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AN OVERVIEW OF TEA GARDENS AND LABOUR SITUATION IN DOOARS AREA OF JALPAIGURI DISTRICT

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Abstract:- A long tradition has been maintained in the development and progress of tea industry Dooars area of Jalpaiguri districts. This garden-based industry began to flourish from the late 19th century. The English traders found this part very ideal for tea plantation. They brought people of different communities to work in the gardens from the hills and from several parts of north Bihar, Chhotanagpur area and southern parts of West Bengal. Thus the tea gardens show people of mixed community. Their life pattern, including culture, livelihood and the work environment changed remarkably over the last one and a half decade. A study has been conducted here make an assessment of the infrastructural characteristics of some selected tea estates of this geographical region. The study was conducted during 2010-2014 upon three tea gardens, namely Ranicherra, Washabarie and Leesh River Tea Gardens.

Keywords: Tea Gardens , Labour Situation , Dooars Area , progress of tea industry .

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE PEOPLE

A greater part of Dooars and Terai remained under deep forest for a long time in the past where only some groups of tribes used to live from the historical time. The first attempt to study the people inhabiting the Dooars was made in 1858-59 at the time of the Revenue Survey of the then Rangpur. A rough census was conducted and it was found that the population of the permanently settled part of the Jalpaiguri district, as well as the Dooars as a whole was 1,89,067 persons (District Census Handbook of Jalpaiguri, 2001). In 1870 the deputy commissioner reported that the estimated population of Dooars was very low. Later his view was proven correct when the first census was taken in 1871-72. As it has been mentioned that it was very difficult to conduct a complete census, and a gradual enumeration was made which lasted throughout the winter season. Serious difficulties were experienced owing to the fact that most of the village headmen, who were appointed enumerator, were illiterates.

The work was, however, continued and the population was found to be 3, 27,985 persons inhabiting an area of approximately 10,000 km², giving an average density of 33 per km². There was a steady influx of population into the Western Dooars afterwards where the land was fertile and the rates of rent were relatively low. Actually, migration of people from the neighbouring districts to the fertile waste land of the Western Dooars began as soon as the British rule ensured the safety of the life and the property in this part of Dooars. As a result subsequent census showed an even more remarkable increase of population. The population of Dooars has been reported as 1, 82,687 persons in 1881 which has increased to 2, 96,384 and 4, 10,606 persons in 1891 and 1901.

It is an established fact that the growth of the population in the Western Dooars has been owing to the rise of the tea industry and partly to the influx of settlers from other districts and from the east the then Coochbehar state. Tea was first grown in the district in 1874-75 and since that time, the industry made rapid progress; in 1876-77 there were 13 tea gardens occupying an area of 818 acres under tea with the total outrun of about 14,00,000kgs. In order to work in these tea gardens a large number of the labours were required and this led to an enormous immigration of the labour class people mainly from the areas of Chotanagpur, Jharkhand and Santhal Parganas, West Bengal. As per the Report of (1889-95) Ranchi area alone supplied about 80,000 labours, most of them were mainly Oraons and Mundas, and the Santhal Parganas about 10, 000. However, in the gardens located on the slopes of the hills the labour force was mainly dominated by the Nepalis (Sundeer, 1889-1895).

Many tea-garden porters, after working for a time and saving some money settled permanently in this

district of West Bengal. Oraons were hard working and practiced excellent cultivation. Many Nepalis took up land and a flourishing settlement developed in the areas around the Alipurduar Tahsil. In addition to the ex-tea garden porters number of people from Rangpur and Coochbehar in the south migrated to Dooars being attracted by the fertile land and low rents.

According to the Census of India (1891) the number of Europeans in the district was 284 in 1901; most of them are employed as managers or inhabitant managers of tea the gardens.

In Jalpaiguri district the total population according to the census of 1901 was 7, 87,380 persons, the number of inhabitants of the district has increased by 15.67 % since 1891. There was a decrease in every police station in the regulation part of the district owing to migration to the Western Dooars, Patgram on the east of the Tista river showing the largest decrease of 5.28 %. The population of the Western Dooars showed a large increase which was well marked in the Alipurduars subdivision where it was reported 64.75 %.

In Western Dooars the number of races has been remarkably numerous, ranging from European planters to Meches and Garos, who from the later part of the 19th century began to abandon their nomadic habits and primitive system of cultivation by jumming and settled down as real farmers. According to Karmakar (2011) development of tea-garden industry made possible the agglomeration of a amazing variety of races in the Western Dooars among which the Oraons and Mundas from Chotanagpur and Santhal from Purnia have been the most numerous. Many Bengalesees from Coochbehar also migrated in this part to work as tea-garden labours, while, Nepalis came to the hills and settled down in the north. Additionally, local indigenous population comprising the Rajbangshis, Muhammada and the Meches as well as Bhutias in the district has also been reported by Karmakar.



Plate 1: A part of the Ranicherra tea garden in Dooars

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES FOR WELFARE OF THE TEALABOUR COMMUNITY

The Tea Board, constituted by an Act of Parliament, deals with the development of tea business in the country. Since 2002, with the implementation of the 10th Five Year Plan (2002-2007) the two departments (The Directorate for Welfare of Tea Garden and Ex-Tea Garden Tribes, and Assam Tea Labour Welfare Board) are working on welfare schemes for this community. The Directorate for Welfare of Tea Garden Tribes (including ex-Tea Garden people) implements schemes for the welfare of the tea-tribes population. For promotion of education, scholarships are awarded and grants-in-aid are provided. The Directorate that was established in 1983 for the welfare of the Tea Tribes Community has been implementing various schemes in the state. For economic development of the people, it provides grants-in-aid under “Family Oriented Income Generating Schemes” to those below poverty line with the objective of enabling the families to enhance their annual income (<<http://www.teaboard.gov.in>> ;accessed on 12 April, 2015).

Plantation Labour Act, 1951: Under the Plantation Labour Act, 1951, the socio-economic development was assigned to the tea management company who employs the labour for their production. The Act has a provision on the registration of the plantation by the chief inspector of the state government. The chief inspector of the state government has to verify the provision of the health facility of the tea garden, drinking water, sanitations, canteen, crèches, recreational facilities, housing facilities, etc. The Act provides that no adult worker/adolescent or child shall be employed for more than 48 hours and 27 hours respectively a week, and also every worker is entitled for one day of rest every seven days. The rules prepared by the state government out of the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 have lopsided provisions. An official committee has suggested review of the relevant provisions in the Act as these provisions instituted in the early years of the industry has become onerous in view of the widening chasm between productivity of labour and the compensation disbursed. The Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) which was set up by

the Union Labour Minister had looked into the various issues relating to the plantation sector in the country.

The plantation labour act 1951 provides for the welfare of plantation labour and regulates the condition of work in plantation. The plantation labour Act is unique in the fact that it requires the employer to provide the workers with medical facilities, housing facilities, sickness and maternity benefits and other form of social security measures.

The Provisions laid down under the Plantation Labour Act 1951 are the following:

i) Housing facility: As per section 15 of the Plantation labour Act, 1951, every employer and his family is required to be provided with accommodation facilities with adequate space.

ii) Medical facility: According to Section 10 of the Plantation Labour Act, every plantation area shall be provided and maintained so as to be readily available such medical facilities for the workers (and their families) as may be prescribed by the State Government. The Medical care and health facilities in the tea gardens form an integral part of the labour welfare programme. This would not only provide protection against sickness which causes absenteeism but also ensure availability of physically fit and stable manpower for economic development.

iii) Educational facilities: Section 14 of the plantation labour Act, states that the state government may frame rule requiring every employer to be provided with educational facility for their children between the age of 6 and 10 years.

iv) Drinking water: Under the Plantation Labour Act Section 8, in every plantation effective arrangement shall be made by the employer to be provided with facilities for living at convenient places in the plantation. Supply of sufficient drinking water for the workers must be arranged.

v). Canteen facility: Under section 11 of the Plantation Labour Act, the state government may make rules so that in every plantation area of one hundred and fifty workers as ordinarily employed, one or more canteens shall be provided with and maintained by the employer for supplying ready meal for the workers.

vi) Crèches facility: According to section 12 of the Plantation Labour Act, the employer must provide and maintain suitable rooms for children where the number of workers is more than fifty or the number of children of women workers is twenty or more.

vii) Recreational Facilities: Section 13 of the Plantation Labour Act every employer is required to have provision for having recreational facilities for them and their children.

viii) Non Statutory Benefits: Certain others welfare measures are also to be provided in the tea plantation which is not statutory in nature. These non-statutory benefits are provided according to the character of the demands submitted by the trade unions and the terms of settlements of the Tripartite Level Meetings. The important non-statutory benefits provided to which the planters have to provide to the workers which would include the following:

a) Concessional/subsidized food grains: The management is liable to supply weekly ration at subsidized rates to all workers. Wages for tea plantation workers would consist of cash component and subsidized food grains. Rations therefore form an important part of wages of the tea plantation workers. Ration includes rice, wheat and kerosene oil.

b) Fuels (firewood): Every worker is to be supplied with sufficient amount of fire wood for domestic use on yearly basis.

c) Umbrella and Slippers: Every year (mostly before the rainy season) the management has to supply umbrella and slippers to the workers.

d) Tarpaulin and kambal: The management also has to supply tarpaulin to the workers to be used during the work.

The report of Integrated Marketing Communications said that in the event of the state providing the welfare amenities ordinarily available to citizens of the country need to extend to plantation estates; therefore, the relevant provisions in plantation labour act need to be reviewed. The Tea Board head office is in Kolkata, and it has three divisions in Assam. The board coordinates the development of tea gardens and up gradation of quality through modernization of tea factories and extension services to growers. Apart from popularizing Indian tea, the board also looks into regulation of various statutory provisions for the control of the tea industry and trade, collecting data and disseminating information on tea periodically to various stakeholders for effective policy intervention and initiatives, welfare of labour through the efforts of various agencies involved in welfare activities among tea garden workers.

Trade union and its movement in Tea garden: Trade union has always been an integral part of the labour. It always stands for the welfare of the worker. The “Dooars Cha Bagan Worker” union which is the largest union in the area, which is affiliated to United Trade Union Congress. Historically it was first Trade union which was established in 1948 and thereafter the process of forming the union was in progress, the region has experienced the role of many trade unions in the tea garden. At the beginning of the trade union movement we can see that the whole worker was merely interested in the activities of the single trade union. Nowadays we see that if the emerging trade union cannot fulfill the demand of the worker than they are obviously interested in the other trade union. Today in Dooars the entry of Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Vikas Parisad has made all other Trade union in minor. The trade union basically demand the basic need of the worker which include high wages, good medical facilities, proper educational facilities to the worker children, adequate rations and proper housing and sanitation. Presently there are more than 10 trade union which are actively participating in the welfare of the labour, the few trade union are ABAVP trade union, CITU, INTUC, GJMTU, Trinamul congress trade union, etc. The following table shows the interest of the workers in the functioning of the Trade union in the tea garden.

Table 1: Showing the interest of the worker towards trade unions

<i>Name of the Tea Gardens</i>	<i>Interested in Trade Union</i>	<i>Not Interested in Trade Union</i>
Ranicherra Tea Estate	42	8
Washabarie Tea Estate	39	11
Leesh River Tea Estate	35	15

Source: Data collected from respected tea gardens.

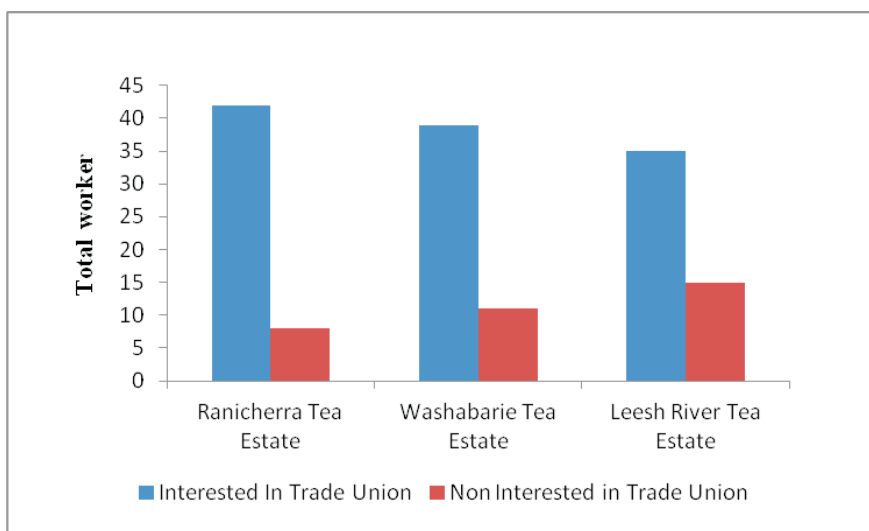
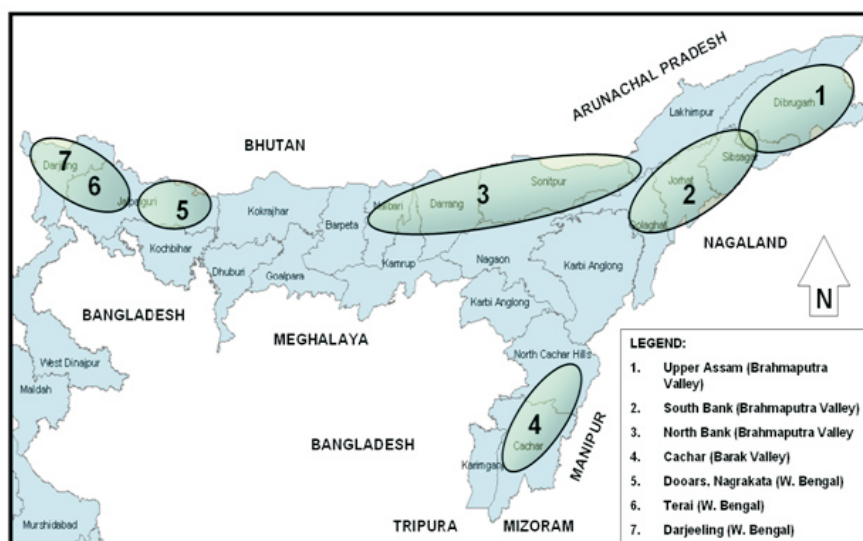


Figure 1: showing the Interest of worker towards trade union

From the above figure it can be assumed the pattern of interest of the tea plantation workers for being associated with the trade union movement. Since the trade union plays a vital role for the welfare of the worker, it is seen that a large proportion of the workers have genuine interest for the trade union movement for materialising their demand.

3: Tea Plantation, Production and Revenue Generation

The Tea industry is the second largest employing sector in India which has been trying to focus the attention of the Government in India for its development. Tea plantation and tea industry which started to expand in Jalpaiguri in Western Dooars from nearby Darjeeling district started in a very rapid manner, for which a greater part of forest area started to be furnished for the tea cultivation which use to attract large number of worker from the Darjeeling district, from Nepal and adjoining states of the country. All the well known Tea Estate in Jalpaiguri district are merely located in Jalpaiguri district, The first tea garden in Jalpaiguri district was started in Gazilduba in 1874 (Gunning,1907) and after that there was increased in the number of the tea garden. At present, there are approximately 153 in tea gardens in Dooars and 45 in Terai region of West Bengal. The tea growing region of West Bengal and Northeast India comprising Darjeeling, Dooars and Terai is given figure below.



Source: Adopted from Bhat et al. (n.d.)

Figure 2: Tea growing region of West Bengal and Northeast India

Small tea growers: As far as tea plantation is concerned apart from the large tea industry, small tea growers are also actively participating in the production of the tea and revenue generation. There area around 28,000 small tea growers in Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Uttar Dinajpur district of which the role of Uttar Dinajpur in producing tea is better than other districts. They produce about 90 million Kg of tea which account for 30.2 % of North Bengal tea production.

Bought-leaf factories are the unit that buy these tea leaves and convert them into the processed tea. Nearly 2,500 bushes can be planted in the area of half acre which can produce about 4,800 kg of green tea leaves which may cost around Rs. 8 to Rs. 10 / Bought-leaf. The detail of tea Plantation in West Bengal is given below.

Table 2: Tea Plantation in West Bengal

Plantation Districts	No. of Gardens	Area (Ha)	Production (millionKgs)	Number of Workers
Darjeeling	85	17818	8.62	54,202
Dooars	163	72918	144.80	16, 8867
Terai	82	24359	76.35	39,680
Total	330	115095	229.78	26, 2749

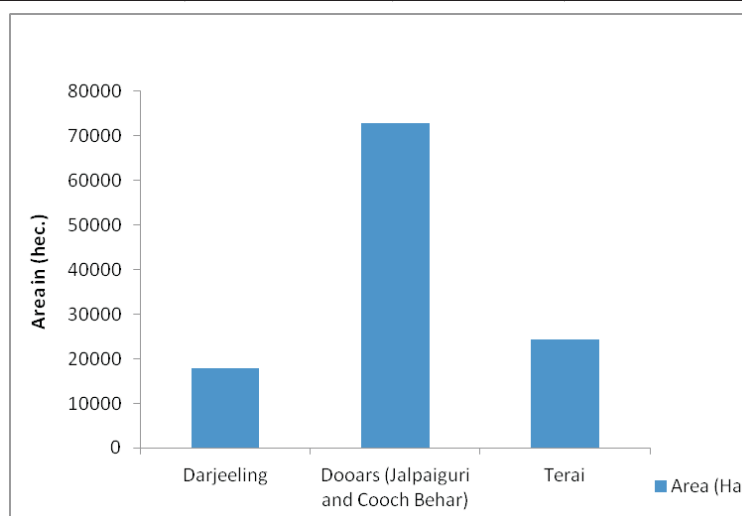


Figure 3: Showing the Area of the Plantation District West Bengal in Hectare

The above figure reveals that the tea plantation district of the West Bengal which are mostly located in the northern part of the state, since the northern part of the region of the state are mostly covered with the tea garden thus in the figure it can be seen that how much of the are the plantation district has covered. Dooars region is the largest tea production zone in West Bengal.

PRODUCTION AND REVENUE GENERATION:

Tea industry is the oldest industry in India and it occupies an important position in the economy of the country. Tea industry has always contributed in generation of the revenue to the country (Dwivedi, 1999). Since there is the large market for the export and import of the tea which directly help in the generation of the income to the government. The production of the Tea in Jalpaiguri varies between 160 million kilogram to 200 million kilogram in 2012 and 2013 (Tea Board of India, 2013). The Tea of the districts is mainly consumed by the native people. Since the Dooars tea does not have the value as much as the tea of the hills but it is able to occupy a good market in domestic and foreign. The region used to produce a good amount of tea but the decline has started in early 1990s. The district of Jalpaiguri roughly generates 250-300 crores annually (Khawas, 2006). The type of tea produced by Darjeeling, Dooars and Terai region of West Bengal has been given below in a Table and graphically represented in Figure below.

Table 3: Tea Production in West Bengal during 1997 – 2002 (in 106Kg)

Year & Types	1997			1998			1999			2000			2001			2002*		
	CTC	OR	T	CTC	OR	T	CTC	OR	T	CTC	OR	T	CTC	OR	T	CTC	OR	T
Darjeeling	0	10	10	0	10	10	0	9	9	0	10	10	0	11	11	0	11	11
Dooars	129	1	130	146	1	147	134	0	134	136	0	136	142	1	143	141	1	142
Terai	30	0	30	36	0	36	37	0	37	35	0	35	37	0	37	37	0	37
West Bengal	159	11	170	182	11	193	171	9	180	171	10	181	179	12	191	178	12	190

Source: Centre for Education and Communication, 2003, Tea plantation of West Bengal, in Crisis, Research Report, PP.21; Kkawas, 2006

CTC = Cut Tear and Curl OR = Orthodox T = Total * = Tentative

Table 4: Total Production of Tea in West Bengal during 1997 – 2002 (million Kg)

Name of the Region	Category (Type)	
	Orthodox	CTC
Darjeeling	61	-
Terrai	-	212
Dooars	04	828

Source: calculated on the basis of data reported by Khawas, 2006

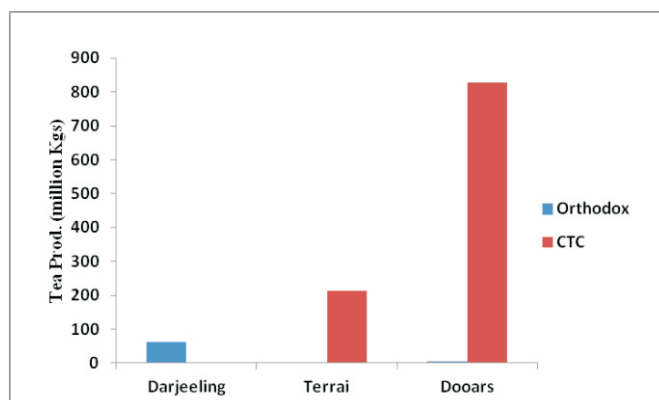


Figure 4: Production of CTC and Orthodox tea in West Bengal

The above table reveals that Darjeeling tea gardens are specialized in producing Orthodox tea only. While, Dooars and Terai tea garden largely produces CTC quality of tea. However, Terai tea garden also produces a meager amount of Orthodox tea. Darjeeling produces 61 million Kg of Orthodox tea between 1997 -2002. However, Dooars region has produced 828 million kg of CTC and 04 million Kgs. of Orthodox tea during the same period. Conversely, Terai region has produced 212 million kg of CTC during 1997-2002. The above regions (Darjeeling-Terai and Dooars) together have produced 1105 million Kgs. of CTC and Orthodox tea during 1997-2002.

OVERALLASSESSMENT

On the basis of the observations and study a number of assessments have been made upon the tea estates of the Western Dooaras. These re described below.

- There has been a) a negligible increase of land in the garden area, b) high rate of population increase and c) some increase in the number of houses of the workers with increase in households. In the case of Washabarie there has been a) a marked increase in the garden area, b) very high rate of population increase and c) considerable increase in the number of houses; and in Leesh River tea garden a) some increase in the garden area, b) high rate of population increase, and c) limited increase in the of houses of the workers have been observed.
- Work participatiopn by the females in the tea industry sector has traditionally been higher than the male participation as is shown by the higher share of female workers in the average number of labour employed compared to the share of male workers. This suggests the presence of feminized labour in the tea plantations
- Among the workers male-female ratio also varies from garden to garden. For the survey years (2007 – 2014) the male-female ratio in Ranicherra 1.8+:1, in Washabarie it is 2+:1 and in Leesh River Tea Estate it ranges from 1.8+:1 to 2+:1. This reveals that the female contingent among the workers is markedly higher in the Washabarie and Leesh River Tea Estates.
- As far as the change in number of the garden workers is concerned there has been only marginal increase in the number of employed persons in the cases of Ranicherra and Washabarie while the number in the Leesh River Tea Estate shows a slightly decreasing trend.

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