

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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(11)

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I would like to express my gratitude to the lock out and labour problems at Gocntee Tea Estate in early December 1981

which in a way initiated this study. The involuntary role that I had to perform in course of my duty for an agreed and acceptable role to bring back order and discipline at the Coontee Tea Estate created a deep urge in my mind to understand the functioning of the tea gardens in hill areas. It is, therefore, in the fitness of things that I owe to Shri Mahabir Prasad, the Proprietor of Coontee Tea Estate, Sri T. S. Sarang and C. N. Pradhan, Trade Union leaders of the Coontee Tea Estate, numerous Tea garden workers, who were aggressive but reasonable, and to the Secretary, Tea Association of India (Siliguri Branch) a personal gratitude.

I would acknowledge my gratitude to the Department of Home (PAR) Government of West Bengal for putting me in charge of a hill sub-division, Kurseong, which is bordered by tea in all its directions. Gratitude is also due to the Government of West Bengal for permitting me to under-take study. The heat of unrest -- of labour and management at tea gardens -- was also instrumental for warning me up for a study of this kind. Finally, I would like to acknowledge to all people at Kurseong and Darjeeling who were tea-men in various senses for nursing my zeal to understand tea of hills.

OBJECTIVE OF THE THESIS

The study of the Darjeeling Tea Industry with reference to its sickness since Independence was taken upto understand the situations instrumental for the present state of affairs of the industry. The tea gardens in Darjeeling provided sustenance and foundation for the growth of the hill-economy for a century or so. It was the spread-effects of tea gardens that led to the growth of urban centres and settlements. The coming into being of a picturesque district like Darjeeling is but due to green landscaping provided by tea gardens. The purpose of this thesis is to understand the problems of Darjeeling tea gardens with reference to sickness since independence.

Tea gardens contribute nearly one third of the national income in the Darjeeling hill areas and employ nearly one third of the total working population in the hill areas. Therefore, sickness of the gardens has brought in Socio-economic and political tension. Moreover, tea gardens which happened to be the largest employment giving sector have not expanded and developed since independence.

It has been endeavoured to understand the perspective and causal factors that might have tended to bring out this state of affairs. It is in this context evolution of

The industry since inception has been sketched to understand the age of the present bushes in Darjeeling tea gardens whose economic life seems to have expired quite a long ago. The impact of the second world war, the independence of the country and the entry of the Indian business community transferred the very edifice of the industry. The frequency of the transfer of owners, background of the neo-owners along with the present quality of managerial cadre have been highlighted to understand their relevance and share in the ongoing state of affairs. The approach of the new management has been detailed to identify their role-relationship for the present state of affairs. It is in this background the role of labourer has been discussed to find out their productivity and also to identify whether loss in production on grounds of strikes and lock-outs has contributed in any meaningful way for the malaise of Darjeeling tea gardens.

It has been attempted to understand the character of cost of producing tea and how far cost of production as quoted for Darjeeling tea is really higher than other tea zones and can be accepted without discount.

The method of disposal of tea through forums of auction market and ex-garden sales has been brought in along with price formations through the same. The state of affairs in export market has also been added to find correlation between

price of tea and export.

The varieties of fiscal imports - state and Central have been detailed to infer whether burden of taxation in tea industry is really high and discriminatory vis-a-vis other agro-based industries of the country.

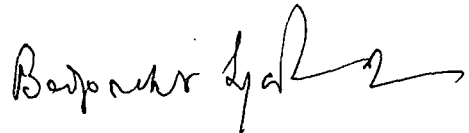
The liquidity problems of the Darjeeling tea gardens have been explained in details. The role of institutional arrangements, terms and conditions of the institutions, the extent of availment of benefits have been focussed to understand whether liquidity crisis is real. The role of neo-owners providing finance to the industry as against those of the earlier decades has also been discussed for proper evaluation of the issue.

The nature of profit in the Darjeeling tea gardens has been traced from earlier decades and the character of the cyclical nature of profit has been discussed. The proposal for Tea Price Stabilisation Fund in the Draft Seventh Five Year Plan has also been indicated.

Case studies have been added to highlight the general pattern of behaviour of neo-owners in the Darjeeling tea industry and their approach towards the industry. Along with the

(viii)

some the roles of the Tax Board, Government of India and the Government of West Bengal have been covered to understand their contribution to this present state of affairs.



(BIRENDRAS SHEKHAR ROY)

Rajabhatbhubanpar
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