1901	2,49,117	1,13,588	45.60
1911	2,65,550	1,11,269	41.90
1921	2,82,748	1,01,807	36.00
1931	3,19,635	1,00,700	31.50
1941	3,76,369	95,750	25.44
1951	4,45,260	1,00,311	22.53

Source : Mitra, A.K. Census of India, 1951, Vol. VI, Part 1A (West Bengal, Sikkim and Chandernagore), Report, Calcutta, 1953, p.268.

The figure of immigrants for 1951 includes 98,572 displaced persons. If this figure is excluded the figure of total immigration came to 1,80,270 which is 19.71 per cent of actual population.

Since the data on Table 3.1 mainly relates to migration in tea estates, we may conclude that the dependency of the industry on migrated labour largely relieved by 1921. After 1921 the industry had come to have a settled labour population who were begetting their successors. This had been possible

as the tea estates of the district had never encouraged much of indentured adult male labour, as happened in Assam. The even proportion of male and female immigrants indicates that the tea companies of the district were from the beginning set on a stable labour policy and on acquiring families of labourers instead of many workers without attachment of family ties and therefore without a stake in their jobs.¹⁹

3.2 Recruitment Legislation

There were no specific legislation under which labourers could be recruited and forced to work in the tea gardens. The recruitment of indentured labourers for the plantations in the British Colonies was made from India under the Indian Emigration Act of 1837.²⁰ This Act was not applicable in case of recruitment of labourers for plantations within India. But the recruitment under the free contractors' system was virtually the indenture system. The recruited labourers were bound by contracts under Section 490 and 492 of the Indian Penal Code (known as penal contracts) and also under workmen's Breach of Contract Act of 1859. The recruits were put under contract to work in the tea gardens in Assam for a term not less than 5 years.

By 1861 the British Government began to concern about labour recruitment policy in tea gardens and in the same year

the Bengal Government appointed a committee to enquire into the emigration of labour to Assam and Cachar which resulted in the passing of the first Inland Emigration Act 1863. The Act provided that all recruiters were to be licensed and every emigrant was to be registered before the district magistrate and his contract of service should not exceed five years. But the Act did not provide any provision regarding wages and conditions of service in tea gardens.

As soon as the labourers arrived they refused to work or leave service because of unfortunate state of relations existed in tea gardens. Punishment for desertion was slight and once punished they got release from all engagements. So the labourers willingly incurred the liability to punishment in the hope of being set free from the contract.²¹ Thus the Government amended the Act in 1865. The new Act put more powers in the hands of the tea garden managers to keep the recruited labourers under their control. The Act empowered them to arrest absconding labourers without warrant and indolence and desertion made punishable by law. In a way of concession to labour the Act reduced the period of contract from 5 years to 3 years and provided a clause that the contracts would be voidable in case of unhealthy tea gardens. It also provided fixed monthly wages.²²

The Act of 1863 and its subsequent amendment in 1865 did not remove the abuses in the recruitment. Workers continued

to be deceived by false promises, now perhaps through licensed contractors. The Government set up another Enquiry Commission in 1868. The Commission reported that recruits were still induced to emigrate by misrepresentation, mortality in transit were high and unfit persons were sent in large numbers. The Commission also observed that many abuses of Contractors system were absent in the recruitment through garden sardars. But the sardari system of recruitment was not included in the Act of 1865. Thus the Act of 1865 was amended in 1870 to legalise recruitment by garden sardars.

The period thereafter saw several amendments of the Act. But no improvement in the condition of recruitment took place upto 1901. The Bengal Government appointed a commission of enquiry in 1895. The Commission criticised abuses in connection with the prevailing system of recruitment and recommended several measures. Assam labour and Emigration Act was passed by the Government of India on the basis of these recommendations in 1901. The Act prohibited the recruitment of labour except through licensed contractors. The Act was amended in 1908 and again in 1915. This amendment put an end to Contractors' system and established what is known as the garden Sardari System of recruitment. The Government of India passed an Act in 1925 ^{repealing} the workmen's breach of contract Act, 1859. From that time onwards tea gardens labour were not required to enter into contract for employment. ²³

The number of labourers recruited by Sardars during the period 1918-1919 to 1928-1929 is presented in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3

Labourers recruited by Sardars 1918-19 to 1928-29

Year	Authorised Sardars	Labourers
1918-19	45,112	1,72,096
1919-20	28,721	53,034
1920-21	6,388	16,188
1921-22	14,148	16,192
1922-23	19,796	20,183
1923-24	30,880	36,685
1924-25	26,425	22,681
1925-26	26,736	29,710
1926-27	30,100	32,500
1927-28	30,209	35,412
1928-29	35,763	60,023

Source : Lokashruti - 1992, Published by West Bengal Rajya Loka Sanskriti Parshad, p.23.

The Labour Commission's Report, 1931 resulted in passing of the tea District Emigration Labour Act, 1932. The main objectives of the Act are to control recruitment and to forward assisted emigrants from other states to the tea gardens in Assam, and to grant a greater measure of freedom in the system of recruitment than had previously ^{been} enjoyed by the industry. Employers are prevented from recruiting otherwise than by

means of certified garden Sardars or licensed recruiters. Persons under the age of 16 could not be emigrated unless accompanied by their parents or guardians, and the women could not be recruited without the consent of their husbands. The workers can go back in case of bad health etc. The Act also conferred on the assisted emigrants the right of repatriation at the cost of employer after three year service.

As a result of the act 1932 the planters have established an organisation called the Tea Districts Labour Association with its headquarter in Calcutta for the purpose of recruitment of labour. The Association recruited labour from six recruiting provinces of Bengal, Behar, Orissa, C.P., U.P. and Madras. The machinery of the association includes 19 depots known as the Local Forwarding Agencies. The licenses for recruitment of local forwarding agents are liable to forfeiture if abuse of the law can be proved against them. The overall incharge ship of recruitment was in the hands of Controller of Emigration, appointed by the Government. The Controller, by means of surprise visits to the transit depots at meal times, satisfies himself that the workers are neither ill-fed nor unduly fatigued. Local authorities were also empowered to supervise the recruitment, forwarding and employment of labour in tea gardens. The cost of recruitment through this association came to be about Rs. 95 in 1946-47 and Rs. 107 in 1947-48 and Rs. 124 in 1948-49.²⁴

Thus after the enactment of Tea District Emigrant Labour Act of 1932, considerable improvements took place in tea garden labour recruitment system. This is the first time that the Government seriously concerned ^{itself} with the abuses connected with labour recruitment in tea plantations and actions taken by the Government goes largely to the favour of labourers. The 80 years history of deplorable conditions of labour recruitment was thereby ended. Mortality in transit reduced considerably. Among the 26,000 persons forwarded to Assam during 1937, there were only nine deaths, six of them being children below the age of four.²⁵

The Tea District Labour Association was liquidated in 1960. The ninth session of the Industrial Committee on Plantations in August 1960 decided that no fresh recruitment should be made from outside except with the permission of the Government and the movement of labourers, from surplus to deficit areas within Assam should be encouraged with the help of the special Employment Exchange.²⁶ The Government of Assam was interested in this matter because the position of labour supply in the tea gardens of Assam had revised from shortage to surplus and unemployment in tea gardens appeared in the scene.

Now there are almost settled labour force in North-East India and the planters could recruit labour directly instead of sending agents to distant aboriginal areas. In West Bengal,

at present, planters recruited permanent workers from the members of the families already recruited, and temporary workers during the plucking season from adjoining villages. A distinct feature of recruitment in tea garden is that the unit of recruitment is the family and not the individual.

3.3 Category of Workers

There are four categories of workers engaged in tea industry. They are adult male and female, adolescents and children. Adults are those who are 18 years of age and above, while adolescents are those between the age group of 16 to 18, and children are those between the ages of 12 and 16. The number of different categories of workers is given in Table 3.4.

In the Terai there were 18,575 (49.04%) males, 17,140 (45.25%) females, 675 (1.78%) adolescents and 1485 (3.93%) children employed in tea garden in 1990. The male workers were more than 3.78 per cent over female workers.

The total number of female workers is slightly higher than the males at all India level. The two tea growing states of South India, viz. Tamil Nadu and Kerala employed higher proportion of female workers, while the tea gardens of Karnataka employed higher proportion of male workers. The male workers in the tea gardens of Assam were 3.32 per cent more over the

Table 3.4
Labour Force in Tea Industry
1990

District/ State/ Region	Male	Female	Adole- scent (A)	Child- ren (C)	Total (A+C)	Total
Dooars	77543 (50.79)	63706 (41.73)	4706 (3.08)	6725 (4.40)	11431 (7.48)	152680 (100.00)
Darjeeling	17885 (37.17)	29043 (60.36)	440 (0.91)	748 (1.56)	1188 (2.47)	48116 (100.00)
Terai	18575 (49.04)	17140 (45.25)	675 (1.78)	1485 (3.93)	2160 (5.71)	37875 (100.00)
West Bengal	114003 (45.84)	119889 (48.21)	5821 (2.34)	8958 (3.61)	14779 (5.95)	248671 (100.00)
Assam	251511 (46.43)	233486 (43.11)	15170 (2.80)	41494 (7.66)	56664 (10.46)	541661 (100.00)
Tamil Nadu	44303 (43.10)	56436 (54.91)	1877 (1.83)	170 (0.16)	2047 (1.99)	102786 (100.00)
Karnataka	2252 (53.40)	1868 (44.30)	75 (1.78)	22 (0.52)	97 (2.30)	4217 (100.00)
Kerala	33539 (45.19)	39719 (53.39)	1025 (1.38)	105 (0.14)	1130 (1.52)	74388 (100.00)
South India	80094 (44.16)	98023 (54.04)	2977 (1.64)	297 (0.16)	3274 (1.8)	181391 (100.00)
All India*	453001 (45.91)	458519 (46.47)	24148 (2.45)	51113 (5.17)	75261 (7.62)	986781 (100.00)

Note : Figures in parenthesis are the percentages.

* Includes all tea growing areas in the country.

Source : Tea statistics - 1990-91, pp.144 & 147.

female workers. In West Bengal tea gardens of Darjeeling hills employed substantially higher proportion of female workers while

in the other two tea growing regions of the state, viz. Dooars and Terai the female workers were outnumbered.

There are 24,148 adolescents and 51,113 children workers employed at all India level in 1990. In terms of percentages, adolescents accounts for 2.45 per cent of the total labour force while children account for 5.17 per cent. Thus the proportion of children workers were higher than adolescents. This was same in the tea gardens of West Bengal and Assam. While the three tea producing states in South India (Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala) employed higher percentage of adolescents than the children. The bulk of the children workers lies in Assam. The Tea industry of the state employed 41,494 children workers which accounts for 7.66 per cent of the total labour force.

Most of the workers in tea industry live within the garden area. The employers provided housing to the workers for their own interest. As in the early days the tea industry suffered the problem of labour shortage, the employers always encouraged recruitment by complete families, rather than individual adult male or female. They were housed in the gardens. Gradually the families were multiplied and could secure the man power for the industry. Subsequently the Plantation Labour Act 1951 which came into force in 1955, makes it compulsory for the employers to provide housing for the workers. The tea garden managers also favoured the

settlement of time-expired labourers in the vicinity of the gardens. Because, apart from a regular labour force kept as resident labour all the year round the planters needed extra labour much more than their normal requirements during the peak tea plucking season. If they maintain a regular labour force at the peak level of requirements their financial obligations became greater. So long labour reside under their control in the gardens they were under certain obligations such as supply of rice at concession rates, housing facilities and others. Thus they favoured settlement of the time-expired labourers near the tea gardens, so that they could have a 'reserve' supply of labourers for meeting extra requirements during peak plucking seasons. In fact, some tea garden managers assisted labourers in reclaiming Government waste land near the gardens and even provided some materials to construct houses. Some managers allotted unused garden land which was in their possession much in excess of their own requirements.²⁷ Thus, the workers permanently settled in the tea growing area, with little or no contract with their places of origin.

The number of resident and non-resident labourers in the tea industry is given in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5 shows that the percentage of resident labour in the tea gardens of West Bengal is higher than that of in other tea growing regions of India. In Dooars and Darjeeling

Table 3.5

Resident and non-resident labour in tea industry-1990

District/ State/Region	Resident labour	Non-resident labour	Percentage of resident labour
Darjeeling	47,853	4,515	91.38
Terai (a)	22,482	9,388	70.54
Dooars (b)	1,53,148	4,788	96.97
West Bengal	2,23,483	18,691	92.28
Assam	3,22,542	98,550	76.60
North India [*]	5,53,012	1,22,175	81.90
South India ^{**}	1,45,234	19,813	88.00
All India ^{***}	6,98,246	1,41,988	83.10

(a) Including West Dinajpur.

(b) Including Cooch Behar.

* Includes all tea growing areas in North India.

** Includes all tea growing areas in South India.

*** Includes all tea growing areas in India.

Source : Tea Statistics, Published by Tea board, Calcutta, 1990-91, pp.138-139.

the proportion of Resident labour is above the all West Bengal average while in the Terai it is less.

3.4 Organization Hierarchy

The organization of work in a tea garden comprises a hierarchy. The hierarchy evolved during the colonial period by the British Planters and has continued without significant

changes to the present.

At the top of the hierarchy are the manager of the plantation. He is the most important authority in the tea garden. He is assisted by assistant managers and engineer. These people fall under the category of management. These posts which were the exclusive preserves of expatriates are now occupied by well educated Indians usually from urban areas in the country.

Below them are a category generally known in the tea gardens as 'staff'. They generally perform clerical tasks in the tea plantation offices and factory. The staff position in the tea plantations located in north-east India are almost exclusively staffed by Bengali male.

The next to the staff is a category of personnel known as 'Sub-Staff'. They are largely supervisory staff. This category consists of the factory sardar who helps the factory assistant, munshi and chaprasi who perform similar work of carrying orders from the top and keeping an eye on the categories of sub-staff below them. Biodar who takes the attendance of the sub-staff and the workers. After him come the dafadar and the chowkidar. The dafadar makes a link between the workers and the management. He guides the workers at every step in their works. Besides these ranks, there are in this category the paniwala, who supplies water to the workers at their work place, davawala (health assistant),

drivers, cleaners, etc. The sub-staff is the highest position to which tribal males can be promoted to in the tea gardens.

Finally, at the very bottom of the hierarchy are the ordinary workers, who are generally known as coolie. They are the most important because they form the majority of the labour force, and are the ones who are directly involved in the process of production. These people do all the physical labour in the garden-plucking of leaves, hoeing and cleaning the soil of undergrowth, pruning the bushes in winter, digging drains when required and so on.

The organization hierarchy in tea garden is shown in Table 3.6

Table 3.6

Organization structure in a tea garden

Level	Composition	
<u>Management :</u>		
Manager	...	Educated
Engineer	...	Outsiders
Assistant Managers	...	
<u>Staff :</u>		
Garden Assistant	...	Educated Bengalis
Factory Assistant		
<u>Sub-staff :</u>		
Factory Sardar	Boider	Tribal Male
Munshi	Dafadar	
Chapراسى	Chowkidar	
<u>Workers :</u>		
Adult Male	Adult Female	Tribal Males/Females
Adolescents	Children	

The hierarchy in the tea garden work organisation is thus quite elaborate. There are several intermediaries between the management and the workers. Many of these strata exist for no apparent reason - just to maintain hierarchy. The spectrum of posts between the assistant manager and the dafadar is associated with no specific duty, apart from relaying orders from the top and keeping an eye on those below. This results in duplication of work, besides increasing the wage bill. An elaborate work hierarchy may be necessary in a modern industrial undertaking where the degree of technical skill distinguishes one stratum from the other. But in the tea industry, with its low level of technology and heavy dependence on manual labour, such a top-heavy organization seems unnecessary. In the early days of the tea industry, a hierarchy of this sort was necessary for the planters because they wielded influence over the workers through physical coercion also. At present with the post independent labour legislations, especially the plantation labour act (PLA), 1951 and the West Bengal Plantation Rules, 1956, the relation between the worker and the employer has been formalised and so physical coercion does not find a place in the tea gardens. Moreover, today, when management philosophy emphasises the wisdom of the manager establishing direct contact with labour, the various levels of sub-staff detract from achieving such a purpose.

The organization^{of} hierarchy also involves ethnic division, which is very unusual in India. The adivasi workers can rise

upto the level of sub-staff, but rarely beyond. Even educated children of the workers are denied the opportunity. In certain gardens, there is a system of son succeeding father who is a member of the staff, and this practice has given rise to resentment among the workers.

3.5 Summary

The early history of recruitment of tea garden workers bears a testimony of cruelty and oppression. Since the tea gardens were situated in jungles and hilly regions infested with Malaria and Kalazar etc. no one wanted to work in the tea gardens. The industry faced acute labour shortage at the stage of its beginning.

The local people did not want to work in tea gardens. Thus, the industry entirely depended upon the migratory labour. Labourers in Terai and Dooars were mainly recruited from the 'aboriginal' areas of Chotonagpur (Bihar). Labourers in Darjeeling hills were recruited from Nepal. The employers caused many abuses and false promises in the course of recruitment of labour.

The recruited workers were sent off on a hazardous journey to the tea gardens. Many died and missed on the ways. In tea gardens the recruits suffered from several cruelty and hardship, unhygienic condition of living, bad and inadequate food,

poor housing conditions etc. But the labourers were not allowed to return or even to communicate with the members of their families. So the free tribal life of the workers transited into semi-feudal life.

There was no specific legislation regarding the recruitment of labourers in tea gardens. By 1861 the British Government began to concern about the policy of recruitment of labour in tea gardens. The first Inland Emigration Act was passed in 1863. The act provided that all recruiters were to be licensed and every emigrant was to be registered before the District Magistrate and his contract of service should not exceed five years. Thereafter the Government passed several acts but all these gave more protection to the employers than the tea garden labourers. This was in 1921, when several legislations had come into being seeking to protect plantation labour.

On early days the employers encouraged families rather than individual to migrate for to tea gardens. This saved the recruitment cost. Again employing a family comprising a man, his wife and two children was preferable to employing four workers of different families. The planter in the later case would not only have to bear the recruiting costs of workers but would also have to provide housing for each of them. By engaging the entire family the planter could cut costs on recruitment as well as on housing.

We have observed that the percentage of immigrations in Jalpaiguri tea gardens continuously increased at least up to 1921, there after the percentage decreased. Thus, after 1921 the industry had come to have a settled labour population who were begetting their successors. In Darjeeling tea gardens all immigration from Nepal has been by complete families, there has been no disturbance of family life, and families have settled complete on a tea estate, and they are multiplied and prospered.

The employers also favoured settlement of the time expired labourers near the tea gardens, so that they could have a 'reserve' supply of labourers for meeting extra requirements during peak plucking seasons. Some employers assisted labourers in reclaiming Government waste land near the gardens and even provided some materials to construct houses. Some employers also allotted unused garden land which was in their possession much in excess of their own requirements. As a result the families have settled complete on a tea estate, and they are multiplied. At present in West Bengal tea gardens more than 92 per cent of the workers are resident labour.

In post-independence period the position of labour supply in the tea gardens, of Assam and West Bengal had revised from shortage to surplus and unemployment in tea gardens appeared in the scene.

The organization hierarchy in tea garden evolved during the colonial period by the British planters and has continued without significant changes to the present. This consists of four levels, viz. management, staff, sub-staff, and workers (coolies). The level of management and staff are filled up from outside and they are mostly educated Bengalis. A tribal male worker can hardly be promoted to the level of sub-staff. But this promotion is not available for female workers. So the organization hierarchy in tea garden evolves ethnic crisis as well as sexual crisis.

Notes & References

1. Andamans - Where convicts committing serious crimes and charged with life imprisonment used to be sent, commonly known as 'Kalapani'.
2. Report on the survey of labour conditions in Tea Plantations and Tea Factories in India, 1961-62. Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour Employment and Rehabilitation, Government of India, 1966, p.22.
3. Phukan, Umanand ; The Ex-Tea Garden Labour Population in Assam , B.R.Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1984, p.5.
4. Ibid., p.5.
5. Ibid., p.10.
6. Ghosh, B.C ; "The Development of the Tea Industry in the District of Jalpaiguri", in Jalpaiguri District Centenary Souvenir - 1869-1968, p.293.
7. Dash, A.J : Gazetteer of the Darjeeling District - 1947, p.114.
8. Lt. Col.Hannangan : "Darjeeling Plantations", in The Assam Review & Tea News, Vol.76, No.2, April-1987, p.28, and Vol.76, No.3, May-1986, p.7.
9. Bhadra, Mita : Life and Labour of Plantation Woman workers , 1982, p.124. (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, North Bengal University under Dr. N.C.Chowdhury, Deptt. of Sociology & Social Anthropology).

10. Bhowmik, Sharit : Class Formation in the Plantation System , People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1981, p.50.
11. Ibid., p.50.
12. Ibid., p.50.
13. Awasthi, R.C : Economics of Tea Industry in India United Publishers, Gauhati, 1975.
14. Griffiths, Pervical : The History of the Indian Tea Industry , Weidenfel and Nicolson, London, 1967, p.270.
15. Lakashruti - 1992, Published by West Bengal Rajya Loka Sanskriti Parshad, p.44.
16. Ibid., p.45.
17. Ibid., p.119.
18. Bhowmik, Sharit, Op.cit., p.56.
19. Mitra, A.K : Census of India 1951, Vol.VI, Part IA (West Bengal, Sikkim and Chandernagore), Report, Calcutta, 1953, p.265.
20. The Indian Emigration Act, 1837 was passed after the abolition of Slavery in 1834.
21. Griffiths, Pervical, Op.cit., p.270.
22. Phukan, Umanand, Op.cit., p.7.
23. Awasthi, R.C. Op.cit., p.153 & Phukan Umanand, Op.cit., p.8.
24. Saxena, R.C : Labour Problems and Social Welfare, Published by Jaiprakash Nath & Co., Meerut, 1953, p.33.
25. Rao, B.Shiva : The Industrial Worker in India, Published by George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1939, p.99.

26. Bhadra, Mita : Op.cit., p.128.
27. Phukan, Umanand, Op.cit., pp.12-13.