

CHAPTER - III

TEA-INDUSTRY AND THE LOCALS OF STUDYFEATURES OF THE TEA INDUSTRY

Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines plantation as large estate in a tropical or sub-tropical region that is generally cultivated by unskilled or semi-skilled labour under central direction (Webster 1961 : 1732). This definition though brings out certain fundamental features, it has also some limitations. It does not state about the form of labour power, purpose of production etc. International Labour Organisation (ILO) in its 42nd session of general conference in 1955 defined plantation as an agricultural undertaking, regularly employing hired workers which is situated in the tropical or sub-tropical region and which is mainly concerned with the cultivation or production crops such Coffee, Tea, Sugercane, Rubber, Bananas etc. for commercial purposes (ILO 1966:2). This definition of course states some basic features of plantation, but it does not incorporate the other form of labour power such as servile labour etc. except the hired labour. According to Oxford English Dictionary (Vol.-VII, 1963:953) Plantation is an estate or farm especially in a tropical country on which Cotton, Tobacco, Sugar-cane, Coffee or other crops are cultivated, formerly chiefly by servile labour.

William O. Jones defines a plantation as "an economic unit producing agricultural commodities..... for sale and employing

a relatively large number of unskilled labourers whose activities are closely supervised.....(It differs) from other kinds of farms in the way in which the factors of production, primarily management and labour are combined"(Jones 1968 : 154). There is a vertical hierarchy in the plantation with skilled supervisors or managers directing production undertaken by unskilled labourers whose "primary skill is to follow orders" (Bhowmik . 1981:10). Jones definition of plantation is better than the other definitions stated above, but it does not tell about how the prevalent production relations emerge and the plantation is a part of the wider social system and a change in that will cause change in the prevailing production relations (Ibid:11). Eric Wolf is more pertinent in this regard. He states that plantation is also an instrument of force wielded to create and maintain a class-structure of workers and owners, connected hierarchically by a staff line of overseers and managers (Wolf 1959 : 136).

The remarkable point in this definition is that coercion is an integral part of the plantation system.

Another very important feature of plantation should be mentioned is that low wages. It is a labour intensive industry and the planters always kept the wage rate low by coercion. Though the areas where plantations are established are thinly populated, yet the planters are successful in keeping the wage rate minimum and static over the years. It is even lower than the wage rate of the neighbouring agricultural labourers (Chapter v).

The Plantation Labour Act, 1951 (Act No. 69 of 1951) defines plantation as, any land use or intended to be used for growing Tea, Coffee, Rubber (Cinchona or Cardamom) which admeasures (5 hectares) or more and in which fifteen or more persons are employed on any day of the preceding twelve months. This definition is made for administrative purposes such as taxation, labour welfare etc.

Considering all the above definitions the common features of plantation are :-

- It is established in tropical and sub-tropical region.
- It is established in large estate.
- The labourers are either hired, migrant or slave.
- They are unskilled or semi skilled.
- There is a vertical hierarchy in the plantation;
The works of the labourers are closely supervised under central direction.
- It is specializes in some crops.
- The production is large scale and made primarily for commercial purposes including export.
- Coercion is an integral part of plantation.
- Wages are being kept low.

INTRODUCTION OF TEA CULTIVATION IN INDIA

In India, indigenous tea plant was grown naturally in Assam, but it was not known to the Britishers till 1821 when Major Robert Bruce discovered it in the Sibsagar district of Assam, followed by Mr. David Scott in 1824 (Sarkar & Lama 1986:1).

The East India Company had a monopoly over Chinese tea trade in Europe. The China tea seeds began to arrive in India from 1774 as Lord Warren Hastings made a treaty in this year for duty free sale of Bhutanese goods in North Bengal. Warren Hastings made a selection of them and sent to George Bogle, then the British Emissary in Bhutan. No practical result seems to have followed, but the general impetus to trade and industry given by Lord Warren Hastings had resulted in many directions (Griffith 1967:33). In 1778, Sir Joseph Banks was asked to prepare a series of notes for the East India Company on the prospects of tea cultivation in India (Ibid:33). He suggested experiments be made with tea which he felt would grow profitably between the latitudes 26° and 30°. He was also optimistic about the possibility of importing tea growers and tea makers from china. From that time, serious thoughts were given to the production of tea in India. Meanwhile, perhaps in 1780 Colonel Kid brought some tea bushes from the Canton area of China and planted it in his garden in Calcutta. This attempt was not successful and it had no commercial purposes (Ghosh 1970:1). In 1793, Sir Josheph Banks visited China with Lord Maccarthy to obtain detailed information about the cultivation and manufacture of tea. As a result a consignment or seeds

and plants arrived at Calcutta Botanical Garden. However, this attempt did not succeed due to improper planning (Ghosh 1987:7-8). After that East India Company did not encourage tea cultivation in India as till then it had monopoly over Chinese tea trade.

In 1833, the East India Company lost its monopoly of trade over China as there were other companies in England as well which started trade with China and other countries, like the United states had, by then, established trade relations with China. This further prompted to take immediate steps regarding promotion of the product.

In 1834, Lord William Bentick the Governor General of India appointed a committee, known as the Tea Committee to investigate into the scope of tea culture in India (Ibid:9). The committee selected Kumayon district at the foothills of Himalayas for tea cultivation. The first attempt of this committee was not successful. Due to heavy rainfall the soil near the root of the bush became loose and the bushes died up. The second attempt was made on the terraces of hills and it became successful.

Having the news of unsuccessful attempt of the tea committee Lord Bentick appointed a commission to find out possibility of tea cultivation in Assam (Assam was annexed in British India in 1826). Soon after the recommendation of that commission, a governmental area was selected at Sadiya in the Lakhimpur district of Assam with China tea seeds in 1835 and another at Chabuya of the same district with Assam indigenous tea seeds in 1837. Similar experimental projects were also taken up in Gurumktesur, and

Kumaon and Garhwal and also in South India under the auspices of the tea committee.

In 1838, the first consignment of Indian tea containing 8 chests (350lbs.) were exported to England and it was sold in the London market on January 10, 1839.

The first tea company in India was Assam company, established in 1839 in London (Ibid:10).

The cultivation of tea started in Darjeeling hills in 1839 and soon after the Bengal Tea Association was formed and subsequently merged with the London Tea Company in 1840. Tea culture also started in Chitagang in about 1840. Tea was introduced in Sylhet & Cachar in about 1855, in Terai in 1862 and in Dooars in 1874. While experiments were carried out in South India in the early days little progress was made there until 1883, only some 11,000 acres in all having been planted until then (Ghosh 1970:2).

However, after that tea cultivation has been spread rapidly in India.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

In 1985, the number of tea estates in India was 13, 536, covering 399, 929 hectre of land (Tea Board 1987:4). The average daily number of labour employed in 1985 in Tea plantation in India was 892, 398 of which 403, 696 were male, 404, 322 were female, 26, 081 were adolescent and 58, 299 were children (Tea Board 1987:158). The total production of tea in 1985 was 624, 646 thousand kg. (Tea Board 1987:12).

The geographical area of tea plantation in India is divided into North & South India. The number of tea estates according to their sizes in North & South India is given in the Table - 3.1

TABLE - 3.1

NUMBER OF TEA ESTATES IN NORTH AND SOUTH INDIA BY SIZE CLASS.

SIZE (X) (Area in Hectre)	NORTH INDIA	SOUTH INDIA	ALL INDIA
$x \leq 8.9$	34	10,469	10,503
$8.9 < x \leq 50$	102	185	287
$50 < x \leq 100$	124	38	162
$100 < x \leq 200$	234	57	291
$200 < x \leq 400$	307	100	407
$x > 400$	285	37	322
OVERALL	1086	10,886	11,972*

Source : Tea Board 1987 : B, 20.

*The figures for tea estates may not always tally with the original number of tea estates because of non-existence/non-continuing of the tea estates still being registered with tea board.

In 1985, the number of tea estates in South India was 10, 886 and that of North India was 1086. In South India total area held by large gardens was more even though small growers were more in number. Whereas in North India most of the gardens were medium and large.

Area, Employment and productivity of Tea Plantation in India in 1985 was as follows :

TABLE - 3.2

AREA, EMPLOYMENT & PRODUCTIVITY OF TEA PLANTATION IN INDIA.

(Percentage in brackets)

ITEMS	NORTH INDIA	SOUTH INDIA	ALL INDIA
AREA (in Hec.)	326260 (81.57)	73669 (18.43)	399929 (100)
OUTPUT (in kg.)	514295 (78.37)	141867 (21.63)	656162 (100)
DAILY EMPLOYMENT OF LABOUR	735206 (80.76)	175192 (19.24)	910398 (100)
AVERAGE YIELD PER HECTARE(in kg.)	1576	1926	1641
NO. OF LABOUR PER HECTARE	2.25	2.13	2.23
PRODUCTIVITY PER LABOUR(in kg.)	699	902	735

Source : Tea Board 1987 : 19,20.

The total area of tea plantation in India in 1985 was 399929 hectare of which 81.57% (i.e. 326260 hec.) was in North India and 18.43% (i.e. 73669)hec.) in South India. Out of total production of 656162 kg. North India produced 78.37% (514295kg.) while South India contributed 21.63% (141867 kg.). The average daily labour employed in the tea plantations in India was 9,10,398 of which 80.76% (7,35,206 persons) was in North India and 19.24% (1,75,192 persons) employed in the South Indian tea plantation. The average yield per hectare in North India was 1576 kg. and that of South India 1926 kg. The all India average yield per hectare was 1641 kg. So, the rate of yield per hectare compare to All India average in North India was 96.03% while in South India it was more high i.e. 117.36%. The All India average of labour employed per hectare was 2.23; In North India it was 2.25 and in South India 2.13. The average productivity per labour in All India was 735 kg. and in North India it was 699kg. and in South India it was 902 kg. The rate of productivity per labour compare to All India average was 95.10% and 122.92% respectively in North and South India.

India produced 656,162 thousand kg. tea in 1985 which was 28.94% of total world production of tea in 1985 (In 1985 total world production of tea was 2,232,620 kg.). It has exported 214,021 kg. of tea in 1985 which was accounted for 22.37% of total world export in 1985 (Tea Board 1987:186,187,189 & 190). India has earned Rs.562,13,00000 from tea exports in 1985 which was nearly 6% of total export earning of India from all commodities Tea was India's second largest foreign-exchange-earner.

LABOUR

Plantation is a combination of agriculture and industry. It has two parts namely cultivation and processing. The nature of work in plantations is therefore of two types, that in the field and that in the factory. Those who are engaged in the cultivation part of production are called field labour. The field labour performs all the work from soil preparation to leaf-plucking including seeding, cloning, nursing, pruning, irrigation, manuring, weeding, administering pesticides etc. and plucking. The processing part includes withering, rolling, fermenting, fibre-extracting, sorting, funning, middle-toning and lastly weighing and packing. All these are done by the factory - labour.

There are four categories of workers engaged in tea plantations :- Male, Female, Adolescents and Children. The first two are workers above the age of 18 yrs. The workers between the ages 16 to 18 yrs. are adolescents and children are those between 14-16 yrs. of age. Adolescent and child labour is a special feature of the plantation industry. In the tea plantations of North India, particularly in Assam and West Bengal the adolescent and child labourers are found to be more numerous than in South India.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

There is a distinctive hierarchy in the work organization in tea plantation system. This hierarchy helps to maintain the class structure of workers and planters. Generally there are four categories of employees in the tea estates, every category is assigned with different type of work, their status, their wages are also different. These categories are Management, Staff, Sub-staff and Worker (collie).

CATEGORY - I : MANAGEMENT

The manager is on the top of the hierarchy in a tea estate. He is all in all in a tea estate. In a tea garden he is responsible for all types of work. He is the legal representative of the employer or the company. In some companies, there are superintending managers above the managers to supervise a group of gardens under one company. In this hierarchial organization the next lower rank consists of a few assistant managers. The number of assistant managers depends on the size of the garden. Generally gardens less than 1000 acres of land under tea will have one or two assistant managers. The gardens above this size may have more than two or three assistant managers. The duties of assistant managers are to assist the managers. In a large tea estate the assistant managers are of two types - i) assistant manager (garden) and ii) assistant manager (factory). Generally the assistant manager (factory) is an engineer who looks after the manufacturing works and machineries of factory. The assistant manager (garden)

is normally given the charge of a division of the garden or a part of it. He is supposed to supervise the works of the labourers in his division or a part of it.

Sometimes, the large tea estates may have middle cadre officer (M.C.O.) or junior cadre officer (J.C.O.) as the link between the managers and staff.

CATEGORY - II : STAFF

The staff category is just below the management category in the organizational hierarchy of a tea estate. Generally this category consists of office clerks, factory assistants and garden assistants. The factory assistant and garden assistants are the only two staff who do not work in the offices. The duty of a factory assistant is to assist the assistant manager (factory). His counterpart in the garden, the garden assistant is also supposed to assist The assistant manager (garden).

There is a number of clerks in the office of a tea estate, headed by the head clerk. The head clerk supervises the works in the office. He also handles the cash. Below him there is a number of clerks like provident fund clerk, store clerk etc. who are assigned with specific official jobs.

CATEGORY - III : SUB-STAFF

This category comes below the staff category. Sub-staff are mainly supervisory staff and generally promoted from the rank of workers. But, unlike the daily rated workers they are

paid on monthly basis and their wages are slightly higher than that of the daily rated workers.

In the sub-staff category Munshi and Sardar are the highest designation in the garden and factory respectively. In the garden, next to Munshi comes Chapراسي. The smaller gardens, i.e. gardens with less than 700 acres, generally do not have either of these two posts. Instead they have only a Munshi or a Chapراسي. Both the Munshi and Chapراسي supervise the works of the daily rated workers. The next rank after Chapراسي in the garden is Baidar. His work is to keep attendance of sub-staff and workers in the field. The Dafader comes next to Baidar. He is given the charge of a group of workers. He is the gang leader. He supervises the works of this group. Dafader is one of the most important post in a tea garden. He directly supervises the performance of the workers. He has to guide them at every step. He is responsible for all minute details of work in the garden i.e. both quantity and quality of work.

Chowkidar and Paniwala are the next two posts after the Dafader. There are a number of Chowkidars and Paniwalas in a garden. The Chowkidar is the watchman or guard of the tea estate. There are line Chowkidars also, who guard the labour lines and also convey manager's orders to the workers. The Paniwala's duty is to carry drinking water to the workers while they are at work.

In the factory, the sub-staff category is not so broad like that of the garden. Beside the factory Sardar there are

Electricians and Fitters (mechanics) also.

Beside all these, there are other sub-staff, such as, Dawawala (health assistant) or the Pharmacist who helps the doctor in dispensing medicines. The drivers, cleaners of vehicles, gardeners, office peons are some other sub-staff in a tea estate.

CATEGORY - IV : WORKER OR COOLIE

This is the fourth or the last category in the hierarchy of a tea estate. This category consists of factory workers and garden workers. They are the main force among the employees in a tea estate. They are directly related with production. These workers are of four types : Male, Female, Adolescent and Children. Those who are above 18 yrs. old are called male or female worker according to their sex. Workers in the age group 16 yrs. to 18 yrs. are called adolescents worker and those who are within 14 yrs. to 16 yrs. old are called children worker. In the tea estates in West Bengal adult Male, Female, Adolescents are paid equal wages. Children are paid half of the wages of former.

The factory workers do all the tea processing works in the factory, this include withering of tea leaves to weighting and packing of prepared tea leaves. In the garden the workers have to do every thing from preparation of soil to plucking of leaves. Generally the female workers are engaged in plucking as they are good pluckers than their male counterparts. The male workers do the heavier works like the hoeing and clearing the soil of undergrowth, pruning the bushes in winter, chopping down shade trees when required and so. on. Children workers

are given lighter works like removing creepers, parasites from bushes and also leaf-plucking.

There is little scope of promotion from one category to another in the hierarchy in tea estate except from worker to sub-staff. It is very rare that a staff gets promotion to management category and also from a sub-staff to a staff. The ethnic composition of workers, sub-staff, staff and management is also different. The workers and the sub-staff are of tribal or Nepali origin. The staff are generally Bengalee and those in management are either Bengalee or Non-Bengalee. Even an educated tribal youth hardly gets a service in the staff category.

TEA INDUSTRY IN WEST BENGAL

The discovery of indigenous tea plant in Assam by Major Bruce in 1821 and Mr. Scott in 1824 strengthened the view that tea can be profitably cultivated under similar condition. The British officials took the major steps in introducing the crop, found the climate of Darjeeling hills ideal for the cultivation of tea. In 1835, a strip of land comprising the present Darjeeling was ceded to the East India company by the Sikkimputlee Rajah. In 1838-39 tea was sent to Britain from Assam and in 1839 it was sold at a high price at London. Encouraged by this, Dr. Cambeel of the Indian Medical service, posted at Darjeeling brought some China seeds from Kumaon in 1839 and planted them at his residence. Pioneering works also started in other places of the district and an experimental tea nursery was established on the Lebong ridge

in 1835. Two years after, with the recommendation of Dr. Hooker, another experimental nursery was started at Lebong under the supervision of Major R.E. Cromlin. The work was appreciably successful. By 1856 development had advanced from the experimental to a more commercial and extensive stage. In that year the Alubari Tea garden was opened by the Kurseong & Darjeeling Tea Company and another on the Lebong spur by the Darjeeling Land Mortgage Bank.

It was in 1862 that the tea plantation was introduced in the Terai (foot hills of Darjeeling Himalayas) region at New Champta and Matigara under the same proprietorship.

The first tea garden in the Dooars of Jalpaiguri district was opened at Gazoldoba in 1874 by Mr. Houghton who also was a pioneer of Tea industry in Darjeeling district.

Thus there are three tea growing areas in West Bengal -
i) Darjeeling hills in the Darjeeling district, ii) Terai, the foot hills of Himalayas in Darjeeling district and iii) Dooars in Jalpaiguri district.

The growth of tea industry in Darjeeling district (including Darjeeling hills an Terai) and Jalpaiguri district is given in the following tables.

TABLE - 3.3GROWTH OF TEA GARDENS IN DARJEELING DISTRICT 1861 to 1985

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NO. OF TEA GARDENS</u>
1861	22
1872	74
1881	155
1891	177
1901	170
1911	156
1921	168
1931	169
1941	136
1951	138
1961	146
1971	145
1981	151
1985	165

Source : Census District Handbook Darjeeling 1951 :
xxx'1, Tea Board 1987 : 3.

From this table it is found that within a short span of 11 years i.e. from 1861 to 1872 the number of tea gardens had more than trebled and again from 1872 to 1881 the number of tea gardens had increased more than doubled. In 1891, the number of tea estate were 177. But the number decreased thereafter though the area under the tea plantation was increased. The reason in that from this time onwards, tea estates were more and more organised under big limited concerns and number of tea estates were merged under one name. From 1981 to 1985 there was significant number of increase of number of tea estates. This was due to that some new tea gardens were opening in the Terai area of Darjeeling district.

TABLE - 3.4GROWTH OF TEA GARDENS IN JALPAIGURI DISTRICT 1876 to 1985

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NO. OF GARDENS</u>
1876	13
1881	55
1892	182
1901	235
1911	191
1921	131
1931	151
1941	189
1951	158
1961	155
1971	151
1981	154
1985	156

Source : Griffith 1967:21
 Mitra 1953:263
 Tea Board 1987:3

The above table shows that from 1876 to 1901 the number of tea gardens had been increased very rapidly. Sometimes it had been quadrupled also (from 1876 to 1881), sometimes more than trebled (from 1881 to 1892). In 1911 the number of tea gardens had been decreased. The apparent decrease in the number of gardens was due to the fact that the figures represents the number of grants or temporarily settled areas. The a number of gardens was really 103, some of which consisted of several grants, which had not been amalgamated (Ghosh 1987:36).

At the time of this study i.e. in 1985, there was 102 tea gardens in Darjeeling hill areas, covering 19,804 hectares of land. The average daily number of labourers engaged in these tea gardens was 46, 275 and the total production was 12,921

thousand kgs. tea. (Tea Board 1987 : 159).

Terai had 63 (one in West Dinajpur district) gardens, the total area covered was 12,395 hectares. The average daily number of labourers in the tea plantation of Terai was 24,893 and the total production was 22,893 thousand kgs. tea in 1985 (Ibid:159).

The number of gardens in Dooars was 158 (one in Coochbehar district), total area covered was 65,817 hectares of land. The number of average daily rated worker was 161,385 and the total production was 121,956 thousand kgs. of tea in 1985 (Ibid:159).

LABOUR

The labourers in the tea plantation in West Bengal are either immigrants or their descendents. They came either from Chotonagpur-Santal pargana region of Bihar or from Nepal. Some of them also came from the adjacent tribal areas of Chotonagpur Santal pargana region of Orissa and Madhyapradesh. The local people like Rajbanshi, Mech, Rava, Toto are rarely found to work in the tea gardens of West Bengal. (Bhowmik 1981:4). The adivasis from Chotonagpur - Santal pargana region and neighbouring tribal areas constitute more than seventy percent of the labourers and the remaining are of Nepali origin.

The total number of labourers engaged in the tea plantation of West Bengal of a decade (from 1976 to 1985) is given in table - 3.5.

TABLE - 3.5

COMPOSITION OF LABOUR FORCE IN TEA GARDENS IN WEST BENGAL
1976 to 1985

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>	<u>ADOLESCENT</u>	<u>CHILDREN</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
1976	84834	94597	7821	12797	200049
1977	87289	96255	8003	13719	205466
1978	92219	95283	8389	14098	209989
1979	93604	96489	9442	13765	213300
1980	97374	100388	9005	12081	218848
1981	95698	98920	7037	12007	213662
1982	97805	99554	7342	12300	217006
1983	102801	101128	7768	9327	221060
1984	105079	102529	7724	9327	224659
1985	109308	106406	5996	10843	232553

Source : Tea Board 1978 : 119, 1987 : 151

The table shows that new employment in the tea gardens is increasing very slowly. In 1976 the total number of labourers were 200049 and in 1985 it had increased to 232553, i.e. only 32504 new recruitment over a period of 10 years, was made in the tea gardens of West Bengal.

TRADE UNIONS

Unlike in other industries trade unions in tea plantation in West Bengal is mainly a post independence phenomenon. Before independence tea gardens were totally isolated from the rest of the country - the communication system in these areas being too bad. Moreover, no one could enter the labour lines

without the permission of the managers of the tea gardens. Though there were some sporadic attempts of workers' protests in the post independence period but it was not possible for the workers to form their organisations for collective bargaining until 1945-46 i.e. just on the eve of independence. Even, the nationalist movement could not touch the plantation workers to a large extent. However, beside the workers' demands, independence played a role in that context. The gardens are not so isolated as they were earlier, communication has improved, outsiders do not require the managements' permission to enter the labour lines. With this, the spread of education among the workers also helped to break up isolation from the outside world. These changes helped the workers to organise themselves to a large extent.

The attempts for organized collective bargaining in Darjeeling hill areas was made in the last part of 1945 when Darjeeling District Tea Garden Workers' Union was formed by the communists. In 1948 the Communist Party of India was banned and its local leaders like Ratanlal Bramhin, Bhadrabahadoor Hamal, Ganeshlal Subha were arrested. The registration of the union was cancelled.

In 1951, they were released from jail and a new union Darjeeling District Chiya Kaman Majdoor Union (DDCKMU) was registered in August, 1951.

In Terai, the first trade union was formed in Maryview Tea Estate by the Communists in 1945-46. But this was not a registered union. It was dismantled when the organizer of this union, Sarbati

Mian, a worker of the tea estate was removed from the garden by the management. Though the Communist Party of India was banned and some of the local leaders were arrested in 1948, the attempts to organise workers were carried on. But these attempts were in vain as the local organisers like Souren Bose, Keshab Sarkar were arrested then while others were already in jail. Then, when they were released from jail before the election of 1952, they again tried to organise the workers and were successful in 1952-53.

Dooars witnessed the first signs of collective action among the plantation workers in 1946, when the communist organizers of the Bengal Assam Rail Road Workers Union (BARRWU) tried to organize the tea plantation workers. The first trade union in tea plantation in Dooars, Zilla Cha Bagan Majdoor Union (ZCBMU) was formed in 1946. The leaders of this union were arrested in 1948, when the Communist Party was banned. The registration of this union was also cancelled.

In 1952 the leaders of this union came out from jail and in 1953 they again started to organize the workers under a newly registered Zilla Cha Bagan Workers' Union (ZCBWU).

However, after the first initiation by communist organizers, the Indian National Congress, Socialist and other parties tried to organize the workers and within a short period, Congress, Revolutionary Socialist Party, Krishak Majdoor Proja Parishad formed their unions. The Congress formed its unions in 1948. The names of the unions were West Bengal Cha Shramik Congress (WBCSC) and Dooars Cha Bagan Majdoor Sangha (DCBMS). Dooars Cha

Bagan Workers' Union (DCBWU) affiliated to UTUC(R.S.P.) was also formed in 1948. In 1950-51 West Bengal Cha Shramik Congress (WBCSC) detached itself from the India National Congress and joined the Krishak Majdoor Proja Parishad. In 1952 the name of the union was changed into West Bengal Cha Shramik Union (WBCSU) and affiliated itself with Hind Majdoor Sabha (HMS). When the West Bengal Cha Shramik Congress joined the Krishak Majdoor Proja Parishad (KMPP) in 1950-51, the Congress formed Darjeeling Cha Kaman Majdoor Sangha (DCKMS - affiliated with INTUC) in Darjeeling district in the same year.

Now, there are a number of trade unions in the tea plantations in West Bengal. Almost all the large central trade union organizations like AITUC, INTUC, HMS, CITU, UTUC (RSP), UTUC (Lenin Sarani), NFITU, HMKP etc. have their affiliated unions here. Most of the workers are now unionized. Growth of multiple unions causes divisions among the workers, but it also leaves room for workers' choice for membership of unions. Besides the above mentioned large central trade unions, there are unions also of small central trade unions like National Labour Coordination Committee (NLCC), Indian Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), Bhartiya Shramik Sangha (BSS) etc.

DESCRIPTION OF THE THREE GARDENS

LALFA TEA ESTATE

Lalfa tea estate is situated on the 31A National Highway in between Bagdogra and Maxalbari of the Siliguri sub-division of

Darjeeling district. It is 5km. West from Bagdogra and 6km. East from Naxalbari under the jurisdiction of Bagdogra police station, and Naxalbari block. This garden is surrounded by Lalfa forest on the North, Atal Tea Estate on the West and Damdama village on the South and Sanyasithan Tea Estate on the East.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The Lalfa Tea Estate was established in 1890. The owner was a British planter - the Bhadunkum brothers. At that time the tea estate was divided into two parts - Lalfa and Titi. The two gardens had one factory.

In 1923, the ownership of this garden had been transferred to Bengalee planters. It came under the ownership of Darjeeling Union Tea Company Ltd. which had two gardens in Terai.

In 1945, the Darjeeling Union Tea Company was divided into three companies. The Lalfa Tea Estate came under the New Darjeeling Union Tea Company.

In 1948, the ownership of the company changed hands again. The agent of the New Darjeeling Union Tea Company purchased the ownership of this tea estate in that year with the help of the British Planter. He himself became the manager of this garden and transferred the head office from Darjeeling to Siliguri. After the death of this person in 1958, his son succeeded him and became the managing director of the company.

DESCRIPTION

Lalfa Tea Estate is a medium sized tea estate, covering an area of 332 hectares. The estate has two divisions - Lalfa & Titi. The total area of this tea estate was 332 hectares of which 201.49 hectares was under tea, proposed tea land (area kept for extension) - 65.45 hectares, others (including roads and paths, quarters, buildings, factory etc.) - 66.6 hectares.

The total population of this tea estate was 1114. Among them the tribal population was 891 and the rest were Bengalees. This tea estate had a variety of tribes like Oraon, Munda, Kheria, Baraik, Mahali etc.

At the time of this study the total number of permanent workers in this garden was 362, of which 223 were male, 139 were female. The total number of sub-staff was 25 and there was 9 staff in this garden. There was one manager and one assistant manager.

Labourers in this garden lived in labour lines. There were 7 labour lines in different parts of the garden. The number of households in this tea estate was 229. The labour quarters or huts were of two types- Pucca and Kuchcha. There were 139 Pucca quarters and the remaining 90 were Kuchcha quarters. The Pucca quarters were made of brick and mortar and the Kuchcha quarters of bamboo, thatch, mud etc. Every Pucca quarter had one bed room, a kitchen and a small varanda. The type of Kuchcha quarters wa also same as the Pucca quarters, but sometimes it may have more rooms.

Previously the workers of same ethnic group used to live side by side in the labour lines, but now the situation has changed. Workers of different ethnic groups lived in a same labour line, though the features of previous type settlement was still existed in some labour lines.

There was one bungalow for the manager and ten staff quarters. The assistant manager stayed in a staff quarter. All these were situated near the office building. Every staff quarter had one small drawing room, two bed rooms, one kitchen and one latrine.

The tea estate had a dispensary. There was one part-time doctor, one midwife, one health assistant, one compounder and one nurse.

The office and the factory of this tea estate were situated near its entrance.

There was a creche near the factory. Working women used to keep their children in this creche while at work. An Aiya (female attendant) looked after the children. The management used to supply two litres milk everyday for all these children.

The canteen was near the factory. Some snacks and tea were available there. The management provided 2 kg. tea per week and necessary fuel for the canteen. In lieu of this the canteen had to supply daily 20 cups of tea to the office free of charge.

There was no regular market in the estate except a small grocery shop. In the weekly payment day, i.e. Monday, a small market

known as Gudrihaat would be held. Vegetables, rice, pulses, meat etc. were available in this market. Apart from these markets the workers used to buy goods from the weekly haats (market) at Kristopur, Bagdogra, Naxalbari, Matigara etc. which were much larger markets. It was also found that a man commonly known as mahajan used to supply door to door various food items like rice, pulses, mustard oil etc. at a higher price or on loan.

This tea garden had a small temple for Hindus. There was no Church in this tea estate. The Christian workers used to go to the nearby Church in Bagdogra for prayer.

Three streams flowed through the eastern and western side of this tea garden. They were Tepu and Lalfa on the east and Deononi on the west. Workers bathed and washed their clothes in these streams. They also used the river banks as their open latrines.

In the middle-west region, there was a playground. Management used to organize an intergarden football tournament every year at this ground.

There was a primary school. There were 84 students and 2 teachers when I conducted the fieldwork.

The sources of drinking water for the workers were 19 wells in different labour lines.

The lingua franca of the workers was Sadri. It is a mixture of Hindi and tribal dialects. Besides this different tribes had their own dialects languages, such as the Oraon had Kurukh, the Mundas had Mundari and so on.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Manager was on the top of the hierarchial organization in Lalfa tea estate. He was the highest authority in the factory, the garden and in the office. There was a Deputy Manager who was hierarchially placed just below the manager. He assisted the manager in performing his activities. These two formed the management category of this tea estate.

Thereafter the organization of this tea estate was divided on three lines - office, factory and garden.

In the office head clerk was the senior most staff. He supervised the office work. There was a second clerk who was placed just below the head clerk. The provident fund clerk came next to the second clerk. The function of second clerk was to assist the head clerk. As the name suggests, the provident fund clerk was to look after the provident fund matters of the employees. These three were the staff in the office. Besides, there was a peon in the office, who was a sub-staff.

In a factory, the highest rank was the head factory assistant who had to assist the Deputy Manager in supervising the works of the factory. There was a second factory assistant who assisted the head factory assistant. These two were the staff in the factory. The next rank in the factory was Gudam Sardar, who was a sub-staff and whose duty was to supervise the workers in the factory. There was one fitter, one driverman in the factory. They were the technicians. Besides, there was a number of tea makers who were engaged in different processing works.

In the garden, there was one head garden-assistant whose hierarchial position was equal to the head factory assistant, the type of work was also same. There was one second garden assistant who was to assist the head garden assistant. Below these two staff in the garden, there was one munshi, two baidars, five Kamdaris (dafader) and four paniwalas. They were all sub-staff.

The work of a munshi was to carry the orders from the top and to supervise the works accordingly. The baidar took the attendance of the sub-staff and daily rated workers. The Kamdaris or Dafaders were given the charge of a group of workers (around fifty) to supervise their work. The Paniwalas' had to supply drinking water to the workers when they were at work. Besides, there was a number of daily rated workers in the garden who performed different cultivation works in the garden.

Table - 3.6 gives us a picture of hierarchial organization of this tea estate.

TABLE - 3 .6

ORGANISATION OF WORK IN LALFA TEA ESTATE

ADMINISTRATION

MANAGER

DEPUTY MANAGER

FACTORY

OFFICE

GARDEN

HEAD FACTORY ASSISTANT

HEAD CLERK

HEAD GARDEN ASSISTANT

SECOND CLERK, P.F. CLERK

SECOND FACTORY ASSISTANT

SECOND GARDEN ASSISTANT

FITTER

MUNSHI

GUDAR SARDAR

BAIDAR

ENGINEMAN, DRIVERMAN

OFFICE PEON

DAFADAR, PANIWALA

TEA MAKERS

DAILY RATED WORKERS

ANGRABHASA TEA ESTATE

Angrabhasa tea estate is situated near Birpara, on the National Highway. It is under the jurisdiction of Birpara police station, Birpara block of Jalpaiguri district. It is surrounded by Dimdima and Nangdala gardens on the West, Birpara town on the North, Dalgaon Tea Estate on the South and Birpara electric sub-station on the East.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

This garden was established by the Buxa-Dooars Tea Company Ltd. in 1896. Subsequently it had been transferred to Duncan Brothers. In 1956 this company came under Indian ownership. From 1972 to 1977 the garden was under the administration of Birpara Tea Company Ltd. which was a part of the Duncan administration and which owned a few more tea estates in Dooars. In 1977, the company was merged with the newly formed Duncan Agro Industries Ltd. It included all gardens owned by Duncan Brothers along with some other agro-business like Cigarette, Jute, Rubber etc.

DESCRIPTION

Angrabhasa tea estate was one of the largest tea estate in Central-eastern Dooars. It had two divisions namely Angrabhasa and Birpitijhora. It covered an area of 1529 hectares of which 915 hectares were under tea, proposed tea land (area kept for extention) = 93 hectares, others (including roads and paths, quarters, buildings, factory etc.) = 521 hectares.

The total population of this garden was 7,020 in 1987. The workers of this tea estate belonged to different tribal groups such as Oraon, Munda, Kheria, Baraik, Mahali, Turi, Santal etc. A significant number of the workers were Nepali speaking people. The workers and their family members contributed nearly 98% (i.e. 6,877) to the total population and the population of the Bengalee staff, the managerial staff and their family members was around 2% (i.e. 143) of the total population of this tea estate.

This tea estate had 1725 permanent workers of which 850 were male and 875 were female. The number of sub-staff was 128 and the number of staff was 19. The garden had 1 manager, 7 assistant managers, 1 middle cadre officer (MCO) and 2 junior cadre officer (JCO) in this tea estate.

There was 25 labour lines in different parts of this garden. The number of labour quarters was 1043, of which 797 were Pucca quarters and remaining 246 were Kuchcha quarters. The type and materials of the quarters were same as that of Lalfa Tea Estate. Sometimes the Kuchcha quarters had more than one room. Though the workers of different ethnic groups lived together in the labour lines, yet it was found that still there was signs of ethnic affinity in their settlement pattern.

The number of staff quarters was 19. The quarters were situated near the office and factory. Every quarter had 1 drawing room, 2 bed rooms, 1 kitchen, 1 varanda, 1 latrine and bathroom etc.

There were 11 banglows, for the managerial staff.

All these staff quarters and banglows were provided with tap water.

There was a hospital with 22 beds. It had 2 permanent doctors, 1 nurses, 1 midwife, 1 attendant, 1 compounder, 1 health assistant, 1 cook, 1 gardener and 2 chowkidars. The hospital was situated beside the office and factory complex.

The office and factory were situated at the entrance of this tea estate.

The tea estate had three permanent creches; in each creche one Aiya (female attendant) used to look after the children of the working women. The management provided milk and misri (sugar crystal) once in a day to the children.

A canteen was there, run by the workers. The management provided nothing for canteen. Tea and snacks were available in this canteen.

There was no regular market in the tea estate. Gudri haat took place on the payment day i.e. every Saturday. Birpara market was very near from the garden. Workers and others had to buy their necessary goods from this market. Besides, the Birpara haat was held on every Sunday.

This tea estate had two temples - one Sarnamandir and one Shibmandir respectively for the Samsar and Hindu workers. The Christians used to go to the nearby Dimdima Church for prayer.

This tea estate was intercepted by two streams in different parts. The streams were Sukli and Birpitijhora. The workers took bath, washed their clothes in these streams.

There was three playgrounds. The management used to organize the annual sports and an intergarden football tournament every year in these play grounds.

There was two burning place on the banks of the streams and two burial grounds in this tea estate.

This tea estate had three primarily schools. Among these, two were sponsored by West Bengal's Secondary Education Board and one was run by the management.

The number of tube wells was around 50 in 25 labour lines. Generally workers and their family members used the bare fields or banks of the streams as their open latrines. However there was around 50 latrines and 25 bathrooms in different labour lines.

The lingua franca of the workers was Sadri. Different tribal groups and the Nepalese also had their own dialects/languages.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Angrabhasa Tea Estate was owned by a company which had the tradition of British administration. The organization of this tea estate was slightly different from the type of a tea estate owned by a Bengalee planter. The managerial staff of this tea estate strictly kept themselves isolated from the others, whereas in a tea estate of a Bengalee planter this type of division was

not maintained so strictly. Besides, there was some other differences as well.

Here also the manager occupied the highest rank in the hierarchy. There was a senior assistant manager just below the manager. He was to assist the manager.

In the office, junior cadre officer was on the top of the administration. He was the link between the manager and the head clerk of the office. The head clerk had to supervise the work of the office, besides, he also acted as a cashier of the tea estate. Below the head clerk, there was one second clerk, one provident fund clerk, two store clerks, seven grade - III clerks in the office.

In the factory, engineer assistant manager occupied the highest rank in hierarchy. He was assisted by one assistant manager. There was one middle cadre officer (MCO) and junior cadre officer (JCO) who were in charge of machineries and manufacturing respectively. This was the management category of the factory. Apart from this, there were five staff in the factory. Hierarchially they were placed as follows - head factory assistant, second factory assistant, third factory assistant, fitter, electrician. The total number of sub-staff in the factory was ten. All of them were in the rank of Gudam Sardar. Besides, there were four technicians - one engine driver and three oilmen. Those who were engaged directly in tea processing, were called tea makers. The factory had a number of tea makers. A good number of other workers

in the factory were associated with other factory - related works.

There were four divisional assistant managers in the garden, two assistant managers for each divisions. The only staff in the garden was head garden assistant. The total number of sub-staff in the garden was seventy. Among them two were munshis, forty were dafaders and the remaining twenty eight were panivalas. In these garden there was no baidar for keeping attendance. The munshis had to keep the attendance of the workers of this garden. Besides, there was a vast number of daily rated workers.

The number of Chowkidars and gardeners were forty eight. All of them were sub-staff.

Table - 3.7 would shows the hierarchial organisation of this tea estate.

TABLE - 3.7

ORGANIZATION OF WORK IN THE ANGRABHASA TEA ESTATE

ADMINISTRATION

MANAGER

SENIOR ASSISTANT MANAGER

FACTORY

OFFICE

GARDEN

ENGINEER ASSISTANT MANAGER

ASSISTANT MANAGER

DIVISIONAL ASSISTANT
MANAGER

M.C.O. (MACHINARY)

J.C.O. (MANUFACTURING)

J.C.O.
HEAD CLERK

HEAD FACTORY ASSISTANT

HEAD GARDEN ASSISTANT

SECOND CLERK, P.F.CLERK, STORE CLERK

SECOND FACTORY ASSISTANT

SECOND GARDEN ASSISTANT

GRADE-III CLERK

FITTER, ELECTRICIAN

GUDAM SARDAR

MUNSHI

ENGINE DRIVER, OILMAN

OFFICE PEON

DAFADAR, PANIWALA

TEA MAKERS

DAILY RATED WORKERS

KURTY TEA ESTATE

Kurty tea estate is situated near Metelli in Jalpaiguri district. It was under the jurisdiction of Metelli police station, Metelli block of the Sadar sub-division. The garden is surrounded by Aibhil Tea Estate on the West, Chiloni Tea Estate on the East, Zurantee Tea Estate on the North and Metelli on the South.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

This garden was founded in 1884 by a British planter. It was under the same management as Angrabhasa Tea Estate.

DESCRIPTION

The tea estate had two divisions - Kurty and Neora. It had a total area of 964.19 hectares of which 599.86 hectares were under tea, proposed tea land (area kept for extention) - 39 hectares, others (including roads and paths, quarters, buildings, factory etc.) - 325.33 hectares.

The total population of this tea estate was 4172 in 1987. Approximately 73% of this population were tribal of Choto-nagpur- Santal pargana region, 25% were Nepali speaking people and the remaining 2% were Bengalees and others. Among the tribals, Oraon, Munda, Baraik, Tanti, Santal, Mahali, Turi were numerically dominant.

The total number of labourers in this tea estate was 1375 of which 700 were male and remaining 765 were female. There was 86 sub-staff, 15 staff. The tea estate had one manager and four assistant managers.

There were 750 labour quarters spread over 13 labour lines. The number of Pucca quarters was 550 and the remaining 200 were Kuchcha quarters. The labour lines were situated in different areas of this tea estate. The settlement pattern was same as that of the other two tea estates.

This tea estate had 15 staff quarters and 5 bungalows. The type of the quarters was the same as that of Angrabhasa Tea Estate. Here also the quarters were situated near the office and factory compound.

The hospital of this tea estate had 12 beds, one permanent doctor, one compounder, one nurse, one midwife, one health assistant, one cook and a sweeper. The hospital was situated near the office and factory complex.

Like the other two tea estates the office and factory of this tea estate were situated at its entrance.

There were two mobile creches, with two Aiyas (female attendant). Milk and misri (sugar crystal) for the children in the creche were provided by the management once in a day.

This tea estate had no canteen nor a regular market. The weekly Gudri haat would take place on the payment day (i.e. Saturdays). The Metelli haat was held every Sunday. A small weekly haat also took place on every Wednesday in the garden. Besides, there were a number of shops at Metelli for daily provision of consumer goods.

This tea estate had two Shibmandirs and two Churches. One was a Protestant Church and the other was Catholic.

Two streams Kurty and Neora have been flowing through this tea estate. The water of these streams was used for bathing, washing clothes etc.

There was one playground, a club-room for the workers. An inter-garden football tournament and an annual sports were being organised by the management annually in the playground.

This tea estate had two primary schools. The average number of students was 200 and the number of teachers was 5. These schools were affiliated with West Bengal Board of Secondary Education.

The number of water taps was around 25. These were the only source of drinking water for the workers. Workers also took bath there. There was 24 latrines and 12 bathrooms in the labour lines of this tea estate.

The lingua franca of the workers of this tea estate was Sadri. Besides, each ethnic group had their own dialect/language.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

In the organizational structure the manager was on the top of the administration. The estate was smaller than Angra-bhasa and hence it had fewer managerial and office staff.

The office, was supervised by the head clerk.

Below him there was one second clerk, one provident fund clerk, one store clerk and three grade - III clerks.

The factory was headed by an assistant manager. Unlike Angrabhasa there was no M.C.O. or J.C.O. between the assistant manager and the head factory assistant. The head factory assistant's duty was to supervise the works of the factory. There was one second factory assistant, one third factory assistant and one fitter. The number of sub-staff in the factory was six, who were all Gudam Sardars. Besides, there was one engine driver two oilmen, one electrician who were the technicians in the factory. There were a number of tea-makers engaged in different tea processing work. A substantial number of other workers were also engaged in the factory.

In the garden, there was three assistant managers. Below them was one head garden assistant. He was the only staff member in the garden. There was no munshi but there were three chaprasis. Beside supervision of works, the chaprasis also kept attendance of the workers. Among the other sub-staff twenty-five were dafadars and seven paniwalas. The total number of sub-staff in the garden was thirty-five. There was also a huge number of daily rated workers who were engaged in different cultivating works.

The number of chowkidars and gardeners in this tea estate was twenty seven. They were all sub-staff.

Table - 3.8 would gives us the structure of hierarchial organization in this tea estate.

TABLE - 3.8

ORGANISATION OF WORK IN THE KURTY TEA ESTATE

ADMINISTRATION

MANAGER

FACTORY

OFFICE

GARDEN

ASSISTANT MANAGER

ASSISTANT MANAGER

HEAD CLERK

HEAD FACTORY ASSISTANT

HEAD GARDEN ASSISTANT

SECOND CLERK, P.F. CLERK, STORE CLERK

SECOND FACTORY ASSISTANT

SECOND GARDEN ASSISTANT

GRADE-III CLERK

THIRD FACTORY ASSISTANT

FITTER, ELECTRICIAN

GUDAM SARDAR

CHAPRASI

ENGINE DRIVER, OILMAN

OFFICE PEON

DAFADAR, PANIWALA

TEA MAKERS

DAILY RATED WORKERS

We have dealt with the features of tea industry as a whole, tea industry in West Bengal and with the locale of the study (profiles of three gardens) in this chapter. We would like to discuss in the next chapter about the historical antecedents concerned with the problems under study.