

CHAPTER II

TEA GARDENS AND THEIR POPULATION IN NORTH EAST INDIA : A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Growth of the Industry

The Tea districts of North East India may be divided into five district regions, viz. (1) Brahmaputra Valley, (2) Barak Valley, (3) Darjeeling, (4) Dooars and Terai and (5) Tripura (Das, 1990).

The Development of tea industry in India was closely linked with the growth of the Western market for tea, and the colonial era in the East which encouraged, and in fact supported the tea plantations with foreign enterprise. Tea of international commerce grown outside of China, USSR and Japan had its origin in Upper Assam.

The tea plant was discovered growing wild in Assam in 1821 (Dash 1947, p113; Ghosh, 1987:p8). There was a bitter controversy as to who made the botanical discovery of tea for the first time. The two contestants were C.A. Bruce and Lieutenant Charlton. Griffiths gave his verdict in favour of the former. The first experimental cultivation of tea in India was undertaken by the British Government in India in 1834 (Edgar, J.W., 1873; Cited in Ghosh, 1987 : p8). Lord William Bentinck appointed the Tea Committee on February 1, 1834 with James Gordon of the firm of Mackintosh and Company as its Secretary. In 1832 Captain F. Jenkins,

an official, was deputed to report on the economic potentialities of Assam. Jenkins and his assistant Lieutenant Charlton sent some seeds and leaves of the tea plant in Assam and at last on 24 December, 1834, the tea committee reported to the Government about the indigenous tea plant of Assam and the possibility of its commercial success (Ghosh 1987 : p9). After being sure that tea could be grown in India the experts started exploring the sites for experimentation. The experts were divided on this issue. Some selected north western India, others the eastern area, while some favoured southern India. The Government wisely decided to try all the areas. The Sub-Himalayan areas were reasonably successful but it was in Assam that the most successful result was obtained. In the south the experiments were generally unsuccessful (Ghosh, 1987 : pp9-10).

In 1835 the Government of Assam started its first experimental plantation in Lakimpur (Ghosh, 1987 : p10; copy of the papers Received from India Related to the Measures Adopted for Introducing the Cultivation of the Tea Plant Within the British Possession in India, 1839). But the experiment failed. The plants were thereafter removed to Jaipur in Sibsagar district of Assam where a garden was established. The garden was later sold to the Assam Tea Company which was a private enterprise formed in 1839. The Company formed entirely with Private Britishers which was the first Tea Company in India, and is still one of the biggest.

There was a supposition that tea would not thrive in lower Assam. In 1854 cultivation of tea commenced in Kamroop Division where in 1859, 12,207 acres of land were granted for tea cultivation of which 297 acres were brought under tea. A good deal of tea grown in Kamroop had hitherto been planted in the low hills around Gauhati (Bengal Military Orphan Press, 1861).

In the Lakhimpur Division of lower Assam where the cultivation of tea plant was first undertaken in 1835, a few indigenous plants, taken from the forest at "Ningroo" bordering "Singphoe", were put down on a strip of land at the "Koondil Mukh" at Suddujah. But the effort to grow tea there did not succeed. The plants were removed to Jaipore in Sibsagar Division where cultivation continued steadfastly till 1840. During this time the Government in view to promote enterprise and development of tea as a resource transferred two thirds of its tea establishment to the Assam Tea Company. The Government Operations after this were confined to a plantation at Muttock, on a spot where much indigenous tea had been discovered. The soil here was peculiarly favourable to the growth of the plant. The Government garden in the locality continued from 1840 to 1848 after which it was sold in April 1849 to a Chinaman named Among, as the affair proved unprofitable. But the Chinaman could make little of it and in 1851 the garden changed hands. It became the property of Messers

Warren Jenkins and Co. The period mentioned was one of depression as to the manufacture of tea. The works of the Assam Tea Company, as far as their operations in the district were concerned, were all but suspended. In 1852 a favourable turn took place which has since opened a prospect of wealth and prosperity for the district. Colonel Hanney who had a small garden close to Dibrugarh raised Cotton, sugarcane, tea, etc for experimental purposes. Having being successful in his experiment with the plantation of small patch of China tea, increased his cultivation area to about 10 acres. At the same time Messers Warren and Jenkins formed the Meejan Tea Barree, now a flourishing plantation. Following the examples first set by Colonel Hanney, an impetus was given to the extension of tea cultivation which led to tea in Lakhimpur inviting the attention of capitalists and to its promising fair to render the district as one of the most important division of Assam (Ghosh, 1987 : pp15-16). The total land taken up for tea cultivation for this division was 14,038 acres, the quantity of land cultivated from 1852 to 1859 was 1,700 acres. The total tea manufacture increased from 92,000 lb in 1852 to 282,000 lb in 1859 (Ghosh, 1987 : p 16). At present, there are approximately 725 gardens in Assam. In 1952 the number of gardens were 787. It increased to 789 in 1953 but decreased to 788 in 1954 and remained so till 1956. The year 1957 experienced an increase to 791, but the succeeding year experienced a decrease after which there had been a steady increase from 789 in 1959 to 799 in 1960. The number decreased to 744 in 1961 only to increase again to 746 in 1962-1963,

747 in 1964-65 and 765 in 1966. After 1966 there had been a decrease. The number was 755 in 1967 and 753 in 1969 (Tea Statistics 1966-67; 1969-70).

In West Bengal the tea gardens are exclusively in the North Bengal districts, 147 in Darjeeling, 187 in Jalpaiguri and one each in Cooch Behar and West Dinajpur districts (Ghosh, 1987 : p 3).

Before going into the development of tea in Darjeeling district it will not be out of the way to have a brief view on the early history and growth of the district. The whole of the Darjeeling district was part of the Dominion of the Raja of Sikkim. What is at present Kalimpong sub-division, was forcibly occupied by Bhutan in the year 1706. In 1780 the Gurkhas of Nepal invaded Sikkim and occupied the remaining areas of the district including Terai (Ghosh, 1987 : p 18).

In the beginning of the nineteenth century war broke out between the East India Company and the Nepalese. At the end of the war with the treaty of Titaliya in 1816 (now in Bangladesh) the entire area wrested by the Nepalese from the Raja of Sikkim was ceded to the East India Company which restored the entire area to Sikkim and guaranteed sovereignty (Ghosh, 1987 : p 18).

At the time of Lord William Bentinck, Governor General of India, it was reported to him that the small village of Darjeeling

could be developed as a sanatorium besides being utilized as a key military station. The proposal was initiated and was passed by the Directors of East India Company. On 1 February, 1835 an unconditional Cession of Darjeeling area to the East India Company was made by the Raja of Sikkim. The Company granted the Raja an allowance of Rupees 3,000 per annum as compensation in lieu which was raised to Rupees 6,000 per annum. During the Cession, the Darjeeling hill tract had a population of not more than 100 (Ghosh, 1987 : p 18).

In 1849, Dr Hooker along with Dr. Campbell, the Superintendent of Darjeeling with the sanction of the British Government and the permission of the Raja of Sikkim crossed the frontier into the State where they were seized and imprisoned by the authority of the Raja's diwan or minister. In February 1850, a punitive force was sent by the British Government. The grant of Rs. 6,000 was withdrawn and the remaining hill area and the Terai were annexed. There was break out of trouble in 1861 due to a military expedition. It ended with a treaty on March 28, 1861 between the British Government and the Raja of Sikkim which put an end to all frontier troubles. Freedom of commerce across the Sikkim frontier for British subjects was secured (Ghosh, 1987 : p 19).

Frontier trouble with Bhutan started around 1862. After various military expeditions a treaty was signed between Bhutan

and British India in 1865. Under the treaty Kalimpong sub-division and Bhutan Dooars (now parts of Jalpaiguri district and Assam) were ceded to the British in return for subsidy (Ghosh, 1987 : p 19). The Kalimpong area was first notified as a Sub-Division under the Western Dooars but in 1866 it was transferred to the district of Darjeeling. After Terai was annexed in 1850, it was placed under the Purnea district (in Bihar), but the dislike of the inhabitants compelled it to be attached to Darjeeling. After Kalimpong was brought under the British rule in 1865 and transferred to Darjeeling district in the same year, the district was divided into two sub-divisions, namely (I) the Headquarters Sub-Division including all the hills on both sides of Teesta and (II) the Terai Sub-Division which included the remaining area at the foothills. In 1891 Kurseong was made a Sub-Divisional Headquarter and Terai was merged with it. In the year 1907 Sili-guri was made a separate Sub-Division and in 1916 Kalimpong was separated from Darjeeling Sadar Sub-Division and made a separate Sub-Division (Ghosh, 1987 : pp 19-20).

Cultivation of Tea in Darjeeling started long back before the formation of Darjeeling district in 1866. But the rapid development of tea plantations in the district owed to a great extent to the consolidation of the British empire in the region and the active interest taken by the East India Company.

The discovery of tea in Bengal, according to Hunter (1876: p 165), dates back to 1826. The introduction of tea into Darjeeling is due to Captain James who persuaded the Government to obtain seed from China, which he distributed among the residents of the district to experiment with (Imperial Gazetteer of India 1908). In the year 1838, Dr. Campbell was posted as Superintendent of Darjeeling. This was an important event as far as the tea industry in Darjeeling is concerned. The development of tea industry in Darjeeling owes greatly to the enterprise of Dr. Campbell. Attempts to introduce the cultivation of tea in Darjeeling were first made sometime previously to 1853 when two or three gardens existed (Hunter, 1876 : p 165). In a report of Dr. Campbell dated 30th March, 1853, No. 123, it is mentioned that experimental planting of tea was started from 1841, but little headway could be made before 1853. The real date of the commencement of the industry may be taken at 1856-57. Of the existing gardens in the district only two date back as 1856, viz., that of the Karsiang and Darjeeling Tea Company and one owned by the Darjeeling Land Mortgage Bank. The two gardens were Alubari and Lebong Mineral Spring (Hunter, 1876 : p 165; Dash, 1947 : p 113). The Imperial Gazetteer (1908) mentions the names of tea gardens Alubari, Padam and Steinthal that were opened up in 1856 in the district. Since 1856, more and more gardens were opened, and more and more companies were registered. In 1859, the Dhuteria garden was started by Brongham (Dash, 1947 : p 113). The largest tea concern in

Darjeeling, that of the Darjeeling Company Limited owned four gardens Ambutia, Ging, Takda and Phubserang which were established between 1860 and 1864 (Hunger, 1876: pp 165-66; Ghosh, 1987 : p 24; O'Malley, 1907 : pp 73-74).

In Terai, the first garden was started at Champta near Khaprail in 1862 by James White (Dash, 1947 : p 113; Ghosh, 1987 : p 25; O'Malley, 1907 : p. 74). James White previously had opened up one of the largest garden in the district and Singell near Kurseong. Prior to 1864, the Lebong Tea Company opened Takvar and Badamtam tea gardens. The Makaibari tea garden was also opened in this period (O'Malley, 1907 : p 74; Ghosh, 1987 : p 25). Others gardens opened up in Terai by 1866. Since 1866 till 1874 there was a steady increase in tea cultivation in the district. In 1866 there were 39 gardens and the extent of land under cultivation was 10,392 acres¹. In 1867, there were 40 gardens with 9,214 acres of land under cultivation. In 1868, the number of gardens was 44 and the land under cultivation was 10,067 acres. The figure of 1869 showed 55 gardens with 10,769 acres of land under cultivation. In the year 1870 there were 56 gardens and the land under cultivation was 11,046 acres². In 1872, 1873 and 1874 there were

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1. O'Malley (1907 : p 74) mentioned that the extent of land **under** cultivation was 10,000 acres.
 2. In O'Malley (1907 : p 74) it is mentioned that the land under cultivation in 1870 was 11,000 acres.

74, 87 and 113 gardens respectively and the corresponding amount of land under cultivation was 14,503 acres, 15,695 acres and 18,888 acres (Hunter, 1876 : p 165). It was thus seen that within a period of nine years between 1866 and 1874 the number of gardens had almost trebled and the area under cultivation increased by 82 percent. In the Kalimpong Sub-Division land was withheld from tea cultivation. The Government policy was to reserve the area for forest and ordinary cultivation. According to the Settlement Report of C.A. Bell, I.C.S. (1901-1903) there were only four tea estates in the Sub-Division, Sama Beong, Ambiak, Phagu and Kumai. The position had not changed even by 1975. At present there are six tea estates Sama Beong, Ambiak, Kumai, Upper Phagu, Lower Phagu and Mission Hill (Ghosh, 1987 : p 27).

To trace the growth of gardens in Darjeeling upto recent times. In 1881 there were 155 gardens with 28,367 acres of land under cultivation. The figure rose to 175 in 1885 with 38,499 acres of land under cultivation, 177 in 1891 with 45,585 acres of land under cultivation and 186 in 1895 with 48,692 acres of land under cultivation. Thereafter there had been decrease in the number of gardens. In 1901 there were 170 gardens and 51,724 acres of land under tea. In 1910 there were 148 gardens and the land under tea was 51,281 acres. The number of gardens remained the same till 1935 with increases in 1911 to 156, 1921 to 168 and 1931 to 169 and corresponding increases in area under tea to 51488 acres in 1911, 59,005 acres in 1921 and 61,178 acres in 1931. After 1935 there was decline in the numbers to 142 in 1940

with 63,059 acres of land under cultivation, 138 in 1951 with 62,580 acres of land under cultivation and 135 in 1952 with 67,526 acres of land under cultivation. It may be noted that though there had been a decrease in the number of gardens the acreage under tea increased (Government of India, 1951).

From the list of tea plantations published by the District Census Handbook, Darjeeling, in the 1961 Census, on the basis of All India Tea Directory, 1960, names of 139 tea gardens were found. The list of villages and towns published in the 1971 Census District Handbook, Darjeeling revealed the names of only 119 tea gardens. It should be mentioned here that it had been a convention since long to treat a tea garden as a separate mouza or village. It was probably that in the 1971 alphabetical list a number of mouzas had not been shown as tea gardens. According to the tea Statistics in 1962 and 1963 there were 144 gardens in the district which increased to 145 in 1964 (Tea Statistics 1966-67).

To resolve the controversy over the total number of tea gardens in the district, records of the Land Utilization and Reforms ~~and Land~~ and Land Revenue Department, Government of West Bengal may be consulted. According to the list of tea gardens as maintained by the Revenue Department the total number of tea gardens of the district is 147 (Ghosh, 1987 : p 32).

Before we study the growth of tea industry in the district of Jalpaiguri let us have a look into the history of the district. The present district of Jalpaiguri was born on 1 January, 1869 by the amalgamation of the Western Dooars district and the Sub-Division of Rangpur district. The Western Duars was wrested by the British Government from Bhutan at the end of Bhutan War of 1864-65. The Western Duars was mostly waste and jungle not subject to any settlement. Though the area was suitable for tea cultivation much progress could not be made before the district assumed some sort of political and administrative stability.

The tea industry in Jalpaiguri did not begin commercially before 1874-75. The first tea garden that was established in the district was Gazilduba in 1874 (Grinnings, 1911). The credit of establishing this garden goes to one named R. Haughton. In 1875, L.W. Barantee brought 500 acres of land under cultivation of tea. In the same year two gardens Phulbari and Bagrakote were established. From 1874 to 1878 thirteen tea estates with a gross acreage of 11, 984 acres were set up by the British planters in the Mal sector : Gazaldoba (1874), Phulbari (1875), Bagrakote (1876), Dalimkota (1876), Kumlai (1877), Damdim (1877), Washabari (1877), Baintbari (1877), Ellenberry (1877), Manabari (1877), Moneyhope (1878), Patabari (1878) and Ranicherra (1878) (Mukherjee, 1978).

In 1881 the number of gardens were 55 with 6,230 acres of land under tea. The number increased to 182 in 1892. The growth of the industry was very rapid in the 80s. This can be gauged from the fact that the area under tea in 1892 was over 6 times than in 1881. But the rapid expansion continued till 1901. During 1901 the number of gardens was 235 and the acreage under cultivation was 76,403 acres. After 1901 there had been a check in the expansion and in 1907 the number of gardens came down to 180 and the acreage under cultivation increased by a mere 4,935 acres (Ghosh, 1987 : p 34). The check in the expansion has been attributed by Mr. C.J. Donnell (1888) to lack of water. But this did not stop the expansion of tea gardens. Gardens obtained water from springs in Bhutan and brought them down in pipes. All the tea gardens in the district are situated in the Western Duars with the exception of 4 to 5 gardens besides Danguajhar (Ghosh, 1987 : p 36).

Shri B.C. Ghosh (1970) in an article "The Development of the Tea Industry in the District of Jalpaiguri : 1869-1968" mentioned that in 1877, 1878, 1884 and 1886, 7, 9, 20 and 14 gardens were established in the respective years. Twelve gardens were started in 1897. The last garden to be established in the district was Surendranagar Tea Estate in 1962.

The growth of the tea industry in the Jalpaiguri district presented an interesting feature. Conscious and bold attempts were

made by Indians mainly Bengalees to establish tea gardens in the face of stiff competition from the Europeans.

The first Indian to start a tea estate in the Jalpaiguri district was Munshi Rahim Baksh, a Peshkar (Clerk) of the Deputy Commissioner in 1877 (Ghosh 1987 : p 36; Mukherjee, 1978). Probably taking advantage of his official position he was able to take a settlement of Jaldhaka Grant of 728 acres. In 1878, Kali Mohan Ray and Durgabati Sen got Ataldanga Grant of 310 acres which was passed to Munshi Rahim Baksh. The first Indian Tea Company, the Jalpaiguri Tea Company Ltd. was formed in 1879. A few Bengalee lawyers and Clerks of Jalpaiguri joined hands to form this company. The Company owned a garden named the Mugalkta Tea Garden established in 1879 (Ghosh, 1987 : pp 36-37; Mukherjee, 1978).

Bhagwan Chandra Bose, father of illustrious scientist Sir J.C. Bose who was posted as the Deputy Magistrate in the district took a good deal of initiative in the formation of tea gardens by Indians. Two Indian ladies, Bibi Meherunnessa and Bibi Gulabjan made efforts to start tea cultivation in the year 1882, but their efforts failed and their grant was transferred to J. Anderson. In 1884, C.K. Das and P.K. Das started two gardens, Youngtong Grant and Chalauni Grant. They also failed and their grants were transferred to Europeans. Beharilal Ganguli, Mahim Chandra Ray and Jagat Chandra Ray took a grant of 758 acres but failed to establish a garden. In 1886, Bibi Rahimannessa, wife of Munshi Rahim Baksh started the Mal Nudy Tea Garden with 329 acres of land. In the

same year one called Benoda Behari Dutta took a grant of 600 acres but failed in his attempt to start a garden and relinquished the grant. Totapara Tea Estate was started in 1892 by the Saha family of Amla Sadarpur (Nadia district). Munshi Rahim Baksh spurned by his earlier success started Rahimabad Tea Garden in 1896. Ambari Tea Estate was established in 1908 by the Sahas of Nadia district. In the year 1909, a Bengalee started the Turturi Tea Estate in the Alipurduar area (Ghosh, 1987 : p 37).

It is therefore satisfactory to note that in the early stage of the development of the tea gardens in the district the Indians did not lag behind. In fact, the enterprise of the Bengalees was responsible for the development of the tea industry in the region. The present picture however, is different. Most of the ownership of tea gardens have slipped out of the hands of the Bengalees.

Alike the case of Darjeeling district, here too there is lack of unanimity as to the exact number of tea gardens in the district. According to the Tea Board's Tea Directory, at present there are 150 tea gardens. The All India Tea Directory puts the figure at 155 tea gardens (Government of India, 1961). The number is much more according to the figures available with the Revenue Department of the Government of West Bengal. The figures recorded in 1975 shows the number of gardens to be 187. For reasons stated earlier it is safe to accept the figures of the Revenue Department.

It has been said earlier, at the beginning while dealing with West Bengal, that besides the districts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and West Dinajpur districts have one garden each. The total number of tea gardens in West Bengal at present is 336 with three plantations namely Sayadabad, Matidhar and Sahabad having fell into West Bengal after the reorganization of States in 1956. These plantations were earlier in Bihar State (Ghosh, 1987 : p 40).

In Tripura tea cultivation was introduced by Maharaja Birendra Kishore in 1916 on the basis of recommendation made by a young scientist Dr. A.C. Bhattacharya. The process initiated by Maharaja Birendra Kishore was furthered by Maharaja Bir Bikram (Ganchoudhuri, 1990 : p 340; Ganguli, 1984 : p 5). To encourage tea plantations 'Tashkhichi Taluk' system was introduced. Under this system, the rights on the estates were permanent, but the rates of land revenue payable on such land holdings were enhancable at the rate of 12.5 per cent at the end of every 20 years. Tea plantation in Tripura was started when the tea industry in India was passing through a period of recession which subsided by 1922. In the year 1931 there were 50 gardens (Ganguli, 1984 : p 6). At present the number of gardens are approximately 54 (Ghosh, 1987 : p 3). Unlike Assam, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri, tea plantations in Tripura were all started by Indian entrepreneurs.

Background of the Labour force

Tea is the product of the cumulative toil of labourers. Labour in the tea industry of North East India has a vital and significant role in the development and progress of the industry.

Assam was the first area in India to come under tea. Here tea manufacture was started in the early 19th century. The treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 resulted in the annexation of Brahmaputra Valley to the British empire. In 1833 Jenkins planned to settle British farmers in the waste lands of Assam and he thought of cultivation of cash crops like, indigo, sugarcane etc. (Guha, 1977 : p 12). But soon experiments to grow tea on a commercial scale began and tea was first produced in Assam in 1837 (Mazumdar, 1984 : p 1)³. From the beginning of the industry in Assam dearth of labour was being felt. In the beginning large numbers of Chinese were imported for cultivation and growing tea. But their performance proved dismal. Attempts then were made to recruit labour from within Assam but it did not succeed. This was because firstly, there were few landless and secondly, the process of alienation of the tribals was absent in North-East India. The indigenous population of the North-East were traditionally agriculturalist and had enough land to live upon. They were not willing to get employed as wage labourers. The shortage of labour was compounded by the Civil War (1770-1791), Burmese invasion

3. Ganguli, J.B., 1990, writes "in 1840, the first tea company namely the Assam Company started production of tea on a commercial basis in Assam".

(1819-1824) and epidemic (1833-1854). The sole source of local labour was the Kacharis of Darrang district and a small proportion of people of the adjacent areas. But this fulfilled only marginal necessity. Two major steps were taken by the British Government to compel the local population to take up tea garden work; first, slavery was abolished and second, heavy taxation was introduced on subsistence farming of the local peasants (Guha, 1977 : p 12). But these methods proved unsuccessful. Moreover, the government in various ways tried to lure the local peasants which too failed. In 1859 the number of local labourers was 10,000, although the labour recruitment was about 16,000 to 20,000 hands. In 1901, out of 307,000 labourers of the plantations in Kamrup and Darrang districts of Assam, only 20,000 were reported to be local peasants, of which 14,000 belonged to the Boro-Kachari tribal group (Bhadra, 1984 : p 8). The failure of the attempts to recruit local labour made the plantation authorities think of recruiting labour from outside the State. Therefore, in 1853 recruitment of indentured labour from outside got under way. The immigrant labourers were mostly tribals hailing from the provinces of Bihar, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Madras and even Bombay. Amalendu Guha (1981 : p 80) noted that the proportion of immigrant labour coming from Chota Nagpur was 44.7 per cent in 1884-85. This proportion increased to 50 per cent in 1889. In the same year 25 per cent workers came from Bengal and from Assam itself 5 per cent. The districts of Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Santhal Parganas, Dumka and Gaya of Bihar; Mayurbhanj, Ganjam, Sambalpur, Chaibasa and Puri

of Orissa; Raipur, Rampurhat and Jabalpur of Madhya Pradesh were the main suppliers of labourers. They belonged to the tribal communities of Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Khasi, Gond, Kisan and Nagesia (Roy Burman, 1968). The Chota Nagpur region of Bihar provided the fertile ground for recruiting tea garden labourers. It was the homeland of the Munda and Oraon tribes. These tribes suffered badly in terms of alienation from their land. With the firm establishment of law and order in the country and as roads and communications were opened up, non-tribal peasants, traders and money lenders from Hazaribagh, Gaya and Manbhum regions started penetrating into tribal areas.

The fundamental factor which contributed to the the extreme miseries of the tribal **pepple** was the replacement of collective ownership of land by private ownership use for profit. This was facilitated by the land tenure system introduced by the British. The Mundas earlier practised the 'Khuntkatti' system of land tenure. Under this system though the land belonged to the lineage others could till the land with the permission of the owner (Bose, 1980 : p 41). The traders, money-lenders and farmers taking advantage of this got the permission from the tribals to till their lands and during the time of Land Settlement Operation on the district of Chota Nagpur got such land registered as private, personal property. It was a case amounting to robbery. To quote Bose (1980 : p 41), "It was thus a case amounting to robbery when land which belonged to the lineages, or even the village commune,

thus passed out of the hand of the tribal folk, for their laws and customs were not known to the Government".

In the pre-British period, the Hindu rajas of this area were paid dues by the tribals in kind or services. With the establishment of British rule, the raja had to pay their dues in cash which they got from the tribals. The latter not being familiar with the system and due to their ignorance and simplicity were always at the losing end. They were duped by the money lenders. The combined effect of alienation from land, increasing demand for payment of taxes and the exploitation of the helpless tribals by the money lenders proved ruinous. Similar, transformation took place in other areas.

It may thus be safely concluded that the British policy was responsible for the plight of the tribals. Whether it was an intentional aberration or not is a pertinent question. However, the whole process cannot be dismissed as to be just an unfortunate coincidence. It can be viewed as a deliberate attempt or move by the British to meet the shortage of labourers for plantations, within and outside India, mining and other labour intensive works. Biplab Dasgupta (1984: pp 133-138) has made an analysis of this phenomenon in detail in the context of Bengal. He has identified six factors those accounted for the increased demand for labour in the second half of the nineteenth century. They are, development of tea plantations and raising of commercial

crops, growth of mining activities, growing process of urbanization and industrialization, expansion of road and rail building activities and rail construction and the demand for labour outside India on rubber, tea and sugar plantations in different parts of the British empire. Keeping in view the high demand for labour it would not be conjectural to say that the British framed the policy to meet the labour demand. Bose(1980 : p 43) also subscribed to the view. He suspected that the Government deliberately followed a policy of encouraging the process of alienation of tribals from lands in order to ensure availability of labourers for plantations. To quote "British firms had discovered that the foothills of Himalayas were excellent for the cultivation of tea. Similarly, there were hilly areas in the southern Peninsula where coffee could be grown. But all this needed a large labour force. The increasing population of tribal folk which suffered from the shortage of land offered a tempting field for recruitment. British companies established depots for the recruitment of indentured labour. These were in Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh where a large number of Santhal, Oraon, Munda and Kharia labourers were drafted for service in the tea plantations of Assam and North Bengal".

Labour shortage in agriculture plantations, mines etc., was largely met by recruiting the so called "semi-Hinduised aborigines". The Santhals and other tribal groups provided the missing element as they were more vulnerable to pressure and inducement and least tied to particular plots of land. Circumstances

forced other tribal groups also out of their own territories reducing them to the status of wage labourers (Dasgupta, 1984 : P A137). Between 1891-1901 from Santhal Parganas alone ten per cent of the population out-migrated towards eastern areas, including tea plantations of Assam and Jalpaiguri (Dasgupta, 1984: p. A.138).

Before the large scale migration from Bangladesh during the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century the main immigrants to Assam were the tea plantation labourers. The number of labourers from 1872-1880 was 226,321. In 1872 they were 40,000 (Guha, 1968 : pp 210-212). A rough estimate by Phukan indicates that there were about 30 lakhs of people belonging to the entire immigrant tea labour class in 1971 (Saikia and Phukan, 1979 : p 6). Between May 1st, 1963 and May 1st, 1866 about 84,915 labourers were imported into Assam tea gardens (Papers Regarding Tea Industry). The number of immigrants into Assam Valley from 1874 to 1900 was 729,000 and presumably between 1871 and 1900 not less than 750,000 (Report of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee, 1906 : p 83). The permanent labour force employed in the year 1951 was over 5 lakhs. In 1961 the number declined to 4.5 lakhs. It further declined to 4.4 lakhs in 1975 and 4.3 lakhs in 1976 (Nag 1990 : p 55).

The decrease in the number of permanent labourers during the decade 1960-70 was of the order 53,000. The subsequent decade 1970-80 experienced a further decrease of 21,000 workers. All these happened inspite of an agreement between the Management and

Labour for increase of permanent employment by providing additional employment to the tune of 15,000 persons by March 31, 1972. The bi-partite agreement was signed on January 1, 1969 by the representatives of the I.T.A., the A.T.P.A. and the Bharatiya Cha Parishad on behalf of the employers and by the leaders of four INTUC affiliated trade unions of tea workers and tea employees of the Brahmaputra Valley and the Barak Valley districts (Nag, 1990 : pp 55-56).

According to the Assam Census Report, a total number of 1,216,661 persons were born outside Assam but enumerated in the Province. The great majority of these were either on tea estates or had been on tea estates and now settled in bastis. Of the above mentioned number of persons 535,565 were born in Bihar and Orissa, 77,082 in the Central Provinces and Berar, 14,311 in the Feudatory States of Central Provinces, 76,982 in the United Provinces, 54,327 in Madras and 17,602 in the Central India Agency (Tea District Labour Association, 1924).

Initially the recruitment of labour was done through "Arkattis" or professional recruiters (Bhadra, 1984 : p 9; Nag, 1990 : p 50). The government passed the "Transport of Native Labourers Act 1853" for recruiting labourers from outside Assam and consequently the "Arkatti" system was introduced (Bhadra, 1984 : p 9). A class of recruitment contractors flourished who operated through the "arkattis". The abuses and exploitation of

the "arkattis" still remain fresh in the memories of the tea garden communities through the varied folk songs and folklores. In 1870 the Act was amended and the "Sardari"⁴ system of recruitment was brought into effect. However, the earlier system of recruitment through "arkattis" did not stop. Both the systems existed side by side till 1915 when under the Assam Labour and Immigration Act of 1915 recruitment through "arkattis" was made unlawful (Bhadra, 1984 : p 9). In 1917 the Tea District Labour Supply Association was formed to control and coordinate recruitment under "Sardari" system (Bhadra, 1984 : p 9).

"The Hand book of Castes and Tribes employed on Tea Estates in North East India" was in all praise for the "Sardari" system. To quote, "For some years past, the "Sirdari" has been a model for other industries which have been compelled to seek labour in distant fields also it is significant to note, that not only is "sirdari" labour more likely to settle down and become absorbed in the permanent labour force but is less susceptible to outside influences of a disturbing nature" (Tea District Labour Association, 1924 : pp 3-4).

The Sirdars were themselves labourers on an estate, consigned to the districts from which they were originally imported, with

4. In Tea District Labour Association (1924) "Sardari" is mentioned as "Sirdari".

the object of persuading their relatives and former co-villagers to accompany them to Assam. The "Sirdars" were held responsible often physically for misrepresentation as to the conditions under which labour has to work.

Bengal Duars, formerly a part of Bhutan was annexed to the British Bengal in 1864. The first tea grant was issued in 1864, since then the story of Duars tea plantation began. Bengal Duars appeared on the tea map of India rather late.

The growth of plantations in the Duars brought a sea change in the economy of the area. The natural economy of the area was transformed into a monetised economy. But the most significant was the demographic change.

In the Census of 1961, 1,359,292 persons were counted in the district of Jalpaiguri. Ten years back the district had a population of 916,747. Therefore, during the ten years the population of the district has increased by 442,545 i.e., 48.27% (Government of India, 1961).

The first attempt to enumerate the people was made in 1858-59, at the time of the Revenue Survey of Rangpur. A rough Census was held then and it was found that the population of the permanently settled parts of the district was 1,89,067 (Government of India, 1961).

At the close of the Bhutan War, a survey of Western Duars was made in 1865-67. The survey officers returned the population at 49,620. A special Census conducted in 1870 showed the figure of population as 100,111 (Government of India, 1961).

It is evident that migration of people from the neighbouring districts to the waste lands of the Western Duars began as soon as the British rule ensured safety. Subsequent Censuses showed remarkable increases. In 1871-72 the population was 327,985 (Government of India, 1961).

The growth of the population of Jalpaiguri district was very much linked to its increasing prosperity due to the growth of tea. In fact the whole history of the growth of population in the Duars was the history of immigration to various tea estates located in the tract. The census of 1961, puts the figure of the people born outside the district at 4,54,177 (Government of India, 1961).

The 1981 Census puts the population figure at 42,214,871 as against 1,750,159 in 1971 i.e., an increase of 26.55% (Government of India, 1981).

As have been stated earlier the tribal society in Bihar was in a state of turmoil in the nineteenth century for various reasons (discussed in the context of Assam). The establishment of tea industry opened up an avenue for employment of the tribals.

Immigration to Jalpaiguri district increased by leaps and bounds in the period 1891 to 1941. The number of immigrants as per the 1901 Census was 188,223 as compared to 143,922 in 1891 (Government of India, 1901). The migration statements showed that 80,436 immigrants were from Ranchi and 10,562 from Santhal Parganas. According to the Census of 1921 the number of persons born in Ranchi but enumerated in the district of Jalpaiguri in 1911 was no less than 126,214 (Thompson, 1923). According to the Census of 1971, the percentage of scheduled tribes to the total population of the district was 24.49 (Government of India, 1971). The number of scheduled tribes engaged in livestock, forestry, fishing, hunting, plantations, orchards and allied activities according to the Census of 1971, was 95,414 (See table I). Bihar's contribution according to the same census was 20,350. The district according to the Census of 1981 had a scheduled tribe population of 491,791 of which 252,842 are males and 238,949 are females. 242,072 persons of the population lived in the Jalpaiguri sub-division. The scheduled tribes inhabiting the 12 towns of the district comprised 1.78% of the population (Government of India, 1981).

TABLE - I

SCHEDULED TRIBES ENGAGED IN LIVESTOCK, FORESTRY,
FISHING, HUNTING, PLANTATIONS, ORCHARDS AND ALLIED
ACTIVITIES

TRIBES	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1. Asur	-	-	-
2. Bhumij	253	481	734
3. Chakma	28	-	28
4. Chero	-	-	-
5. Chik Baraik	182	139	321
6. Garo	61	31	92
7. Gond	-	-	-
8. Kisan	26	59	85
9. Kora	539	472	1,011
10. Kharia	1,986	1,106	3,092
11. Lohra or Lohara	-	-	-
12. Mahali	3,243	2,077	5,320
13. Malpaharia	1,440	862	2,302
14. Mech	734	720	1,454
15. Munda	9,127	6,331	15,458
16. Magh	12	-	12
17. Nagesia	187	199	386
18. Oraon	21,402	17,247	38,649
19. Santhal	7,999	5,688	13,687
20. Lepcha	400	372	772
21. Unclassified	7,203	4,808	12,011
Total	54,822	40,592	95,414

The East India Company acquired the nucleus of the Darjeeling district from the Raja of Sikkim in 1835. At that time it was almost entirely under forest and practically uninhabited. This hill tract of 135 square miles had a population of 100 (Dash 1947 : p 49). The Company decided to raise it as a hill resort. The decision encouraged migration from neighbouring areas. The original inhabitants, probably the Lepchas were out numbered. By the year 1850, Dr. Campbell, the first Superintendent, reported that the number of inhabitants had risen to 10,000 (Dash, 1947 : p 49). A rough Census taken in 1869 stated the total number of inhabitants to be over 22,000.

When Terai was added to the Darjeeling district it was not clear of what was then the population of the area, but it may be assumed that it was considerable from the fact that in 1874, it was reported that at the time of annexation there were 544 jotes (revenue area).

In the first regular census of the district, taken in 1872, the population figure reports was 94,712 (Dash, 1947 : p 49; O'Malley 1907 : p 35). The same census showed the population of Terai to be 47,985. The Censuses of 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931 and 1941 put the population figure of the district at 1,55,179, 2,23,134, 2,49,117, 2,65,550, 2,82,748, 3,19,635 and 3,76,369 respectively (Dash, 1947 : p 49). But, the District Census Hand book 1971, put the population figures of 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931

and 1941 at 265,780, 279,899, 294,237, 332,061 and 390,899 respectively. The rapid increase in 1881 has been attributed in part to the incompleteness and inaccuracy of the first census. The main causes have been the development of tea industry and the influx of settlers to cultivate the waste lands. After 1891 there had been a check in the population growth due to the fact that after 1891 upto 1921 the tea industry was in a period of recession. Since 1931 the growth of population increased. Then it was 332,061 i.e., a decadal variation of +37,824. In 1941, 1951, 1961 and 1971, the population was 390,899, 459,617, 624,640 and 781,777 respectively (Government of India, 1971). According to the 1981 Census the population of the district was 1,024,269 of which 542,567 were males and 481,702 were females (Government of India, 1981).

Scheduled tribes constituted a considerable proportion of the population of the district. In 1971 the total tribal population of the district was 108,586, of which 56,047 were males and 52,539 were females (Government of India, 1971). Ten years back 96,444 persons were found to be belonging to scheduled tribe category (Government of India, 1961). The Census of 1981 recorded 151,073 persons as to belong to scheduled tribe category thus recording an increase of 42,488 persons over that of 1971. The following table presents the scheduled tribe population of the district according to 1971 Census.

TABLE - 2

SCHEDULED TRIBE POPULATION OF DARJEELING
DISTRICT ACCORDING TO 1971 CENSUS

TRIBE	TOTAL POPULATION
1. Bhutia including Sherpa, Toto, Dukpa, Kagatary, Tibetan and Yolmo	30,442
2. Chakma	59
3. Chik Baraik	1,544
4. Garo	203
5. Hajang	46
6. Kisan	713
7. Lepcha	13,536
8. Lodha, Kheria or Kharia	1,744
9. Magh	41
10. Mahali	647
11. Malpaharia	2,443
12. Mech	253
13. Munda	6,844
14. Nagesia	855
15. Oraon	26,682
16. Senthali	10,335
17. Unclassified	12,149
Total	108,586

Preponderance of scheduled tribe population is observed in the Siliguri Sub-Division. According to the 1961 Census 58.59% of the total tribal population of the district was found in the Sub-Division. The 1971 Census showed the figure of scheduled tribes inhabiting the Siliguri Sub-Division at 59,931 with Naxalbari, Phansidewa and Kharibari accounting for 13,286, 21,228 and 13,579 persons respectively (Government of India, 1971). The next decade experienced an increase of 30,557 persons bringing the total figure to 90,488 (Government of India, 1981). In the same year, the Naxalbari and Phansidewa blocks experienced increase of 8,340 and 17,359 persons respectively, but the Kharibari block experienced decrease of 1,701 persons. The Naxalbari and Phansidewa blocks as per 1981 Census had scheduled tribe population of 21,626 and 38,587 persons respectively while the Kharibari block had 11,878 persons (Government of India, 1981).

The Oraons were the maximum in number among the scheduled tribes in the district. This tribe immigrated to the district from the Chota Nagpur Plateau. They were recruited primarily to clear out land for cultivation of tea. In 1961 they accounted for 33.18% of the total scheduled tribes of the district in the rural areas. In the year 1872 the district had a Oraon population of 1,648. The number increased to 4,632 in 1891, 8,042 in 1901, 7,543 in 1911, 10,952 in 1921, 12,412 in 1931 and 12,433 in 1941. The figure of 1941 did not include Oraon Christian who were 2,000

in number (Dash, 1947 : p 69). In 1971 they were 26,682 in number (Government of India, 1971).

The Mundas accounted for 9.95% of the total tribal rural population of the district in 1961. They came to the district from Chota Nagpur. They too were recruited for opening outland for tea cultivation. In 1891 their population was 255. The number increased to 3,980 in 1901, 3,365 in 1911 and 5,332 in 1921. After 1921 there had been a decrease in the number in 1931 the number was 5,062 and in 1941 it was 4,993. The 1971 Census put the Munda population of the district at 6,844 (Government of India, 1971).

The Santhals who were immigrants from Santhal Parganas accounted for 8.55% of the districts's scheduled tribe population. This tribe was recruited in Terai mainly for the purpose of cleaning jungles and bringing waste lands under cultivation of tea. In 1891 there were 999 persons of the tribe. The number increased to 3,537 in 1911 and 4,771 in 1931, but came down to 4,045 in 1941 (Dash, 1947 : p 68). The 1971 Census puts the figure at 10,335 (Government of India, 1971). Most of the Santhals of the Siliguri Sub-Division resided in villages only about 1,000 lived in tea gardens (Dash, 1947 : p 69).

Alike Assam labour shortage was felt even in the district of Darjeeling with the expansion of tea industry. In the Darjeeling

hill the shortage was met by large scale migrants from Nepal, but in Terai the need for labour was met by tribal immigrants from Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. Tribals like the Oraon, Munda and the Santhals were the main migrants. Recruitments were made through "Sardars" discussed earlier.