

**Study of Trade Union Organisation Among The Tea Workers
In Terai and Dooars Regions.**

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KANCHAN SARKER

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL.

RAJA RAMMOHUNPUR, DARJEELING.

WEST BENGAL 734430

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "Study of Trade Union Organisation among the Tea Workers in Terai and Dooars Regions" submitted for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of North Bengal, is a record of research work carried out by Sri Kanchan Sarker, M.A. under my supervision. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or diploma. The help received from various sources has been duly acknowledged. There is nothing in his habits and character which may debar him from being admitted to the degree.



(Dr. SHARIT K. BHOWMIK)

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NAMES OF VETERAN AND OTHER POLITICAL AND TRADE
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 Guha (A.I.T.U.C.), Matelli, Badal Sarkar (W.B.C.S.U.), Jalpaiguri
 Naren Sen (N.F.I.T.U.), Calcutta, Kedar Acharjee (R.C.M.C.),
 Jalpaiguri, Nani Bhattacharya (R.S.P.), Calcutta, Suresh Talukdar
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CHAPTER - 1

INTRODUCTION

Tea is one of the most important industries in India. India is the world's largest tea producer & exporter. Not only that, as a single commodity tea is one of the largest export earner in India. It produces around 700 million Kgs. of tea annually and exports around 200 million Kgs. The export earning is around Rs. 1000 crores per year. There is two tea growing zones in India - North India and South India. In North India tea is grown in Assam, West Bengal, Tripura, Bihar, Uttarpradesh, Manipur, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Orissa and in South India in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. But the four major tea producing states are Assam, West Bengal, Karnataka and Kerala. The total number of tea estates in India is 13, 536 (Tea Board 1987 : 4) and the number of permanent labourers is 892, 398 (Tea Board 1987 : 158). Besides, there is a significant number of temporary (casual) workers employed in these tea estates.

This study covers tea plantation of West Bengal which is the second largest tea producing state in the country. It produces nearly 25% of the total tea production of India and employes about 25% of its total labour force. The state has 323 tea estates (Tea Board 1987 : 3), engaging 2, 32,553

permanent workers (Ibid : 155) and it produced 157,371,000 kgs. of tea (Ibid : 11) in 1985. Nearly half of the workers are female. There are three tea growing areas in West Bengal namely, Darjeeling hills and Terai in Darjeeling district and Dooars in Jalpaiguri district. The huge labour force in the tea plantations of West Bengal are immigrants either from Chotanagpur - Santal Pargana region of Bihar or from Nepal. In the Darjeeling hill areas most of the tea garden workers are Nepalis but in the plains namely Terai and Dooars the workers are immigrants mainly from the tribal pockets of Bihar and its neighbouring areas. Workers of Nepali origin constitute around 20% of the total tea plantation labour force in these two areas. The immigrants workers have settled permanently in these areas, with little or no relations with their places of origin. Though the tribal workers had their origins in the same region, they were divided into multiple tribes. Majority of them are Oraon, Munda, Kharia but there are substantial number of other tribes such as Lohar, Baraik, Turi, Mahali and so on. In the initial stage these workers maintained their tribal boundaries. They were grouped according to their traditional occupations - cultivating and non-cultivating or artisan groups. The cultivating groups such as Oraon, Munda, Kharia claimed themselves socially superior to the non-cultivating or artisan tribes and formed a common status group. Lohar, Baraik, Mahali comprises another status

group, namely the non-cultivating or artisan tribes. The cultivating group in order to assert their superiority maintained certain taboos and concepts of 'purity and pollution' relating mainly to marriage and food. However, there has been certain changes among the workers and they show greater signs of integration.

The wages of plantation workers were very low before 1947. The wages at that time were arbitrarily fixed by the planters through their organisations namely D.P.A., I.T.P.A. The workers had no say in this matter. They are the lowest paid among the industrial workers.

Besides the low wages living conditions of the workers were extremely deplorable. They lived in an unhygienic and unhealthy atmosphere. Poor source of water, lack of sanitation, irregular settlement pattern, inadequate supply of building materials, overcrowdedness etc. were the typical features of the living condition of the plantation workers.

The level of literacy of the workers was also very low. Inadequate educational facilities like absence of sufficient number of schools in the gardens and its neighbourhood, lack of consciousness about the necessity of education kept the tribals in a level of low literacy.

The above mentioned factors kept the plantation workers backward. This process could be maintained because they were isolated and had little or no knowledge of the world outside the plantation. The worker at this stage had no organisation of their own which would help them to fight for their rights or for their social development. It was the trade union movement which entered as an intervening force.

The first trade union was formed in Dooars in 1946. Terai witnessed the first sign of trade union movement in 1949. Though the development of trade unions in the tea plantations started at a late stage, it spread quite rapidly. Almost all the workers in these regions are now unionised. Trade unions became important organisations for the workers because they were the only outside organisations to enter the tea gardens with a view to help the workers.

Trade union is the main and only organisation of the workers for collective bargaining. Its impact is not restricted only to the work relations, but also extended to the social life of the workers. It played a very important role in changing the industrial relation by breaking down the fear and servility of the workers towards the planters. They have awakend the workers to their rights and taught them to fight for their demands.

The main features of the trade union movement in the plains of North Bengal can be summerised as the following.

There are several trade unions operating in the region. Most of these unions are affiliated to all India federations such as A.I.T.U.C., I.N.T.U.C., H.M.S.U.T.U.C., C.I.T.U. etc., though there are cases of regional unions also. The existence of multiunions on the industry level influences at the garden level. Hence one can find the operation of more than one union at the garden level. The existence of multiunions may help the workers as they have a choice of membership or it can harm their interests due to disunity in their ranks.

The union leadership at the industrial level, comprising the office bearers are usually non-workers belonging to the middle class Bengalee. This is because these non worker leaders were the first to organise the workers and make them aware of their rights. The local or garden level leadership however is from the workers. This pattern of leadership at the union level persists because the local level leaders are not adequately educated and not fully equipped to deal with the complex problems relating to the laws concerning labour. It may also be likely that the existing leadership does not encourage the development of internal leadership.

In the tea gardens of North Bengal half of the workers are female. However it can be seen that their participation in union activities is low. One can very rarely find women leaders at the local level. At the same time it can also be

seen that in some extreme cases women became more militant and took active part than men.

The spread of educational facilities, erosion of isolation of the plantations during the post-independence period has given rise to young educated workers who show greater awareness of their problems than the earlier generations. There has been improvement also in the living and working conditions of the plantations during this period. It is necessary to study these phenomenon and analyse its' impact on the functioning and growth of trade unions.

BRIEF REVIEW OF LITERATURE

So far a number of studies have been made on the history of tea plantation in India, history of the trade union movements in the tea plantations, on the social change among the workers, on the women workers in the tea plantations, on the conciousness of the workers and so on by various scholars. A brief review of few of them are given below.

Sir Percival Griffiths

(1967) in his book describes vividly the history of Indian tea industry and its different aspects like production, labour, recruitment ownership etc. He also tells about the origin of trade union movements in some areas. Griffiths' book is one of the most authentic books regarding the history of tea industry in India.

B.C. Ghosh (1970), a planter, has told about the origin of the tea industry in Dooars, pioneers in this tea industry, special features of tea estates and also about the recruitment process and about the habits, customs of the workers, health, education, earning of workers and so on. While this book is good enough in describing about the origin of the tea industry in Dooars and its entrepreneurs but inadequate in describing the habits and customs of the workers, their condition, earnings etc. in his book.

R. L. Sarkar and M. P. Lama (1986) have given an unique description about the different aspects of tea industry like wages including social security benefits, employment, living standards of the workers in the Eastern Himalayas, mainly of Darjeeling hills. The importance of this book lies in that it covers briefly almost all aspects of tea plantation in Darjeeling hills from the origin of the tea industry, origin of the trade union movements to the living condition of the workers.

Tushar Kanti Ghosh's book contains history of tea plantation of West Bengal, the land management policies, rules, regulations etc. and the problems existing therein. It also studies land management of sick and closed tea gardens and the existence of dual economy. It concludes with the observation that the problem of sick and closed gardens lies in the improper

land management policies and seeks governments intervention there for.

Manas Dasgupta's (1988) three articles on the trade union movement in Tea plantations in Terai is of course a pioneer in this field, but it has some limitation. It describes well the background of Terai tea plantations, plantation economy and the wage labourers but the section of the history of trade union movement is very brief and lacking in detailing.

Nani Bhattacharya's (1976) booklet (in Hindi) is written on the trade union movement in the tea gardens of Dooars upto 1974. Mr. Bhattacharya is a R.S.P. (Revolutionary Socialist Party) leader and also a well known trade unionist (President, U.T.U.C., Lenin Sarani) - so his book mainly consists of the contributions of the Dooars Cha Bagan Workers Union (U.T.U.C.L.S. affiliated).

Samir Chakrabarty's (1984) small book in Bengali contends history of tea in India and West Bengal, history of Terai and Dooars, recruitment process, process of tea cultivation, wages in tea plantation etc. Once can get a bird's eye view about tea in this book.

Ranjit Dasgupta's article (1987) on the worker's protests in Dooars : 1890-1947 in Bengali is an unique description of the tea garden workers' protests in the pre-inde-

pendence period in Doears. He cited evidences of labour unrests though they were a few, sporadic and short lived.

Sharit Bhowmik's (1981) ^{study} on Plantation System is an unique and fine analysis of different aspects of class formation and its relation to class consciousness : The workers of the tea plantation are all immigrants. The system of plantation has changed their traditional economy. Previously they were self-supporting cultivator or secal craftman, now they have become wage labourers. The objective conditions like homogeneous economic activity along with the trade union movements give rise to the subjective awareness of class consciousness among the workers. These two factors have also made certain impacts on the social life of the workers. Different tribal barriers, heterogenety, stratifications have been eroded to a large extent. Thus heterogeneous tribal communities have emerged as a "class for itself".

Sharit Bhowmik's (1992) another study on Tea Plantations covers more or less all aspects of tea plantation in brief. He specially emphasizes on the recent employment trend and unionisation in the tea plantations and shows the high rate of casualisation in one hand and on the other hand stagnation in the trade union movement. He also points out the reasons behind their high casualisation, stagnation in trade union movements etc.

The study of A. K. Das and H. N. Banerjee (1964) is made on the impact of the tea industry on the economic system, social life and psychology of the tribal workers of tea gardens. This study was made in four tea estates of Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal. The authors describes how the simple agricultural tribes have become more economically conscious, why the simple or nuclear type of families are now preferred by the tribal labourers instead of traditional joint families. They also points out that the workers' hard bound life in the tea estates and also the change in their economy affected their traditional social system and social activities to a great extent. The earlier co-operation among the family members are no longer exist. The sole authority of husband or father does not exist. Divorces, remarriages, consumption of intoxicants, various diseases like gastrointestinal troubles, venereal diseases, tuberculosis etc. are increasing owing to moral laxity.

In another important study on social change, Ramendra K. Kar (1981) describes and discusses the life of an immigrant tribal group in a tea plantation in Assam. The changes have taken place in their family life, religious life, kinship bond, occupational pattern, marriage, material aspects of life, social control, attitudes towards education, modern medicine, solving problems of individuals and community level etc. The joint family system has been breaking down, while nuclear families

are coming up. The uses of birth control methods are increasing; the size of the families are now small. Marriage is now become a more personal affair. Intertribal and interclan marriages have been taken place. The eldest person does not have the economic control when he retires. The traditional observations in the performances of birth, marriage, death etc. in day to day life are no longer taken seriously. The Dravidian names have been changed into Sanskrit names. They are now bilingual, besides their own tribal dialect they also speak a dialect (Sadri) which is a mixture of Hindi and tribal dialect.

P. K. Dasgupta and Iar Ali Khan's monograph (1983) attempts to deal with the life and culture of the tribes who work in the tea plantation in West Bengal and Assam. It shows how the various tribes have forged into an inter ethnic solidarity while maintaining some of the markers of individual ethnic identity. This study was made in three estates, one in the Darjeeling district (West Bengal), one in the Jalpaiguri district (West Bengal) and one in the Goalpara district of Assam. It has also tried to show that though in all the three districts tea plantation started with migrant labourers from Chotonagpur and Nepal and the labourers in the long run had settled in the respective regions, yet there is marked differences in attitude and behaviour among the three sets of population in their socio-cultural and political concepts.

Women constitute half of the workforce; however there have very few very fullfledged studies on women workers. The above mentioned studies cover women workers but their focus lies on all workers, There are a few studies on women workers.

The Labour Bureau (1980) in a report provides a broad picture of the characteristics of womens' employment, their working conditions, wages and earnings, the welfare amenities and social status available to them, besides throwing some light on their living conditions and other socio-demographic characteristics in Tea, Coffee, Rubber and other plantations in India.

Life and labour of plantation Women Workers which was investigated by Mita Bhadra shows that ideas, values, awareness concerning status are a functions of educational and cultural background. Emancipation and liberation from male domination leading to improvement in status can not be achieved through economic independence alone. It also shows that conflict between work and home life among working women largely depends on the nature of employment. If the working conditions in an industry is flexible enough to the special needs of mothers and housewives, as the plantation industry

shows, the maladjustment of women workers with industrial jobs can be reduced to minimum. Lastly it points out Industrialisation may affect men and women workers differently. The women workers in plantation, being confined more to home life, seem to be less affected by it than men.

Shobita Jain's (1988) study of wage labourers on a tea garden of Assam shows that the plantation women workers, part of the largest and most viable section of Indian working women possess a level of independence sufficient to enable them to live on their own. The independence is likely to be eroded^{if} it is not viewed as an asset to mobilise action for changing the present working and living conditions on the tea gardens.

Sibranjan Mishra (1986) in his study of tea industry in India observed that inputs are not utilized to the optimum available capacity. Producers are not efficient allocators of resources in exploiting fully the economic opportunities available to them.

Apart from the historical reasons for this phenomenon the requirement of large capital, technical equipment and scientific marketing service for plantations, whether in Southern or in the North-Eastern states in India, There has not been optimal growth of this industry.

Since the conditions of labour has close association with the health of the industry, the haulling growth of the plantations has told upon the organised movement of workers. Strong trade union movement was not possible due to this.

The above review is not exhaustive as it does not cover the wide range of literature in the historical and economic perspectives. However these studies have helped me in classifying my ideas and refining my objectives and methods for the present study. The following chapter discusses these objectives and methods.

CHAPTER - II

OBJECTIVES AND METHODSOBJECTIVES :

The above studies mentioned in previous chapter on different aspects of Tea plantation were highly informative and necessary. But none of them is made on the trade union leadership, impact of trade unions on the social change among the workers, on the emerging youth leadership, women workers and trade union movements, on the fragmentation among the workers.

So, this study will attempt to analyse the functioning of trade unions in the Terai - Dooars region, trade union leadership and the impact of trade unions on the social life of the workers. The research questions are as follows :-

- i) To study the origin and development of trade unions and their leaderships both in local and regional levels. What are the different factors or influences which shape leadership? Do factors such as tribal affinity have a bearing on development of leadership and on the growth of a union?
- ii) To study the impact of trade unions on the social and work life of the workers. Have trade unions been able to initiate social change among the tribals?
- iii) To study the role of the youth in the trade union movement. Have the educated tribal youths been able to change or influence the existing leadership structure.
- iv) To study the role of women in the trade union movement. What are the constraints to their participation in union activities?

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v) To study the points of fragmentation among the workers and the reasons of why trade union movement has failed to take the shape of working class movement?

DATA COLLECTION :

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The data for this study was collected through questionnaire was formulated and administered to individual workers to collect information about workers' social background, their trade union membership, participation and involvement in trade union activities. In addition there were questions relating to the workers' awareness about the role and functions of trade unions, the nature of his relationship with the trade union leadership, causes of joining or changing trade unions etc. The questionnaire was initially tested through a pilot survey. Some of the questions especially those where a single response would be recorded, were close ended while others, which sought opinions were open ended. To give an example, a question like, "Do you know the central affiliation of your trade union?" Was an open ended question. This questionnaires were administered to a sample of one fourth of the total permanent workers in each of the tea gardens I have studied. No specific sample technique was adopted, but different segments of the workers according to sex, trade union membership and ethnicity were interviewed.

In addition to the collection of quantitative data through questionnaire, informal methods like observation, discussions, intensive interviews, which are traditional anthropological methods, were also adopted to gather some qualitative data. For my fieldwork I stayed in each of the gardens under study for some months. During my stay in these gardens I observed the day to day life of the workers, their relation with the trade union leaders, their awareness about the trade unions etc. Often I had informal chat with the workers from which I could collect a lot of information. I also interviewed different trade union leaders of past and present of these areas.

In addition, data were also collected from secondary sources such as the reports of the Indian Tea Planters' Association (ITPA), Indian Tea Association (ITA), Terai Branch of Indian Tea Association (TBITA), Dooars Branch of Indian Tea Association (DBITA), Tea Association of India (TAI), Terai Indian Planters' Association (TIPA), Tea board, Office of the Labour Commissioner etc. Some important information collected from these offices were charters of demands, minutes of meetings, registration date of the trade unions, records of trade union movements and many other information related to my study.

FIELDWORK

I started the fieldwork in December, 1986. The three

gardens selected for my study were :-

i) Lalfa Tea Estate in Terai, ii) Angrabhasa Tea Estate in Eastern Dooars and iii) Kurty Tea Estate in Western Dooars.

The Angrabhasa Tea Estate was situated near Birpara in Jalpaiguri district. Permission from the management to do fieldwork was necessary in any tea estate. So, I met the secretary of a staff association who introduced me to a regional trade union leader. This regional leader assured me that he would inform the management of the tea estate about me. I also made contact with the other regional leaders of some trade unions and requested them to introduce me to the garden level leaders. This was necessary since I was going to work on a topic which was sensitive. Meanwhile the regional leader told me that the manager of the tea estate had given me the necessary permission.

So, I went to the garden and met the garden secretary of a trade union. I expected him to be informed about me and my work by his regional leader. But, I found him totally uninformed. However I introduced myself and explained to him about my work and sought his cooperation. The leader promised and provided the necessary help. I started taking interview of the workers. This union leader also took me to the leader of another union. I also became friendly with him latter. I observed with some degree of surprise that the relationship between the leaders of two rival unions was cordial and friendly.

Some questions instantly struck my mind - was there no inter-union rivalry? Is it because the leaders belong to same community? However, I felt happy for my quick report. I also met the secretary of the third trade union of this garden within a few days. All these leaders helped me a lot. They accompanied me to the labour lines, introduced me with their fellow workers, but off and on I had to face one problem. It was really difficult to make my intention clear to the workers. Hardly any of them was familiar with the term college, university or research. They knew upto the school level, but not beyond that. Suspicion grew among some of the workers. They suspected me to be a trade union office bearers or as a government officer of even as a management's man. Some of them requested me for a service for their son, some of them for quick repairing of their quarters etc. I, of course, could not help them in these matters. Everything was going smoothly till I was about to complete the data collection in this tea estate. Trouble however came unexpectedly when I tried to collect some official data. I met the manager and told him about my requirements. The manager was on leave when I had just started taking interviews of the workers. He not only refused me to give any official data but also told me to stop my work. He questioned me about my bonafides and asked who had given me permission to do fieldwork in that garden. I told the name of the regional trade union leader who was supposed to tell the manager about myself. The manager feigned ignorance and asked me to seek permission from their head office, at Calcutta. This was an agency house garden. Considering the time consuming and complicated process of the permission I planned

not to try for it immediately. Instead I decided to continue my work without entering the workplace of the workers. I went to the labour lines and completed my work within a few days.

It took three months to complete the first phase of my fieldwork. Throughout this time I was mostly engaged in filling up the questionnaires, interviewing the trade union leaders etc. I always kept in mind that the quantitative data collected through questionnaire and interview were not sufficient, so, I always tried to observe the socio-political behaviour of the workers, their day to day life and so on. I often shared food with them.

I returned to university with a plan that I have to stay among the workers at least for a few days to have a keener observation.

In April, 1987 I went to urty ea state at Metelli. This time I brought an official recommendation from my head of the deptt. to permit me to do fieldwork in this garden. I met the then acting manager of this garden. He gave me the permission without any hesitation and also told me a bit on the trade unionism in the tea gardens of this area. I started collecting data. There were four unions in this garden. The relation among them were not very good. When I had started to familiarize myself with the workers, the supporters of one union was trying to increase its membership forcibly. Incidentally I met a leader of a former union of this garden. The supporters of a rival union took me as an outside organizer of their rival union. One day some of them had assembled at choupathi of Metelli with a plan to assault me.

Fortunately, in the mean time a sympathiser of this union came there. He was a senior student of our university and was known to me. He came to know their plan and explained to them about my purpose. The crowd then dispersed though some of them were still suspicious about me.

The majority of the workers of this garden was Adivasis, but a few were Nepali speaking. When I was at Metelli the Gorkhaland movement in the Darjeeling hills was at its peak. This area was also a hot bed of this movement. Sometimes the Nepali workers of this garden considered me to be a spy of the government or as a C.P.I.(M) activist. Some of them were suspicious and refused to talk to me.

In Metelli also, I was staying at one of my freinds house. After some days I decided to stay at labour quarter to observe people at their close quarters and to be friendly with them. Accordingly I shifted to a labour quarter. My host was a leader of one of the unions in that garden.

This experience was highly valuable. I became friendly and intimate to the workers. Quite often they used to came to me, gossiped with me and talked about many of their problems. This informal conversations regarding any social or personal matter helped me to have an insight of their life and culture and political views. Some of them were more anxious than me about my work. They accompanied me off & on to the labour lines.

I went to university after two months and again came back to the garden. This time I stayed there for one and half months.

The manager of this garden was on leave. When he came back, I approached him for some official data. Here also I was refused and asked to seek official permission from their head office at Calcutta. This garden was also under the same ownership as Angrabhasa tea estate. Meanwhile the acting manager who gave me permission, had been transferred to other garden of the same agency house. So, I was in problem.

I made my second trip to Birpara in October, 1987. In the meantime I wrote a letter to the head office of this tea garden as told by the manager. I also had sent a copy of this letter to the tea garden office. I met the manager and enquired whether he received any correspondence from his head office. He replied in the negative. However, he allowed me inside the office to collect the required official data.

This time I stayed in the labour lines. Here also my host was an union leader. This experience was as rewarding as that of Kurty Tea Estate.

I again came back to university in December, 1987. In January, 1988 I had started fieldwork in Lalfa tea estate. This tea estate is situated near Bagdogra. In post-graduation we prepared dissertation on tea gardens. The fieldwork was done in this tea estate. So, this field was not new to me. I completed the official formalities very easily. Everyday in the morning I went to the field from university and came back in the evening. Often I had my lunch with the workers. I was known to the workers as I stayed here for nearly one month during my post graduation.

They were in no hesitation to offer their hospitality to me. In the end of March, 1988 I completed the data collection in this garden.

Whenever I was in the field, I often went to the neighbouring gardens. Sometimes I had the opportunity to observe some conflicts between the managements and workers. I met the union leaders of these gardens, sometimes I took interviews of some of them, sometimes I had some informal discussions. All these proved to be very useful in the subsequent phases of my work. I had gone to at least thirty tea gardens in Terai and Dooars regions, collected structure of union leadership of these gardens. I had also made period trips to different parts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri district, talked to the early and present day union leaders and sought their highly valued opinions which helped me having an insight of the trade union activities in the tea gardens.

In this chapter we discussed about the research questions of this study, methods of data collection and about the fieldwork. In the following chapter we would describe the tea industry and the tea gardens under study.

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 Chaprasi. 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 Chaprasi. Both the Munshi and Chaprasi supervise the works of the daily rated workers. The next rank after Chaprasi 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 and 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 was 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. (MACHINERY)

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.

CHAPTER - IV

HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS : GARDENS AND WORKERSBRIEF HISTORY - TERAI AND DOOARSTERAI

The Terai region lies in the plains of Darjeeling district. O'Malley describes it as, "a low lying belt of country traversed by numerous rivers and streams rushing down the hills and by the upland ridges which mark their courses. It is an unhealthy marshy tract, formerly covered by dense malarious jungle in which aboriginal tribes of Meches, Dhimals and Koches burnt clearings and raised their scanty crops of rice and cotton on a system, if system it can be called of nomadic husbandry. It has now been extensively cleared for tea gardens and settled tillage, but still contains large block of Sal forests interspersed with cultivated land and village sites" (L.S.S.O' Malley 1907:2).

Originally the Terai portion of Darjeeling district was a part of the state of Sikkim. The Gurkhas invaded Sikkim in 1780. During next 30 years they overran Sikkim as far east as the Tista and Conquered and annexed Terai. Meanwhile war broke out between Nepal and East India Company and at the close of the war in 1817 by the treaty of Titaliya the tract which the Nepalese has conquered from Sikkim, was ceded to the company. The company made over the whole of country between the Mechi and the Tista to the Raja of Sikkim and guaranteed his sovereignty. Sikkim thus became a buffer state between Nepal and Bhutan (Ibid : 19).

According to this treaty the Raja of Sikkim was bound to refer to the arbitration of the British all disputes between his subjects and those of neighbouring states. In 1828, two British officers Captain Lloyd and Mr. Grant were deputed to Sikkim as the disputes on the Sikkim-Nepal frontiers were increasing. The officers were sent to deal with these disputes. Captain Lloyd spend there a few days in "the old Gorkha station of Darjeeling". He was attracted by its numerous advantages as a site for a sanatorium. They reported it to the Governor General Lord William Bentinck. It was also recommended for military purpose as the key to a pass to Nepal (Ibid : 20). In 1835, the Raja of Sikkim granted the land unconditionally to the British. The tract was described in the deed of grant, dated 1st February, 1835 as "all the land south of the Ranjit river, east of the Balason, Kahel and little Ranjit rivers and west of Rango and Mahananda rivers". In 1841, British government granted the Raja of Sikkim an allowance of Rs. 3000 per annum as compensation and this was raised in 1846 to Rs. 6000 per annum (Ibid : 21).

In the mean time the relations between the British and Sikkim deteriorated. The development of Darjeeling under free institutions was a source of loss and frustration to the Lamas and leading men of Sikkim who had monopoly over all trades in Sikkim. They lost their rights over those slaves who settled as free men and British subjects in the Darjeeling territory. Frequent kidnappings and demands for return of slaves took place.

The relation deteriorated further when in November, 1849 Sir Joshep Hooker and Dr. Campbell were imprisoned, while travelling in Sikkim with the permission of the Raja of Sikkim and British government. Various demands were made as conditions of release but the Sikkimese eventually released both the prisoners unconditionally on the December 24, 1849. In February, 1850 British sent a small punitive force to Sikkim. They remained on the bank of the great Ranjit river for a few weeks. The British withdrew the grant of Rs. 6000/- per annum from the Raja of Sikkim and annexed the Terai and the portion of the Sikkim hills bounded by the Ramman and the great Ranjit river on the North, by the Tista on the East and by the Nepal frontier on the West. The area annexed was 640 Sq. miles in extent.

A greater part of Terai at that time was under forest. However, after annexation, large areas of forest land were brought down under cultivation, either for tea plantation or for paddy. The land had been allotted by the British government among 544 Jotedars in the Terai area immediately after annexation. Since then the settlement was renewed from time to time, the number of Jotes as well as Jotedars increased over time as the forests were cleared for cultivation (other than tea) in each year.

We have earlier mentioned that establishment of tea plantation was started in Terai 1862. A massive labour force was required for setting up plantations in this area. The local tribal people like Mech, Dhimal, Rajbansi rarely worked in tea

plantations in Terai. The probable reasons were 1) It was not possible to collect necessary number of labourers from these tribes as their population was not much. ii) These tribal people, after becoming alienated from their land did not like the establishment of tea plantations. iii) These sons of the soil wanted to maintain their livelihood by agriculture and hunting as still then a large portion of fellow and forest land was available. iv) The monthly wages of plantation labour at that time ranged from Rs.2/- to Rs.5/- per person (Sen 1979:60) which was less than the wages of agricultural labourers of these areas. v) The planters also were not interested to employ local people as they could easily rebel against their brutal exploitation with the help of their own people in the adjacent villages.

In the nineteenth century the tribal society in Bihar was in a state of turmoil, the reasons of which could be traced back in the seventeenth century when Hinduism crept into the ruling family of Chotonagpur. The Munda tribal Raja of Chotonagpur sought to elevate his status through the process of Hinduanising himself and his family. This alienated the tribal Raja and his kinsfolk from the rest of the people. This also brought in an infiltration of non-tribals into this region (Bhowmik 1981:43). These outsiders had some formal education. They were given administrative posts by the King in lieu of the local tribes. The tribal king also granted these people and Brahmin priests large portions of land (Jagirs) depriving the local people. Along with these, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs traders and moneylenders were encouraged to come there (Ibid:44).

The resultant of all these was that within a hundred years the tribal people lost their rights on their traditional property and became merely rent paying tenants.

Meanwhile, Chotonagpur as a part of Bihar was leased to the British East India Company in 1765. Introduction of British rule resulted in a change of masters. The judicial powers of local raja were initially curtailed and finally fortified (Ibid:44). The British administrators made no attempts to understand the traditional rights on land, which were unwritten, and treated documents as sole proof of ownership. The simple minded, illiterate tribal on the hand was innocent of the complicated deeds and documents relating to ownership, which were completely in contrast with his traditional right to proprietorship. The British could cleverly manipulate documents relating to their advantage and before the Adivasi realized it, he was relieved of his right to cultivation (Choudhury & Bhowmik 1986;324).

Unable to bear these tyrannies, Adivasis frequently rose in revolt. The entire nineteenth century is dotted with tribal uprisings - 1795-1800, 1811, 1820, 1831, 1885 and 1899. These reflected the unhappy state of affairs (Ibid : 325).

Besides these human exploitation, nature also betrayed these people. A series of famines and floods plagued the area. The first recorded famine occurred in 1868-69, followed by famines in 1873-74, 1893-94, 1897 and 1918.

All these eventually caused a steady out migration of tribal people to other places in search of land or work.

Thus this area (Chotonagpur-Santal Pargana region of Bihar) remained the focal area of tribal migration to the adjoining states during the last two centuries.

The phenomenal growth of the population since 1872 is due to two main causes, the development of Tea industry and the influx of settlers to exploit the waste lands of the district (Darjeeling) (L.S.S.O' Malley 1907:36). It will be observed that Darjeeling owes a large proportion of its population to the advent of immigrants. Barely half of the inhabitants have, in fact, been born in the districts. In the Terai it receives numerous settlers from the adjoining districts of Purnea and Jalpaiguri who engage in cultivation and a large number of coolies from Chotonagpur-Santal Parganas who are attracted by the wages given in the tea gardens (Ibid: 38-39).

DOOARS

The word "Dooars" originated from the Hindustani word dwar meaning gateway. The Dooars area of Jalpaiguri district is a gateway to Bhutan.

The low, fertile strip of country lying along the base of the Bhutan hills was called Dooars. Formerly it was divided into Eastern Dooars, which is now a part of Goalpara district of Assam and is no longer known by the name and the western Dooars, the area which is lying along the foot of Bhutan hills between river Tista in the west and the river Sankos in the

east. It is a flat strip of land about 22 miles broad and nearly 200 miles long, bounded by Bhutan and Darjeeling district in the north and Coochbehar district and Baikunthpur forest in the south. Only this area i.e. the previous Western Dooars is now called as Dooars. The present Dooars area was formerly a part of Coochbehar (Sunder 1894:307).

In 1661 the Mughals attacked the Coochbehar state. During this war Bhutan sent military help to Coochbehar. Bhutan had also trade relation with Coochbehar before this war.

However, in lieu of the military help, Bhutan wanted the Dooars area from Coochbehar. The Cooches had no alternative, they were bound to meet the demands of Bhutan (Majumder 1984:18).

Political relations between the British government and Bhutan started in 1772, when Bhutan invaded the principality of Coochbehar, the then a dependency of Bengal. The Raja of Coochbehar sought British help and they send a force to assist the Raja. They expelled the invaders and forced them back into their own territories. In 1774, a treaty of peace was signed between the East India Company and Bhutan. In 1783, Captain Turner was deputed to Bhutan to promote commercial exchange, but the attempt was unsuccessful. From that time to 1826, when the British occupied Assam little interactions took place between the Bhutias and the British. It was then the Bhutias who usurped several tracts of low land lying at the foothills of Bhutan called Dooars. Captain Pemberton was sent to Bhutan to negotiate the matter in 1837, but his attempt yielded no definite results.

Then the British wrested the Assam Dooars from the Bhutias and agreed to pay £1000 per annum to Bhutan as a compensation for the loss (Hunter 1876:219-220) and in 1842 the Bengal Dooars (Ambari-Falakata Jalpesh Taluk) also were held in farm by the British government on an annual payment to Bhutan.

The Bhutias continued outrages and aggressions on British subjects in the entire Dooars. Several remonstrations and threats were given from the Britishers to the Bhutias, who paid no heed to it. They continued their raids on British territory, plundered the inhabitants, massacred them or carried them off as slaves.

In the last part of 1863, British sent Mr. Ashley Eden with a mission to the king of Bhutan to stop these depredation and outrages and to demand compensation. Mr. Eden was insulted grossly and came back with the ill success of his mission. He was obliged by force to sign two papers, agreeing to make over the Assam and Bengal Dooars to Bhutan and to surrender all runaway slaves and political offenders. (Ghosh 1970:5).

The British government disavowed the treaty, stopped all communications with Bhutan and strengthened the police force on the frontier. In June, 1864 the British government addressed letters to Bhutan declaring permanent annexation of Bengal Dooars (district of Ambari-Falakata) and the annual payments previously made by the British government to Bhutan for rent and revenue for Bengal Dooars and Assam Dooars had ceased. This letter also demanded the release of all British

subjects, as well as subjects of Coochbehar and Sikkim and the restoration of all property which had been carried off from British territory, Coochbehar or Sikkim, within the previous five years. The letters concluded by stating that unless these demands were fully met by the commencement of the ensuing September, further measures would be taken to enforce them. The Bhutan government sent no reply to these demands but in August of this year Bhutan government wrote a letter to the British, offering no apology for the gross insults offered to the British envoy, and altogether ignoring the government's threat of coercion, but proposing to receive a fresh envoy or to send one himself. This proposition was considered to be out of question. In November, 1864 the British government decided to make an expedition to enforce their demands. Accordingly an expedition was made in four columns and took up their several posts at Diwangiri, Sidli, Pasakha and Dalingkot. In December of this year the four columns made a simultaneous advance and within six weeks they had driven in the Bhutias and occupied eight or ten of their posts. In January, 1865 the Bhutias made a bold effort and recovered the territory they had lost and also drove out the invaders. The British sent a fresh army and within March, 1865 they reoccupied their positions in Dooars. In November of this year, a treaty of peace was signed between the government of Bhutan and the British government. By this treaty the rights of the British in the Bhutan Dooars including those of Assam and Taluk Ambari-Falakata and the hill territory on the left bank of the Tista had been recognised (Hunter 1876:220-221).

The Western Dooars (from now it would be called as only Dooars) was a temporarily settled area where the colonial state itself was the Zamindar. The area in Bhutan rule could be regarded as a stagnant social formation judging by the semifeudal production relations, archaic technique of agricultural production and the corresponding low level of productivity found there.

There was virtually no change in the land tenure system in Dooars even after the extension of British rule to the area. Although the new government expressed a vague desire to settle the land of Western Dooars with small capitalist cultivators who would mostly cultivate their own land, in practice the first British settlement in Western Dooars in 1871 gave formal recognition to the existing Jotedars and also to their tenants, Chukanidars.

Thus the colonial government did not touch the semi-feudal production relations that served well the general aims of the imperial government viz, to shift the burden of capital accumulation in the metropolis to the colonies without any corresponding expansion of the forces of production. Such a regime provides ideal conditions for the working of merchant capital (Choudhury 1984: 98).

When land became scarce in Darjeeling where commercial tea cultivation began in 1856, the sub-montane tract of Dooars attracted the attention of planters. Plantation agriculture was imposed on this area by British merchant capitalists who were later joined by the Bengalee planters of Jalpaiguri town and also by some rich Jotedars of Dooars. The first tea garden in

the Dooars was set at Gazualdoba in 1874 by Mr. Brougham and within 1877 leases were issued to 22 gardens. Consequently a spectacular increase in the population of the district (Jalpaiguri) during the period 1872-1881 by 1, 14, 916 persons was noticed (Bhattacharya 1970:199). This increase of population went on almost steadily during the subsequent census years owing to the gradual development of tea industry and natural growth of population. The increase during the earlier census years were primarily due to influx of tribal labourers in the tea gardens. D.H.E. Sunder in his survey report of Western Dooars, 1895, attributed the large rise of population (1,14,277 between 1881-1891) in Western Dooars to immigration from neighbouring districts of Darjeeling, Dinajpur; Rangpur and Coochbehar on the one hand and from Bihar, Orissa, Chotanagpur and other provinces on the other.

The following table, presented in District Gazetteer (1951) shows the migration to the district from outside West Bengal.

TABLE 4.1

IMMIGRATION TO JALPAIGURI DISTRICT FROM OUTSIDE

WEST BENGAL 1891-1941

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>ACTUAL POPULATION</u>	<u>IMMIGRANTS</u>
1891	433, 334	44, 329
1901	544, 906	95, 899
1911	661, 282	152, 174
1921	694, 054	163, 024
1931	739, 160	158, 757
1941	845, 702	156, 765

Source : Mitra 1951: Tii

The above figures for immigrants include all immigrants to Jalpaiguri district from outside West Bengal. The break-up of immigrants from different districts are available in the census prior to 1951. But before partition (i.e. 1947) Jalpaiguri was a larger district containing sixteen police stations, five of which were transferred to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). So, the figures for immigrants in 1951 census could not be compared with the same figures in the censuses prior to 1951. However, the extent of migration would be understood from the earlier censuses (Choudhury and Bhoumik 1986:334).

The 1901 Census shows that the number of immigrants to Jalpaiguri district was 188, 223. Most of them were enumerated in the Dooars region and "half of the immigrants were tea garden coolies from Chotonagpur and Santal Pargana" (Census 1901:66). The statement on migration also stated that 80,436 immigrants were from Ranchi district and 10,562 from Santal Pargana (Ibid, Appendix I:iii). The 1921 census report states that "the number of persons born in Ranchi and enumerated in Jalpaiguri district in the last census (i.e. 1911) was no less than 126,214" (Census 1921:145). The report further states that "the most numerous people among the labour force were Oraons and Mundas" who had migrated from Chotonagpur. In 1921, "90, 348 coolies were born in Chotonagpur and 20, 018 in the district (i.e. Jalpaiguri) and these were also children of imported coolies" (Ibid:389).

We have earlier (in the Terai portion) discussed the factors responsible for this large scale migration to the tea gardens of Terai and Dooars. Migration to the tea estates

was mainly 'family migration' and not of individuals. The tribals were encouraged to migrate with their families. The nature of production in the tea industry requires the participation of male and female labour. Moreover, since the planters wanted cheap labour, they had to have workers who would be permanently settled in the industry and who would be more or less cut off from their place of origin. Coercion and lack of alternative employment were ^{The} two ways of keeping down the wage rate (Ibid:334).

BACKGROUND OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENTS IN TERAJ & DOOARS

The first tea garden was opened in Terai in 1862 and in Dooars in 1874. The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was established in 1920, but the organized trade union movements started both in Terai and Dooars after a long time. It started in these areas only in 1946.

So, in Terai eighty-four years after the establishment of its first tea garden and in Dooars it was after seventy-two years after setting up of the first tea garden and twenty-six years after the formation of AITUC, workers of both the areas witnessed the first sign of organized trade union movements. Before it, some sporadic, short lived workers' movements took place in the tea gardens in Terai and Dooars.

TERAI

So, far, little was known about the workers' movements in Terai before 1946, but, a report of a British planter proved

that, sometimes workers voiced their grievances. The report stated that there were very few estates where there had been a labour strike, the usual cause of strike was an accumulation of either real or fancied grievances. It was a rare thing for more than one garden to stop work at a time and generally a section workers adopted this course, just to bring to notice of their manager about their story of grievances. It was obvious that much tact and wisdom was required to deal with these situations, more especially if the labour was 'non-agreement'..... In most cases it was good to insist upon the coolies returning to work before any sort of discussion of the situation was allowed and if the coolies persisted in an attitude of defiance, it was probable that neighbouring planters would assist with labour during the difficulty of the neighbouring planters as had been often done. (Dasgupta 1988:14).

These types of protests against their sub-human conditions were very few. If there was any, they were sporadic, unorganised and short lived. For a long time the workers did not have an organisation to focus their humiliation. The causes were :

- i) The managers did not allow any outsider to enter the garden. Even the relatives of the workers had to come with prior notice. If anybody came without notice, the host and the guest both were tied up with a wooden stand in the manager's quarter and were beaten up. This practice was known as ghantidara.

ii) At that time Terai was virtually inaccessible. It had thick forests, several rivers and an inadequate transport system.

iii) The workers had no relation with the outside world. Even the nationalist movement could not reach there.

The workers thus became an insulated community, cut off from the mainstream of national life.

Communication with the workers was very difficult, at the sametime there were few attempts by the nationalist and others to involve the workers in the movement. Thus the workers became an enclave community and unorganized in truest sense.

It was in early forties that some attempts have been made by some communists to organize them. They were Souren Bose, Keshab Sarkar, Panchanan Sarkar, Nripen Bose, Yogen Mukherjee, Kanu Sanyal Charu Majumdar, Santi Basu, Chunal Goyala, Jangal Santal, Biren Bose and others.

In 1945-46 the first trade union was formed in Maryview Tea Estate by the communists. This union was not a registered union. In Maryview Tea Estate, Sarbati Mian, an worker-leader had revolted against inhuman treatment by the manager and that is why he was removed from the garden by the management. With Sarbati Mian's removal from the garden the union was dismantled. Similar attempts was also made in Gangaram tea estate at that time. The workers had protested against the management, but this was not successful. These were the beginning of organized trade union movements in Terai and beginners were Communists.

In 1948, the Communist Party of India (C.P.I.) was banned and a number of important leaders were arrested. This resulted in a setback, but the attempts to form unions in tea gardens continued secretly. In this year, Keshab Sarkar, Chuninal Goyala, Souren Bose and some others had tried to organize the workers in Mohongaon, Chandmoni Tea Estate, but the police arrested Keshab Sarkar and Souren Bose with the help of managers. Then the communists had changed their tactics, they started to organize meetings in the adjacent villages, in the weekly haats. In these haats they also sold Soviet Desh, Tebhagar Katha to the workers. The farmers also came into contact with the working class movements. The secret activities of the communists were predominant in Fulbari, Tirhana, Thanjhora tea estates in those days.

West Bengal Cha Shramik Congress (W.B.C.S.C.) affiliated to INTUC was formed in 1948. Deven Sarkar was the first general secretary of that union; he was also the president of Jalpaiguri District Congress Committee at that time. From a personal interview with him I came to know that this union was successful in organizing the workers in the tea gardens like Dagapur, Mohongaon-Gulma, Sukna, Bhojnarayan, Maryview, Naxalbari, Chandmoni, Kamala etc. These gardens were mostly owned by the Bengalee planters of Jalpaiguri town. The planters were also patrons of India National Congress. So, they allowed W.B.C.S.C. to form unions in their gardens. In 1950-51 W.B.C.S.C. detached itself from the Indian

National Congress and joined the Krishak Majdoor Proja Parishad. In 1951, the name of this union was changed to West Bengal Cha Shramik Union (W.B.C.S.U.) and attached itself with Hind Majdoor Sabha (H.M.S.). However, after a few years, the influence of this union gradually diminished.

The first general election of independent India was held in 1952. Before the election the government lifted the ban order on the communist party. This election gave a boost to the communist organizers. They started to organize the workers under the camouflage of election campaigns. At that time workers did not know the use of microphone. In Manja tea estate, when the Communists used the microphone for election campaign, the workers got afraid and went away. The similar incident happened in other gardens also. Even in 1952 the managers of tea gardens were very powerful to check political activities inside the garden. In Pahar-gumiya Tea Estate when the communists went for election campaign, the manager of this tea estate tore the flag of the Communist party and ordered the communists to leave the place within five minutes. These two instances showed us the ignorance of the workers in one hand and the power of the managers on the other. However in 1954 the communists could organize the workers and the Red-flag union was formed in Fulbari, Thanjhora, Kharibari, Kamala, Maryview Tea gardens. The secretary of this union was Sri Biren Bose and the president was Sri Satyendra Narayan Majumdar. When the election was over, attacks in different forms were launched against the

communist organizers. So, again the communists started to organize the workers secretly, the workers were called to the villages and the organizers used to go the workers' houses under cover of darkness at nights. Red flag union was increasing its influence over the workers at that time. They organized movements centering around the demands of compensatory allowance, wage revision etc. Gherao was unknown to the workers of tea gardens before that time. In 1953, the workers of Thanjhora Tea Estate gheraoed the manager and put forward some demands. Thus, enough pressure was exerted on the managers to concede some of the demands. After this achievement both the male and female workers assembled in a place, the female workers tied red handkerchief on their heads and organized a procession. This incidence became a morale booster to the tea workers of Terai. Communists' influence among both the workers and peasants was increasing substantially during this time. The communists used to go to the labour lines of tea gardens with the peasant relatives of the workers. Regular political classes among the workers were taken by the communist organizers during 1953-54. The workers were taught about mass decision, labour laws, what should be done in a particular circumstance, etc. The famous workers magazine Naya Jamana, published from Dooars, were also distributed among the workers of Terai. Naya Jamana was purely a magazine of working class. It was published in Sadri language and all types of workers literate as well as illiterate belonging to different religions

were the subscribers of this magazine. The songs etc. published in this magazine were written by the workers. The editor of this magazine was Fagu oraon who was a worker. This magazine had a great impact on the tea plantation workers of North Bengal.

The cherished unity of working class and peasantry was also forged at that time. In 1954, when the management of Kharibari Tea Estate declared lock out the unity of the workers and peasants became manifest. The workers at that time did not know much about look-outs and were ignorant about how to tackle such a situation. They, however protested against the lock out. The management did not open the garden for 8-9 months. This time the workers of this tea estate had to pass through a very critical time. The farmers of the Buraganz area came forward and stood beside the workers. They gave money, paddy etc. to the workers. The workers of Thanjhora Tea Estate could continue their struggle with the help of peasantry. Around 1955, the Red flag unon was successful in having unions in twelve gardens in Terai. But, at that time the I.N.T.U.C. put up stiff challenge to the communists.

In Terai, both the communists and the Congress claimed to be the pioneers in the trade union movement in tea gardens. Congress tried to trace its origin in the 1920's when Mr. Seomangal Singh tried to organize the workers in Matigara and Hanskua tea estates against liquor addiction. Mr. Singh came from Bihar to Siliguri. He was a famous congress leader and

an organizer of nationalist movement at that time. Among the workers his role was more of a social worker than a trade unionist. He also tried to organize the workers against the British rule and for his activities in Matigara and Hanskua Tea Estates, he was imprisoned in 1928.

Mr. Iswar Tirky, the president of National Union of Plantation Workers (N.U.P.W), affiliated to I.N.T.U.C. was an ex-service man. He was one of the pioneers among the congress trade unionists in the tea plantation of Terai. He came back home after taking part in the second world war in 1945. After returning home, he started to spread formal education among the tribals and tried to educate them against liquor addiction. In 1947-48 he established a social organization - Terai Adibasi Welfare Board. During this time another social organization named Terai Managal Samity was also formed. It was a Rajbanshi organization and the founders were Mr. Khagen Roy and Mr. Dijen Roy Sarkar. Mr. Tirky also became president of this organization too. In 1950-51 I.N.T.U.C. affiliated Darjeeling Cha Kaman Majdoor Sangha (D.C.K.M.S.) was established. The first president of this union was Mr. Atulya Ghosh and Theodar Manin was the general secretary. In 1951-52 Mr. Kiron Bhattacharya, one of the leading congress leaders of Siliguri town asked Mr. Tirky to join the trade union. In 1952-53 Mr. Tirky became the general secretary of D.C.K.M.S.

Mr. Seomangal Singh also became a trade unionist and tried to organize the workers under the banner of D.C.K.M.S. during this period. Darjeeling Cha Kaman Majdoor Union was

successful in forming in New Chanta, Pahargumiya, Hanskua, Saidabad, Putinbari, Fulbari (Patan), Bijohnagar, Maryview, Singhijhora, Jaipoo, Bhojnarayan, Gayerganga, Tirhana, Ord, Panighata, Laharghat, Manja tea estate etc. at that time. Mr. Tirky was a Christian. The workers belonging to Christian Community stood by him. In 1954-55 Terai Adibasi welfare Board and Terai Mangal Samity was merged and a new organization "North Bengal Adibasi Mahasabha" was formed. Mr. Tirky was the general secretary of this union. The main objective of this organization was the social upliftment of the adivasis in the five districts of North Bengal. This organization became defunct after three years. In 1957 Assembly election Mr. Tirky contested against Mr. Sonam Wangdi the official candidate of the Indian National Congress. He was expelled from the Indian National Congress for six years on this ground. This hampered the growth of Congress led unions in Terai.

The year 1955, was the landmark in the history of trade union movement in tea gardens. There was a sudden increase in the prices of tea in 1954. The planters could accumulate a huge profit. The workers demanded for bonus. The planters did not agree to concede the demand. Strike notice was given by the communist trade unions. Initially the I.N.T.U.C. affiliated unions did not agree to join hands with the communists. However, later, they also came in tune with the communists. Conciliation was started with the initiation of West Bengal government. It failed to bring about a settlement. Tea workers struck off work from August 29, 1955. During this time the worker leaders and

the employers were discussing the bonus issue in Delhi in the session of Industrial Committee on Plantations. This also failed to yield a solution as the employers remained rigid. However, the Chairman of the Industrial Committee on Plantations assured the workers' leaders that the deadlock could be resolved and he directed both sides to come to an agreement within three months, otherwise the case would be referred to the tribunal. The strike was then called off on September 7, 1955.

This was the first time in the history of tea Plantations that the workers inspite all differences, political, ethnic, social, religious organized a joint movement.

During this movement workers organised processions everyday. The peasantry of this area also joined these processions. Everyday processions started in the morning and continued till night. But there was no fixed time or place where the processions would be dispersed. Thousands of workers and peasants spontaneously participated in these processions. They used to carry food with themselves. There were pan-shops (shops of betelleaf), arrangements for gramophones in these processions; even there were sometimes arrangements for showing bioscopes. It seemed to be a festival for the workers and peasants of Terai. The peasantry not only joined this movement physically but also helped the workers by providing them with food grains, cashmoney etc. The peasantry had been taught to believe that this workers' movement was also their movement. The cherished unity of working class and peasantry was evident at that time.

Workers of almost all the gardens of Terai had participated in this movement except Deomoni (now Kiron Chandra Tea Estate) and Sanyasithan Tea estate. The owner of Deomoni tea estate was Mr. Kiron Ch. Bhattacharya. Mr. Bhattacharya was the then President of District Congress Committee, Darjeeling. There was an agreement between the communists and Mr. Bhattacharya that strike would not be called in his tea estate. The agreement was that Mr. Bhattacharya would help to organize strike even in the gardens where Congress led unions were functioning but the communist would not organize this strike in his garden.

In January 1956, with the intervention of the Labour Minister and Ministry for Commerce and Industry, the members of the Bonus sub-committee of Industrial Committee on Plantations laid down a formula for four years from 1953-1956. The workers received more than they had wanted. This was a landmark in the history of Plantation workers' movement since India was the first country to accept the principle of bonus to plantation workers out of profit (I.T.P.A. 1955:21).

During 1957-1967 Communist trade unionists faced stiff resistance both from the planters and I.N.T.U.C. A number of communist workers were discharged from their work during these years.

Till 1959, in Terai and in Darjeeling hills the communist-led trade unions used the same name Darjeeling District Cha Naman Majdoor Union. This year i.e. in 1959 the communist trade-unionist in Terai formed a separate union - Terai Cha Bagan Majdoor Union.

There were a number of Congress-led Unions affiliated to I.N.T.U.C. in tea Plantation in North Bengal such as Dooars Cha Bagan Majdoor Sangha, Darjeeling Cha Kaman Majdoor Sangha, Rastriya Cha Majdoor Congress etc. before 1960-61. In 1960-61 Congress decided that there would be one I.N.T.U.C. affiliated union in one industry. Accordingly a new union National Union of Plantation workers was formed in April, 1961 and all the Congress-led unions merged with it except Rastriya Cha Majdoor Congress.

In 1962 K.T. Chako, a Keralian Christian and an ex-employer of Tata was sent to Terai by an I.N.T.U.C. leader of Jamshedpur to organize the workers in Terai. He came, joined Terai Cha Bagan Sanjukta Majdoor Union and became the general secretary of this union. This union was formed by Mr. Tensing Wangdi in 1960. Mr. Wangdi was a congress M.L.A. from Terai and also the minister for tribal development. This union was active in Gangaram, Mamala, Hanskua Tea Estates at that time. It was not affiliated to any central trade unions. In 1967, Mr. Chako changed its name to Terai Plantation Workers Union and affiliated it to H.M.S. to keep the union free from politics, party and government. From 1963 the influence of this union gradually increased and in 1970 it formed unions in around fifteen gardens in Terai such as Bijolimoni, Pahargumiya, Singhijhora, Sahabad, Gangara, Gayerganga, Hanskua, Marapur, Bagdogra etc. However, at present this union was lost much of its early influence over the workers and exists only in

a few gardens. Mr. Chako also works as an agent of Life Insurance Corporation and most of his clients are tea garden workers. This also partially contributed towards survival of this union.

In 1964 C.P.I. was divided on the issue of Indo-Chinese war and for some other reasons and a new party, Communist Party of India (Marxist) was established. In 1971 C.P.I. (M) organizers broke away from A.I.T.U.C. and formed a new central trade union - Centre for Indian Trade Unions (C.I.T.U). Terai Cha Bagan Majdoor Union was controlled by C.P.I.(M) organizers and therefore it was affiliated to C.I.T.U. In 1977, the name Terai Cha Bagan Majdoor Union was dropped and in Terai and Darjeeling hills, the C.P.I.(M) led trade unions started using the same name - Darjeeling District Chiya Kaman Majdoor Union. From 1962 to 1966 the communists were sometimes in jail and sometimes outside the jail. When they were outside the jail, most of them went underground.

During these years there was great tussle between the congress trade unionists and the communists to keep control over the workers. Frequent clashes between the supporters of these two rival trade unions took place at that time. Emergency was declared throughout the country in 1962 due to Indo-Chinese war. There was too much of nationalist propoganda done by the Congress government all over the country. On the otherhand a group of communists blamed Indian goveenment as an agressor. The workers of tea gardens were influenced by the nationalist propaganda. The I.N.T.U.C. trying to take the advantage. The

workers became confused. Inter-union rivalry was increasing. In that situation to bring co-operation among the workers and to stop inter-union rivalry, Co-ordination Committee of Tea Plantation Workers was formed in this year i.e. in 1962. The initiation was taken by a staff union - the Tea Garden Indian Employees' Association, which had then close relation with the Revolutionary Socialist Party (R.S.P.). Now, the Coordination Committee consists of most of the major unions of tea plantation. There was another committee namely the Defence Committee, established after the Coordination Committee. The Defence Committee consists of a few unions.

In 1964, Ranjit Ghosh, a leader of Rastriya Cha Majdoor Congress came to Terai from Western Dooars to organize the tea workers in Terai under the banner of R.C.M.C. He started forming unions in the tea gardens of Terai very rapidly. In 1967 it detached itself from I.N.T.U.C. for much interference of party, politics and government in trade union activities and affiliated itself to National Front of Indian Trade Unions (N.F.I.T.U.). Now, R.C.M.C. is one of the most influential trade unions in Terai having its wings in around 24 gardens in this region.

The second joint movement by the workers of tea plantation was in 1966 for increase of minimum wages. The Central Wage Board For Tea Plantation was appointed in December, 1960. It was taking too much time to complete its report. There was a sudden rise of price index after 1962. Tea Workers started agitations,

demanding the wages, based on the W.B. Government order of 1959 for the minimum wages for tea plantation workers which was decided in a tripartite conciliation.

The Coordination Committee of Tea Plantation Workers issued a strike notice in August, 1966, when the employers did not agree to give the minimum wages according to the government order. Strike started from August 22, 1966. In Terai, initially the workers of most of the tea gardens, except the unions with Congress domination, had joined this movement. However when police fired in hills and shot one worker dead, the Congress led unions also joined. The strike was called off after a few days. It ended in a partial success as the tea plantation workers in the West Bengal received 40-50 lakhs of rupees as arrear, though they had demanded 7 crores of rupees.

In the early sixties, Revolutionary Socialist Party (R.S.P.) started to organize trade unions in Terai under the leadership of Mr. Nani Bhattacharya and Mr. Suresh Talukdar. In 1968, R.S.P. formed its first union in Terai in Sanyasithan tea estate. The name of this union was Darjeeling Cha Bagan Workers Union (D.C.B.W.U.). Subsequently in 1969, in some other gardens like Kiron Chandra, Gayerganga, Bagdogra it was successful in having its branches. Swapan Bikash Roy, a lawyer of Siliguri town and Badal Mukherjee, an ex-head clerk of a tea garden of Terai are the prominent local leaders of this union. Now D.C.B.W.U. has expanded its influence in some other gardens also (around 13 gardens).

The third joint movement of the tea workers took place in 1969. The first United Front ministry came into power in West Bengal in 1967 and the second in 1969. This brought some qualitative changes in trade union movements in the tea gardens as these governments had a pro-labour policy. The coordination committee framed a charter of demands which included revision of wages as the cost of living index had increased abnormally in 1968, implementation of the plantation labour Act of 1951 and the increase of employment etc. The employers refused to meet any one of the major demands. The Coordination Committee called for an indefinite strike from August 18, 1969. The strike continued for sixteen days and almost all the workers of all the gardens in Terai joined this strike. The conciliation started between the trade union leaders and the employers during the strike. The government intervened and on September 2, 1969 they came to an agreement. The strike was called off from September 3, 1969.

The agreement was reached on the following points :

- 1) All vacancies in the tea gardens which were caused by either death or retirement of permanent workers were to be filled up. In addition all tea gardens were to recruit new workers proportionately.

- 11) Bigha workers (workers employed temporarily during peak seasons) resident within the garden, would be given subsidised rations while non-resident bigha workers would be given cash compensation.

iii) Wages would be revised after a machinery was set up but extra leaf price (doubly) would be raised from 5.5. paise to 7 paise per kilogram.

After 1969, no big joint movements took place in the tea gardens in Terai. Strikes, gheraoes etc. in the individual gardens for specific demands, were however quite common. From 1970, all the important negotiations were followed by tripartite conciliations, in which representatives of different trade unions, employers' association (I.T.A., I.T.P.A., T.A.I., T.I.P.A.) and the representative officials of government took part. So, from 1970 to 1987 there was a number of tripartite negotiations which included Wage, Bonus, New employment etc. as the major demands. Now, every year before the Durgapuja the bonus negotiations take place and once in every three years wage negotiations take place as regular features. One of the major negotiation in recent years was regarding the additional employment in 1985. It was decided in that negotiation that 10,000 additional workers would be taken to fill in the vacancies of this 7771 workers would be taken in the gardens of Dooars, 1409 workers in the Terai gardens and 820 workers would be employed in Darjeeling hill gardens.

Meanwhile in 1981, a new communist trade union - Darjeeling Zilla Cha Majdoor Karmachari Union was formed by the Organization Committee for Communist Revolutionaries (O.C.C.R.) under the leadership of Mr. Kanu Sanyal. This union was active in Azamabad, Kamalpur, Gangaram, Lohagarh and Taipu tea estates.

In Terai, besides the above mentioned trade unions, some small trade unions were also formed but, could not exist for long or had to merge with larger trade union in course.

Terai Cha Karmi Sangha was founded in the late forties by Mr. Sushil Mukherjee who was a staff of a tea garden. The president of this union was the then head clerk of Gangaram tea estate. It was a Congress union. Since the influence of this union was not much, very few had been known about it.

In Sahabad tea estate, in the late forties, Anath Basu and Dr. Gobinda Das organized a union called "Krisanganj Majdoor Sangha". But this union became defunct in the early fifties.

In the late forties, another union known as "Bihar Cha Bagan Karmachari Union" was established under the leadership of Bhai Premananda of Patna and its secretary was Mr. Nalini Roy. This union was active in Sahabad and Motidhar tea estate. Later on, this union came under the leadership of Mr. Ishar Tirky.

Some prominent leaders of R.C.M.C. such as Pijush Mukherjee, Bendhu Bhagat, Antony Toppo Munda, Danish Lakra were expelled from this union in 1965 for direct involvement in politics. They formed a new union - Cha Majdoor Congress (C.M.C.). This union could form its branches in a very ^{few} gardens (around three) in Terai under the leadership of Mr. Shib Bose and Mr. Ratin Dey. This union did not exist now.

All these small unions were not affiliated to any central trade union organizations.

DOOARS

Organized trade union movements started in Dooars only in 1946. Even the flame of nationalist movement could not touch substantially the workers of tea plantation in Dooars. The workers of other organized industries like Jute, Coal, Textile, Railways, had already started struggling since 1918-20 against the British rule. The workers of tea plantation of adjacent Assam also participated in the nationalist struggle from 1921 and their participation became more pronounced in the latter years.

Why Tea Plantation of Dooars was not affected either by nationalist movement or the trade union movements of other areas for so many years? The probable reasons were :

- i) The whole area was covered with forests and a number of rivers. It had a very poor communication system which isolated Dooars from rest of the country.
- ii) British planters maintained their own army - the North Bengal Mounted Rifles upto 1947 and that was used to check the rise of trade union movements in this region.
- iii) The tea gardens were virtually a prohibited place for the outsiders. No outsiders, even the relatives of the workers could enter these gardens without the permission of the managers.

- iv) Most of the people of the Jalpaiguri town were not aware about the prevalent conditions in Dooars.
- v) The leaders of the nationalist movements in the area did not try to organize the workers.

However, before 1946 there were some incidents of sporadic movements in the tea plantation of Dooars. Those movements could not be called as organised movements in truest sense. The most popular form of their protests was to form small groups among themselves and not to attend their duties. In a government report in 1895, it was stated that the workers of tea gardens often expressed their independent will and tried to disobey the management. Sometimes even the workers themselves were the rulers of these circumstances (Dasgupta 1987:193). Another government report also stated that those who were influential among the workers, asked other workers not to do work and tried to create large scale disturbances forming a group (Ibid:193).

In another government report it was stated that management of a tea estate had to take helps of police to control a situation. In this garden the workers were forced to do extra work after completion of their stipulated work. One day they had thrown away the plucked leaves and broke the glass-door of store-room. This report also stated that sometimes strikes took place in the tea gardens at that time. (Ibid:194).

From the end of the 1915 and upto the middle of the 1916 both Eastern and Western Dooars witnessed the Oraon movement. This movement was a part of the Tana Bhagat movement of Chotonagpur in 1914. It was basically a socio-religious movement, but it also had distinct economic and political objectives. This movement also reflected the hope of Chotonagpur oraons to be free from brutal exploitation of Zamindars, Mahajans and the Government. The waves of this movement escalated to Dooars from Chotonagpur in 1915. It was exclusively a movement of the Oraons. A group of Oraons gave up the habit of practising magic, drinking liquor, eating meat, killing animals and luxury. According to them they were ordered to do this by their principal god Dharmesh. They even stopped cultivation, because cultivation could not eradicate poverty, famine, rather it unnecessarily caused suffering to Cow. It was also hoped that good days were coming for the oraons. Actually a new sect in the Oraon religion known as Kurukh came up and the Oraons who belonged to this sect were known as Bhagat. These were the socio-religious and ritualistic aspects of this movement but alongwith this they also made protest against the British government through their songs, poetries etc. They wrote songs which clearly indicated their dislikes for the British government. Not only that, the most remarkable point was that they had invited the Germans through their songs to liberate them. This was the time when the First World War had already started and the British was suffering a set back against the Germans and its allies. The workers of tea plantation of this region were aware about it for different

reasons. There was a shrinkage of employment opportunities in the tea gardens as the amount of export of tea from India became less due to this war and there was an extraordinary increase of prices of clothes and salt during the war time. The cause of British hatred among the tea plantation workers was due to the British planters' exploitation. It was known that the movement took a larger shape at that time and the management was also too much worried about this movement. However, from the middle of 1916 this movement became subdued.

We have already said that there was little impact of the nationalist movement on the workers, yet, there were some instances where we could find the workers' awareness about nationalist movements. A D.P.A. report of 1921 stated that workers specially of Damdim region regularly organised meetings on the alluvial land of the Mal river. Generally the Dafaders and the Chowkidars joined these meetings. Some of the participants of these meetings used to come to join these meetings with Mahatma Gandhi's name on their lips.

The occurrence of united protest by the workers against their sub-human condition was also rare before 1946. In 1936, there was an incident of united protest by the workers against the management. In 1945, the Dalgaon Tea Estate and Rangamati Tea Estate experienced the incidents of such united protests. There might be more occurrences of united protests, but from the

available documents, till now, only a very few had been known.

The united protests of the workers against the managements before 1946 were spontaneous, short lived and without any support of any political organization. But, those were the beginnings of organised trade union movements in Dooars. The Bengal Assam Rail Road Workers' Union (B.A.R.R.W.U.) was a non-political organization at that time. This organization also included the workers of Bengal Dooars Railway (B.D.R.). Most of the members of this organization were the supporters of Communist party and the majority of the whole time organizers were communists. In the mid-forties the organizers of B.D.R. and some other workers tried to contact the tea garden workers. They had to do it very secretly, under the cover at night, because no trespassers were allowed in the gardens. Generally the meetings with the garden workers were held in the railway gangmans' quarters at night.

The first trade union was formed in Hai Hai Pather garden (now Rupali) situated near the Mal. The beginning was a peculiar incident. One day some workers had gone to the manager of this garden and complained about the poor quality of ropes supplied to them for repairing of their huts. The manager was a communist-hater and was of the habit of harassing the workers unnecessarily. Instead of entertaining the complaint, he scolded the workers and called them followers of the Red flag who wanted to harass their employers. By this, the workers became more curious about the Red Flag union and some of them went to the office of the Red flag union (i.e. B.D.R. Union) at Dumohini, where the workshop of B.D.R. was situated. Latter on, this contact gave birth to

the first trade union of the tea gardens in Dooars. The Communists were also active in the Denguajhar, Bagrakote, Lakhipara gardens at that time. All these gardens were situated near railway stations.

Two other incidents, occurred during this time, also contributed sufficiently to increase the consciousness of workers of tea gardens about their rights. In 1946, the railway trade unions called for a nation wide strike on June 27. Their demands were higher pay, fair price shops for essential commodities, better service conditions etc. All the preparations for the strike were made, but the strike was withdrawn as the railway authorities conceded the demands. In Dooars, the railway workers, having success in collective bargaining, were returning home by rail, flying red handkerchiefs.

The workers of the tea gardens located besides the rail line witnessed it. That the workers took a lesson from it was evident from the fact that the number of labour unrests had increased after this incident in the tea gardens of Dooars.

The second one was - there was a general shortage of foodgrains in Bengal in 1946. The Communist Party of India started agitation throughout the state. In the tea gardens, managements were not supplying the quota of food grains to the workers. The workers of several tea gardens being influenced by the Communist trade unions also protested against it. All these further helped to develop the organized trade union movement in Dooars.

These were the situations in middle of 1946 and in the last part of this year the first Central trade union for tea garden workers - Zilla Cha Bagan Majdoor Union, was formed at Mal. The first secretary of this union was Sri Deb Prosad Ghosh (Patal Ghosh). This union, latter, was affiliated to A.I.T.U.C.

During this time the Share Croppers of Bengal were demanding an increase in their shares of harvest. There were large scale unrests among the sharecroppers of Bengal. They were protesting against their landlords under the leadership of Communist Party of India. The agitation engulfed the entire peasantry of Bengal. It also shocked the Dooars, but in a later stage, during the early 1947. This movement was known as Tebhaga. The literal meaning of Tebhaga is three parts. The sharecroppers were demanding that the harvest should be divided into three parts and they would get two parts and the one part be given to the landlord.

In Dooars, Patalbabu and his associates started campaigning about Tebhaga centering around Malbazar. They not only organised the peasants but also the rail and tea workers. The workers of rail and tea gardens also took it as their struggle for livelihood. They participated in the movement with the peasantry. This was the first time that the tea garden workers participated in an organised movement. A

solidarity was established among the workers and peasants of Dooars during this movement. In the 4th annual conference of the B.A.R.R.W.U. held at Laming in Assam between 6 and 8 December, 1946, a resolution was passed supporting Tebhaga movement (Dasgupta 1975:103).

Volunteer groups were formed comprising peasants and workers. The workers were majority among the volunteers. The Tebhagar Katha published by the trade unionists and rail and tea garden workers, were distributed among the peasants and workers. The Communists' dominated All India Kishan Sabha which had already started to organize the adivasi peasants. Regular meetings were held among the peasants and workers.

In Dooars the Joetdars not only took the half of the harvest but also charged hundred per cent interest on the loans of foodgrains given to share croppers. In Dooars, most of the haats belonged to the Joetdars. The agents of the joetdars used to buy the grains at a low price by force and resell it at the same haat at a higher price. Besides, they also imposed different types of levies on the peasants, such as :-

Sephahi Posha (maintenance of his guarês),

Hari shave (religious gatherings),

Maiya Porha (education of his daughters),

Hathibandha, Ghorabandha (maintenance of elephants and horses)

and so on.

This was the condition of the sharecroppers in Dooars. The tribal peasants of Dooars had the similar experiences in Chotonagpur.

So, they quickly responded to the call of the All India Kishan Sabha. The tribal workers of tea gardens also started agitations with the peasants. They left work off and on to join the peasants in this movement.

This was the first time that the tea workers found an outlet to express their dissatisfaction in an organized way.

Indian National Trade Union Congress (I.N.T.U.C.) was formed in May, 1947. In July, this year, the then Congress secretary of the Jalpaiguri District Congress Committee wrote to the planters' associations namely D.P.A. and I.T.P.A. to seek their permission to form trade unions among the plantation workers (I.T.P.A. 1947:112). This was the time when Communists' influence had been spread very rapidly among the tea workers and the planters were too much worried about it. So, the above proposal was a boon for the planters. They had extended help to the Indian National Congress to form unions. Within 1948 two Congress unions were formed - West Bengal Cha Shramik Union under the leadership of Mr. Deven Sarkar, the then secretary of Jalpaiguri District Congress Committee and Dooars Cha Bagan Majdoor Sangha led by Mr. L.M. Prodhan. Mr. L.M. Prodhan was a school teacher and a Gorkha league Organiser. He came to Kalchini from Kurseong to spread the influence of Gorkha League. However, Mrs. (Dr.) Maitrayee Bose, the I.N.T.U.C. leader won over him and convinced Mr. Prodhan to join the Indian National Congress.

In 1950-51 W.B.C.S.C. left the I.N.T.U.C. and next year (i.e. in 1952) it affiliated itself to Hindu Majdoor Sabha (H.M.S.)

It also changed its name into West Bengal Cha Shramik Union (W.B.C.S.U.). During 1950-60 W.B.C.M.S. was a major force in Dooars. When W.B.C.S.C. broke away from Congress, a new union - Rastriya Cha Majdoor Congress (R.C.M.C.) affiliated to I.N.T.U.C. was formed in 1952. It had some influence over the gardens near Mal, Nagrakata.

When the communists tried to organise the workers in the tea gardens of Western Dooars, the Eastern Dooars was more or less uncovered by them. The R.S.P. was very active in Eastern Dooars during that time. But before R.S.P., the area was under the influence of Gorkha League. It had formed a union called the Adibasi Gorkha League which merged with I.N.T.U.C. in 1950. Later on, the R.S.P. came there. In 1948, in Sarugaon Tea Estate the first union of R.S.P. was formed followed by Akhoy division of Mathura Tea Estate, Kohinoor and Majherdabri Tea Estates. The name of this union was Dooars Cha Bagan Workers' Union (D.C.B.W.U.) which was registered in 1948. The first president of this union was Sri Brojen Das and the general secretary was Sri Suresh Talukdar. Now, in Eastern Dooars and Central Dooars D.C.B.W.U. is one of the most dominating union.

But in the Central-Eastern Dooars, there were traces of organised trade union movements even before the R.S.P. and Indian National Congress tried to organise the tea garden workers. In 1946 or before it, the tea garden workers had to work from dawn to dusk. The children of the working women used to come to the

workplaces with lantern to bring back their mothers. Any one, who dared to disobey the manager's order was beaten up severely or was thrown out of the garden for a week. This practice was known as HaptaBahar. During this time, in the Dumchipara Tea Estate of Central-Eastern Dooars a group of fourteen workers came to their huts to take lunch. It happened during that time when the workers were not allowed to go to their huts for lunch. The manager ordered to cut their wages for a whole day. The fourteen workers protested but it was in vain. Then they formed a union called Cha Majdoor Samity with the help of some outsiders. The outsiders were Biradhaj Rai, whose mother and brothers were workers in this garden. A.B. Roy, a primary school teacher and B.K. Prodhan, a groceryshop owner in this garden. Later, Sunil Sarkar, a Forward Block organiser also joined them. This union was not registered and it had no political or central affiliation. This union gave a memorandum to the Munshi of this garden to pass it on the Manager.

This memorandum included fourteen demands such as medical benefits, ration for dependants, good behaviour from the management etc. The munshi refused to pass it on to the manager. The workers then gheraoed the manager and exerted pressure on him to accept the memorandum. The police came and tried to arrest the workers for illegal gherao. The police, however could not do it since a large number of workers had assembled there. The manager then was bound to accept the memorandum. The D.P.A. discussed on this memorandum and met some of the demands. However,

after this the management ordered for Haptabahar on these fourteen workers and filed suit against the outsider organisers of this union for trespassing. The organisers of this union then felt the need of a larger political support. Contacts were made with the Gorkha League, with the Indian National Congress, and with the Communists. Ultimately in 1948 the union merged with the W.B.C.S.C as the latter had a good support among the tea workers of this region at that time.

While we were telling about the trade union movements in Terai, we have discussed the causes and consequences of 1955 Bonus movement in the tea gardens of North Bengal. While in Terai the strike was started from August 29, 1955, in Dooars where D.C.B.W.U. (R.S.P.) was a dominating union, the strike was started from August 22, 1955. The Communist and the Socialist led unions started strike from August 29, 1955 both in Terai and Dooars. The Congress led union R.C.M.C. also did the same, but in some gardens where another Congress union D.C.B.M.S. (led by Mr. L.M. Prodhan) was active, they observed only one day token strike to express their support to this movement. The then labour minister of Central government Mr. Khandu Bhai Desai had assured the leaders of Congress Unions that their demands would be considered and told them not to join the indefinite strike. So, except those few gardens in Dooars, strike for a long period took place in almost all the gardens in Dooars.

In 1957, a group of Socialists had broken away from Praja Socialist Party (P.S.P.) and formed a new party Sanjukta Socialist

Party (S.S.P.). In Jalpaiguri district, leaders like Deben Sarkar, B.D. Rai joined S.S.P. but Ghanashyam Mishra, Badal Sarkar etc. had remained with P.S.P. They (P.S.P.) formed a new union in the name of West Bengal Cha Majdoor Sabha (W.B.C.M.S.). This union was active in some gardens in Dooars.

In 1963, Ghanashyam Mishra was murdered by the vested interests. In the next year i.e. in 1964 W.B.C.M.S. merged with W.B.C.S.U., but no official procedure had been followed. In 1967 W.B.C.M.S. got a new registration number and affiliated itself to H.M.S. (Raja Kulkarni group). This union now has a moderate number of followers in Dooars.

Meanwhie in 1961, the National Union for Plantation Workers (N.U.P.W.) affiliated to I.N.T.U.C. was formed and all the Congress unions in the tea gardens in North Bengal had merged with it except R.C.M.C., which retained its separate identity. In 1967, R.C.M.C. affiliated itself to N.F.I.T.U. to keep itself free from party, politics and government. Before it, in 1966 a broke away faction of R.C.M.C. formed a new trade union called Cha Majdoor Congress (C.M.C.). It had a very marginal influence in Dooars and now it does not exist at all, while R.C.M.C. has its branches in a few gardens near Jalpaiguri town.

The second joint movement of tea plantation workers took place in 1966. The Coordination Committee gave a strike call in August, 1966 on the issue of payment of arrear, wage revision etc.

In Dooars, before the strike call, the followers of D.C.B.W.U. observed a token strike for one day on these demands. Continued strike was started from August 22, 1966 in almost all the gardens in Dooars. I.N.T.U.C. affiliated unions also joined this strike. The members of the Tea Garden Indian Employees' Union (T.G.I.E.U.) of Dooars also joined the strike from the very first day. The other organization of staff, West Bengal Tea Employees' Association (W.B.T.E.A.) struck work for three days. The strike was withdrawn after a few days when an agreement was reached.

In 1969, Co-ordination Committee framed a charter of demands which included increase of employment opportunities in the tea gardens, revision of wages and implementation of Plantation Labour Act of 1951 as the major demands. When the planters refused to concede any of the demands, the workers started strike from August 18, 1969. In Dooars, workers of almost all the gardens had joined the strike. The strike completely stopped the work in the tea gardens of Dooars. It was called off from September 3, 1969 as on the previous day the employers and trade union representatives reached to an agreement with the intervention of state government. The nature of both the agreements have already been discussed in the history of trade union movements in Terai.

The split in the Communist Party of India took place in 1964 and a new party, Communist party of India (Marxist) was formed. It was a severe jolt to The Communist trade union movement. In 1971 the C.P.I.(M) faction of A.I.T.U.C. formed a separate organization - Centre of India Trade Unions (C.I.T.U.)

In Dooars C.I.T.U. affiliated Cha Bagan Majdoor Union (C.B.M.U.) was formed in 1972. After the establishment of Left Front government in West Bengal in 1977, this union has spreaded its influence very quickly in the entire Dooars particularly in Central and Western Dooars. Now Cha Bagan Majdoor Union is a major force in Dooars. The earlier organization Zilla Cha Bagan Workers' Union (Z.C.B.W.U.) remained with A.I.T.U.C. (C.P.I.) and lost its control over the workers. Now it does not have much followers in Dooars.

The official I.N.T.U.C. affiliated Congress Union in tea plantation is National Union of Plantation Workers (N.U.P.W.) . However, a section of Congress trade unionists formed a new central trade union - National Labour Coordination Committee (N.L.C.C.) in 1973. In tea plantation the N.L.C.C. affiliated union is Jatiya Cha Majdoor Congress (J.C.M.C.): It was successful in forming unions in some tea gardens near Mal, Metelli of Western Dooars.

In 1975, North Bengal Tea Planters Employees Union (N.B.T.P.E.U.) affiliated to U.T.U.C. (Lenin Sarani) was formed. U.T.U.C. (Lenin Sarani) is the central trade union organization of Socialist Unity Centre of India (S.U.C.I.). It has a very marginal support in Central and Eastern Dooars.

Communists were again divided in 1969. A group of C.P.I.(M) activists had broken away from it and formed a new party Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) in 1969. Most of the activists of this party were jailed between 1969 and 1977. In 1977 the Left

Front came into power in West Bengal. The C.P.I.(M.L.) activists were released after that. The C.P.I.(M.L.) then splitted into a number of groups. In 1979, some of the groups formed a new central trade union called Indian Federation of Trade Unions (I.F.T.U.). In this year the C.P.I.M.L.(P.C.C.) formed a new trade union in tea plantation - Paschim Banga Cha Bagan Shramik Karmachari Union (P.B.C.B.S.K.U.) which was affiliated to I.F.T.U. In Western Dooars, at the beginning it could spread its influence in some gardens, but now it has been loosing ground gradually. In 1986, splitting of I.F.T.U. took place and a new central trade union, Bharatiya Shramik Sangha (B.S.S.) was formed. Now P.B.C.B.S.K.U. is affiliated to B.S.S. Another splinter group of C.P.I.(M.L.) namely U.C.C.R.I.M.L. (Nagireddi group) also formed a new union in tea plantation. It was also active in some gardens in Western Dooars. Now this group had joined the C.O.I.(M.L.) led by Mr. Kanu Sanyal.

In 1977, the Govt. of West Bengal appointed the Tripartite Wage Fixation Committee for the Tea Industry. This committee comprised representatives of the employers and the workers and was presided over by the state labour minister. In the memorandum signed by the three parties (i.e., employers, workers and government) on August 3, 1977, the employers agreed to recruit 9,000 more workers to the tea plantations in Dooars.

The last major agreement between the planters and the workers till 1987 was signed in 1985 regarding creation of additional employment opportunities. It was settled that 10,000

additional jobs would be created in the tea gardens in Terai, Dooars and Darjeeling hills.

Till now, we were discussing about the origin of trade union movement in Terai and Dooars and its background, origin of different trade unions and about their joint movements as a whole. Besides those, some large scale movements also took place in the individual gardens. In 1968, the workers of Hope Tea Estate in Western Dooars continued a strike for eight months, organised by West Bengal Cha Shramik Union (W.B.C.S.U.).

TRADE UNION IN THE THREE GARDENS

Lalfa Tea Estate

The owner of this garden was Sri Kiron Ch. Bhattacharya. He was once the president of District Congress Committee, Darjeeling and also a trade unionist. When communists were trying to form trade unions in the tea gardens of Terai during 1946-47, this tea estate was not under their influence. Mr. Bhattacharya knew that sooner or later the trade union would enter his tea garden and in this circumstance it was likely that the Communist would take the initiative. In order to prevent such a move, in 1951 Mr. Bhattacharya took initiative to form a Congress union in this garden. The president of this union was Mr. Bhattacharya himself. The workers did not have to pay any union fees as Mr. Bhattacharya bore all the expenses of this trade union.

Mr. Bhattacharya was thus able to isolate his garden from the influence of other trade unions. We have earlier discussed

that the Bonus movement of 1955 did not affect this garden as Mr. Bhattacharya made an agreement with the Communist trade unionists to exempt his garden from the continued strike. Till 1959, there was only one union in this garden, i.e. upto a year after the death of Mr. Bhattacharya. After this the garden suffered from a lot of disturbness. Mr. Bhattacharya was very popular among the workers due to his kindheartedness. He used to help his workers to their problems. The management and the staff became corrupt after his death. A growing dissatisfaction was observed among the workers. Then Mr. Tensing Wangdi, the then Minister in charge of Tribal Development and the local Congress leader took this opportunity. He organised some workers of this tea garden and formed a union in this garden in 1962. The name of this union was Terai Cha Bagan Sanjukta Majdoor Union. The influence of this union over the workers of this tea garden was also limited and it could not persist for a long time.

In 1966, the workers of this tea garden participated in a joint movement organised by the Coordination Committee of Tea Plantation Workers on the issues of arear and revision of wages. They struck work for few days.

In 1967, Rastriya Cha Majdoor Congress (R.C.M.C.) formed its branch in this garden and in the next year it put forward a memorandum of demands to the management for implementation of Wage Board recommendation, employment of dependants of permanent workers. The management met the demands. In the same year R.C.M.C. and N.U.P.W. jointly submitted a demand to the management on the supply of bad quality of ration to the workers.

The year 1969 witnessed a number of incidents in this garden. Till this year the unions of this garden were either directly associated with the Congress or had an indirect relation with Congress. There was no leftist union in this garden at that time. Two leftist unions formed its branches here in 1969. They were Darjeeling Cha Bagan Workers' Union (D.C.B.W.U.) affiliated to U.T.U.C. and Terai Cha Bagan Majdoor Union (T.C.B.M.U.) affiliated to A.I.T.U.C. The head clerk of this tea garden was a R.S.P. trade unionist. The D.C.B.W.U. was formed in this garden for his initiative. Soon after the formation of D.C.B.W.U. in this garden, this union placed a charter of demands to the management. The demands were - bonus, increase of wages, medical facilities, new recruitment, umbrella, better quality of ration, supply of drinking water, shortening of working hours etc. The management initially did not want to consider the demands. Then the workers of this tea estate started picketing for an indefinite period in front of the factory from June 30, 1969. The workers did not allow to take finished tea outside the garden during the picketing. After a few days the picketing turned militant shape. One day when the management was forcefully trying to take tea leaves outside the garden, workers broke the windscreen of the tea-loaded lorry. The management then sat with the union leaders for discussion and assured the workers about considering their demands. The picketing was then withdrawn after eleven days.

In the same year R.C.M.C. also put forward some demands to the management such as regular supply of firewood, umbrella,

sick wages and paid holiday on the day of death of the Rastrapati.

The Communist formed its trade union in this garden with the help of the then manager of this garden. The manager was a communist sympathiser. He invited the communist trade unionist to form union. The name of the union was Terai Cha Bagan Majdoor Union. It was then affiliated to A.I.T.U.C. but when the C.P.I.(M) section of A.I.T.U.C. formed another central union called C.I.T.U., the C.I.T.U. men took charge of this union.

The Coordination Committee of Tea Plantation Workers Union organised the third joint movement of the tea workers on the demands for implementation of Plantation Labour Act of 1951, increase of employment in the gardens etc. in the same year i.e. in 1969. The workers of this tea estate also participated in this movement with the workers of other gardens.

In the same year a Coordination Committee of the three unions - R.C.M.C., D.C.M.W.U. and T.C.B.M.U. was formed also. This committee framed a charter of demands which included - new recruitment, bonus, leave wages, categorisation of sub-staff, firewood, maintenance and repairing of labour quarters, supply of drinking water, housing etc.

In 1970, R.C.M.C. again submitted a charter of demands to the management. The demands were regular supply of good quality of ration, blanket, increase of wages for lorry or tractor driver.

In 1977, Darjeeling District Cha Kaman Majdoor Union (In 1975, the name of T.C.B.M.U. was dropped; the C.I.T.U.

decided to use the earlier name Darjeeling District Chiya Kaman Majdoor Union instead of it) affiliated to C.I.T.U. called for a strike for filling up 19 retirement vacancies. The management agreed to fill up 14 vacancies and then the strike was withdrawn.

In 1980, R.C.M.C. made a demand for payment of arrear of wages. In the same year workers of this tea estate started Bonus movement. Their demand was 12%. The management initially agreed to pay 10%. The workers did not agree. The head clerk of this tea estate who was also a R.S.P. leader conciliated with the management on behalf of the workers. The management ultimately agreed to pay 12% bonus. This incident helped to increase the D.C.B.W.U. among the workers of this tea estate.

In 1983 R.C.M.C. started agitation demanding for implementation of increased wages, extra leave price etc. In the next year i.e. in 1984 D.C.B.W.U. submitted a demand for implementation of minimum wages for temporary workers. The management did not want to consider the demand. The supporters of D.C.B.W.U. started hunger strike. Then the management agreed to implement the minimum wages for temporary (bigha) workers.

In the same year R.C.M.C. put forward another demand for temporary employment which stated that the non-dependent workers should be given second preference for temporary employment.

D.D.C.K.M.U. made a charter of demands in 1985 which included 15 demands. The major demands were - filling up of new vacancies, repairing of quarters, L.M.F. doctors should be

replaced by M.B.B.S. doctors etc. In the same year D.C.B.W.U. put forward another demand for payment of full wages to the workers. R.C.M.C. also placed a demand in 1985 for payment of bonus on instalment.

In 1987, D.D.C.K.M.U., again started agitations for filling up of vacancies.

Angrabhasa Tea Estate

Organised trade union movements started in the Angrabhasa Tea Estate in 1952 when the West Bengal Cha Shramik Union (W.B. C.S.U.) formed its branch in this garden. W.B.C.S.U. was the first trade union in this garden. But before this there was sporadic incidences of labour unrests, such as in June, 1984 the workers of this tea garden were seen agitating as a munshi was assaulted by the management and against the high quantum of ticca etc. The workers even struck work for one day in the later part of 1948. to reduce the task of sickling.

In the beginning of the organised trade union movement, the situation was such that the management even tried to ban tribal panchayat meetings in the garden. But, the management could not stop it as the association of the planters (D.B.I.T.A.) decided that the panchayats could take place in the gardens if they wouldn't disturb the normal works and were confined purely to social and religious matters.

However, the workers of this garden could organise themselves under the banner of W.B.C.S.U. and in 1952, they called on a strike for two days as the management dismissed

a chaprasi. The strike was organised by W.B.C.S.U.

In 1953, a strike was organised for one day in the garden. by W.B.C.S.U. to dismiss a munshi, who was a Congress supporter and pro-management in outlook. In the same year, the workers agitated several times for excess load of task(ticca). The workers even assaulted an assistant manager of this garden in this connection. The workers struck work again for three days in the same year, demanding two weightment of ticca instead of four.

In 1954, W.B.C.S.U. demanded for new school, water, church etc.

In the next year i.e. in 1955, this union framed a charter of demands which included weightment should be two times in lieu of four times, two hundred retrenched workers should be reinstated, schedule of ticca should be less, labour club, firewood, proper amusement facilities for the workers etc. In this year again labour unrest resulted for weightment of ficca. The management took some decisions against the workers in the middle of this year. The decisions included-free issue of tea to the workers would be discontinued, the system of giving advance would operate if the workers cooperated with the management and temporary workers would be given work for half day only in the months^{of} July, August and September. The workers started agitation against these decisions. Later in the year, the workers again protested

against weightment of ticca. The workers of this tea estate also participated in the Bonus movement of 1955. They struck work from August 29, 1955 to September 7, 1955.

R.S.P. led Dooars Cha Bagan Workers' Union (D.C.B.W.U.) was formed in this garden in the 1956. A peculiar incident of this year could show us the arbitrary nature of the management. Two dogs of the then assistant manager of this garden quarrelled with three dogs of a labour line. The assistant manager ordered an worker to kill the dogs of the labour line. The worker declined to carry out the order. The management then dismissed the worker. The D.C.B.W.U. made a protest against it. The worker then get back his job. In the same year W.B.C.S.U. was demanding for 25% increase of emoluments. The management did not concede the demands. The workers called on strike which continued for three days. But strike was unsuccessful.

The I.N.T.U.C. affiliated Dooars Cha Bagan Majdoor Sangha (D.C.B.M.S.) was formed in this garden in 1957.

In 1958, D.C.B.M.S. organised a strike for one day to show solidarity with the Chowkidar who was dismissed for having hands in a theft case in the bungalow of an assistant manager.

In 1960, D.C.B.M.S. placed a demand for supply of firewood. In this year workers again started agitation for excess ticca and four times of weightment. They also observed strike for a day in this year in support of their demands. In the same year the W.B.C.S.U. put forward a charter of demands for firewood, permanency

of temporary workers, abolition of ticca when the leaf is coarse, quarters etc.

In 1961, W.B.C.S.U. organised a strike for one day on the issue of supply of firewood. The workers struck again for two times in this year. In one case some workers were not allowed to resume work as they were late by 25 minutes. In another case their demands were - mode of payment, ^{at} Extra leaf price should be changed, supply of firewood, distribution of fresh flour etc.

The W.B.C.S.U. again put forward a 12 point charter of demands in 1962 which included - children and wives of permanent workers should be given employment, seperate house for married couple, supply of water, repairing of labour quarters, quantum of task should be written in Hindi etc.

National Union of Plantation Workers (N.U.P.W.), the official I.N.T.U.C. affiliated union was formed in 1961 and most of the congress led unions (such as D.C.B.W.S. etc.) merged with it except the R.C.M.C. The N.U.P.W. was formed in this garden in 1964 and in the same year R.C.M.C. was also formed in this garden. In this year a worker was dismissed for his absenteeism. N.U.P.W. made a protest against it. Two strikes took place in 1964 in this garden. The reason for the first strike was that some workers were transfered from one division to another division. The second strike occured when a group of women workers refused to do the task of eradication of creepers, they wanted to pluck leaves only. Both the strikes were unsuccessful. Besides, workers also protested against the ticca of cheeling work, change of weekly holiday of

factory workers, period of non-task work. In the same year, D.C.B.W.U. put forward a demand to give preference to the dependants of permanent workers for temporary works. In this year, there was a another type of incident in this garden. Mr. Deven Sarkar, the general secretary of W.B.C.S.U. had a meeting with the workers of this garden. The meeting took place ⁱⁿ the garden. The manager of this tea estate wrote to the Superintendent of Police of Jalpaiguri District accusing him of criminal trespassing in the garden.

In 1965, the D.C.B.W.U. demanded reduction of the workload and increase in the supply of firewood. In the same year W.B.C.S.U. gave a strike notice to the management for violation of Minimum Wages Act, non-payment of wages for annual leaves, supply of water, canteen, ration, mobile creche etc.

In the next year i.e. in 1966, D.C.B.W.U. placed a number of demands to the management. The demands were - supply of kerosene oil, land for cultivation, extra pay for extra work etc. The strike, called by the Coordination Committee for arrear, revision of pay etc. received partial response in this garden. This year also witnessed the most noteworthy incident in the history of trade union movement of this garden. The management of this tea garden demolished the houses of some dismissed workers. Mr. A. H. Basterwitch,

the R.S.P. leader met the manager to protest against it. The manager did not pay any heed to this protest. There were some other demands also; such as implementation of the 5th Industrial Tribunal etc. Mr. Baterwitch started hunger strike from November 8, 1966 in front of the gate of the tea estate. The hunger strike continued for three days. All the workers of this garden stopped work. The workers also demanded for transfer of the manager. The head office of the tea estate intervened. The manager was transferred and the head office assured the workers to consider the other demands.

In 1967 & 1968 D.C.B.W.U. and N.U.P.W. placed various charter of demands. The demands were - reduction of ticca, introduction of two times of weightments, stopping of arbitrary change of jobs for the workers, immediate stoppage of all anti-labour and anti-union activities, fire-wood, equal distribution of Khet (cultivable) land, repairing of houses, free quarters for every worker, a dispensary in Birpitijhora division, festival holiday for chowkidar, ration, filling up of vacancies etc. The workers once gheraoed the assistant in 1967 and started "go-slow" movement in the same year on the issue of these demands.

The third joint movement of the workers, organised by the Coordination Committee for increase of employment, revision of wages, implementation of Plantation Labour Act of 1951 was totally successful in this garden. The workers

of this garden struck work from August 18, 1969 to September 2, 1969.

From 1970 to 1972, there was no significant movement or no significant demands were placed by the workers in this garden.

In 1973, N.U.P.W. put forward two demands for labour housing and filling up of sub-staff vacancies.

In 1974, D.C.B.W.U. placed a number of demands to the management. Those are - confirmation of all daily rated dafadars who are serving for more than six months, filling up of vacancies, payment of sick wages, quality of ration should be improved, regular cleaning of drains of labour lines etc.

The union activities were more or less nil during 1975 to 1977. A growing dissatisfaction was seen among the workers. A group of D.C.B.W.U. came out from it and made contact with the local C.P.I.(M) leader. With the help of this leader they formed C.I.T.U. affiliated Cha Bagan Majdoor Union (C.B.M.U.) in this garden in 1978. This union submitted a charter of demands to the management. The demands were - supply of firewood, construction of cement floors in the labour quarters, water-taps in the labour lines etc.

In 1979-80 labour unrests took place in the garden on the previous charter of demands and for advance for Rathjatra.

In 1981 D.C.B.W.U. framed a charter of demands which included demands for firewood, conversion of temporary sub-

staff to permanent, stopping of reduction of the number of paniwalas, dafadars etc., supply of ration for the dependants, jobs for the educated and efficient tribal youths, timely repairing of labour quarters etc.

In 1983, the workers made a protest against the transfer of a staff.

In 1985, the workers of this garden organised demonstrations for new employment opportunities, ration card, promotion of minors to adolescents, repairing of doors and windows of their quarters. These demonstrations were organised jointly by the D.C.B.W.U. and the W.B.C.M.S. In the same year both the above unions put forward some other demands also - additional employment, increase in the number of doctors and midwives, tubewell, converting Kuccha labour quarters to Pucca, supply of kerosene oil, regular supply of concessional ration, club house, school transport etc.

In the next year i.e. in 1986, the workers of this garden again demonstrated demanding ration on credit, not to employ women workers in cheeling works.

C.B.M.U. made a twenty-point charter of demands in 1987. The main demands were - Badle appointment for incapable workers, ration for the dependants, separate quarters for the workers with large families, construction of Pucca roads in the labour lines, demand for a cemented water point for every ten houses, ration and four peels firewood for the temporary

workers and monthly rated workers. In this year of April 17, the workers gheraoed all the staff and managers for a few hours. Their demand was : wages due to be paid on 22nd April should be paid on 18th April on account of Easter-Saturday. The management did not agree as the papers were not ready and also apprehended that it might be a practice in future. The police came and dispersed the agitated workers. Women workers took a leading role in this movement.

KURTY TEA ESTATE

The first trade union in Kurty tea estate was formed by the Socialists in 1950. The union was West Bengal Cha Shramik Union (WBCSU). During this time the Communist Party had already formed trade unions in a number of gardens in Western Dooars. Debprosad Ghosh (Patalbabu) and his Adivasi and Nepali associates off and on held meeting at Metelli haat. They also took up the task of selling and distributing books and leaflets (written in Sadri) etc. to the tea garden workers. Through these meetings Patalbabu came in contact with some workers in Kurty Tea Estate. Prem Oraon was one of them. He joined C.P.I. and took initiative to form C.P.I. union in this garden. He, however, did not succeed, because the Socialists in the garden were very popular at that time.

During this time the workers of this tea garden, under the leadership of Ghanashyam Mishra the famous socialist leader, were agitating against the management for poor-quality of ration

items. The extent of agitation could be understood from a telegram sent to the Regional Labour Officer, Jalpaiguri and Assistant Labour Commissioner, Darjeeling by the manager of this garden. The telegram stated : "Mishra causing trouble in Kurty Tea Estate on account of ration scales stop. Your intervention immediately solicited". This agitation continued from 1951 to 1953.

In 1953, the workers of this tea estate organised a strike for two days. Their demands were - issuing of ration at prorata rates must be ceased, Extra-leaf price (doubly) should be increased, increase of wages, the quantum of rice in the cereal ration should be increased, security of service should be ensured. The strike was unsuccessful as the management did not concede the demands.

The workers of this tea estate also participated in the Bonus movement of 1955. They struck work from August 29, 1955 to September 6, 1955.

In 1956, the workers of this tea garden again stopped work for two days in the month of June. Their demand was to dismiss a lorry driver who had abused a women worker. The management ordered an enquiry and on the basis of this report the lorry driver was suspended for fourteen days. In the same year, in November, the workers put forward some demands, such as, the maundage weighthment ticca of Mikania creepers must be stopped and the work should be stopped at 12 O'clock. The

management refused to meet the demand. The workers then stopped work for 2 days. The strike, however, was unsuccessful. The workers then started a 'go-slow' movement. This angered the management. Fourteen workers were given charge sheets and then suspended.

From 1957 to 1958 W.B.C.S.U. submitted several demands to the management regarding - supply of firewood, kerchiefs, jobs for the retrenched jobless workers, implementation of minimum wages, lessening the quantum of ticca, jobs to the wives of the workers and other dependants. In support of these demands the workers went on strike for a day. Finally some of the demands were conceded by the management.

In 1959, the workers again went on strike for two days in the month of September as the secretary of the garden unit of W.B.C.S.U., who also was an ex-employee, was stopped by the management from entering the factory.

In the next year i.e. in 1960, W.B.C.S.U. again submitted a memorandum of demands to the management which included - supply of firewood, permanent services for temporary chowkidars, treatment of blind persons during the service, supply of drinking water, weighshed, club room etc. The management agreed to meet the demands.

In 1963, the workers of this garden struck work for two times in protest against the dismissal of some workers.

In 1966, Zilla Cha Bagan Workers' Union was formed in this garden. In the same year the supporters of this

union gheraoed the office staff , broke the glasses of windows on the issue of bonus. They also organised a strike in January of this year. The management reacted with coercive measures and dismissed ten workers. The workers of this tea garden also participated in the joint movement of tea workers organised by the Coordination Committee in this year.

In 1969, Z.C.B.W.U. again put forward a memorandum which included demands like, jobs of unemployed youths, re- instalment of the dismissed workers, ration, good quality of tea , sugar, kerosene, firewood, latrine, proper treatment and full wages for sick worker, clubroom, increase of wages, extra leaf price must be given seperately from daily wages etc. In this year, workers of this garden also participated in the joint movement organised by Coordination Committee for increase of employment opportunities in the tea gardens, revision of wages and implementation of the Plantation Labour Act of 1951. The strike was started from 18th August, 1969 and was called off on September 2, 1969.

With the growth of the Z.C.B.W.U. under the leadership of Prem Oraon, the influence of socialists over the workers in this tea garden was gradually diminishing.

In 1970, a clash took place in a labour line of this tea garden. In this clash two socialist workers were murdered and one more was severely injured. In the same year, West Bengal

Cha Majdoor Sabha affiliated to H.M.S. formed its branch in this garden. Its influence was restricted particularly to one ethnic group (Tanti) of a labour line (Tanti line). One of the most noteworthy incidents of the trade union movements in this garden was happened in this year. The management of this tea estate planned to remove the factory from this garden to another tea estate of the same ownership. The workers of this tea estate protested against it, because if the factory was removed a huge number of workers would have lost their jobs. The management did not pay any heed to the workers' protest. As a part of the shifting process the management started to send the green leaves from this garden to another garden for processing. Till then the workers' protest was peaceful. Prem Oraon, the then secretary of garden unit of the Z.C.B.W.U. could realise the consequence of such a move. He organised the workers and started picketing in front of the gate of the garden. In the mean time, the workers of the other factory, where the leaves were sent for processing, stopped processing these leaves in support of the workers of this garden. When the movement continued for fourteen days, the Calcutta head office of this agency house sent some observers. The union gave them an ultimatum to stop factory - shifting. The management did retreat and cancelled the idea of factory-shifting. During this movement Prem Oraon lost his right leg through an accident when he forcibly tried to drive away a tractor.

In 1973, the workers of this tea garden observed a strike for one day in November for political reasons.

In 1975, Z.C.B.W.U. made a protest to the management to stop bringing casual workers from outside the garden.

In 1976-77, Z.C.B.W.U. sent a number of memorandum of demands to the management. The demands were - supply of firewood and water in the labour lines, repairing of labour quarters, repairing of the roads in the labour lines, supply of milk, biscuits and other food items for the children in the creche, supply of medicine, payment of gratuity, ration for sick workers, vacancy fill up, building of a temple etc.

C.I.T.U. affiliated Cha Bagan Majdoor Union was formed in this garden in 1977. In this year Z.C.B.W.U. demanded for 20% bonus but C.B.M.U. did not agree to it. They were ready to concede much lesser percentage of bonus.

In 1978, Z.C.B.W.U. called a strike for a one day but C.B.M.U. opposed the strike.

In the next year (i.e. in 1979) also, Z.C.B.W.U. called a strike for one day to withdraw the chargesheet given to a chowkidar.

In 1980, both the Z.C.B.W.U. and the W.B.C.M.S. started demanding for filling up of vacancies, repairing of labour quarters, supply of firewood, establishment of school building, labour club, latrine, supply of ration, twenty per cent bonus etc.

From the beginning of the eighties to the eighty four, no significant movement took place in this garden. The union activities were virtually nil during that time. Meanwhile a worker was sent to the educational courses of the Central Board for Workers Education, Siliguri, during that time. There, this worker came in contact with a defence personnel who was a supporter of C.P.I.M.L.(P.C.C.). The worker became convinced by the defence personnel. Returning to the tea garden, this worker organised some workers and formed Paschim Banga Cha Bagan Shramik Karmachari Union (P.B.C.B.S.K.U.) affiliated to I.F.T.U., a trade union of C.P.I.M.L. (P.C.C.) in 1984. The union quickly gained popularity among the workers of this tea garden for its activities. In this year this tea estate witnessed a large scale workers' movement in the history of its trade union movements. This movement occurred on the issue of the appointment of a staff. A vacancy was created in the office on the retirement of a staff. The management selected an outsider for the post. The workers' and the staff organisations demanded that the appointment must be given to one who is an insider either to a spouse of a staff or to the spouse of a worker. The management did not concede the demand. When the selected person selected came to join, the workers and the staff togetherly prevented him from joining. They remained assembled in front of the gate of the garden. The management then suddenly declared lock out and all the managerial staff left the garden. During the continuation of the lockout, the government intervened and through a tripartite conciliation

it was decided that (i) the unions would have to allow the selected person to join, (ii) the company would consider their demand for the future vacancies. The company then called off the lock-out after forty days. During the forty days of lock-out the workers had to suffer a lot. They were virtually jobless as they were not provided with temporary works in the adjacent gardens, because the management of this tea estate had requested the management of other tea gardens of this area not to give jobs to the workers of this tea estate.

During 1984-85 both the Z.C.B.W.U. and C.B.M.U. were loosing their influence over the workers. Most of the workers became the supporter of P.B.C.B.S.K.U.

In 1986, the workers of this tea estate struck work for one day on the demands for supply of firewood, land for cultivation, sick wages etc.

In 1987, Z.C.B.W.U. and P.B.C.B.S.K.U. put forward a number of demands. The demands were - regular supply of firewood, pucca construction of labour quarters, repairing of labour quarters, double wages for work done on sunday (weekly holiday), adequate protective equipments for the sprayers, free supply of medicine, filling up of vacancies and so on.

CHAPTER - V

THE LABOUR FORCEGENERAL DESCRIPTION OF LABOUR FORCE IN THE THREE GARDENS

We have already told that the labourers in the tea gardens of North Bengal have either migrated generally from Chotonagpur - Santal Pargana region or its adjacent areas of Bihar or from Nepal. The Adivasi workers of the tea gardens were composed of different tribes; such as Oraon, Munda, Kharia Baraik, Mahali, Lohar, Turi, Santal etc. from the tribal belt of Bihar. The Nepali workers also belonged to different castes and tribes. Besides, there were some workers also who have come from Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.

In the three tea gardens, we have studied, we have divided the workers into three broad categories - Tribals of Chotanagpur-Santhal Pargana region of Bihar, people of Nepali origin and others. The 'others' include those who have migrated from Orissa. Madhya Pradesh, other areas of Bihar and the Bhotiyas. There was no Bengalee worker in these tea gardens.

Table : 5.1ETHNIC GROUP OF THE WORKERS (PERCENTAGE IN BRACKETS)

<u>Ethnic group</u>	<u>Lalfa T.E.</u>	<u>Angrabhasa T.E.</u>	<u>Kurty T.E.</u>	<u>Total</u>
Chotanagpur Santhal Pargana tribals	371(94.4)	1525(82.3)	1164(79.6)	3060(82.5)
Nepaleese	7 (1.8)	310(16.7)	273(18.7)	590(15.4)
Others	15 (3.8)	18(.9)	24(1.6)	57(1.5)
	<u>393(100)</u>	<u>1853(100)</u>	<u>1461(100)</u>	<u>3707(100)</u>

The above table shows that among the 3707 workers in the three gardens Chotanagpur tribals were dominant. They were more than 82.5%. The next were the Nepaleese, they were nearly 16%. And the remaining 1.5% included the 'others'.

In the individual gardens there were similarities in ethnic composition of workers among the two gardens namely Angrabhasa and Kurty but the composition was slightly differed in the Lalfa Tea Estate. The proportion of Chotonagpur-Santal pargana tribals and 'others' was highest in this tea estate among the three estates perhaps because this tea estate is more adjacent to Bihar.

Male and Female workers

In the tea gardens both male and female workers were employed. The nature of work of tea plantation requires female workers. In some works like plucking, sorting etc., female workers are more efficient than the male workers. Besides this, the Planters also wanted a cheap and permanent labour force. So, they have induced the family based migration to establish a new settlement, the people of which have no alternative but to work in the tea gardens. In the following table we will get the number of male and female workers in the three gardens,

Table : 5.2

MALE AND FEMALE WORKERS (Percentage in brackets)

<u>SEX</u>	<u>TEA GARDENS</u>			<u>TOTAL</u>
Male	Lalfa 252(64)	Angrabhasa 978(53)	Kurty 786(54)	2016(54)
Female	141(36)	875(47)	675(46)	1691(46)
	393(100)	1853(100)	1461(100)	3707(100)

So, from the above table it is found that among the 3707 workers, 2016(54%) were males and 1691(46%) were females. The ratio of male and female workers in Angrabhasa Tea Estate to that of kurty Tea Estate was more or less same. In Angrabhasa Tea Estate the percentages of male and female workers were 53% and 47% and in Kurty Tea Estate these were 54% and 46% respectively. In Lalfa Tea Estate it differed from the other two estates.

The percentages of male and female workers in this tea estate were 64 and 36. Again if we compare the sex composition of Angrabhasa and Kurty with that of total of Dooars, we will get the more or less same types of compositions. In Dooars the numbers of male and female workers in 1987 were 77,307(52%) and 71,937(48%). The numbers of male and female workers in the two gardens of Dooars (Angrabhasa and Kurty Tea Estate), we have studied, were 1764(53%) and 1550(47%). But the sex composition of Lalfa Tea Estate (Terai) and that of Terai differed. In Terai the numbers of male and female workers in 1987 were 12,101 (51%) and 11,517(49%), whereas in Lalfa tea estate the corresponding numbers were 252(64%) and 141(36%).

Housing

The workers generally reside within the territory of the tea estate. The work hours of the tea plantation is such that it requires the workers to reside within the area of the tea estate. The work starts at 7 A.M. and closes after 3 P.M.

The planters provide land for housing to the workers. In the earlier days the homestead land was distributed through the Sardars. The Sardars were tea garden workers and also worked as recruiters of labourers from Chotanagpur - Santhal Pargana region. The Sardars also gave the workers the materials necessary for construction of houses. Those were generally thatch, bamboo, rope etc. The planters bore no responsibility to regulate the housing or settlement pattern. In those days

most of the houses were of Kachcha type i.e. thatched roofs and bamboo walls. The walls sometimes were plastered with mud. Some houses also had roofs with corrugated iron sheets and sun dried brick walls. The workers of the same tribe generally preferred to live near each other.

The section 15 of the Plantation Labour Act of 1951 makes it mandatory for every employer to provide and maintain necessary housing accomodation - a) for every worker (including his family) residing in the plantation; b) for every worker (including his family residing outside the plantation), who has put six months continuous service in the plantation and who has expressed a desire in writing to reside within the plantation.

The state government made the Plantation Labour Housing Scheme Rules in 1958. The rules specified the standard of housing and also provided for loans. The standard specified (except in hill areas) in this scheme was - i) Two rooms with floor area of 100 Sq.ft. ii) Kitchen and Verandah with a total floor area of 100 sq. ft. iii) Bath and Lavatory with floor area of 16sq.ft. and 12 sq.ft. respectively. iv) Storage space for food and fuel - 12 sq.ft. and the houses with ventilation lighting (if available), drainage and water tap facilities. The State Government would provide soft loans to the maximum upto 80% of the total cost of construction, but not for acquiring land. The planters have to construct annually 8% of the total houses required. The central government agreed to help the planters for construction of houses in 1967 through the Subsidised Housing Scheme for Plantation Workers. The Central Government agreed to give 50%

soft loan, 37.5% subsidy to the total cost of a house. The planters had to bear only 12.5% of the total cost. This assistance was closed in 1986.

The type and condition of housing in the three gardens studied are given below.

Table : 5.3

TYPE OF HOUSING (Percentage in brackets)

<u>Type</u>	<u>Lalfa T.E.</u>	<u>Angrabhasa T.E.</u>	<u>Kurty T.E.</u>	<u>Total</u>
Pucca	139(61)	797(76)	550(73)	1486(73.5)
Kuchcha	90(39)	246(24)	200(27)	536(26.5)
Grand Total	229(100)	1043(100)	750(100)	1022(100)

So, from the above table it is found that nearly 3/4th of the total number of houses in the three gardens were of Pucca type and the remaining were of Kuchcha type. In Angrabhasa and Kurty Tea Estates the number of Pucca houses were high (more than 76% and 73% respectively) compare to Lalfa Tea Estate (nearly 61%) as the former two tea estates were owned by a agency house company.

The houses were situated in the rows of labour lines. The Pucca houses generally had one room, one verandah and one kitchen. Their walls were brick built with corrugated iron roofs. The average size of the houses was 16' x 12'. The Kuchcha houses, sometimes had more than one room. The walls of these houses were

built of bamboo, thatch and plastered with mud and the roofs were made of bamboo and thatch. No houses had the facilities of latrines or sanitation. There were some community bathrooms and latrines in the labour lines. There was no provision of electricity in the houses. Insufficient sunlight due to small window made it more unhygienic and unhealthy with the common feature of overcrowdedness. The roads in the labour lines did not have brick-saling, they were uneven and made of mud. In the two gardens of Dooars some of the houses had small pieces of land for kitchen garden.

Such was the condition of housing in the three gardens. Houses were not built according to the specification. The government, the management and even the workers were not careful about it. If we trace the history of workers' movements in these gardens (Chapter - IV), we would rarely find that the workers are demanding for proper housing facilities. In the tri-annual wage settlements the demand for proper housing is included, but this demand was not discussed or considered seriously. However, workers' demand for repairing of houses was more common.

Wages

In the early years of tea plantation the wages were fixed arbitrarily by the planters. The government normally had no say in this matter. In the post-independence period (i.e. after 1947) the government started mediating in provision of minimum wages. Moreover with the growth of trade unions the workers were also able to bargain with the planters in matters

relating to wages.

Wages of plantation workers is a combination of both cash and kind. The workers get rations at a subsidized rate , a limited amount of free fuel, free housing, free medical facilities etc. and a cash wage. All these constitute the total wage.

In the earlier days the wages in the tea plantation were very low. In spite of the increase in wages during the post-independence period they are lower than the wages in the other industries in the organized sector such as Jute, Coal, Textile etc.

The First Minimum Wages Advisory Committee for Tea Plantations of West Bengal government was set up in 1950. This committee was known as Modak Committee and it recommended that the minimum wage must not be merely a subsistence wage. Besides providing for his food, it should also help the worker preserve his efficiency by providing for education for his children, medical and other amenities (Bhowmik 1981:88). This Committee took nearly two years to study the situation and after these lofty ideals it recommended the minimum wages as Rs.1.19 for male and Rs.1.06 for female workers. This was fairly low wages compared to the 1952 consumer price index level. In spite of this, the planters, just after the implementation of the Modak Committee recommendations, resorted to a wage cut on the issue that there was a crisis in the tea industry. The government appointed a committee-The Second Minimum Wages Committee in November, 1952 to examine the justification of planters' step. This committee was known as Banerjee Committee.

It recommended the minimum wages laid down by the Modak Committee, but curtailed certain other facilities (Ibid:87). The workers were supplied food grains (Rice and Wheat) at a subsidised rate of Rs.5 per maund. This was to be increased to Rs.15 per maund. They were also getting pulses, mustard oil, kerosene at a slight concessional rate since the food crisis after the Second world war. These were to be withdrawn and as a compensation to this, workers would get an additional 34 paise per day.

In 1955, the workers got 18 paise adhoc increment in their daily wages, because there was a sudden spurt in the tea market in India in this year as a result of Korean war.

The another adhoc increment was given in 1959. In 1958-59 the consumer price index rose to a high point. The State government issued a notice that there should be rise in the dearness allowance as compensation. So, the tea workers got an increase of 13 paise in their daily wages in 1959.

The Central Wage Board for Tea Plantation was appointed in December, 1960 according to a decision of the 15th session of the Indian Labour Conference held in July, 1957. The conference set the guidelines for a national wage policy by unanimously adopting the need based minimum wage formula. It recommended the setting up of wage boards in each industry as a device for implementing the formula (Ibid:89). The Central government appointed wage boards in 22 industries including tea plantations. The recommendations of this board came after five years and six months i.e. in April 1966. The board announced

two interim wage increments of 8 paise and 6 paise during this time. The final recommendations of the board was that the wages ^{would} be increased by 13 paise, 10 paise and 7 paise respectively for Male, Female and Children from 1, January, 1966. It also announced a further increase of 2 paise for Male and 1 paise for Female and Children from 1 April, 1966.

It is difficult to understand the basis of fixing the wages. The standard formula for fixing a need based wage was to take 3 units of consumption for every adult male worker, among other things. In the tea industry the units of consumption taken were 1.5 as the employers argued that employment was family-based. Though the board did not agreed totally with the argument of the employers, yet they fixed a wage which was based on 1.5 consumption unit.

The Second Minimum Wage Fixation Committee for Tea Plantations was appointed by the State Government in April, 1973. The Committee was a tripartite body, consisting of representatives from the employers' organisation, workers' organisations and presided over by the state labour commissioner as a government representative. The final recommendations of this committee was made in July, 1977. But, before it the committee had announced three interim increase of the wages. The wages at that time (i.e. in April 1973) was Rs.3 for male, Rs.2.83 for female and Rs.1.50 for children. From 1966 i.e. after the final recommendations of the Central Wage Board to 1975 the wages were increased by small amounts, either by tripartite settlements or through the workers' movements as in 1969. The Second Minimum Wage Fixation Committee just after its formation, announced an

interim increase of wages 15 paise for males and females and 7 paise for children. In 1974 Co-ordination Committee of Tea Plantation Workers (CCTPW) put a memorandum of demands before the Wage Fixation Committee, demanding a need based wage. The CCTPW demanded Rs.7.40 as daily wages. The daily wages at that time was Rs.3.15 more males. Initially the Consultative Committee of Plantation Association agreed to increase the daily wage by 7 paise only. The workers did not agree, they started demonstrations and token strikes. Then the Wage Fixation Committee, in July 1977, announced another interim increase of 25 paise. But this was mopped up by the compulsory deposit scheme introduced by the central government in that year. In 1975, there was an extra ordinary price hike in the tea market. The workers naturally put a strong demand for wage increase. After a prolonged discussions for a few months, the Wage Fixation Committee in December 1975 announced an interim increase of Rs.1.15 in two instalments; the first one by 60 paise from January, 1976. This increase was fairly large one compared to previous increments.

The committee finally recommended that daily wages were to increase by Rs.1.00 from August, 1977 and a further increase of another Rs.1.00 from July, 1978. The extra leaf price was increased to 10 paise per kg. from 7 paise per kg. This was the highest increase of daily wages of tea plantation workers ever since. The reasons for such increase were that the rise in the prices of tea had stabilised at a point which was more

than double the prices of the 1975 period. If there would be a decrease in tea prices, in future that would be minimum and permanent. Another reason was that, in June, 1977 the left front had come to power in the State which had a pro-labour policy.

The difference between wages of male and female workers was deemed abolished from December, 1976 when the Labour Ministry clarified that the Equal Remuneration Act applied to equal nature of work and not to equal volume of work.

The previous agreement expired on June 30, 1979. In April, 1980 a tripartite committee, constituting representatives of CCTPW* , CCPA* and the State Government decided to increase the wages by 90 paise annually for the next three years i.e. upto June 30, 1982 with retrospective effect from July, 1979. Thus the daily wage became Rs.9 per day from July, 1981.

(*C.C.T.P.W. - Coordination Committee for tea plantation workers

*C.C.P.A. - Consultative Committee for Planters' Association)

The next agreement was signed after one year of the previous agreement had expired i.e. in August, 1983 and the increase was reduced to 75 paise per annum for three years with retrospective effect from April, 1, 1983, not from July, 1982. This agreement expired on June 30, 1986 when the daily wage was Rs.11.25.

The latest agreement, at the time of my field work, was made in June, 1987. It was also signed after one year of the previous agreement had expired. It was agreed that daily wages would be increased by 85 paise per annum for the next three years. The retrospective effect of this agreement was from February 14, 1987, though it should have been from July 1, 1986. So, at the end of the three years i.e. in June, 1990 a worker would get Rs.13.80 per day. The doubly (Extra leaf price) would be increased to 19 paise per kg. from 16 paise per kg. In this settlement the workers' original demand was Rs.6.75 per annum while they got only 85 paise per annum.

Both these agreements had some things in common. Both came into operation a year after the previous agreements had expired. The three year wage agreement of came into force only in June, 1983. The last agreement expired on May 30, 1986 but the present agreement came into effect only from June, 1987. So, in both cases workers lost their enhanced wages for one year each. Both agreements have retrospective effect, but this does not cover the full year. The previous agreement was retrospective from April 1, 1983 not June 1, 1982 and the present one is from February 14, 1987 though it should have been from June 1, 1986. Further, the next annual increment was from June, 1, 1988 and not one year from the date from which the agreement was in effect (February 14, 1987).

In Terai the daily wage was 6 paise less than that of Dooars and in the gardens less than 500 acres the wage was 3 paise less in Dooars.

Other facilities

We have already mentioned that tea workers get wages in cash and kind. Beside the cash wages discussed above, they also get subsidised ration, free housing, free fuel, free tea, medical facilities and protective clothings etc.

Ration - In a workers' family, dependants upto 18 years get full ration and those between the ages 2 and 12 get half rations. The quota for an adult is 3 kg. 260 Gms. cereals (1kg. rice and 2 kg. 260 gm. wheat) at a rate of Rs.1.40 per kg. A child is entitled to 1.22 kg. (500 gm. rice and 720 gm. wheat) at the same rate.

The facility of subsidised ration came into existence because the Dooars is a deficit area in food grains. The rations given to the workers do not fully cover their weekly needs and they have to purchase food grains from the open market. The quality of ration was not always good. It was often found that the workers were demanding good quality of ration(chapter IV).

Housing - We have already discussed about it.

Firewood - A worker is entitled 2.5 pill firewood, free of cost per year. One pill is approximately equal to 12.5 maunds. This also does not fulfill the need of a worker's family. So, they have to collect firewood from nearby forest or from other sources, The supply of firewood was not also regular. Workers were found demanding for more quantity of regular supply of

firewood (chapter IV).

Tea - The management provides 275 gms. tea per month per worker, free of cost.

Medical facilities - The management is supposed to provide all medical facilities to the workers.

While the Angrabhasa and Kurty Tea Estates had hospitals with 22 and 12 beds respectively, the Lalfa Tea Estate had no bed. Even it did not have a permanent doctor, but only a part time doctor . The Angrabhasa Tea Estate had two doctors and Kurty had one. The number of other staffs (i.e. nurse, midwife, compounder, cook, sweeper chowkider etc.) in these three estates were four, nine and six respectively in Lalfa, Angrabhasa and Kurty Tea Estates. In no way, these were sufficient or adequate. The number of workers in Angrabhasa Tea Estate was 1853 and in Kurty Tea Estate it was 1461. The total population was 7020 (workers' population 6877) and 4172 (workers' population 4087) respectively in these two tea estates. The number of beds (only 22 and 12 beds) in the hospitals of these two tea estates were extremely less according to the need. Then we can not expect 24 hours service from a person. A hospital should have atleast 3 doctors and other staff accordingly. Moreover the supply of medicine in all these three estates was extremely poor. Thus the patients in these three tea estates had to depend either on the private medical practitioners or on the government hospital.

In the following table we have given the medical facilities available in the three gardens in 1987.

Table 5.4

MEDICAL FACILITIES IN THE THREE GARDENS

Name of the Garden	No. of workers	Total Population	No. of Hospital/Dispensary	No. of beds	No. of doctors	No. of Mid-wives	No. of Nurses	No. of Coma	No. of H.A.
LALFA T.E.	393	1114	1		*R-V 1	1	1	1	1
ANGRABHASA T.E.	1853	7020	1	22	2	1	1	1	1
KURTY T.E.	1461	4172	1	12	1	1	1	1	1

Protective clothings - The workers are given certain items for their type of work. These are umbrellas, Hessian (Jute) clothes to collect tea leaves, cotton blankets, Aprons to protect their clothes from tea bushes, Mask for spraying pesticides etc. But these are not always provided according to necessity.

*R = Residential

V = Visiting

SAMPLE COMPOSITION :

The respondents were five hundred in number - one hundred from Lalfa Tea Estate and two hundred each from Angrabhasa and Kurty Tea Estate as the latter two estates were larger than the former. Respondents were selected randomly, keeping some points in mind. Those are, the sample should cover members of all trade unions in these three gardens, more or less all ethnic groups, different ages and both sexes.

The description of the sample i.e. its Ethnic composition, Age, Sex, Places of origin, Places of birth, Religion, Years of service, Secondary occupations, Languages, Literacy etc. is given below.

Ethnic Composition :

The respondents belonged to different ethnic groups. They were Adibasis of Chotanagpur - Santhal Pargana region and its adjacent areas, Nepalis, Oriyas, Biharis and also Bhotias. The adivasis were locally known as Madesia which means people of my country. Externally they appeared to be homogeneous, but they were divided into different tribes. They are Oraon, Munda, Kheria, Baraik, Santhal, Mahali, Turi and so on. We did not break up them into different tribes, We have lumped them into a broad term. The Nepalis also were divided into various castes and tribes.

From the table below we have the break up of different ethnic groups among the respondents.

Table : 5.5

ETHNIC GROUP (Percentage in brackets)

Ethnic Group	Lalfa T.E.	Angrabhasa T.E.	Kurty T.E.	Total	
Adivasi	93(93)	170(85)	182(91)	445	(89)
Nepali	2(2)	26(13)	12(6)	40	(8)
Bihari	5(5)	2(1)	2(1)	9	(2)
Oriya	0	1(.5)	4(2)	5	(.8)
Bhotia	0	1(.5)	0	1	(.2)
	100(100)	200(100)	200(100)	500	(100)

Among the five hundred respondents, Adivasis were numerically dominant. They formed 89% (i.e. 445) of the total respondents. The Nepalis were 8% (i.e. 40) and the remaining 3% were Biharies, Oriya and Bhotia.

If we see the gardenwise break up, we will find that among the respondents, Adivasis were more or less equal in percentage in the three gardens. But the respondents of Nepali Origin differed. It was only 2% in Lalfa Tea Estate of Terai and 13% and 6% in Angrabhasa and Kurty Tea Estate of Dooars respectively. In Terai and also in Lalfa Tea Estate the ratio of workers of Nepali origin to the Adivasi workers was less than that of Dooars and also of Angrabhasa and Kurty Tea Estate. From our sample it may be taken that percentage of workers of Nepali origin in Kurty Tea Estate was less than that of Angrabhasa Tea Estate. But this was not true. Percentage of workers

belonged to Nepali origin was more or less same in the two tea estates of Dooars. The sample does not show the true picture here because during the time of my fieldwork Gorkhaland movement was in its full swing and the Metelli area was a hot belt of this movement. The Nepali workers of this area were afraid of any discussion with an outsider. That is why the Nepali workers of the Kurty Tea Estate were rarely found to be respondents.

The number of caste people of Bihar was highest in Lalfa Tea Estate, perhaps because Bihar is more adjacent to Terai than the Dooars.

Age Group

We have divided the respondents into five age groups such as children (12-16 yrs.), adolescents (16-18 yrs.) and three groups among the adult workers. They are given in the table below.

Table : 5.6

AGE GROUP (Percentage in brackets)

Age Group	Lalfa T.E.	Angrabhasa T.E.	Kurty T.E.	Total
12-16 yrs	1(1)	0	1(.5)	2(.4)
16-18 yrs	2(2)	4(2)	2(1)	8(1.6)
18-30 yrs	45(45)	86(43)	87(43.5)	218(44)
30-40 yrs	27(27)	58(29)	51(25.5)	136(27)
40+ yrs	25(25)	52(26)	59(29.5)	136(27)
	100(100)	200(100)	200(100)	500(100)

Among the respondents only two were children and eight were adolescents. The remaining four hundred Ninety (i.e. 98%) were adults. The largest group of respondents (i.e. 43.6%) was of the age of 18-30 yrs. They were followed by the respondents in the 30-40 yrs. and 40 + yrs. age groups. Both of them formed 27.2% of the respondents. This table also shows that the majority (nearly 71%) of the workers were between 18-40 yrs., hence they were young. We have also seen that majority (nearly 75%) of the union leaders were also young (chapterVI). These may have some bearings on the trade union movement, social changes among the workers, which we would try to see in the following chapters.

The breakup of the three gardens shows that respondents of the different age groups were distributed more or less uniformly.

Sex Composition :

We have already mentioned that the employment in the tea estates were family based. The nature of work tea plantation is such that it required participation of female workers. Besides, there were some other reasons also for family based employment which have already been discussed earlier in the same chapter. The table below will show us the sex composition of the respondents.

Table 5.7SEX COMPOSITION (Percentage in brackets)

Sex	Lalfa T.E.	Angrabhasa T.E.	Kurty T.E.	Total
Male	66(66)	141(70.5)	136(68)	343(69)
Female	34(34)	59(29.5)	64(32)	157(31)
	100(100)	200(100)	200(100)	500(100)

Among the 500 respondents, 343 i.e. nearly 69% were males and the rest 157 i.e. a slight above 31% were females. The break-up of three gardens shows that except the Lalfa Tea Estate the percentage of female respondents in respect of male is lower than the actual percentage of male and female workers in the other two gardens i.e. in Angrabhasa and Kurty Tea Estate. This was because women workers generally felt shy to be respondents to a male investigator.

Place of Origin

Most of the workers have migrated either from the Chotonagpur-Santhal Pargana region and its adjacent areas or from Nepal. A few of them also came from the other places. We have already discussed (chapter IV) the factors responsible for this migration. From the Table below we will get the places of origin of the respondents.

Table 5.8

PLACE OF ORIGIN (Percentage in brackets)

Place	Lalfa T.E.	Angrabhasa T.E.	Kurty T.E.	Total
Chotanagpur- Santhal Pargana region.	88(88)	170(85)	181(90.5)	439(87.8)
Nepal	2(2)	24(12)	12(6)	38(7.6)
Darjeeling	0	1(.5)	0	1(.2)
Sikkim	0	1(.5)	0	1(.2)
Other districts of Bihar.	10(10)	1(.5)	0	11(2.2)
Orissa	0	2(1)	7(3.5)	9(1.8)
Bhutan	0	1(.5)	0	1(.2)
	100(100)	200(100)	200(100)	500(100)

The above table shows that nearly 88% of the respondents' places of origin were Chotanagpur-Santhal Pargana region, 8% came mainly from Nepal, Darjeeling and Sikkim and the remaining 2% from the other districts (except Chotanagpur - Santhal Pargana region) of Bihar and Orissa and only one from Bhutan.

The gardenwise breakup shows that the percentages of respondents born in Chotanagpur Santhal Pargana region were more or less evenly distributed in the three gardens but the

same of the respondents of Nepali origin and other districts of Bihar differed. We have already discussed the reasons of these in the same chapter (see-Ethnic Group).

Place of birth :

Now-a-days migration to the tea districts of North Bengal has been stopped. It is very rare now that a group of people migrate from the Chotanagpur - Santhal Pargana region or from Nepal for work in the plantations. The main reason is that the employment opportunities in the tea gardens have already been more or less saturated. So, it was expected that most of the respondents' places of birth would be the tea gardens of North Bengal as the table below shows.

Table 5.9

PLACE OF BIRTH

(Percentage in brackets)

<u>Place of Birth</u>	<u>Lalfa T.E.</u>	<u>Angrabhasa T.E.</u>	<u>Kurty T.E.</u>	<u>Total</u>
Place of origin	20(20)	17(8.5)	41(20.5)	78(15.6)
Same garden	60(60)	146(73)	112(56)	318(63.6)
Other garden	15(15)	32(16)	44(22)	91(18.2)
Busty	5(5)	5(2.5)	3(1.5)	13(2.6)
	100(100)	200(100)	200(100)	500(100)

Among the respondents, nearly 80% (i.e. 399 = 318 + 91) were born in the tea gardens (same gardens and other gardens), nearly 15.6% (i.e. 78) respondents were born in their places of origin and a few more than the 2% (i.e. 13) were born in the bustees (villages) of North Bengal.

Religion :

The workers were divided into different religions such as Samsar, Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Islam. The traditional religion of the tribal workers was Samsar. It is a religion based on animistic beliefs. They believe that all or many selected physical phenomena - inanimate as well as animate, have an indwelling personalized spiritual being (such as soul) which is at least potentially separable from the physical object with which it is associated. But while living in a area for years which is surrounded by Hindu people some Hindu rituals and religious practices crept among the tribals; most of these tribal workers (non-christian tribals) claimed themselves as Hindus. Besides the above reason, the other reason perhaps was to elevate their status as they had a concept that Hindu religion was superior to their traditional religion. However, in the prolonged discussions with them, they admitted that they were Samsars. The table below will show the religions of the respondents.

Table 5.10

RELIGION(Percentage in brackets)

Religion	Kalfa T.E.	Angrabhasa T.E.	Kurty T.E.	Total
Hindu	4(4)	20(10)	36(18)	60(12)
Samsar	89(89)	154(77)	154(78)	399(80)
Christian	6(3)	15(7.5)	7(3.5)	28(5.6)
Budhist	0	11(3.5)	0	11(2)
Islam	1(1)	0	1(.5)	2(.4)
	100(100)	200(100)	200(100)	500(100)

From the above table it is found that nearly 80% (i.e. 399) of the respondents were Samsars, 12% (i.e. 60) were Hindus, 5.6% (i.e. 28) were Christians, a little above the 2% (i.e. 11) were Bushists and only 2 were Muslims.

The Hindus were mainly Nepaleese and some lower castes migrants of Orissa and Bihar. All the Samsars were also adivasis. The Budhists were Nepaleese and Bhotia and the Muslims were Biharies.

Drastic changes have taken place in the religious life of these people. The work schedule of tea plantation gives little scope for observing all traditional religious practices and festivals in full length. Besides, living side by side with a

number of different ethnic groups having different cultural traditions, the tea garden workers had to give up some of their religious practices like ancestor worship, household worship, family festivals etc. While giving up some of these religious practices they used to perform worships like Gram Puja, Fagua etc., where people of all ethnic groups and religions participated. The workers also organise Durga Puja, Biswakarma Puja, Saraswati Puja in the tea gardens with the staff members of the tea gardens.

Primary Occupation (Daily rated worker and sub-staff) :

Earlier we have discussed about the Daily rated workers and that the sub-staff play important roles both in the sectors of production and union activities. Nearly half of the union leaders are sub-staff (chapter VIII).

In the work organisation sub-staff is the link between the management and the daily rated workers. Both the sub-staff and daily rated category of workers belonged to same ethnic groups.

Among the respondents about 88% (i.e. 439) were daily rated workers and the remaining about 12% (i.e. 61) were sub-staff. The table below give us the breakup.

Table 5.11

DAILY RATED WORKERS AND SUB-STAFF (Percentage in brackets)

Daily Rated workers	Lalfa T.E.	Angrabhasa T.E.	Kurty T.E.	Total
Daily Rated workers	94(94)	169(84.5)	176(88)	439(88)
Sub-staff	6(6)	31(15.5)	24(12)	61(12)
	100(100)	200(100)	200(100)	500(100)

Years of service :

In tea plantation a person could work after attaining 12 years of age. The retirement age is 58 yrs. So, the years of service of the respondents may vary from less than 1 year to the maximum 46 years. The following table will give us the break up of the years of service of the respondents.

Table 5.12

YEARS OF SERVICE(Percentage in brackets)

Years	Lalfa T.E.	Angrabhasa T.E.	Kurty T.E.	Total
1 to 5	32(32)	37(18.5)	36(18)	105(21)
5 to 10	13(13)	39(19.5)	39(19.5)	91(18)
10 to 15	21(21)	40(20)	39(19.5)	100(20)
15 to 20	15(15)	28(14)	27(13.5)	70(14)
20 +	19(19)	56(28)	59(29.5)	94(19)
	100(100)	200(100)	200(100)	500(100)

We have seen earlier that about 71% of the respondents were young (between 18 to 40 yrs.). Hence a majority (67.2%) of the respondents' years of service varies between less than one to 15 year.

Secondary Occupation :

The workers of the tea gardens often have to depend on subsidiary occupations to supplement their low wages. Cultivation is the most lucrative secondary occupation among the workers as most of the workers have agricultural background and possession of land also elevate their status in their society. In the tea gardens, where there was surplus land, it was generally distributed among the workers for cultivation. The affluent workers sometimes also purchase land in the adjacent areas of the gardens. Besides land, a very few of them were also engaged in petty trades or services like small shops (pan-bidi etc.), hariya (Rice beer), video, tailoring etc. The following table will show us the number of respondents engaged in secondary occupation and the type of occupations.

Table 5.13
SECONDARY OCCUPATION
(Percentage in brackets)

Type of occupation	Lalfa T.E.	Angrabhasa T.E.	Kurty T.E.	Total
Cultivation	25(25)	43(21.5)	37(18.5)	105(21)
Petty Trade/ Services		4(2)	2(1)	6(1.2)
Cultivation and Petty Trade	1(1)	3(1.5)		4(.8)
Nil	74(74)	150(75)	161(80.5)	385(77)
	100(100)	200(100)	200(100)	500(100)

Among the respondents 23% (i.e. 115) had secondary occupations. Of them more than 91% (i.e. 105) were engaged only in cultivation, only 4 were engaged both in cultivation and petty trade and only 6 respondents were doing petty trade, services etc.

Again, we can see from the above fact that in Lalfa Tea Estate cultivation as a secondary occupation was highest (i.e. 25%) among the three tea estate, followed by Angrabhasa Tea Estate (21.5%) and Kurty Tea Estate (18.5%). This was due to that land availability for cultivation was highest in Lalfa Tea Estate. Generally, the proposed tea land are given to the workers for cultivation. In the Lalfa Tea Estate in respect to the number of workers proposed tea land was highest following by Angrabhasa and Kurty Tea Estate (Please see Description of the three tea estates, chapter III). Petty trade and services even including petty trade along with cultivation as secondary occupation was only 2% (i.e. 10). Among this only one worker was in Lalfa Tea Estate and other six workers in Angrabhasa and the remaining two workers in Kurty Tea Estate. There was little scope for trade or services in the adjacent area of Lalfa Tea Estate. While Angrabhasa Tea Estate is situated just beside the Birpara town which is a densely populated area and a trade centre. In case of Kurty Tea Estate, the adjacent area is Metelli which is a less populated area than Birpara and also not an important trade centre as Birpara. Besides, the workers

were more interested in cultivation as they were familiar with its management.

A majority of the workers did not have any secondary occupation. With this low wage it was not possible for them to invest money for buying land, setting up of shops etc.

Language :

The lingua franca of workers of all ethnic groups was Sadri. Sadri is a mixture of tribal dialects and Hindi. It is even spoken by the adibasis of Chotanagpur. Besides, every tribe had their own language or dialect. The Oraons had Kurukh a language belonging to the Dravidian family. The Mundas spoke Mundari, a language of the Kolarian group. The other tribes such as, Kharia, Turi, Mahali, Baraik etc. spoke languages of the same group (E.T. Datton : 1972). Grierson referred to this group as Kherwari (Grierson 1906:7). But only the Oraons could retain their mother tongue in the tea gardens, perhaps because they formed over half of the adivasi population and their language belonged to a distinct family than the others. The Mundas, though they have forgotten their own language, were aware of it. All other tribes mostly have totally forgotten their languages. Now, Sadri have become their mother tongues also. The Nepalees had their own language Nepali. It is also the lingua franca of different castes and tribes of this group. They could retain the use of their language. The workers of other ethnic groups such as Biharies, Oriyas, Tanti* etc. had their own.

mother tongues like Hindi, Maithali, Oriya, Tanti etc.

*(In Kurty tea estate there was a line called Tanti line. The inhabitants of this line were Tantis. They came from Bihar. They called their mother tongue as Tanti.)

We will get a picture of different mother tongues/ dialects of the workers as staged in the table below.

Table 5.14

MOTHER TONGUE
(Percentage in brackets)

Name of Mother Tongue/ Dialect	Lalfa T.E.	Angrabhasa T.E.	Kurty T.E.	Total
Kuruk	19(19)	118(58)	83(41.5)	220(44)
Sadri	43(43)	35(17.5)	71(35.5)	149(29.8)
Mundari	23(23)	11(5.5)	6(3)	40(8)
Kalandi	0	0	4(2)	4(8)
Tanti	0	0	12(6)	12(2.4)
Kheriya	8(8)	5(2.5)	3(1.5)	16(3.2)
Maithali	3(3)	0	0	3(.6)
Hindi	2(2)	2(1)	2(1)	6(1.2)
Oriya	0	2(1)	7(3.5)	9(1.8)
Nepali	2(2)	26(13)	12(6)	40(8)
Bhotia	0	1(1)	0	1(.2)
	100(100)	200(100)	200(100)	500(100)

The table shows that Kuruk was the mother tongue of 44% (i.e. 220) respondents. Nearly 30% (i.e. 149) respondents' mother tongue was Sadri, followed by Mundari and Nepali, which are the Mother tongue of 8% (i.e. 40) of the respondents, each. The remaining 10% of the respondents included Kheriya, Tanti, Oriya, Hindi, Kalandi and Bhotia.

Literacy :

Here literate were those who at least could sign their names. According to this definition nearly 50% (i.e. 246) respondents were literates. Among the literates 35.4% (i.e. 177 persons) had formal education and the remaining 13.8% (i.e. 69 persons) could sign their names only, but did not have any formal education. The literacy rate among the respondents was rather high than the state average (40.94% - 1981). The probable reasons were i) all these three tea gardens had primary schools, though not sufficiently equipped, ii) in an organised sector, workers had to maintain some official formalities. However, higher education among them was rare. Only 5 respondents had passed Madhyamik (class 10) and 1 read upto class XII. No one was graduate among them. A little over 18% (i.e. 92) respondents read upto primary level and nearly 18% (i.e. 79) had crossed the primary level but could not cross the Madhyamik level. Again, excluding those who only could sign their names the percentage of literates was only 35.4%. This was too low as earlier we have seen that most of the respondents

were young. Regular classes were not taken in primary schools of these gardens, all these schools did not have separate class rooms for separate classes, all class rooms did not have even blackboards. The condition of the school building was not also good. There was no arrangement for mid-day tiffin in these schools to encourage students to attend classes. Moreover, the stratification in the work organisation in the tea plantation was such that it was difficult for educated tribal youth to get employment in the white collar category as vacancies here were reserved for the children of those already in these categories. They naturally did not feel encouraged to take higher education, though Madhyamik and Higher secondary schools were situated close to two of the gardens. Besides, the trade unions did not show sufficient interest on this aspect. They did not encourage workers to send their children to the schools. Demand for development of schools was included in the charter of demands, but no union bothered to press for it during the conciliations and they did not give any special effort to encourage the spread of education.

The low rate of literacy, particularly the low rate of higher education had some bearings on the trade union movements. Except for some small things the workers had to wait for the outsider leaders who were more educated. They even could not write answers to the charge sheets. Low education made difficult for them to understand the labour laws. Ultimately they became more and more dependable on the outside leaders.

Low education was also a barrier to grow awareness among the workers. They could not mix up properly with the neighbouring (outside the tea gardens) societies. Mixing with the neighbouring societies might help to exchange views.

In this respect, the management had always an edge over the workers. The workers felt hesitated while talking with the management regarding any bargaining etc. As we have earlier mentioned that the workers faced difficulties in understanding the labour laws and they themselves could not write the answers of these charge sheets. All these made them more submissive to the management. The management took these advantages.

The management's apathy to the development of education among the workers and on the otherhand unions' less interest about it, ultimately hampered the growth of trade union movement. The table below will show us the level of literacy of the workers.

Table 5.15

LEVEL OF LITERACY

(Percentage in brackets)

Level of literacy	Lalfa T.E.	Angrabhasa T.E.	Kurty T.E.	Total
Can sign	10(10)	26(13)	33(16.5)	69(13.8)
Primary	16(16)	42(21)	34(17)	92(18.4)
V to IX	16(16)	29(14.5)	34(17)	79(15.8)
S.F.	1(1)	2(1)	2(1)	5(1)
XI to XII	0	0	1(.5)	1(.2)
Graduate	0	0	0	0
Illiterate	57(57)	101(50.5)	96(48)	254(50.8)
	100(100)	200(100)	200(100)	500(100)

CONCLUSION :

From the general description of the labour force of the three tea gardens discussed above we find that the workers have migrated from the tribal belt of Bihar and its adjacent areas and Nepal. The migration was family based. The local people like Mech, Dhimal, Robha, Rajbansis, Toto etc. would rarely be found as plantation labourers.

The workers inspite of their economic homogeneity, are divided into different ethnic groups and religions. They were Oraon, Munda, Kharia, Baraik, Mahali and of Nepali origins etc. and their religions were Samsar, Hindu, Christian, Buddhism

and Islam. Each ethnic group has its own dialect or mother tongue, though their lingua franca is Sadri.

Though our sample shows that the rate of literacy among them is about 50% but 1991 census data states that it is only 21.52% in the tea gardens of Dooars (STATESMAN:FEB.4, 92). The same for the tea gardens in Terai is not available. But a survey on the composition of labour force in the tea gardens of Terai was done in 1975 by the then S.D.O. of Siliguri Sub-division shows that only 14% workers were literates in the tea plantation of Terai (Dasgupta 1988:17).

The condition of their existence have changed to some extent, but not according to expectations. They are still the lowest paid workers among the organised sectors. They work throughout under sun and in the rain in the rainy season. The condition and standard of their houses are also bad.

The houses are overcrowded without any sanitation, most of them are deprived of sunlight and no proper maintenance of the houses have been done by the management. The medical facilities are barely minimum. The opportunities of subsidiary occupation are also limited. They do not have surplus money to invest for land or for any trade.

Their isolation from the outside world is not so much as it was in the post independence period. They are now more open to the outside world. Better communication with the development of roads, establishment of schools

in the tea gardens and the formations of trade unions help to break the former isolation, but still they are comparatively isolated, uneducated, ignorant at the end of this 20th century. The interaction between the tribal societies of tea gardens and the neighbouring (outside the tea gardens) Bengali societies is not frequent and large scale. The garden workers use to come to the markets for different purposes, but it is rarely found that they pay any social visit to the adjacent societies. The rate of literacy as well as the level of education is extremely poor. This is also a barrier for development of trade union movements.

Given the background of the workers let us examine the impact of trade unions on their life in the next three chapters.

CHAPTER - VI

FUNCTIONING OF TRADE UNIONS

In the preceding chapters we have discussed about the labour force, trade union movements in the three gardens as well as in Terai and Dooars regions and so on. In this chapter we will discuss about the functioning of trade unions such as trade union membership, period of membership, workers' position in unions, reasons for joining unions, reasons for changing unions, emerging picture of multi unions, workers' awareness about union activities, their participation in union activities etc.

A. TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP

Almost all the central trade unions have their organisational network in Dooars and Terai. In the three gardens, we have studied, however, not all the central trade unions have their branches. We have found the existence of the AITUC, HMS, UTUC, NFITU, CITU and BSS affiliated unions. Most of the respondents were the members of any one of the above trade unions, but some of them were also members of more than one union and a very few of them were not even members of any trade union.

1) Break up of union membership :-

The break up of union membership is given in the table - 6.1.

TABLE - 6.1BREAK UP OF UNION MEMBERSHIP
(Percentage in brackets)

Name of the union	Central affiliation.	Angrabhasta T.E.	Kurty tea estate.	Lalfa tea estate.	Total
1. ZCBWU	AITUC	0	35	0	35
2. WBCMS	HMS	31	29	0	60
3. DCBWU (Dooars)	UTUC	71	0	0	71
4. DCBWU (Darjeeling)	UTUC	0	0	34	34
5. RCMC	NFITU	0	0	25	25
6. DDCKMU	CITU	0	0	41	41
7. CBMU	CITU	98	57	0	155
8. PBCBSKU	BSS	0	52	0	52
9. Multiunion members	-	0	18	0	18
10. Non-member	-	0	9	0	9
		<u>200</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>500 (100)</u>

Only the CITU affiliated unions had members in all the three gardens. Membership of these unions was also highest among the respondents. The number of members of the CITU affiliated unions, (CBMU in Dooars and DDCKMU in Terai) was 196 i.e. 39.2% of the total respondents. In membership strength, the CITU was followed by UTUC. It had unions in two gardens - one in Eastern Dooars and the other in Terai. The membership strength was 105 which constituted 21% of the total number of

respondents. The names of the UTUC affiliated unions were Dooars Cha Workers' Union (DCBWU) in Dooars and Darjeeling Cha Bagan Workers' Union in Terai.

The HMS (Raja Kulkarni group) affiliated West Bengal Cha Majdoor Sabha (WBCMS) came next. In Terai it did not have any influence, but in Dooars this union had significant influence. This union had organisations in the two tea estates among the three tea estate we have studied. The membership of this union was 60 i.e. only 12% of the respondents. Paschim-banga Cha Bagan Shramik Karmachari Union (PBCBSKU) affiliated to Bharatiya Shramik Sangha (BSS) had influence only in some pockets in Western Dooars. Among the three tea estates we have studied it had its organisation only in Kurty Tea Estate. In our sample, the number of members of this union was 52, i.e. 10.4% of the total sample.

AITUC affiliated Zilla Cha Bagan Workers' Union (ZCBWU) was the oldest of the existing unions. Its influence was limited only to a few gardens in Western Dooars. Among our studied gardens, it had a moderate number of membership in Kurty Tea Estate. The number of members of this union was 35 i.e. only 7% of the total respondents.

So, we found that there were three unions each in Lalfa and Angrabhasa Tea Estate and four unions in Kurty Tea Estate. According to our sample membership strength of

CITU affiliated unions were highest in all the three gardens. In Lalfa Tea Estate the membership strength of DDCKMU(CITU) was 41%, followed by 34% of DCBWU (UTUC) and 25% of RCMC (NFITU). In Angrabhasa Tea Estate, the unions were CBMU (CITU), DCBWU (UTUC) and WBCMS (HMS) and their respective membership strength in this garden was 49%, 35.5% and 15.5%. The unions of Kurty Tea Estate was CBMU (CITU), PBCBSKU(BSS), ACBWU (AITUC) and WBCMS (HMS). The membership strength respectively was 28.5%, 26%, 17.5% and 14.5%.

Only in this garden we have found that some of the respondents were members of more than one union. Among them some workers were members of all the unions in the garden. A few respondents were not members of any of the unions. This was a garden where inter-union rivalry was a recurring feature. Unions of this garden most of the time tried to increase its members in a militant way. Most of the workers have been disgusted with such activities. Some of them were afraid of being member of a trade union in the fear of being victimized by the rival unions. Some of them preferred to become members of a number of unions with a view to please everybody.

ii) Position in trade union

The garden unit of a trade union has two types of members -- general members and office bearers. The general members constitute the general body and the office bearers

constitute the executive body. The office bearers of a garden unit are President, Vice-President, Secretary, Assistant Secretary and Treasurer. From the following table we will get the positions of the respondents in the garden units.

TABLE - 6.2

POSITION IN THE GARDEN UNIT

(Percentage in brackets)

	Angra- bhasa T.E.	Kurty Tea Estate	Lalfa Tea Estate	Total
1. General members	180	183	96	459 (91.8)
2. Office bearers	20	08	04	32 (6.4)
3. Non-members	0	09	0	09 (1.8)
	<u>200</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>500 (100)</u>

In our sample, 459 i.e. 91.8% of the total workers were general members, 32 i.e. 6.4% were office bearers and 9 i.e. 1.8% were non-members.

iii) Period of membership

Generally when any one gets employment in a garden, he/she becomes member of any one of the trade unions. Even from the time of his/her temporary appointment he/she may be a member of a trade union. Here the period of membership has been taken from the time of the respondents' union

membership irrespective of their service status whether temporary or permanent.

The following table would show us the period of union membership of the respondents.

TABLE 6.3

PERIOD OF MEMBERSHIP

(Percentage in brackets)

	Angra- bhasa T.E.	Kurty Tea Estate	lalfa Tea Estate	Total
1. Upto 1 yr.	12	56	12	80(16)
2. 2 to 5 yrs.	67	66	43	176(35.2)
3. 6 to 10 yrs.	64	38	15	117(23.4)
4. 11 to 15 yrs.	19	11	19	49(9.8)
5. 16 to 20 yrs.	10	9	10	29(5.8)
6. 21 +	28	11	2	40(8)
7. Non-members	0	9	0	9(1.8)
	<u>200</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>500(100)</u>

From the above table it is found the union membership for a short period (i.e. upto 5 yrs.) was 51.2% (256). Union membership for medium period (i.e. from 6 to 10 yrs.) was 23.4% (117) and membership for a long period (i.e. from 11 yrs to more than 21 yrs.) was 24.6% (118). Union membership for short and medium period was high due to that the most of the respondents were young.

iv) Reasons for joining union

Trade union is the workers' organisation for collective bargaining. So, generally when workers join a trade union, the obvious reason is for organised collective bargaining. To a worker this is the only organisation, through which he/she can communicate with the management and also with the government in an organised way. This is the general reason for joining a trade union. But, in particular, when a worker joins a trade union the reasons vary. It may be that the worker's kin is / was a member of the union or this union serves the interest of workers or due to any other personal reasons and so on.

We have got various reasons for joining trade unions among the respondents in the three gardens, we have studied. The number of reasons was more than the number of respondents as some respondents talked about more than one reasons.

The most dominant reason to become a member of a trade union was the workers' kins were also the members of the respective unions. In most of the cases, a worker chooses that union of which either his/her father, brother, son, husband (in case of women workers) or any other relative was member. Particularly, the women workers, in most of the cases were influenced by their husbands or sons.

The next important reasons was the performances of the respective union. If a union serves the interests of the

workers i.e. if this union could fulfil the demands of the workers, the workers would support this union.

The third important reasons was 'influence of others.' Besides their kin the workers were also influenced by their friends, neighbours, fellow-workers etc.

The workers also have become members of a union being influenced by a particular leader. In Kurty Tea Estate, 'the influence of a particular leader' was high among the three gardens. Prem Oraon was a famous trade unionist in this tea estate and an M.L.A. for the session 1972-77 of that region. His charisma influenced the workers of this garden to become members of the AITUC affiliated trade union, ZCBWU.

Sometimes 'personal reason' also become a factor for joining a union. It may be like that the worker personal feud with a member of any other union, personal gain like getting service of their near kin etc.

Membership due to 'ethnic affinity' was not very high. This was found only in one of the tea estate we have studied. As for example, there was a labour line in Kurty Tea Estate named Tanti Line. Most of the inhabitants of this line were Tanti and almost all of them were belonged to a particular union as the of leader of this union was a Tanti.

According to the workers' verbal response the reasons like 'political party affiliation' of the respective union was

very rare. Even the reason like the political party to which the Union was close to, was in the government was also rare, but our observations show that due to change in the party in power a particular union have gained a quick and massive support. This has happened with the CITU when the Left Front with CPI(M) as its largest constituent party, came into power in West Bengal in 1977. As for examples :

Prior to 1977 there was no existence of CITU affiliated union in Angrabhasa Tea Estate. This area (Eastern Dooars) also was not a stronghold of CPI(M). Before 1977, CITU tried to form union in this garden but could not succeed. In 1978, one year after the Left Front Government came in to the power CITU has been successful in forming its union in this tea estate and also got a quick and major support from the workers of this garden. Not only that after 1977 CITU could also form its union in a number of gardens of this area .

In Kurty Tea Estate, most of the workers were with ZCBWU (CPI). In 1977 election CPI suffered a set back both in this region and in West Bengal in general. The CITU was trying to spread its influence in this region since its birth but could not succeed significantly. Its role in this region was militant. When Left Front government came into power in 1977, in which CPI(M) was a major partner, the police remained inactive if any violence was done by the

CITU men, in this region. Thus CITU was trying to form its union in this tea estate in a militant way after 1977. The workers became afraid of this militancy and the ZCBWU could not protect them either. So, a significant number of workers joined CITU affiliated union CBMU after 1977.

So, though the workers did not admit fully that they have joined the union as the respective party is in power, but our observations shows that this was one of the most important reason for joining a union. It may be happened in indirect way also, such as, an worker may join a union by the influence of his/her kin; the reason of his/her kin's influence may be due to that the party of the respective union is in power.

There were some other reasons also. They were - this was dominant union, there was only one union at that time, for better expectation, for fear, active union (this did not indicate that this union served the interest of workers, active union means the organisers of this union keep regular contact with the workers) etc. Only in Kurty Tea Estate union membership due to the above reasons was found significantly. Once, there was only one union (ZCBWU) in this tea estate. The workers did not have any alternative choice. So, they took the membership of this union. We have already mentioned that in Kurty Tea Estate inter-union rivalry was high and workers did not have faith on any union. The extent of change of unions was also high in this tea estate (discussed later). That was why the union membership due to 'better expectation'; 'dominant union'

was found. ^{There} The workers of tea estate also have become members of a particular union as this union was restoring militancy to increase its membership. We have observed the adoption of force in increasing membership at the time of fieldwork.

A very few respondents could not tell the reasons for joining unions.

We have excluded the members of more than one unions and those who were not members of any one of the unions from the above category. They were only found in Kurty Tea Estate. This was due to the fact that a section of the workers of this tea estate could not keep faith on the unions of that garden due to too much inter-union rivalry, unions inability to meet the workers demands etc. They casually subscribed to more than one unions which also saved them from the grudge of the members of rival unions. Some of them even did not subscribe to any unions for the same reasons.

EMERGING PICTURE OF MULTIUNIONS

We have found that in all the three gardens more than one union were functioning. In Angrabhasa and Lalfa the number of unions was three and in Kurty the number was four. The CBMU (CITU), DCBMU (UTUC), and WBCMS (HMS) were three unions in Angrabhasa Tea Estate : In Kurty Tea Estate the unions were CBMU (CITU), ZCBWU (AITUC), PBCBSKU (BSS) and WBCMS(HMS). The unions in Lalfa Tea Estate were DDCKMU (CITU), DCBMU(UTUC)

and RCMC (NFITU). The presence of a number of unions may be found in almost all the tea gardens in Dooars and Terai. Not only that, as we have earlier mentioned almost all the central trade unions have their affiliated unions in the tea plantation of these areas.

If we look into the objectives of the trade unions associated with the CPI, CPI(M), CPI(ML), RSP. We would find a lot of resemblance. A number of similarities may also be observed in the objectives of the Congress and the Janata Dal associated unions. The Communists want a socialist state, a nationalized production system to ameliorate the social and economic condition of the workers. The Socialists (Janata Dal and others - HMS) wants to establish such a democratic socialist state which would promote the economic, political, social and cultural interests of the Indian working class. The Nationalist (Congress - INTUC), on the otherhand want such a state which would be free from hindrances in the way to an allround development of its individuals. So, every union wants to develop the social, economic and cultural standard of the workers. The differences lie in the character of derived society.

The prescribed methods to be followed by all the unions are legitimate, peaceful and democratic and in the last resort stricks may be followed by the communist trade unions.

So, there is a number of similarities in the objectives and prescribed methods of different unions and also some basic differences such as the derived character of society, ownership

of property, use of strike as a method. In practice strike as a method have been used by all the unions. Workers may be divided on these grounds, but are they aware of all these political questions? Our observation is that the workers of the tea gardens are not aware of all these political questions. The number of trade unions increased with the number of political parties. Every political party tries to widen its influence through their unions. Even unions without any basic differences in their objectives such as AITUC, CITU, BSS etc. are divided in a same garden. Presence of multi-unions, of course offer the workers to choice, but at the same time it is a hindrance to the working class unity.

In the tea plantation of North Bengal now at least 20 unions of different political parties are operating. If we trace the history of trade union movement, we would find that both conflict and cooperation exists within the inter-relationship of these unions. Inter union rivalry becomes a feature of multi-unionism. Even this rivalry sometimes have gone upto such extent that workers of rival union were murdered by the workers of another union. Disunity among the unions at the time of placing major demands at the garden level or industry level hampered the workers' interests. We have seen that the workers were partially divided even during the time of 1955 Bonus movement. A section of workers initially did not join this strike. To prevent all these a Coordination Committee of Tea Plantation Workers was formed in 1962. This Coordination Committee of course is successful to create cooperation among the unions at industry

level to a significant extent, but the impact of this committee rarely reach to the garden level. Still we sometimes find that the workers at the garden level are fighting within themselves.

B. WORKERS' AWARENESS ABOUT UNION ACTIVITIES

Workers' awareness about union activities generally varies. In this section we have tried to measure the level of awareness of the workers about union activities. We have tried to study it through the workers' knowledge about central affiliation, about the relationship between trade unions and political parties and through their participation in union meetings, processions, demonstrations and elections.

i) Awareness about central affiliation :

Every trade union has a central organisation. This central organisation or central trade union has different unions in different industries. The unions in different industries are thus affiliated to a central trade union or organisation. The following table 6.4 will show us the workers' awareness about their central affiliation.

TABLE - 6.4AWARENESS OF CENTRAL AFFILIATION

(Percentage in brackets)

	Angra- bhasa T.E.	Kurty Tea Estate	Lalfa Tea Estate	Total
Aware	53	19	6	78(15.6)
Not-aware	147	154	94	395(79)
Members of multiunions & non-members	0	27	0	27(5.4)
	<u>200</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>500(100)</u>

The above table shows that only seventy eight (i.e. 15.6%) respondents knew the names of the central trade union organisations of their trade unions. This level is extremely low. This table also shows the comparative awareness of the workers about the central affiliation of their unions in the three gardens. The awareness was comparatively high in Angra-bhasa Tea Estate than that of the other two tea estates.

ii) Awareness about political party affiliation :

A trade union is generally a mass organisation of a political party. Though some unions are not associated with any political party, but these unions may have indirect linkages with any of the political parties. In tea plantation, the examples are - West Bengal Cha Majdoor Sabha (HMS Raja Kulkarni group), which is not directly associated with any

political party, but this union maintains indirect link with Indian National Congress; another example is Rastriya Cha Majdoor Congress (NFITU) which is not an official mass organisation of Congress, but it also has indirect link with the Congress. However, the workers do not know about these complexity of official or unofficial political relations of their unions; they just know that this particular union is associated with that political party. The relationship may be official or unofficial, they are not aware of it.

The table given below would show the workers' awareness about the political party affiliation of their unions.

TABLE - 6.5

AWARENESS ABOUT POLITICAL PARTY AFFILIATION
(Percentage in brackets)

	Angra- bhasa T.E.	Kurty Tea Estate	Lalfa Tea Estate	Total
Aware	174	160	94	428(85.6)
Not-aware	26	13	6	45(9)
Members of Multiunions & non-members	<u>0</u> 200	<u>27</u> 200	<u>0</u> 100	<u>27(5.4)</u> 500(100)

From the above table it is found that the respondents (i.e. 85.6%) knew the name of political parties to which their unions were associated. This awareness about the political party affiliation is rather high. We can also observe from the table that there are no significant differences of awareness about the political party association among the workers of the three tea gardens.

iii) Workers' participation in union activities :

Participation in union activities not only indicates the level of workers' awareness about their unions but also shows the activities of their unions. Though most of the workers of the three gardens are now unionised and a significant number of them participate in union activities but not all of them are regular participants. In the following tables we would see how many of these workers participate in the union meetings, processions, demonstration and union elections.

TABLE - 6.6

WORKERS' PARTICIPATION IN UNION MEETINGS, PROCESSIONS ETC.

(Percentage in brackets)

Name of the tea estate	Number of regular participant	Number of irregular participant	Number of non-participant	Total
Angrabhasa T.E.	38	120	42	200
Kurty T.E.	60	103	37	200
Lalfa T.E.	33	61	6	100
	<u>131(26.2)</u>	<u>284(56.8)</u>	<u>85(17)</u>	<u>500(100)</u>

From this table it is found that among the respondents 415 respondents (i.e. 83%) used to participate in union meetings, processions, demonstrations etc., 85 (i.e. 13%) respondents did not participate in the above mentioned union activities. Among those workers (415) who used to participate in the union activities, a major portion (284 out of 415, i.e. 68.43%) were irregular participant and remaining (131 i.e. 31.56%) were regular participant.

The rate of participation was high (94%) in the Lalfa Tea Estate followed by Kurty Tea Estate and Angrabhasa Tea Estate (81.5% & 79% respectively). The probable reason of the high rate of participation in Lalfa Tea Estate may be that this tea estate is a small tea estate compare to the other two tea estates; all the labour lines are situated side by side; it is easy to contact the workers and to the workers also it is easy to join union activities as all the labour lines are situated near the office of the tea estate, where most of the union activities used to take place.

iv) Workers' participation in union election :

Union election is not an annual feature of all the unions. It may be held annually, bi-annually or tri-annually or due to any crisis in union leadership. There is no hard and fast practice regarding this.

Workers' rate of participation in union election is given in the table 6.7.

TABLE - 6.7PARTICIPATION IN UNION ELECTION

(Percentage in brackets)

Name of the garden	Participant	Non-participant	Total
Angrabhasa tea estate	128 (64%)	72(36%)	200
Kurty T.E.	59 (29.5)	141(70.5)	200
Lalfa T.E.	43 (43%)	57(57%)	100
	<u>230 (46%)</u>	<u>270(54%)</u>	<u>500</u>

It may be observed from the above table that among the respondents 230 (i.e. 46%) had participated in their union elections and the remaining 270 (i.e. 54%) were absent. The rate of participation in union elections was high (64%) among the workers in Angrabhasa Tea Estate followed by Lalfa Tea Estate (43%) and Kurty Tea Estate (29.5%).

In the above tables we see that only 15.6% of the respondents knew the names of the central affiliations of their unions, whereas 85.6% respondents were aware about the political parties to which their unions were associated. So, awareness about the political party affiliation was rather very high, but awareness about the central affiliation was very low. It was also found that the workers even did not know the names of their unions. Being asked, "can you tell me the name of your trade union?", the workers answered CPI(M), CPI, RSP, Congress

and so on. The members of the unions like WBCMS, RCMC which did not have any direct association with any political party, were, however able to name their unions. The union leaders were also found having low level of consciousness. Workers' high awareness about the political party affiliation of their unions should not be taken as their degree of consciousness as the same workers could not tell the names of their unions and central affiliations.

The rate of participation of the workers in union activities (meetings, processions, demonstrations etc.) was rather high (83%) compare to their awareness about the central affiliation, political party affiliation. However, though the rate of participation was high, the percentage of regular participants was very low (26.2%). The number of regular participants was much less among the female workers (see chapter - viii).

Workers' participation in union elections was not also so high. Among the respondents 46% used to participate in their union elections and ^{that} too was not regular. Trade union is the only organisation of the workers for collective bargaining. The success of a trade union, particularly at garden (local) level depends too much on its leadership (besides other reasons like ideology of the union, political party affiliation, existing socio-economic and political condition etc.). So, it is expected that the workers would be interested to choose their leaders, but actually that did not happen.

All these indicate workers' low degree of consciousness about their unions, its activities and so on. The probable

reasons were :- Unions' activities in the three gardens were too less. From 1977 to 1987, during this ten years there were only four strikes, one gherao and four other cases of labour unrests in the three gardens. During the same period (1977 - 1987) the number of strikes took place in the Tea plantation in West Bengal were only 49 (labour in West Bengal 1983 : 26 & 1987 : 24). Out of these in 1978, the number of strikes were 17. So, during the last ten years, in more than three hundred gardens, the average number of strikes per year was nearly five. It would be much less if we exclude the year 1978. All the unions' activities now-a-days have been restricted only to annual bonus negotiations, tri-annual wage negotiations and some day to day minor movements. The bonus and wage movements also were not very frequent and intensive; some of these became a routine work of the unions. There was no enthusiasm among the workers about these movements. The charter of demands of the tri-annual wage negotiations included nearly fifty demands of various kinds, but during these negotiations only increase of wages was discussed, while the others were neglected. This low rate of labour movements did not indicate true industrial peace where there was too much of inequalities and exploitation. It rather reflected the unions' inability to mobilise the workers. The more active the unions the more would be the awareness and consciousness.

Besides the objective condition, workers' consciousness also depends on the subjective teaching i.e. political class,

seminars, workshops etc. In Terai and Dooars, almost all the central trade unions had their affiliated unions, but it was rarely found that any union was taking regular political classes among their members. Only two unions with the help of ILO, sometimes organised seminars, but its participation rate was not encouraging.

Formal education is another factor responsible for the workers consciousness. The level of literacy among the workers was rather high compare to state average. It was nearly 50% Here the literate means who can sign their names. The level of higher education was extremely low; only five among the respondents have passed School Final and one has crossed the Higher Secondary level. Nearly 16% of the respondents have crossed the primary level (see chapter - V). This was rather low. Most of the workers left their schools a long years ago. They were not in the habit of reading, writing now. The medium of their education was Hindi, which was not the mother tongue of any of the ethnic groups. The weekly/monthly organs of different central trade unions were not supplied to the workers. Moreover there was no particular periodical publication of any of the trade unions in tea plantation. The adult education programmes were not also regularly carried out among the workers.

All these were barriers for development of consciousness, awareness among the workers. The tea workers now no more in a enclave, insultated society as it was in the preindependence age; they are now more concious about their rights, state of existence,

about their organisations than the earlier period but still they were not so aware, so conscious as they were expected to be.

C. CHANGE OF UNIONS

The workers change union off and on. Among the respondents 209 have changed unions, while 264 did not change and the remaining 27 workers were members of more than one unions and non-members. Out of these 27 workers, 18 were multiunion members. Sometimes they were with CITU, INTUC affiliated unions and sometimes with the unions of HMS, AITUC and so on. The combination may vary. The remaining 9 were not members of any trade unions at the time of my field work though they were at one time or either members of the unions. They also had the experience of switching over from one union to the other. Since they had become fed up with the unions now they do not give subscription to any unions. So, these 27 workers had also changed unions at one time or other, yet we have excluded them from our following discussions for analysis.

Therefore it may be said that, 41.8% of the workers had changed unions and if we include the workers with multiunion membership and non-members the percentage would go up to 47.2%.

Those who have changed unions, some of them have also changed unions for two or three times.

We will get the extent of change of unions in the following table.

TABLE - 6.8EXTENT OF CHANGE OF UNIONS

(Percentage in brackets).

	Angra- bhasa T.E.	Kurty Tea Estate	Lalfa Tea Estate	Total
Changed unions	78(37.3)	96(45.9)	35(16.7)	209(41.8)
Did not change unions	122(46.2)	77(29.1)	65(24.6)	264(52.8)
Members of multinions & non- members	0	27	0	27(5.4)
	<u>200</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>500(100)</u>

From the above table it was also found that the extent of change was the highest in Kurty Tea Estate. Among the respondents who have changed unions (excluding the members of multinions and non-members), nearly 46% belonged to Kurty Tea Estate. Also, the number of respondents who have changed unions among the total number of respondents was the highest in this estate. This was more than 47% in this tea estate followed by Angrabhasa Tea Estate (39%) and Lalfa Tea Estate (35%). Both the numbers would be more in Kurty Tea Estate if we include the members of multiunions and non-members as these two types of respondents were found only in this tea estate and they have also changed unions in one time or other. In this tea estate, unions' inactivity, unsuccessfulness, inter-union

rivalry etc. caused the loss of faith of the workers on their unions. So, more workers of this garden changed unions than the other two gardens. The frequency of changes was also high in this garden due to the same reasons.

The first and foremost reason for change of unions was that the workers lost faith in the unions as these unions could not serve the interest of the workers. Change of unions due to this reasons was much more in Kurty Tea Estate which shows that workers' more unhappyness with the unions in this garden. This fact may be supported by the number of reasons for joining unions due to the reason 'union serves the interests of workers', in the same garden. This was much lower in this garden than the other two gardens.

The next imporatnt reason was 'union was loosing strength'. When an union looses its strength, the workers also switch over their loyalty to other unions. This was remarkebly high in Kurty Tea Estate. In this tea estate it was seen that once most of the workers were members of ZCBWU but during 1985-86 most of the workers have become members of PBCBSKU and in the end of my fieldwork a significant number of workers have joined DBMU.

'Influence of kins and others' was also found to be a very strong factor for shifting union membership among the female workers.

Workers also changed unions for 'personal reasons'. As for example, in Angrabhasa Tea Estate an elder brother of a

DCBWU member was beaten up by leader of this union. The younger brother who was also a member of the same union left this union and joined CBMU to protest against the assault of his elder brother. Besides personal feud, personal reasons also included some other causes like personal help etc.

Leaders' incompetence, dishonesty, moral degradation also were the major causes for change of unions. Both in Kurty Tea Estate and Angrabhasa Tea Estate, there were two charismatic leaders, one belonged to AITUC and other to UTUC. The workers of both the tea estates had lost faith upon their leaders and changed unions.

There were some other reasons also for which workers changed unions. They were - better expectation from the other union, for fear etc.

A very few of the respondents could not give me the reasons as to why they have changed unions.

Besides all these reasons, though the workers did not tell me personally, change in the government was also an important reason for change of unions. (Please see reasons for joining unions).

CHAPTER - VII

TRADE UNION LEADERSHIP

Leadership is the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of predefined goals. It is the activity of influencing people to strike willingly for group objectives.

In a trade union organisation leadership is the most vital aspect. Besides, the broad objectives of a trade union, the day to day union activities, programmes, policies, styles of actions are generally determined by the leadership of a trade union. It is the bridge between the management and the rank and file of the workers.

TYPES OF TRADE UNION LEADERS

The structures of different trade unions are more or less identical, though sometimes some variations are found. The ideal structure of a trade union is the Secretariat at the top, then there is an executive council or council of members in the middle and ends at the local committee and its general members at the bottom. The prescribed norms are the general workers will elect the local committee, the office bearers of the local committee will elect the executive council or council of members and this council of members will ultimately elect the secretariat body. Thus the top leadership would be elected through a democratic process from below.

The secretariat body consists of President, Vice-president, general secretary, Assistant Secretary, Cashier etc. The executive council or council of members is a larger body, the number of members may be more than fifty. Actually this council is made to represent the local committees. The local committee also consists of the posts like President, Vice-president, General Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer etc.

The Secretariat body frames the rules and regulations of the union, looks after the major functions, represents the union in the conciliations etc. It also helps the general workers in forming the local committee.

Most of the secretariat members of this body are outsiders, generally middle class Bengalees. In almost all the central trade unions, operating in the tea gardens of Terai and Dooars and also in the studied three gardens, it has been found that nearly more than two-third of the secretariat posts have been occupied by the outsiders. Not only in number, the outsiders have also occupied the key posts like President, General Secretary, Treasurers etc. leaving aside the less important posts like Vice-president, Assistant Secretary etc. for the insiders i.e. for the workers. The post of the president is generally ornamental. In the larger unions the presidents generally are outsiders, even may reside outside the districts. The person may be a member of the legislative assembly or a

member of parliament. However, in the smaller unions the president may not be an outsider of the district. The post of general secretary is the most important one. In most cases the person is a full time union organiser and is paid a remuneration. Actually the general secretary is all in all in a union, though constitutionally the president is the highest post. The general secretary keeps information about the day to day activities of the unions, advises the local committees, represents the conciliations, tribunals etc. In the larger unions there are some other paid wholetimers, generally holding key post like secretary, treasurer etc.

Below the secretariat, there is a larger body called executive council, council of members or central committee. Whereas the secretariat body varies between 7 to 16 office bearers, the executive council consists of a larger number of members. Normally the size of the executive council is related to the strength of the union membership. The larger the membership of a union, the larger its executive. The members of this council are taken from the local committies of different gardens. In this body the workers have a higher representation. Officially this body is important as it consists of representatives of generally all local committees of a union. But the importance of this body is not much in the day to day functioning of a union. However, it is the highest body between the two conferences. So, any policy making or emergency decisions may take place in

the council meetings. The council meets 3 to 4 times in a year to discuss the union activities. But most of the meetings are customary and even sometimes, some members are not aware of their membership in this body or council.

Lastly there is the branch or local committee or the garden level committee. This committee also has post like President, Vice-president, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer etc. This is the basic unit of a trade union. Its function is very vital. This committee enjoys some sort of autonomy though it has to work according to the rules and regulations framed by the Secretariat body. It looks after the day to day activities of the union at garden level and can take decisions of some minor matters. The strength of a union depends on the proper functioning of this committee. It enrolls the members, collects membership fees, sends a part of it to the secretariat body, also sends reports of the functioning of the union at local/garden level regularly to the Secretariat body, informs its members about the communications it receives from the secretariates.

This committee also keeps in constant touch with its members, looks into their problems, grievances, sees whether the agreements entered into with the union are implemented or that the conditions of work do not deteriorate.

In the tea gardens, almost all the local leaders are

workers, except in very rare occasions where one or two outsiders are found in the local committee.

According to official norms the local committees would select the central committee or executive council and the executive committee would select the secretariates. But, in practice this does not happen. The secretariat body or sometimes just the general secretary selects the office bearers of local committee. The election or selection of the office bearers may be held in every year or after two to three years. During the time, some members of secretariat body or in most cases only the general secretary comes to the respective garden and puts the list of their/his choices in front of their members, assuming their acceptance. The choice generally depends on some qualities i.e. the power of speech, education, activity, loyalty to the union and so on. The general members may agree with the selection or not. In case of disagree, the general members put their choices. But this happens rarely. Only in some abnormal situations, like if anyone of the choice of secretariat body is extremely disliked by the general members for any of the reasons like indese^{nt}, ^{behaviour} dishonest, inactive, not vocal, unsocial, immoral personal life etc., the general members disobey the selections of the secretariat body or the general secretary. The secretariat body or only the general secretary also selects the members of executive council without any proper democratic way. Thus we find that where choice should come from

the rank and file of the workers, in practice it comes from the upper strata of a union. This practice hinders the development of organic leadership as well as the trade union movements. However, sometimes, it is also seen that the election of local committee is being held even without the presence of secretaries or if they are present, they act just as observers.

ANALYSIS OF LEADERSHIP PATTERN

To understand the pattern of leadership in the tea plantation of Terai and Dooars a survey of leadership was made among the 50 union leaders of different unions in the studied three gardens. This survey included the age-group of the leaders, their sex, educational level, occupation, ethnic groups, whether they were traditional leaders, whether the union leaders also acted as social leaders or not^{and so on}. In addition to that the data was also collected from another 30 gardens in Terai, Eastern Dooars and Western Dooars.

i) Sex of union leaders :

The distribution of male and female workers among the union leaders is given in the following table.

Table - 7.1SEXWISE DISTRIBUTION OF UNION LEADERS

(Percentage in brackets)

Name of the garden	Male	Female	Total
Lalfa T.E.	15(100)	0	15(100)
Angrabhasa T.E.	15(93.75)	1(6.25)	16(100)
Kurty T.E.	<u>19(100)</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>19(100)</u>
	<u>49(98)</u>	<u>1(2)</u>	<u>50(100)</u>
Other Thirty gardens	213(99.51)	1(.5)	214(100)

The above table shows that almost all the union leaders are male though nearly half of the workers of Terai and Dooars are female. There is only one female among the 50 union leaders of the studied 3 gardens and another one among the 214 leaders of the 30 tea gardens of Terai, Eastern Dooars and Western Dooars. A study conducted by the labour bureau, Simla (Labour Bureau 1980 : XIII) registered the similar experience. It showed that 72% of women workers in plantation were members of unions and no sampled women workers in the selected plantations was found holding any responsible position at the decision and policy making levels of the trade unions.

The reasons of extremely low participation of women in union leadership in the tea plantation of Terai and Dooars are housework, low education, less awareness, shyness to come forward, fellow workers' pessimistic perception about their (womens') capacity to take union leadership etc. (This will be discussed in the following chapter).

ii) Age group of union leaders:

In the recent years there has been some changes in the pattern of leadership. One of the changes is that the old leaders have been replaced by young leaders. The dominance of the young and middle aged workers in the union leadership would be seen from the table below.

TABLE - 7.2

AGE GROUP OF THE UNION LEADERS

(Percentage in brackets)

Name of the garden	Upto 30 yrs.	31 to 40 yrs.	41 yrs. +	Total
Lalfa T.E.	6	4	5	15
Angrabhasa T.E.	4	5	7	16
Kurty T.E.	11	3	5	19
	<u>21(42)</u>	<u>12(24)</u>	<u>17(34)</u>	<u>50(100)</u>
Other Thirty gardens	70(33)	94(44)	50(23)	214(100)

From the above table it is found that among the 50 union leaders 42% (21 in number) were within 30 years old, 24% (12 in number) were between 31 to 40 yrs. old and the age of the remaining 34% (17 in number) leaders were more than 40 yrs. So, 66% (42 + 24) leaders were of young age group in the studied 3 gardens. The percentage of young leaders were more (33 + 44 = 76%) among the 214 union leaders of the another 30 gardens of Terai, Eastern Dooars and Western Dooars.

In the earlier days most of the leaders were old. The situation has changed in the recent years. Young workers have come to take leadership from the old generation. It is because of their better education, ability to lead due to better articulation of demands of workers, they are more vocal with the management about their demands, more active in the day to day problems of the workers and also it (union leadership) carries a social prestige.

iii) Literacy :

Union leaders were generally more educated than the general workers. Whereas the average literacy among the sampled workers in the three gardens were nearly 50%, the same among the union leaders was 96%. Actually education was one of the factors

The following table shows that among the 50 leaders of the studied 3 gardens only 4% (2 in number) were illiterate. Among the literates, 6% (3 in number) could sign their names,

52% (26 in number) read between class I to Class V, 36% (18 in number) read between class VI to class IX and only 2% (1 in number) leader passed Madhyamik (class X).

TABLE - 7.3

LITERACY OF UNION LEADERS : (Percentage in brackets)

	Lalfa T.E.	Angra- bhasa T.E.	Kurty T.E.	Total	Other thirty gardens
Illiterate	1	0	1	2(4)	5(2.3)
Could sign	1	0	2	3(6)	15(7)
Class I to IV	6	10	10	26(52)	64(29.9)
Class V to IX	7	5	6	18(36)	104(48.5)
Madhyamik (class X)	0	1	0	1(2)	22(10.2)
Class XI to XII	0	0	0	0	3(1.4)
Graduate	0	0	0	0	1(.46)
	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>50(100)</u>	<u>214(100)</u>

Though illiteracy among the union leaders was less, but their level of literacy was extremely poor in the studied 3 gardens. In other 30 gardens the level literacy of the union leaders was comparatively little high. Whereas in the 3 gardens 36% leaders crossed the primary level, it was 48.5% among the leaders of the other 30 gardens.

Only 2% leaders passed Madhyamik in the 3 gardens, but there were more than 10% leaders who passed Madhyamik in the 30

gardens. There were none who passed H.S. (class XI) or H.S. (class XII) and also no one was graduate among the union leaders of the 3 gardens, but in the 30 gardens nearly 1.5% union leaders passed Higher Secondary (H.S.) and one was a graduate.

The reasons of fairly low level of higher education among the union leaders could be attributed to some causes. In almost all the tea gardens of Terai and Dooars, now-a-days scope for primary education is available, but there are little scope for higher education. The Madhyamik (Secondary), Higher Secondary schools and colleges are mostly situated at a distant place from most of the tea gardens. There were little scope for the workers of getting jobs in the staff category in tea plantation. The educated tribal youth could get better job in government services like Railways, Post & Telegraph Department etc., but, generally they do not want to go outside of their society. It was seen that the educated tribal youth working in Railway services, have left the job and came back to the tea gardens. The low level of economic standard of a worker's family also is a barrier to send their children for higher education. So, naturally they are not much interested to take higher education due to all these disadvantages.

iv) Occupational status of the union leaders :

In the initial stage of the trade union leaders were mostly from the Sardars. The Sardars who were also recruiters had enough control over the workers. The Sardars were mainly sub-staff. This system persisted for a long time and the union

leadership continued to be dominated by the sub-staff. It was rarely found a daily rated worker in the union leadership. Gradually, with the spread of the trade union movement, daily rated workers have come forward to take union leadership. The following table will show us the number of sub-staff and daily rated workers in the union leadership.

Table - 7.4

OCCUPATIONAL STATES OF THE UNION LEADERS

Name of the garden	Sub-Staff	Daily rated worker	Ex-worker	Others*	Total
Lalfa T.E.	11	4	0	0	15
Angrabhasa T.E.	11	5	0	0	16
Kurty T.E.	4	13	2	0	19
	<u>26(52)</u>	<u>22(44)</u>	<u>2(4)</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>50(100)</u>
Other thirty garden	98(46)	111(52)	0	4(2)	214(100)

* Others means clerical staff & teacher.

So, in the three tea estate, among the 50 union leaders 52% (26 in number) were sub-staff, 44% (22 in number) were daily rated workers and 4% (2 in number) were ex-workers. The two ex-workers were also ex-sub-staff. In the other 30 gardens the percentage of sub-staff among the union leaders was rather low compare to the 3 gardens; it was 46%. The percentage of daily

rated workers was 52 and 4% leaders were clerical staff and teachers. There were no ex-worker leader in these gardens. So, though there were some differences between the two cases, but, one thing was common that the daily rated workers were coming up to take union leadership. But, inspite of this trend, still sub-staff were more important in union leadership. Though sub-staff constitute around 5% of the labour face (Bhowmik 1992:31) yet they dominate the unions. The most important posts like President, Secretary were generally occupied by the sub-staff. In the garden level generally there was one or two person of every union who was/were the all important man/men of a union. In most of the cases the person was/were sub-sraff. Actually they were the effective leaders of the unions. These persons represent the unions before the management and they were the link between the general workers and the regional or central leaders. The other office bearers of the unions were rather customary. Thus, whether the sub-staff numerically dominated the secretariat body of a union, was not a factor; in real sense they are still dominating the unions due to the above reasons.

v) Years of union membership :

Earlier we have told that any worker may be a member of a union from his/her temporary period of service. From the following table we will get the union leaders' years of

membership of the union he/she presently belongs.

TABLE - 7.5

YEARS OF MEMBERSHIP : (Percentage in brackets).

Name of the garden.	Upto 5 yrs.	6 to 10 yrs.	11 to 15 yrs.	16 to 20 yrs.	21 yrs. & above.	Total
Lalfa T.E.	2	8	3	2	0	15
Angra-bhasa T. E.	0	5	4	4	3	16
Kurty T. E.	5	11	1	1	1	19
	<u>7(14)</u>	<u>24(48)</u>	<u>8(16)</u>	<u>7(14)</u>	<u>4(8)</u>	<u>50(100)</u>
Other thirty gardens	88(41)	67(31)	32(15)	23(11)	4(2)	214(100)

From the above table it is found that most (14% + 48% = 62%) of the union leaders of the studied 3 gardens had been members of any of the unions for not more than 10 years. In the other 30 gardens the percentage for the same was 72% (41% + 31%). In the tea plantation of Terai, Dooars generally every worker takes his/her union membership as soon as he/she gets a service. Even, they take membership of a union when they are casual (temporary) workers. As most of the union members were young, that is why their period of membership was not too much.

vi) Ethnic groups.

In the tea plantation of North Bengal among the union leaders Oraons were dominating. We have seen from the following table that in the studied 3 gardens 38% leaders were Oraons; Nepalis were 10% and 'Others' (including Kheria, Munda, Baraik, Lohar etc.) were 52%. Among the 'Others' no single tribe was more than 15%. The percentage of Oraons among the union leaders was more among the other 30 gardens. It was nearly 46% there. The Nepalis were 27% among the leaders of these tea estates. This was more compared to the studied 3 gardens. The tribes other than Oraons (such as Munda, Kheria, Lohar, Baraik etc.) constituted nearly 29% of the union leaders of the other 30 gardens. Among the leaders Bengalees were around 3%. They were clerical staff & teachers of primary schools. The following table will give us the ethnic groups of the union leaders.

TABLE -7.6ETHNIC GROUP OF UNION LEADERS :(Percentage in brackets)

<u>Name of the garden.</u>	<u>Nepali</u>	<u>Bengali</u>	<u>Oraon</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>Total</u>
Lalfa T.E.	0	0	7	8	15
Angrabhasa T.E.	3	0	7	6	16
Kurty T.E.	2	0	5	12	19
	<u>5(10)</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>19(38)</u>	<u>26(52)</u>	<u>50(100)</u>
Other thirty garden	58(27)	7(3)	98(46)	51(24)	214(100)

The dominance of Oraons among the union leaders may be due to that the Oraons were majority among the tea plantation workers. It is difficult to give the exact break up of ethnic groups of tea garden workers as a separate census of tea garden workers does not exist. The 1961 district census hand book was the last census where break up of the tribes and economic activities were given. The district census handbook for Jalpaiguri (1961) shows that the Oraons formed the 51.23% of the tribes in the district. Among them, those employed in plantations, mines, forests etc. were about 65%. There were very few orchards and mines in the Jalpaiguri district, so we could easily say that most workers in this category were infact employed in plantations. In Terai a survey was undertaken by the S.D.O. in 1975 to understand the composition of work force in the Terai region. This survey shows that Oraons are numerically more prominent in the gardens (about 51%) of Terai (Dasgupta 1988 : 17). So both in Dooars (Jalpaiguri district) and Terai Oraons were numerically dominating among the tea plantation workers. So, they had the maximum number of leaders in the tea gardens of North Bengal. But that does not mean that ethnic affinity have played a vital role here. Then the workers of minority tribes would not get berth in union leadership. It was often found that members of a union have selected their leaders from minority tribes. Besides the above reasons one of the reasons of the Oraons' dominance in the union leadership may be that they were more educated among the tribal population

of tea plantation in North Bengal.

vii) Place of birth

The following table will show us the places of births of the union leaders.

TABLE - 7.7

PLACES OF BIRTHS OF UNION LEADERS : (Percentage in Brackets).

Place of birth.	Lalfa T. E.	Angra- bhasa T. E.	Kurty T. E.	Total
Place of origin	4	1	2	7(14)
Same garden	9	13	14	36(72)
Other garden	2	2	2	6(12)
Busty	0	1	1	2(4)
	<u>15</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>50(100)</u>

The above table shows that 14% union leaders' places of births were the places of their origins, 72% union leaders were born in the same garden they were working, 12% union leaders' places of births were the gardens other than they were working and only 4% took birth in the busties. This data were taken only from the studied 3 gardens. It shows that those who were born in the same garden they have been working, were majority, i.e. the workers prefer those workers as their leaders who are acquainted with them for a long time. On the otherhand it is also helpful for an worker to be a union leader if the person

is born and grown up in the same garden he/she is working.

viii) Traditional leadership

Traditional leadership means whether the leader's parent or near relatives (uncle, brother etc.) is/was a leader. Data of the 3 gardens shows that only 8% (4 in number) union leaders in these gardens were traditional; their fathers were union leaders.

ix) Social leader.

In the traditional tribal society, every tribe had a Panchayet (to be discussed in the following chapter). This Panchayet was the part & parcel of tribal society. It had a chief or Mukhiya who was generally an older person. This panchayet mitigates all the intra-tribal and inter-tribal social, religious disputes. Now-a-days this traditional tribal panchayet system has been gradually abolishing. In lieu of that a type of socio-political leadership is emerging. They are the union leaders. Any disputes arising of any social, religious, political events, now being mitigated by these union leaders. Thus, we have found that most of the union leaders (effective leaders) also acted as the social leaders also.

ATTITUDES OF WORKERS TOWARDS THEIR LEADERS :

The relationship between the rank and file of the workers and their leaders (both local and central), their

attitudes towards the leaders are the most important factors for running the day to day union activities. The proper functioning of a trade union depends a lot on the above relationship. As earlier discussed, there were two types of leaders (inside and outside) in the tea gardens of Terai and Dooars; the attitudes, the relations of the workers are also different in the two cases. Besides, now-a-days youth leadership is one of the emerging patterns in the trade unions of tea plantations of these regions. The youth have numerically replaced the old leadership; but how much the youth leaders have been successful in replacing the old in the functions of the union? What is the workers' perception about it?

To find out the answers of the above queries, a number of questions were administered among the sampled workers in the three gardens. Some of questions were: whether the young leaders could successfully replace the old leadership? Whether they were happy with the existing leadership? Would the inside leaders capable of replacing the outside leaders? What factors or qualities were required to be a union leader? Besides these selected questions, informal interviews of the workers were also taken. And above all, observation from the close quarter was also made to perceive the workers' attitude.

We have earlier seen that nearly 64% union leaders were within 40 years of age; hence they were young. More than 90% respondents told us that this young leaders were successful

in replacing the old leadership in the functioning of their unions. The young leaders were more vocal, enthusiastic, active than the old leaders. Not only that they were also more educated and well aware about the world outside the tea gardens. This information was rather comparative - workers' general views about the youth leadership compared to the old leadership. Whether the workers were happy with the existing leadership was a different type of enquiry. It was rather a particular type of enquiry about the leadership of a particular garden. The workers generally felt shaky to reply to these types of queries. So, it was really difficult to judge the workers' views about the existing leadership of their gardens. Being myself an outsider, they may have a disbelief about my intention and again they may not have such faith on me to what extent I would keep secrecy of their replies. So, it was at first a question of creating faith among the workers and secondly the keen observation to understand their likeness for their leaders.

Now-a-days the trade union movement in the tea gardens of Terai and Dooars are going through a stagnant phase (to be discussed in the concluding chapter).

The expectation of the workers from the unions as well as from their leaders became low what was rather high during the days of sixties and seventies. The Bonus movement of 1955, demands for increase of minimum wages of 1966 and for filling up of vacancies and increase of employment in the tea gardens

of 1969 etc. have increased the expectation of the workers from their unions as well as from their leaders. After 1969, there were no large scale movement in the tea gardens of this areas. Though the condition of workers has improved now in respect to the pre-independence period, but still a lot have to be improved. Trade unions are aware of these facts, but surprisingly enough they are not interested to launch large scale movements. The trade union movements are now restricted mainly to annual bonus negotiations, tri-annual wage negotiations with the management. Some sporadic movements may take place in the individual garden concerning the amount of bonus or minimum wages, but they are generally short lived or without any long/term impact on the workers. This state of lack of movements in recent years in the tea plantation of these areas have made the workers less ambitious. Now, they expect from their unions a yearly bonus, an annual increase in their wages, a sub-standard quarter and mitigation of occasional disputes with the management. The unions mechanically fulfilled these demands. These were the main functions of the unions now-a-days and these have become routine works of the unions. There was little enthusiasims found among the workers centred around a settlement or payment of bonus or an increase in their wages. Besides these, there were some day to day problems also-like the settlement of thika, supply of firewood, repairing of quarters etc. The workers now have become used to the irregular supply of firewood, unrepaired quarter, supply of low quality

of medicines or even non-supply of medicines. They have become habituated, but of course are not happy with the existing conditions. They were aggrieved but really helpless. They knew the limitations of their leaders (garden level). The local leaders could not take a major or radical decision without consulting their seniors i.e. with the central leaders even if they (local leaders) wish to do something. The central leaders in most cases preferred to maintain status quo instead of organising large scale movements. Even, they tried to convince the workers and the local leaders in such a way, so that the workers remain happy with the existing situation. The central leaders also sometimes expressed their inability to press the management or government or government's limitations or unwillingness to press the management. So, in such a situation workers were more or less happy with their leadership and also to some extent indifferent and bewildered; yet sometimes the general workers expressed their unhappiness, but those are sporadic and short lived.

Workers' attitudes and relations with the two different types of leaders (local & central) were also different. Whereas the local leaders were their neighbours, co-workers and belonged to same ethnic groups, the central leaders were mostly outsiders (sometimes from a distant place), non-workers and mainly belonged to Bengalee middle class. The relationship grew up in two ways - one was a very free and close knit relationship and another was

not so close, rather a formal relationship. Moreover, the outside leaders were more educated, socially upgraded people than the inside leaders. So, they were more respected and honoured by the the general workers than the inside leaders.

There were some exceptions also. It was also found that the workers were not happy with some of their leaders. Leaders with dishonesty, unnecessary militant, inactive and and with immoral personal life were not liked by the general workers. Very recently we have also noticed that the general workers, though in rare occasions, have come to the A.L.C. office to watch the bipartite or tripartite negotiations. These indicated their disbelief and faithlessness on their leaders.

Another important factor of this relationship was that the workers' perception about their local leaders ability to run the unions without the central leaders. Most of the workers' opinions were that the inside leaders could manage the minor union activities successfully without their central leaders but in case of any major problem (i.e. negotiations with the management regarding Bonus, Wages etc.) assistance of the central leaders was must. The general workers thought that inside leaders with their low education, knowledge and and experience were not capable to take any major decision. They were also not fully aware of the rules and regulations of Plantation. They also felt shaky to talk with the management

and with the representatives of the government.

A few of the workers were of a different opinion. They thought that the local leaders could manage everything successfully without the central leaders if the general workers stand by them.

REASONS FOR CHOICE OF LEADERSHIP :

Workers' choice of leadership depends on some factors. There are some qualities which the workers like to see among their leaders. It may be that due to a single reason a worker was preferred as a union leader by his/her co-workers or the reasons may be more than one.

The most important factor for choice of a leader was the capacity of speaking with the management. During any formal and informal negotiation if a worker was found putting the right argument, he/she would be the definite choice of the workers as their leader.

The next important reason was the involvement in the workers' day to day problems. A person who helps his/her co-workers in any problem like work, social, political, religious, etc. may be selected by the workers as their leader.

Formal or informal education, intelligence, experience, awareness about the rules and regulations of tea plantations were also the qualities the workers like to find among their leaders.

The choice of leadership also depended on the honesty of an worker and also on his/her behavioural pattern.

Sometimes, it was also found that the workers have selected a leader by the influence of their co-workers or the central committee has selected him/her.

There were some other reasons also which were comparatively less significant. Those are - traditional leadership, commitment to party, occupational status (sub-staff), ethnic affinity, ones personal sacrifice etc.

With this analysis of the trade union leadership in this chapter we would like to discuss the trade union and social change in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VIII

TRADE UNION & SOCIAL CHANGE

We have already mentioned that the workers of tea gardens of Terai and Dooars regions were mostly tribals of Chotonagpur - Santhalpargana region. A significant number of tea workers of these regions also were Nepalise or Nepali speaking people. As most of the workers were adivasis of Chotonagpur - Santhal Pargana region, this chapter deals only with the social life of the adivasi workers, role of union in their social life and the impact of it.

The adivasi workers of Chotonagpur - Santhal Pargana origin were not a homogeneous group. They were divided into different tribes such as Oraon, Munda, Kharia, Baraik, Mahali, Lohar etc. A clear hierarchy existed among these tribes. The Oraon, Munda, Kheria etc. were traditionally cultivating tribes and formed a common status group, whereas the Baraik, Mahali, Lohar etc. were artisan tribes, formed another status group. The former claimed themselves superior to the latter. This hierarchy also reflected in their social life.

Besides having different occupation and different social status in the social hierarchy, the languages or dialects of these tribes are also different. The Oraons speak Kurukh, a language/dialect belongs to the Dravidian family. The language/dialect of the Mundas is Mundari which belongs to the austro-asiatic section of the austric language family. The other tribes, such as Kharia, Turi, Mahali etc. speak dialects of Mundari.

There are more similarities and dissimilarities among these tribes before migration to the tea gardens. But after migrating to the tea gardens their economic activities have been homogeneous, settlement patterns have been mixed, communications with the outside world have been developed, they are now more educated and they have come under a new type of political organization - the trade union.

We will now try to find out how trade unions involve changes in their way of life, which mean social adjustments and adaptations.

Here we have tried to see the changes in their religious institutions, social institutions, political institutions, material culture and so on.

RELIGION :

The adivasis mainly belonged to two religions - Samsar and Christian. The Christians were either Roman Catholics or Protestants. The Samsar religion was based on animistic beliefs. At the same time they have borrowed from their Hindu neighbours some Hindu rituals, ceremonies etc. They also gave up practicing some of their traditional festivals like Sarhul, Baha, Megha etc. Among their traditional festivals they now observe Fagua, Gaonpuja, Jitia, Karma etc. With the change of economy the rituals once practiced by them in agricultural operations, hunting and in their dormitories, were no longer necessary. Instead of these,

they worshipped different Hindu Gods and Goddesses like Durga, Kali, Saraswati, Biswakarma etc.

The Christians observed their own religious festivals like Good Friday, Christmas etc.

So far our observations went, there was no superior-inferior feelings among the above two religious groups.

In the traditional tribal society Totem was very important ritualistic belief. Each tribe was subdivided into number of clan. The clan was exogamous and totemic in nature. Each clan bore the name of either a bird or an animal or a tree etc. The tribal people believed that they have descended from that bird, animal or the tree. The clan totems were not worshiped by the tribal workers of the tea gardens but they maintained totemic restrictions in the form of not doing any harm to the totemic objects. The rule of clan exogamy were not followed rigidly by the tribal people.

PURITY & POLLUTION :

The concept of purity and pollution still exist among the tribal workers. In the days of yore, the Oraon, Munda, Kheria, Santhal - the people of upper status group would not dine with the members of other status group-Baraik, Mahali, Lohar etc. Even the concept of pollution was observed in case of water also. If an Oraon, Munda, Kheria Santhal or anyone of this common status group was carrying water and if it was touched by a person of another status group or even his shadow

fell on the person carrying the water, the person would throw away the water. If the pot was earthen, he would break it and if it were of metal it would be heated till red hot to purify it. Food, cooked or uncooked also was considered polluted had it been touched by anyone of the so called lower status group. The conception of pollution was so rigid that if a person of lower status group entered the house of a person of higher status group, the house had to be purified by smearing with a mixture of cowdung, turmeric powder and a bit of copper (an old coin).

However, now-a-days in the tribal society of the tea gardens, this concept of purity and pollution has eroded a lot, particularly among the younger generation tribals. The younger generation did not observe all these concepts of pollution in their day to day life. Now, they dine with each other irrespective of any tribes. But, still in the ceremonies like marriage, child birth, death (Sradh ceremony) the people of one status group would not dine with the people of another status group. The former would be supplied some uncooked food items and the person himself would cook it separately. The women folk and old people were found to be less flexible than the menfolk and younger generation regarding the rituals of pollution.

INTER-TRIBAL MARRIAGE :

Inter-tribal marriage was strictly forbidden in the tribal society in the past. It was a punishable offence and

the tribal panchayat was to decide it. In the tea gardens also, the tribal panchayat would decide the fate of the couple. In the earlier days, the couple would be asked to leave the garden or they would be excommunicated. If they did not leave the garden, they were driven out of the garden.

But, during the last few years, inter-tribal marriages were increasing. The tribal society now have become less rigid about it. The panchayat generally decided a fine for the grooms party. The panchayat kept a minimum part of it and the bride's father/guardian got the maximum part. After this, Hariya was distributed and a white chicken or goat was sacrificed. Each one of the concerned parties would drink a drop of blood of this animal. The meat was cooked and consumed. The Christian adivasis also observed all these rules and rituals in case of inter-tribal marriages and in addition to these they went to the church.

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS :

In their homeland there were two distinct political bodies which looked after all the matters of public interests and private rights in and outside the village community. The village panch (or panchayet) headed by a recognised headman (generally an elderly person) controlled the affairs within the village, whereas the parha organisation was a confederacy of a number of neighbouring villages with a central organisation known as the Parha Panch acted like an inter-village council.

The meaning of panch means five, but in practice all the elder members of the village community could participate in its deliberations. There were three recognised officials, the munda (headman), the pahan (priest) and the mahato (messenger) gave permanency and corporate character to the panch. The process of panchayat, was as follows. The aggrieved person verbally had to complain to the village mahato and the village pahan. The elders of the village would assemble at the villa akhra or some other appointed place. The village gorait summoned the depicting parties before the assembly. The pahan or the mahato informed the defendant of the substance of the complaint against him and heard his answer, and if necessary took evidence. Then panch gave its judgement. After the judgement, each party had to pay a fees to the panch. The money was to be spent on liquor.

Each parha consisted of a number of villages. One of the villages was called the Raja (king) village, another the Dewan (prime minister) villagg, a third the panrey (clerk of the crown) village, a fourth the Kotwar (bailiff) village and so on. Those villages which have not got such denominations were known as Praja (subject) villages. The Raja village was the head of the villages of the Parha. Some head men of that village presided over the meeting of the parha panch. In the traditional tribal society, through the meetings of the parhapanch the inter-villages disputes were solved.

The above structure of Panch and Parha have been nearly extinct in the tribal society of the tea gardens.

The elderly leaders of the traditional panch now have been gradually replacing by the union leaders. If any dispute occurs out of any social, political, religious or economic matter in the tribal society of tea gardens, the union leaders only or with some elderly persons would meet to solve the problem. If they could not, they would inform it to the manager of the tea garden.

The pahan (priest) beside a member of the panch also acted as a priest in their homeland. But in the tea gardens of Terai and Dooars the Pahans have been replaced by the Bhagats. Perhaps the pahans did not migrate to the tea districts of North Bengal.

LANGUAGE :

We have already discussed that each tribe had its own dialect. But, in the tea gardens most of the tribes except Oraon, Munda have forgotten the use of their mother tongues. The lingua franca of all these tribes was Sadri including the Oraons and Mundas. Due to the commercial intercourses among the different tribes in the tea gardens Sadri has been developed as the lingua franca among the tribes. Sadri was also spoken by the tribes in Chotonagpur also.

SOCIALIZATION :

Bachelors' and Maidens' dormitories were the institution for the training and socialization of youths and girls among most of the tribes in the past. These dormitories were the glimpses of the very archaic form of economic, social and

religious organisations to train the youths and girls for the purposes of food-quest, about their social and other duties and about the magico-religious observations calculated to secure success in hunting and to augment the procreative power.

In the tea gardens the dormitories were absent. Food quest, agriculture and hunting were no longer so much necessary to the tribes and also there was little scope for these types of economic activities. In lieu of the dormitories the elders taught the youths and girls about their social, religious, cultural customs and duties. Besides, most of the tea gardens had primary schools, though they were not properly equipped and maintained. The children of the workers read in these schools. The percentage of literacy among the workers of the three tea gardens was 49.2, though the level of higher education was much lesser (chapter - V).

FOOD HABIT :

The staple food of the adivasis was Rice. But an ordinary adivasi could not provide for himself and his family a full diet of rice all the year around. Wheat has been introduced lately in these areas. In the lean period they took Gondli (*Panicum miliare*), Marua (*Eleusine coracana*) etc. The side dishes included Sag (spinach), vegetables like pumpkins, arum, sweet potato, brinjals, lady's-finger, beans, radishes, onions, chillies, etc. Meat, fish, milk, eggs were also taken when available.

In the tea gardens, the staple food of adivasi workers was rice and wheat. The side dishes remained more or less same with their past habit. But in the lean period the adivasi workers took Cha-Bhat. The Cha-Bhat was boiled rice with tea and with a little salt added.

In the past they had only one addiction of drinking Haria (rice-beer). But, now-a-days a significant number of adivasi workers have picked up the habit of smoking biri, cigarette, ganja (hemp), tea, pachai (unlicenced country liquor), pan (betel leaf) etc.

DRESS PATTERN :

In the earlier days the clothing of an adult tribal male was generally a piece of cotton cloth about a foot in width and three to five or even six yards in length. It was being worn around the waist and then passed between the thighs once tightly and again loosely, the ends being allowed to hang down from the waist. The dress of an adult tribal women was a piece of cloth about four cubits long. They used to wore it round the waist and reached down to the knees. The upper part of the body was without covering.

But now, the pattern of dresses has been changed. The old men wear Dhotis and shirts, young men wear trousers, shirts etc. The dresses of old women were sarees and sometimes blouses also. The girls or young women generally wear frocks, sarees, petticoats, blouses etc.

The uses of traditional pattern of brass-jewellery or bell-metal jewellery have been on the wane. The tribal girls of tea gardens now use hairpins, ribbons, plastic or glass bangles etc. The males do use ornaments now, though in the old days they wear ornaments.

Tatuing was very popular particularly among the tribal girls, but now, it is seldom practiced.

HEALTH PRACTICES BEHAVIOUR

The health practices behaviour of the tribal people have also been changed to some extent. In the earlier days they were totally dependent on the local medicants and herbs. But in the tea gardens they have come into contact with the modern allopathic treatment. They used allopathic drugs where it was available. Uses of herbs were also continuing among them, but at a lesser degree.

RECREATION :

The tribal people were very fond of dancing and singing. Dances were part and parcel of their life. They danced, they sang in their marriages, fighting, hunting, agricultural operations in their religious festivals etc. Now, these types of entertainments are on the verge of ruin. Instead of these, loudspeakers, tapes, videos, @inemas are the medium of entertainments of the tribal workers of tea gardens now.

Till now we have discussed about the social life of the adivasi workers with their changes, adaptations and adjustments

with the new socio-economic environment. It is not always possible to work out a particular cause for a particular change. A variety of changes have taken place in the life of these workers, in some cases they have adapted themselves with the new environment, in other cases they have adjusted.

Here, now we would discuss about the role and impact of trade union on the social life of the workers.

Besides its role in collective bargaining and on the working life of the workers, the trade union should influence the social life of the workers, otherwise the all round development of the society would be incomplete. In the present tribal society of the tea gardens, we have seen that changes have taken place in all spheres of their life, i.e. in their social institutions, cultural institutions, religious institution, political institutions and so on. Trade unions, had definitely some roles on it. But the question was that how much these roles had penetrated into the social life of the workers and whether these impacts were direct or indirect?

Trade union was the only organisation of the workers. It helped to break the isolation of the tea workers who were insulated in the tea gardens for a number of decades. Besides other reasons like independence, development of communication and so on, trade union helped very significantly to establish the relation between the tea workers and the outside world. Mixing with the neighbouring semi-urban and urban societies,

which were comparatively modern than the tribal societies in the tea gardens, helped to develop modern outlooks about different spheres of life.

Struggling unitedly years after years under the banners of trade unions, a sense of solidarity had developed among the workers which cut across partially the barriers of stratification among the tribal society.

In the annual conferences of unions, delegates came, belonged to different tribal communities. In the earlier days, there were separate cooking arrangements for Bhagats (a sect of Oraon), for women delegates. The system had gradually stopped. Now all delegates irrespective of castes, tribes, sexes dined together. Delegates belonged to different tribes and castes also slept in a common place. When they came back home, the memories of these practice remained. It definitely helped to erase partially the age old concept of pollution among the tribal workers.

We have also seen that most of the social leaders of the tribal societies of the tea gardens were also union leaders. They were also young. In any disputes out of any social, religious or other reasons the judgement of a young social leader (who was a union leader also) should be more progressive than an orthodox old leader.

Besides, some of the unions also organised different seminars, workshops, annual sports, tournaments etc. One union

organised zonal annual sports among the tea garden workers, annual football and volleyball tournaments and coaching camp for mental and physical development of the workers. This union was also conducting adult education classes among its members. Two unions were running training programme on tailoring for the dependent female relatives of the workers. One of the unions conducted educational courses for its women members. Two unions organised regular seminars on the different problems of tea plantation workers to aware the workers about their social and economic rights. Some of the unions also arranged seminars on women trade union leaders for the development of union leaders. But all these seminars, workshops were attended by few participants as the seminars, workshops could hardly create any enthusiasm among the workers.

Though most of the seminars and workshops were attended by few participants, yet the unions did not try seriously to increase the number of participants. We did not find any follow up of these seminars or workshops. Still some of the unions were interested in organising these seminars etc., perhaps because these unions got a handsome amount of money from their international organisations for organising these seminars, workshops etc.

Above all every union conducted political classes for their members, though the number of political classes had been decreased gradually to a minimum. The union leaders also sometimes taught the workers about the evils of inter-tribal barrier,

liquor addiction and so on in their day to day conversations. But those are too casual in nature.

These were the roles and impacts of unions in the social life of the workers. Some of the roles of the unions directly influenced the life of the workers, while others indirectly. The extent of penetration of the works of the unions was not too much as almost all the unions were not so interested about the social life of the workers. We did not find any union organised any seminar on the evils of inter-tribal barrier, concept of pollution, liquor addiction, savings, importance of education etc. Education, which is the pioneer liberating force, hardly got any importance to the union for discussion on the bargaining table.

What we have seen that trade unions did not help the workers to be conscious, educated and well informed so that they became independent.

Besides the trade unions the central government also introduced workers' Education Schemes through Central Board for Workers Education (CBWE) aims at achieving the following four objectives :

- 1) to develop stronger and more effective trade unions through better trained officials and more enlightened members, for the strengthening of bonds of loyalty to the unions,

- ii) to develop leadership from the rank and file and to promote the growth of democratic process and trade union organisation and administration.
- iii) to equip organised labour to take its place in democratic society and fulfill its social and economic responsibilities, and
- iv) to promote among workers a greater understanding of the problems of their economic environment and their privileges and obligations as union members and officials and citizens.

An important objective of the scheme was to inculcate a sense of trade union consciousness among workers. Another objective was to develop a cadre of inside leaders and do away with outside leaders. In order to achieve this objective trade union involvement in the running of the scheme was sought to be enhanced. However, the CBWE scheme does not seem to have much headway in achieving the objective.

TRADE UNION AND WOMEN WORKERS:

Tea is the only industry in the organised sector which employs a large number of female workers. They form half the total work force. This is significant because in other industries

in the organised sector employment of women has been decreased continuously.

There was perhaps no other organised industry employing women in so large numbers and at the same time having so high proportion of women workers. This high concentration of women workers was due to certain factors which were peculiar to this industry. The work in plantation being of agricultural nature, women find it easy to adapt themselves to the jobs. In fact, because of their skilful fingers, they can perform certain jobs like tea plucking, coffee picking etc. better than even men in certain cases. Recruitment of labour was done family basis and the whole family was made to settle on plantations. This provided equal opportunity to women for taking up wage employment in plantations.

In 1985, the total number of average daily workers (permanent) in the tea gardens of West Bengal was 199, 581. The number of male workers was 97,305, number of female workers was 93,224 while adolescent and children numbered was 4,655 and 4,397 respectively (Tea Board 1987:153 & 154).

The percentage of trade union membership among the female workers was also high in tea industry among all other industries in India. In 1927-28 the number of women workers in the membership of registered trade unions was 1,168 (2.1%). It increased to 106,242 (6.1%) in 1950-51. The percentage of plantation women workers in that was 33% (33,424 in number) followed by 24.7% (26,209 in number) of cotton industry (V.V. Giri 1958 : 400 - 402, Mathur &

Mathur 1962 : 71-78).

A study conducted by the labour bureau shows that about 72% of the total sampled women workers in the plantations studied were reported to be members of one or the other trade union. Women formed about 52% of the total membership while their share in the total employment in sampled plantation was 53% (Labour Bureau 1980 : xiii).

In the tea plantation of West Bengal also a large section of female workers are unionised. Among our women respondents (157 in number), most of them were members of any one of the trade unions or more except a very few.

In the following pages we would discuss the level of literacy of women workers, their union membership, awareness about trade unions, participation in trade union activities, reasons for joining and changing unions, their positions in the unions and the prospect of development of women trade union leadership etc.

LEVEL OF LITERACY :

We had earlier seen that around 50% of the respondents (Including male and female workers) were literates which was high compare to the state average of nearly 41% (1981 census). But among the 157 women respondents only around 11% (17 in number) were literates; of them only 5% (8 in number) could sign their names, 2.5% (4 in number) read upto primary level (class I to IV)

and a little high than the 3% (5 in number) crossed the primary level (between V to IX). The remaining around 89% were illiterates.

The table below will give us the level of literacy of women workers.

TABLE - 8.1

LEVEL OF LITERACY OF WOMEN WORKERS

(Percentage in brackets)

Level of literacy	Lalfa T.E.	Angra-bhasa T. E.	Kurty T.E.	Total
Could sign	0	1	7	8(5.09)
Class I-IV	0	3	1	4(2.54)
Class V-IX	2	2	1	5(3.18)
Illiterate	32	53	55	140(89.17)
	<u>34</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>157(100)</u>

We have earlier discussed (in chapter V) the causes of low level of literacy particularly about the low level of education among the workers. The reasons were the primary schools in the tea gardens were not properly equipped, there was no scope for the workers to get services in the staff category, unions did not encourage their members to take education, absence of Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools in

the vicinity of most of the gardens etc. In case of women workers, besides these reasons there were some other reasons also. The girl members of an worker's family got little encouragement from their guardians to take education. The girls also found little time to go to schools as they had to do a lot of domestic works including looking after the minors in the houses.

This low level of literacy also reflected on their awareness about trade unions and participation in union activities which we would see in the following pages.

TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP AND WOMEN WORKERS' AWARENESS :

In the studied three gardens among the women respondents almost all the respondents were the members of any of the trade unions. The survey showed that 146 of 157 women respondents were members of a trade union, 8 respondents were members of more than one union and only 3 of the respondents were not members of any trade union. The table below gives the gardenwise breakup.

TABLE - 8.2

MEMBERSHIP OF TRADE UNIONS
(Percentage in brackets)

	Lalfa T.E.	Angra- bhasa T.E.	Kurty T.E.	Total
Members of one union	34	59	53	146(93)
Members of more than one union	0	0	8	8(5)
Non-members	0	0	3	3(2)
	<u>34</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>157(100)</u>

The above table also shows that multi-union members and non-members are found only in Kurty Tea Estate. Earlier (Chapter VI) we have discussed that in this garden inter-union rivalry was too much and a section of workers were also disgusted with the unions. So, some of them gave up the union membership being disgusted and some of them became members of more than one union to please everybody.

Though most of the women respondents were unionised but it was not a scale for measurement their awareness about their unions. So, we have tried to understand this awareness through their awareness about the central affiliations, political party affiliations of their unions, reasons for joining and changing unions, their participation in union activities and so on.

The tables below will show the women workers' awareness about their central trade unions and political party affiliation.

TABLE - 8.3

AWARENESS ABOUT CENTRAL TRADE UNION

(Percentage in brackets)

	Lalfa T.E.	Angra- bhasa T.E.	Kurty T.E.	Total
Aware	0	6	1	7(4.45)
Not-aware	34	53	52	139(88.53)
Non-members & members of multi-unions	0	0	11	11(7.00)
	<u>34</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>157(100)</u>

TABLE - 8.4

AWARENESS ABOUT POLITICAL PARTY AFFILIATION
(Percentage in brackets)

	Lalfa T.E.	Angra- bhasa T.E.	Kurty T.E.	Total
Aware	29	43	42	114(72.61)
Not-aware	5	16	11	32(20.38)
Non-members & members of multi- unions	0	0	11	11(7.00)
	<u>34</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>157(100)</u>

The table 8.3 shows that only 4.4% (7 in number) respondents were aware of the central trade unions of their unions. But a significant number of respondents i.e. more than 72% (114 in number) respondents could tell the names of the political parties their unions were attached with. One of the interesting features was that whenever they were asked about the names of their unions, most of them told the name of the party to which the particular trade union was associated. Those who could tell the name of their unions, most were members of such unions which did not have any direct affiliation with any political party. As for example - RCMC and WBCMS had no direct political affiliations with the Congress, though both these unions were indirectly associated with this party. Almost all members of these two unions among our respondents were aware of the names of their unions. When they were asked about the names of their unions,

most of the members of CBMU, DCBWU, DDCKMU, ZCBWU etc. among our respondents told the names of the parties to which their unions were associated.

This, in one hand shows women workers' less awareness about their unions, on the other hand it also reflects most of the unions close association with the political parties.

REASONS FOR JOINING UNIONS :

Earlier we have discussed the reasons for joining unions of the workers (both men and women workers). Now we will discuss only about the female workers' reasons for joining unions.

A number of different types of reasons we have received from the female respondents for joining unions. The reasons may be single or more. We have excluded the 11 workers from this survey who were members of more than one union and non-members. Only one respondent could not tell the reason for joining union.

The most dominant reason was husband's influence over the female workers followed by fathers' influence. About 90% women respondents told it. Influence of sons, brothers and other relatives were some reasons for joining unions, but they were not so significant.

The next important reason was union's activities i.e. whether this union serves the interest of the workers. If a

union serves the interest of the workers, the workers would naturally join this union. But, here this reason was not as significant as it should be.

Besides the influences of husbands, fathers, female workers also were influenced by their fellow workers, workers of other gardens and by their neighbours.

There were some other reasons also like ethnic affinity, personal gain, in search of a better union etc.; but none of them was so important.

So, it is found that women workers are mainly dependent on the others for choicing their unions, particularly dependency on their husbands and fathers is very high. If follow the general tendency of women folk of our country. Union's positive role for workers' interest is not the prime factor for choicing a union to the women workers. It does not mean that when an women worker joins a union by the influence of her husband or father, the union's activity is not a factor; what we have seen is that the judgement is not of herself, in most cases it depends on the others. The same nature of dependence, more or less, also we would see in case of changing unions in the next few pages.

PERIOD OF MEMBERSHIP :

The period of membership was taken from the time when an worker became a member of a union irrespective of her..

employment status (temporary or permanent). The table below will show the period of membership of the women workers in the three gardens.

TABLE - 8.5

PERIOD OF UNION MEMBERSHIP

(Percentage in brackets)

Years of membership	Lalfa T.E.	Angra-bhasa T.E.	Kurty T.E.	Total
1 yr. or less	5	5	22	32(20.4)
2 to 5 yrs.	14	13	19	46(29.3)
6 to 10 yrs.	5	20	11	36(22.9)
11 to, 15 yrs.	5	7	1	13(8.3)
16 to 20 yrs.	4	4	1	9(5.7)
21 yrs. +	1	10	2	13(8.3)
	<u>34</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>56</u>	<u>149(99.9)</u>
Non-members	0	0	8	08(5.0)
	<u>34</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>157(100)</u>

The above table shows that nearly 50% (20.4 + 29.3 = 49.7%) women respondents' period of membership is not more than 5 years (i.e. for a short period). Membership for a medium period (6 to 10 yrs.) is nearly 23% and membership for a long period (i.e. from 11 yrs. to more than 21 yrs.) is little high than

22%. The short period of union membership is high due to that most of the respondents are young.

CHANGE OF UNIONS :

The table 8.6. shows that around 47% women workers including the 11 non-members and multi-union members have changed unions for one time or more. Excluding the 11 workers the percentage would be around 40%. The extent of change among the women workers is more or less same as all types (both male & female) of workers.

TABLE - 8.6

EXTENT OF CHANGE

(Percentage in brackets)

	Lalfa T.E.	Angra- bhasa T.E.	Kurty T.E.	Total
Changed unions	13	17	33	63(40.12)
Did not change unions	21	42	20	83(52.86)
Members of multi-unions & non-members	0	0	11	11(7.00)
	<u>34</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>157(100)</u>

Like the reasons for joining unions here also female workers depend much on their counterpart, though the degrees of dependency is less than the former (i.e. in case of joining unions). Here also women workers' dependency on their husbands

is the dominant reason than their dependency on sons, fathers etc.

Previous union's incompetency to serve the workers' interest is the next important reason for changing unions. Earlier we have seen that union's activity was not so important factor for joining a union. But this time it became a very important factor.

There were some other reasons also for changing unions which were not so significant. They were influence of other workers, differences with leaders, personal causes (like personal gain etc.) etc.

From this table it was also found that the extent of change was highest in Kurty Tea Estate. Among the respondents who have changed unions around 60% belonged to Kurty Tea Estate. A significant number of them have changed unions for incompetency of the previous unions. Not only that this reason was found highest in this tea estate for change of unions. Members of multi-unions and non-members were also found only in this tea estate. All these shows the instability of trade union movements in this garden.

WOMEN WORKERS' PARTICIPATION IN TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES :

In the day to day union activities such as meetings, processions, demonstrations were the main features. Election of office bearers was one of the most important programme of

the unions, but that is not held regularly.

The following tables will show us the rate of participation, type of participation of women workers in their union activities.

TABLE - 8.7

WOMEN WORKERS' PARTICIPATION IN MEETINGS, PROCESSIONS & DEMONSTRATIONS (Percentage in brackets)

	Lalfa T.E.	Angra- bhasa T.E.	Kurty T.E.	Total
Regular	5	6	6	17(10.32)
Irregular	26	27	47	100(63.69)
Non-participant	3	26	11	40(25.47)
	<u>34</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>157(100)</u>

TABLE - 8.8

WOMEN WORKERS' PARTICIPATION IN ELECTION
(Percentage in brackets)

	Lalfa T.E.	Angra- bhasa T.E.	Kurty T.E.	Total
Participant	10	16	9	35(22.29)
Non-participant	24	43	55	122(77.07)
	<u>34</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>157(100)</u>

So, from the table 8.7 it is found that nearly 11% women respondents participated regularly in the day to day union activities. This is extremely low. However, the percentage of irregular participants is quite low; more than 63% respondents sometimes participate in union activities. And around 25% women respondents never participate in union activities.

Womens' participation in union election is also low. Only around 22% of them participate in union elections.

There are number of reasons for the low participation in union activities. The most vital of these is the housework. The women workers have to do all domestic works in, their home from food preparation to washing clothes. They also have to collect excess firewood. Besides they have to look after their children. After doing all these they find little time to join union activities.

Besides housework, sometimes they also feel shy to join union activities with the males. In this respect low education, low awareness are also barriers.

All the women workers are also not aware of their leaders. It is found that while 80% women respondents are aware of their local leaders, only 40% of them knew their regional/central leaders. This shows in one hand women workers' less awareness about their leaders, on the other hand it also shows the leaders incapability to organise the women workers.

WOMEN LEADERSHIP - PROSPECT OF DEVELOPMENT :

In the tea gardens, though half of the workers are women, they are rarely in the union leadership. In the three gardens studied, we have found only 2 women trade union leaders among 50 union leaders. In another 30 gardens (10 each in Terai, Eastern Dooars and Western Dooars) there are no women leader among 214 union leaders. A study by the Labour Bureau showed that though the bulk of women workers were found unionised but most of them were only passive members and did not play an active trade union role. No sampled women worker in the selected plantations was found holding any responsible position at the decision and policy making level of trade unions (Labour Bureau 1980 ; xiii).

Women workers' rate of participation in union activities is also very low. Their awareness about their unions is also limited. But this picture often becomes totally different when any movement takes pick form. It is often seen that women workers have taken the leadership of a number of movements in their pick form. Not only that it has become a popular practice in the trade union movements in tea plantation that the men union leaders push forward the women workers during any movement, particularly if the situation takes a militant shape. The women workers become more militant than their counterpart in these movements. Besides their (women workers') militancy the male workers also think that the management can not scold or

beat the women workers. Some instances could be cited as for example.

The Sonali Tea Estate of Dooars was abandoned by the management in 1973. The ownership of this garden was handed over the workers with all liabilities which worth Rs.3,400,000. The transfer of ownership was held in the cold season, when there was no production in the garden, only expenses were to be done. Union meetings were held off and on, but these seemed to give no solution. The union leaders were as unsure as the workers. They were faced with a new situation and they did not know how to grapple with it. Then, sometime in the beginning of December, in one such union meeting a solution seemed to emerge. All of a sudden a group of women started chattering amongst themselves excitedly. A hushed silece fell on the rest. The voices died down after a few moments and a women spoke out; let us go to Jalpaiguri. What is the point in sitting here and starving? Let us go to Jalpaiguri to the Sarkar (the civil authorities). Thus the decision to march on foot to Jalpaiguri was taken (Bhowmik 1981 ; 193-194).

There was an incident on 17th April, 1987 in Angrabhasa Tea Estate. The workers of this tea estate gheraoed all the staff and managers for a few hours. The demand was : wages due to be paid on 22nd April should be paid on 18th April on account of Easter-Saturday. The management did not agree as the papers were not ready and also apprehended that it might be a practice in future. The police came and dispersed the agitated workers.

The women workers of this garden took a leading role in this movement.

In the same year another incident was happened in another tea estate of Western Dooars. The then manager of this tea estate was too much rough; off and on used to behave with the workers in an inhuman manner, scold the workers in ugly languages, even the women workers were not exempted by him. One day situation turned violent. The workers were demanding to lessen the thica (quantum of tusk). The manager did not agree. Instead he started abusing the workers. The workers gheraoed the manager, demanding his apology. The manager continued abusing the workers. The workers attacked the manager and killed him. It was heard that women workers were the first who attacked the manager.

Prior to this incident another incident happened in a tea estate of Central Dooars. It occurred with the same manager of the previous tea estate. He was then in the present tea estate. Unable to bear his dirty languages day after day one day women workers of this tea estate tied the manager by a rope and brought him to the A.L.C. office, Birpara.

In 1983, the women workers of a tea estate of Eastern Dooars became disgusted with their union leaders (NUPW). They came to the NUPW, Birpara office and took charges of the garden committee. They run the union smoothly for a couple of years. But ultimately the women workers could not hold the union leadership due to male chauvinism.

So, we have seen that though women workers are not office bearers of their unions yet they often takes the leadership during the pick hours of the workers' struggle. A number of question come-up - whether women workers are reluctant to take formal union leadership? Whether they would be more efficient leaders than their counterpart? Whether their leadership is necessary? We would try to get answers of these questions and also the reasons there of in the following discussion.

A survey on women leadership shows that nearly 35% of the respondents (both male & female) thinks that women workers are not reluctant to take union leadership; more than 40% workers tell that the women workers are reluctant to take union leadership and around 25% of the respondents can not say whether the women workers are reluctant to take union leadership or not.

Why such a high proportion of women workers are reluctant to take union leadership? A number of reasons are told by the respondents.

The most dominant reason is housework. In the tea gardens role of women workers' is very important both in the work life and social life of the tea gardens. They are more committed than their counterpart in their worklike and in their social life women performed all the duties besides contributing their total earnings. They usually get up at

4 a.m., prepare food for the family, perform all other household work, then go to work place. After returning from their work place they again prepare meal, wash clothes and perform other works. Even the excess firewood (besides the quota) is collected by them after their duties. If they have children, they are exclusively brought up by them. They contribute all their earnings to their family. On the other hand the male members of an worker family generally do not perform any household work; after returning from their duties they usually take rest or go to market. Moreover the males are generally liquor addicted, a good portion of their earnings is drained out for it. So, naturally the women workers have little spare time to attend union activities regularly; joining leadership is rather a distant matter to them.

The next important reason is womens' secondary status in society which have made them shy. They feel some sort of social barrier which retarded the growth of mental development for leadership.

Women workers' less education, less awareness about the world outside the tea garden, less experience about union leadership are also some of the reasons told by the respondents for which made the women workers reluctant to take union leadership.

Inter-union rivalry is also a reason for which women workers feel disgusted with union activities and they are not interested to take union leadership.

There are some other reasons also for women workers' less interest to take union leadership. One of them are - the women are more committed to work, they think that if they become more active in union activities, their duties would be hampered; the other causes are fear of management, communication problem etc.

Whether women workers would be more efficient than the male workers, if they take union leadership? Nearly 50% of the workers think that women workers would be more efficient than their counterpart in union leadership; more than 35% of the workers do not think that the women leaders would be more efficient than the men leaders and remaining around 15% workers can not tell whether the women trade union leaders would be more efficient or not.

Why the women leaders would be less efficient? The most important reasons according to our respondents are their (women workers') comparative illiteracy, inexperience, less awareness etc.

Earlier we have seen that women workers' shyness due to their secondary status in society is a reason for which women workers are not coming to union leadership. Here, also, the respondents told that women workers' shyness would also be a barrier for efficient leadership.

There are some other reasons also told by the respondents for probable less efficiency of women leadership such as :
Communication problem - union meetings are held also in nights and also in some distant places. It is not always possible for the woman workers to move in nights and to distant places.

About the necessity of women leadership in trade unions most of the workers agree that women should come forward to take union leadership. Only a small section of the workers do not agree with the former and some of the workers can not tell their decisions about it. Why womens' leadership is so necessary? Some of the respondents can not describe the reasons. These who could tell the reasons, half of them think that women should come into the union leadership because they can convince the other women workers. Another important reason is that women workers can tell their demands more freely to a women leader. In the tea gardens though there is less rigidity about free mixing between male and female workers, but still it is not possible for a male worker to interact so freely with an women worker as it could be done by an women worker. So, it is obvious that an women would be more easy to an women and they can freely discuss their problems among themselves.

Women workers' militancy, courage, managements different attitude with them are some of the most important reasons for which workers thought they (women workers) should take the union leadership. They can stick to their demand until it is

met by the management. The management also obey them as they are women.

Some of the workers think that women workers should also share the responsibilities with the male workers in the union leadership. If they come, the union would be more strong.

In the tea gardens generally the male workers are liquor addicted, there are corruption also among them. Women are not liquor addicted, they are comparatively honest also. These are some of the reasons for which some workers want women leadership in their unions.

Some of the respondents also feel that if the women come forward to take the union leadership the male workers would be more active in the union activities.

The above discussion showed that the workers in general want women leadership in trade unions. Most of them think that women leaders would be more efficient than the male workers and they also admit the necessity of women leadership. A number of central leaders (mainly outside leaders) were interviewed. All of them prefer the women workers as union leaders as the women are more honest, disciplined, less opportunist and sincere to workers' interest. Two unions also organize seminars on role of women workers in trade unions and on women leadership etc., though those

seminars are attained by a few participants.

However, in practice there are very few women trade union leaders in the tea plantation. Why the women workers are so much lagging behind the male workers in the union leadership inspite of their nearly half share in the work force in the tea plantation and their necessity in the union leadership?

Housework, womens' secondary status in society social barrier, less education (both formal and informal) etc. are some of the most important barriers for the development of women leadership which we have discussed earlier.

But there are some other reasons also. They are - in the tea industry traditionally the union leaderships were in the hands of male workers. It was obvious in a male dominated society. Perhaps women workers did not felt necessity to come into the leadership in the past. Now the situation have been changed. The trade union movements now is going through a stagnant phase. Many of the recommendations of Plantation Labour Act. Have yet to be fulfilled. The unions do not care for it, they are mainly concerned with the three years wage agreement, annual bonus etc. The other demands of workers such as-regular supply of firewood, repairing of their quarters etc. remained unfulfilled. For it, the women workers are the worst sufferer. They have to pay more for the incompetent, inactive, dishonest leaders. Naturally, now-a-

days there are a growing dissatisfaction among the women workers. They want a change. In a number of situation it is seen that they have taken leadership from the males during the movements. They feel the necessity to come forward. Male workers also admit women workers' efficiency and necessity in the union leadership, their leaders (both the garden level and central level) also support it, but still the males are not mentally prepare to transfer the leadership to the females. A sense of male - chauvinism dominate their minds. The central leaders also are not exception to that. All these actually retarded the development of women leadership.

CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding chapters we have tried to study the tea plantation workers of Terai and Dooars regions of North Bengal. We have searched the origins of these workers, nature of the labour force, history of trade union movements, functioning of trade unions, trade union leadership, social life of the workers and the changes that have taken place in their social life including the prospect of women leadership.

Almost all the labourers in the tea plantation of Terai and Dooars are immigrants and their descendants. Majority of them came from the Chotonagpur - Santal Pargana region of Bihar and a section of them came from Nepal. Those who came from Chotonagpur - Santal Pargana region were mainly tribal (adivasi) and the immigrants from Nepal were both caste and tribal people. The adivasi workers of Chotonagpur - Santal Pargana region are divided into different tribes like - Oraon, Munda, Kharia, Santal, Mahali, Baraik, Turi and so on; the workers of Nepali origin were also divided into various castes and tribes, such as - Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Tamang, Chettri, Sarki, Damai etc. They were pushed from their homeland and at the same time they were also pulled by the vague promises of better life in the tea gardens. Exploitation of landlords, administrators, moneylenders with the recurrent natural calamities, famines set the stage for migration. The recruiters (Sardars) did the final work with their false assurances. The adivasi people came, cut up the dense, malarious forest and established the tea gardens. The migration

was family based as the nature of works in tea plantation demanded it.

They had to work from dawn to dusk. The wages were fixed arbitrarily by the management. The workers had no say in it. The wages they were paid were less than that of the agricultural labourers in these areas. The monthly wages in the early period ranged from Rs.2 to Rs.5 per person. In 1857 a labourer could be secured at Rs.2½ per month but this was soon raised to Rs.4 and more due to building up of railways and other public works as well as by the opening up of the country to money economy.

The conditions of their houses were extremely deplorable. They were made of mud, bamboo, and thatch. They were not regularly repaired. Rain water was the part & parcel of their life. The houses were overcrowded as they were too small. There was no arrangement for latrines, bathrooms and drainage system. There were also no provision for sufficient drinking water. The houses were devoid of sunlight as most of them had no windows and no space for ventilation. All these made the houses so unhygienic, unhealthy where human being can hardly be grown up properly. The paths in between the houses were Kuchcha and in rainy season it became so slippery that it was really difficult to go through. The medical facilities were barely minimum. There were little scope for education. Most of the gardens had no primary

schools. The communication system was extremely poor. Roads and paths were not developed. Most of the gardens were surrounded by forests.

The management was tyrant. Every minor offence was punishable. The workers were beaten up, thrown out of the garden without any sufficient reason. No outsider, even the relatives of the workers could enter the gardens without any prior permission of the managers. The British planters even maintained their own army - the North Bengal Mounted Rifles.

Thus the tea garden workers were isolated from the rest of country, they were insulated and it was an enclave economy. The workers were at the helm of the management. They did not have any organisation to voice their will, their misery, their helpless condition.

Moreover, the workers were not a homogeneous group. Earlier we have told that the adivasis of Chotonagpur - Santal Pargana region were divided into various tribes. A clear hierarchy existed among them. The Oraon, Munda, Santal, Kheria etc. were the agricultural tribes. They formed one status group. While Baraik, Mahali, Turi etc. were the artisan tribes. They also formed another status group. The former claimed themselves superior to the latter. People of these two groups would not dine with each other. They maintained strictly the concept of purity and pollution. Inter-

tribal marriage was strictly forbidden and a punishable offence among them. There was tribal panchayet who mitigated all the social, political, religious disputes among them.

This was the condition of the workers in the pre independence period. Independence, development of communications and the trade unions were the most important factors which broke the ironchest isolation of the plantation workers. We will now see how the trade unions intervend in the socio-economic life of these workers.

It was in 1946, both Terai and Dooars witnessed the first sign of organised trade union movements. Though before that, there were some short lived, sporadic, unorganised labour unrest in both of these areas. In the initial phase the trade union organisers had to face stiff resistance from the planters. They also faced resistance from the rival unions. However in 1955, tea garden workers created history. Workers of almost all the gardens, of all the unions joined the Bonus movement. Not only that, peasants of these areas also came forward to help the tea garden workers.

In 1962, most of the major trade unions of the tea gardens formed a coordination committee - coordination committee of tea plantation workers. Actually it was unofficially formed during the Bonus movement of 1955. It shows the sense of unity among the workers which leads all the workers of different trade unions under one organisation. This was an

unique incident of working class unity. Perhaps, there was no other industry in West Bengal where different unions of different political ideologies unitedly formed a coordination committee. Forming of coordination committee did not always mean that there was no inter-union rivalry, no differences of opinions among them, but it was an attempt to lessen the inter-union rivalries, differences of opinions and ultimately to learn to fight unitedly for the working class interest.

In 1966 and 1969, the workers of tea plantation of North Bengal struck work for payment of arrear, revision of wages, filling up of vacancies etc. Both these movements were organised by the coordination committee. We have seen not all the unions participated equally in these movements. In 1966, one union, in the initial phase did not join this movement, but when police fired in the hills and killed one worker, this union joined this movement. One of the staff union struck work for 3 days in support of this movement. This again showed the unity of tea garden workers.

From all these we may conclude that though organised trade union movements have started in the tea plantation of North Bengal in a latter stage, it did not take much time to give it a shape.

Then, from 1970 and onwards there were no large scale movements in the tea gardens of these areas. Most of the industry-wise negotiations were done through the tripartite conciliations where representatives of government, planter

and workers took part. Settlement of workers' demands only through the tripartite conciliations did not mean that workers' all rational demands were met through these conciliations; actually these conciliations were mainly restricted to yearly bonus negotiations and tri-annual wage negotiations.

Though the wages have increased, still the tea plantation workers are the lowest paid among the organised sector. The quantity and quality of the houses are poor. All the workers are yet to get quarters and not all the quarters are pucca. Still there are sufficient number of kuchcha quarters. The pucca houses are not built according to specification. There are no drainage facilities, facilities for drinking water (tube-wells) are minimum; number of latrines, bathrooms are more than insufficient. The condition of paths remained the same, in the rainy season these become too muddy to walk. There is no provision for electricity. It is rather a distant hope to the workers. Repairing of old quarters are not done regularly. We have seen that in the gardens workers are often demanding for repairing of their quarters. The quantity of firewood given, is not according to the requirement of a workers' family. The supply is also irregular. We have also seen that workers are often demanding for regular supply of firewood. The medical facilities are minimum. In the studied three gardens we have seen that there were only three doctors (2 permanent, 1 visiting) for 12,306 population; the number of hospitals were only two, number of Dispensary was one; there

were only 34 beds in these two hospitals, the number of other staff (Midwives, Nurses, Compounders, Health Assistants) were only twelve. If we see the condition of Terai and Dooars, we will find that for 566,778 population of 167 gardens (record received) there are only 119 hospitals with 3230 beds, 48 dispensaries, 181 doctors (171 residentials, 10 visiting) and 654 other staffs in 1987 (source - office of the labour commissioner, Calcutta, Govt. of W. Bengal). The availability of medicine is also extremely poor.

The condition of creches is also not up to the mark. The food items (mainly milk) supplied, is not sufficient. There is no arrangement of recreation for the children.

Though most of the gardens now have primary schools, they are not properly equipped. School buildings are not properly maintained, number of benches are not sufficient, teachers do not come regularly, there are no provision for mid-day tiffin to attract the students. The medium of instructions is either Hindi or Bengali. It should be in Sadri as the lingua franca of tea garden workers is Sadri.

The protective measures for those who work with pesticides, insecticides are not sufficient.

Most of the gardens do not have any recreational facilities for their workers.

In the work structure, there is no scope for educated tribal youth to get a service in the staff category.

Another very important feature is that since 1969 the mutually agreed land-labour (permanent) ratio was 1:2.8 i.e. 2.8 labour per 1 hectare of land. But even in 1985 it was (the ratio) around 1:2.4. It leads to the heavy casualization. A survey on the casual labour in the tea plantation in 149 tea gardens of West Bengal shows that the ratio of casual labour to permanent workers is 50.6%. This in fact much higher than the estimates given by all quarters (Bhowmik 1991 : 30).

Earlier we have mentioned that the workers were not a homogeneous group. Social hierarchy, inter-tribal barrier, concept of purity and pollution etc. existed among the different tribes. These have eroded a lot. Though still the agricultural tribal group thinks themselves superior than the artisan tribal group, yet their sense of superiority is not so high as it was in the previous days. They still maintain concept of purity and pollution, but not so much strictly. It has become more flexible now, particularly the young tribal workers do not maintain it. They dine with each other irrespective of any tribes. The existence of this barrier mainly would be found among the people of old generation and to some extent among the females. Inter-tribal marriages are now increasing and the party just has to pay a mere fine to show formal obedience to the earlier rituals. Actually the tea garden workers irrespective of their social differences, have

started thinking themselves under a common identity - we are madesia (people of my country), we are adivasi.

In the recent years we have noticed that there is a change in the union leadership. The old leaders have been replaced by the youth leaders. The workers prefer those leaders who are more vocal, can put right argument during the negotiations with the management, who are more active and also who are comparatively educated. In this respect tribal affinity does not play any significant role. Earlier we have mentioned that trade union movements in the tea plantation of Terai & Dooars are going through a stagnating phase, which have made the workers less ambitious. Years after years (nearly 20 yrs.) in a stagnant environment, where there is more or less no struggle (Union movements), the workers have become used to the existing situation.

They have also been convinced by their leaders to be satisfied with this situation. In that respect, they are more or less happy with the existing leadership; though sometimes a section of them express their unhappiness, but those are sporadic and short lived. Very recently we have seen that the workers use to come to observe the tripartite negotiations in the A.L.C. (Assistant Labour Commissioner) office. Though this happens very rarely, it shows their distrust on their leaders.

We have also seen that after 40 years of trade union movements still the garden level leaders are dependent on the

central leaders. The local leaders (garden level) can not take any major decision on their own. For every major decision they wait for the central leaders (outside leaders).

(We have also seen that around half of the tea plantation workers are female. It is an astonishing fact that their representations in the union leadership is virtually nil. It is more astonishing that when we see that their roles in the pick forms of trade unions movements. Though they can not participate regular union activities due to housework, sickness etc., but there are lots of examples where we have seen that women workers have taken the lead. They are more militant than their counterpart when militancy is required. They are also more honest and committed to the causes. They can stick to their demands until these are fulfilled. The men workers are aware of it. They push forward the women workers when they think it is necessary. But they do not keep them in the union leadership. It is true that women workers generally do not want to be in the union leadership as they get little time to join the regular union activities after doing all the household works. Their secondary status in the society makes them shy away from responsibilities outside the household. Moreover their comparative illiteracy, less awareness also debarred them from taking union leadership (formal). But the most important reason is that male workers are not ready to transfer the union leadership to them. The male workers do not agree to act according to an women leader. In this respect role of

central leaders also is in tune with the garden level leaders.

So far we are discussing about the socio-economic conditions of the workers in the pre-trade union stage (also pre-independence age) and about the same after trade unions have intervened in their lives. Now we would try to see how much the trade unions have ^{been} successful in bringing changes in the socio-economic conditions of the workers.

Trade unions have made a lot of positive contributions to the lives of the tea garden workers. Perhaps, the foremost of them ^{is} that they broke the servility of workers towards the planters. They have made the workers aware of their rights and taught them to fight for them. The workers could now realize the need for a union. Thus the trade unions have united the workers. Workers belonging to different ethnic groups came under the banner of trade union.

In the economic sphere, the wages have increased of course, but not according to the price index. It is difficult to say the basis of their wage increase. From 1950 to 1974 the average annual increase in daily wages was a mere 8 p. However, after 1977 wages have increased at a faster rate. During the time of my field work the daily wage of an worker was only Rs.12.10 (June, 1987). It ~~has~~ now (May, 1992) have increased to Rs.17.90. Both of these wages were lowest in the organised sectors also lower than the statutory wage of the agricultural labour in the state.

Regarding the houses, drinking water, medical facilities, education etc. trade unions have failed to make any significant contributions. The Plantation Labour Act of 1951 stated that all workers should have been provided with permanent houses by 1969. But still now 30 percent houses are of kuchcha type. We have already told about the medical facilities available in the tea gardens. It is surprising that trade union shows little interest about these. Another very important sphere which trade union ignores is the education of the workers. It is rarely found that any trade union is seriously encouraging the workers to take education and demanding better facilities in the schools. Trade unions do not organise the workers to launch any movement on these problems.

In the social life of the workers the impacts of trade unions is rather indirect. Uniting the workers of ethnic groups under the banner of trade union has helped to erase the inter-tribal barrier. Participating union activities regularly with the co-workers belonging to different ethnic groups, and sometimes staying with them under a common roof and dinning with them have slowly eroded the barrier first among the union activists and then among the general workers partially. Moreover, most of the traditional tribal panchayet have now been replaced by the union leaders, who are mostly young. The young trade union leaders are less orthodox about the social barrier among the tribes. This

has also contributed towards eroding the inter-tribal barrier.

The trade unions also have failed to develop organic leaders. It takes no interest in developing leadership from the grass root level. It also does not encourage the women workers to come to the union leadership.

Summarising all these we may conclude that inspite of some positive contributions, trade unions have failed to change the conditions of the existence of the workers significantly. The all-round development of the workers is not possible without changing the conditions of their existence. Working class consciousness develop out of the objective conditions and the subjective awareness about it. Trade unions have also failed to develop the subjective awareness of the workers. Thus the trade union movements in the tea gardens have failed to take the shape of the working class movements.

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