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Certificate from the supervisor

Certified that, Mr.Surjapada Paul, Assistant Professor in Geography, Siliguri College, worked under my supervision while preparing his thesis "Socio – Economic Condition of Tea Garden Workers of Dooars Region, West Bengal and Formulation of Development Strategies". He has fulfilled all the requirements relating to the submission of a thesis for the Ph.D. degree under University of North Bengal. The thesis is the result of his own investigation and neither the thesis nor any part thereof was submitted for any other degree of this or any other university.

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DECLARATION

The present work in this thesis entitled "Socio – Economic Condition of Tea Garden Workers of Dooars Region, West Bengal and Formulation of Development Strategies" has been carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. Sushma Rohatgi, Associate Professor, Department of Geography and Applied Geography, University of North Bengal. I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work in this thesis is original and not submitted anywhere for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy or any other degree.

Dated- The ..16th...May, 2014

Surjapada Paul
Signature of the candidate

PREFACE

Tea plantation as an organised industry came up around the middle of the nineteenth century in India. Two major tea producing states are Assam and West Bengal. Tea development of tea plantation in Assam is rooted in the history of India. It is summarized as the gift of the colonial administration being favoured by geographical and political factors which have paved the way for the early start of tea plantation in Assam. It started during 1840s in Assam valley and 1855s in Surma valley. In West Bengal the districts of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling are the only two districts where tea is produced. Bengal Dooars appeared on the tea map of India lately by 1874.

Tea plantation is an agro-based enterprise in which large numbers of manual workers are required around the clock. The workers both skilled and unskilled live within the plantation area. Tea plantation also provides maximum employment per household. The success of the tea industry depends upon the labour whose strenuous efforts produce maximum green crop. The tea plantation workers play a significant role in the management of tea industry all over the world. Nearly half of the labour force is supplied by the women folk. Labourers are employed in tea industry both in field and factory operations. They are mainly resident and also outside workers. Resident workers are the permanent labourers of the garden whereas outside workers are temporary or casual labourers. Both resident and outside workers are again divided into male, female, adolescent and children categories based on their sex and age.

In West Bengal the local labourers (local tribal labour) engaged in the early state were found inactive, lazy and indisciplined and were mostly conscious. Consequently, the colonial rulers and European planters decided to import labourers from the famine stricken states of Bihar (mainly Chotonagpur), Eastern U.P., Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh where the workers are facing starvation. The poor, illiterate and innocent persons were misled by the recruiting agents. Many false and golden promises were put forward before them and they were lured under compelling circumstances and they came to Dooars with hungry stomach and empty bowls. Fortune did not smile on them and they had to face untold miseries in the early part of the tea plantation. However, they were forced to settle permanently in different tea gardens of Dooars. Many generations have passed since then and the workers have been acclimatized in Dooars and have become part and parcel of socio economic life of West Bengal in general and Dooars in

particular. For the plantation workers, West Bengal is their permanent abode and they were forgotten their ancestral places.

The plantation labourers of Dooars were mostly from the weaker section of the society and were tortured and exploited by the local landlords. Their descendants are still working in the tea gardens of Dooars. They belong to multi-ethnic and multi linguistic origin. They have been kept or are forced to remain at the lowest rungs of the society in political, education, economic progress and cultural life. In the past they were denied even an identifying name such as Adivasi. Vested interests quibbled over the etymology of the word, even though there are no people in India designated by their profession or work. Yet the Adivasis have been designated as "Tea garden labourers" or as "Plantation labourers" in Dooars. However, with the passage of time they have lost everything, their ancestral places, the sweet languages and culture and now they have been acclimatized in the local languages and culture. Though they have been kept aloof, due to irony of fate, they represent a unique class of people who are really seemed to be most graceful in the gardens environment as that of a child in his mother's lap.

The vestiges of the feudal culture in tea industry are still observed in tea gardens of Dooars, unparalleled in any other industrial sector. The labour community of the industry is still untouched by modern progressive development. The wages they receive do not match the welfare of the labour. Till today no sincere efforts have been made by any corner say Govt. or management to liberate these people from the clutches of feudalism by providing proper facilities for education. This has made them more and more dependent on the master rather than being independent. The wages and other benefits to be provided to the labour are determined by tripartite meeting comprising the management, the Govt. of West Bengal and representative of the tea workers.

The study on the tea garden workers of Dooars is important from sociological, historical and anthropological point of view. The present study is an attempt to unravel the socio economic condition of tea workers, impact of various legislations role of trade unions, workers condition, the changing cultural profile of the tea garden community etc. in the Dooars region of West Bengal. The year from 2009 to 2013 around 21 tea gardens located in the Dooars region are either locked out or abandoned for certain period and some of them still closed creating huge socio economic crisis in this region. Many tea gardens located in the Dooars region have failed

to fulfil their statutory obligations of labour welfare as stipulated by the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 creating fear psychosis in the minds of the tea workers. As a result, the condition of the tea workers is appalling and beyond description. Their socio economic condition did not improved to the desired level. The socio cultural awareness of the plantation workers is still sordid and undeveloped. Henceforth, they are bound to start of taking various kinds of agitation movements in order to create pressure on their respective management for securing maximum benefits. As a result of which labour management relations have been seriously affected. These deteriorating industrial relations have ultimately affected the morale of tea workers. They are getting fewer wages in comparison to workers in other industries. The workers are still in distress, backward and poverty stricken, the main cause of which are large scale illiteracy, ignorance, lack of guidance, the habit of drinking alcohol etc. So, it leads to establish the fact that simply by enacting some legislation, the socio economic conditions of the large chunk of tea plantation workers cannot be improved but by educating them in proper perspective of the problems which they are to encounter in their day to day life.

On the light of the findings of the study, it is intended to recommend some suggestive measures for the welfare of the tea garden workers to ameliorate their socio economic conditions as well as the overall growth and deveiopment of the tea industries of Dooars region of West Bengal.

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16.5.14

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