

Tea Industry and Its Workers in Darjeeling: An Analysis of Health, Economy and State Policies

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SMRITIMA DIKSHA LAMA



**Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi – 110 067
India**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis entitled “**TEA INDUSTRY AND ITS WORKERS IN DARJEELING: AN ANALYSIS OF HEALTH, ECONOMY AND STATE POLICIES**” submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University for the award of degree of **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**, is my original work. This thesis has not been previously submitted for the award of any other degree of this or any other university.

Smritima Diksha Lama

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that the thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation and consideration of the award of Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Prof. Sanghmitra S. Acharya
Supervisor

Prof. Sanghmitra S. Acharya
Chairperson

DR. SANGHMITRA S. ACHARYA
Centre of Social Medicine & Community Health
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067

CHAIRPERSON
Centre of Social Medicine & Community Health
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgement	i
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	x
Abbreviations	xi
Chapter 1	1
Tea Industry: An Introduction	1
1.1 Background of the study	1
Socio-Economic Discourse: Issues and Concerns of the Plantation Workers	3
Public Health Concerns	7
Women, Work and Health	10
Purpose of Study	13
1.2 Conceptual Framework	13
1.3 Rationale of the Study	17
1.4 Research Questions	19
1.5 Objectives	20
1.6 Key Concepts	20
1.7 Research Design and Methodology	22
Study Area	23
Study Sample and Sampling Frame	23
Data Sources	24
Analytical Framework:	25
1.8 Ethical Consideration	26

1.9 Limitation of the study.....	27
Chapter Scheme	28
Chapter 2.....	29
Locating India in Global Tea Economy: History, Trade and Expanse.....	29
2.1 Historical Overview.....	29
Tea Industry and Trade: A Situational Analysis.....	32
Tea Exports: Expansion of the Industry	34
2.2 Growth of Indian Tea Industry -Plantations and Labour.....	36
Tea Processing and Marketing.....	40
Key Organisational Features of Indian Tea Industry.....	42
Provisions safeguarding plantation workers	43
Plantation Labour Act (1951)	45
Crisis in the Indian tea industry	47
2.3 Tea Regions of India.....	49
Major Tea Growing States.....	49
History	51
Production and Area under Tea	52
Auction System and Tea Price Mechanism	54
Labour, Wages and Benefits.....	55
Chapter 3.....	61
Cultivation and Production of Tea in Darjeeling.....	61
3.1 Historical Account: Birth of ‘Darjeeling Tea’	61
3.2 Growth of Organic Tea Industry in Darjeeling.....	63
3.3 Critical Issues in the Darjeeling Tea Industry	70
3.4 Demand for Separate Statehood & Its Impact on the Darjeeling Tea Industry	75

Chapter 4.....	79
Profile of the Study Sites: Namring and Singell.....	79
4.1 Traditional Tea Estate: Namring, Rangli-Rangliot Block, Darjeeling sub-division	80
• Area, Production and Employees	81
4.2 Organic Estate: Singell, Kurseong Block, Kurseong Sub-division	83
• Area, Production, Employees	84
Fair Trade.....	87
4.3 Rural Infrastructure.....	89
Namring Tea Estate	89
Singell Tea Estate	91
4.4 Social Hierarchy	91
Chapter 5.....	93
Social Realities of Plantation Workers	93
5.1 Socio-demographic profile of the study sample	93
5.2 Distribution of Population by Social Groups.....	97
5.3 Wage Structure, Nature of Work and Pattern of Employment	98
• Field Operations.....	101
• Factory Operations (March-November)	103
Wage Pattern & Entitlements	104
5.4 Patterns of Recruitment and Nature of Work	109
5.5 Socio-Economic Differentials Across Workers.....	111
5.6 State Response: Schemes & Programmes for Workers	117
5.7 Access to Basic Amenities.....	120
Housing.....	120

Electricity.....	125
Water & Sanitation	125
Chapter 6.....	132
Health Choices and Illness: Patterns of Provisioning and Utilisation	132
6.1 Reported Illness among Workers and their families.....	133
6.2 Lifestyle Induced Illnesses	137
6.3 Preference of health service provider	139
6.4 Mortality Experiences.....	141
6.5 Infrastructure facilities for health available at Traditional TE	142
6.6 Infrastructure facilities available at Organic TE.....	150
Chapter 7.....	156
Gender Dynamics in Tea Plantations	156
7.1 Women in Tea Cultivation.....	156
7.2 Status of Women WorkersWomen in Tea Cultivation	157
7.3 Gender relations.....	161
7.4 Issues to be Addressed.....	166
Chapter 8.....	169
Summary and Conclusion.....	169
8.1 Major Findings.....	171
Health Conditions	171
Economic Conditions.....	173
State Policies.....	176
Separate Statehood Movement	177
Role of Gender.....	179
8.2 Inferences and Suggestions.....	180

Minimum Wage and Proper Implementation of PLA (1951).....	180
Marketing Mechanisms as ensured under Fair Trade.....	181
Unmet Needs of Workers	185
Increasing dearth of labour	186
Reinvestment of Profit.....	187
8.3 Conclusion	189
BIBLIOGRAPHY	191
Appendix.....	205

List of Tables

Table 1.1	Conceptual Framework of study
Table 1.2	Conceptual Framework for understanding health
Table 2.1	World Production of Tea 2013-2017
Table 2.2	Share of tea in India: Total exports during 1960-2018
Table 2.3	All India Data 1951-2006
Table 2.4	India: Tea Area & Production 2013-2014 to 2015-16
Table 2.5	Average Daily Employment
Table 2.6	Rates of Daily Wage
Table 3.1	Area, Production and Employment in Darjeeling District
Table 3.2	Nature of Tea Gardens in Darjeeling
Table 4.1	Tea Estate divisions, areas and employees
Table 4.2	Tea Estate divisions, areas and employees
Table 4.3	Population of tea estate employees and villages
Table 4.4	Caste Distribution
Table 5.1	Socio-demographic profile of the study sample
Table 5.2	Dependents in Households
Table 5.4	Wage Structure
Table 5.5	Wage Increment Agreement
Table 5.6	Entitlements
Table 5.7	Work Characteristics (per cent)
Table 5.8	Household Size and Income Earners
Table 5.9	Percentage Distribution of Household Income
Table 5.10	Access to Assets, Finances and Insurance
Table 5.11	Provisioning of basic amenities
Table 5.12	Cooking Fuel in Households of Workers (per cent)
Table 5.13	Source of Water Facilities and Its treatment (per cent)
Table 5.14	Sanitary Conditions (per cent)
Table 6.1	Reported Illness in Plantation Sites (per cent)
Table 6.2	Common Health Problems
Table 6.3	Lifestyle Diseases

List of Figures

Figure 2.1	Tea Leaf Activity- from garden to cup
Figure 2.2	How earning from a cup of tea is shared across the production chain
Figure 2.3	Map of Tea Growing States in India
Figure 2.3	Trends in Tea Production Across India
Figure 3.1	The Darjeeling Tea Logo
Figure 4.1	Organisational Flow Chart for Namring TE
Figure 4.2	Organisational Flow Chart for Singell TE
Figure 6.1	Maslow's Hieracrchy of Needs

Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ANC	Ante Natal Care
ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
ATO	Alternative Trade Organisations
AWC	Anganwadi Centre
BJP	Bhartiya Janta Party
BMOH	Block Medical Officer of Health
BLF	Bought Leaf Factory
BPHC	Block Primary Health Centre
CEC	Centre for Education and Communication
CMO	Chief Medical Officer
CTC	Crush Tear Curl
DGHC	Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council
DOTS	Directly Observed Treatment Short
DPA	Darjeeling Planters' Association
DTDPLU	Darjeeling Terai Dooars Plantation Labour Union
EIC	East India Company
ELP	Extra Leaf Price
EPFA	Employee Provident Fund Act
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FLO	Fair trade Labelling Organisation
FTPC	Fair Trade Premium Committee
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GI	Geographical Indication
GJMM	Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha

GNLF	Gorkha National Liberation Front
GTA	Gorkhaland Territorial Agreement
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Service
IDA	Industrial Dispute Act
IDI	In-Depth Interview
IEC	Information Education and Communication
JB	Joint Body
JSY	Janani Suraksha Yojana
KI	Key Informant
MBA	Maternity Benefits Act
MBBS	Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MNC	Multi National Corporation
MP	Member of Parliament
MWA	Minimum Wage Act
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRHM	National Rural Health Mission
OMRE	Other Monthly Rated Employees
PGA	Payment of Gratuity Act
PHC	Primary Health Centre
PHE	Public Health Engineering
PLA	Plantation Labour Act
PMGSY	Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana
PNC	Post Natal Care
RMP	Registered Medical Practitioner
RSBY	Rashtriya Swastha Bima Yojana

SBA	Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan
SHG	Self Help Group
SKS	Sanu Krishak Sanstha
SSK	Sishu Shiksha Kendra
TATEC	Tea Action Trust Executive Committee
TB	Tuberculosis
TE	Tea Estate
UPASI	United Planters' Association of Southern India
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republic
WHO	World Health Organisation

Chapter 1

Tea Industry: An Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Tea was first brought to India by the East India Company prior to which the Britishers procured all their tea from China. The credit for creating India's vast tea empire goes to the Britishers who discovered, cultivated and consumed the same. However, in discussions on tea those who remain least described and attended are the tea plantation workers. They are the people who are most crucial in tea chain who are involved in the delicate art of hand-plucking the "*dui paat ek suiro*" (2 leaves and a bud). Thus, this delicate art makes the perfect cup of tea of which Darjeeling tea is considered to be the "*champagne of teas.*" Tea is also said to be the most common drink after water to be consumed by individuals the beginning of which is said to have begun in China.

This thesis examines the situation of the tea industry at two levels. At one level it proposes a comparative analysis of different tea regions of the country with special reference to Darjeeling. At level two, it endeavours to detail the understanding of the Darjeeling tea industry; tea plantation workers, their socioeconomic conditions and differential access and utilisation of health care services as well as an enquiry of the legislative measures and market operations that impact the industry.

This thesis builds on the researcher's previous study titled "Factors affecting health, housing and lifestyle: A comparative study on tea plantation workers of Darjeeling & Sikkim". The study tried to understand how workers' health, housing and lifestyle in the tea industry of Darjeeling and Sikkim are influenced by the socio-economic conditions of the workers', political conditions of the two regions and the working conditions existing at the tea gardens. The major findings of this study were:

- a) There is increasing pressure on the plantation system in terms of housing, health infrastructure, education and livelihood concerns from the growing population in the

Darjeeling tea gardens while the same is not experienced at the Sikkim tea garden (relatively new establishment).

- b) The socio-economic development of the two regions was also observed to be starkly different in terms of education, health, standard of living and rural infrastructure. Provisioning was considerably better in Sikkim as compared to Darjeeling.
- c) In terms of health among the tea plantation workers it was seen that 74% of the households sampled in Darjeeling reported illness within the last five years while 92% households reported the same in Sikkim.
- d) Most common medical service provider sought by the workers in both regions was the traditional faith healers who were invariably used each year despite visiting the government as well as private medical services. Hence, a dependence on traditional system of medicine was still prevalent in the tea estates of these regions.
- e) As suggested by literature utilisation of health centres is influenced by the ability to deliver the complete package of services. This was found to be true in the case of the Darjeeling tea garden as a greater percentage of workers from Selimbong tea garden approached the district health centre directly as they reported that they were sure of getting treatment. Hence it was seen that the burden of providing health services to the garden population of Selimbong fell directly on the district health centre.
- f) Political awareness as well as the political conditions prevalent among the workers and in the two hill regions had noteworthy impact on the conditions of the workers. The '*Gorkhaland*' movement appeared to have eroded the labourers' work culture in Darjeeling. While Sikkim had had a relatively stable political climate. However it was observed that there was a lack in trade union activity in both the tea gardens.
- g) Another major significant difference between the tea gardens of Darjeeling and Sikkim was the fact that the PLA (1951) was not applicable in the Sikkim tea garden. Despite its implementation there are still exist major lacunae in the benefits provided over the wages to garden labour in the Darjeeling tea plantation.
- h) A positive change observed in both the tea gardens was the adoption of organic farming practices and thereby reducing the harmful impact of monoculture farming. This has also resulted in banning of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in the

plantation thereby reducing the harmful health effects of fertilizers and pesticides on the workers. However, the adoption of organic practices needs to be further understood from the market perspective as the tea industry is said to be buyer-driven.

By focusing on the same tea region of Darjeeling in West Bengal this thesis seeks to explore the interplay of social relations of production (industry, market & state policies) and health in a tea plantation structure. This study looks at health from a holistic perspective as being a socially produced phenomenon in a plantation unit. Hence the concern of this study does not lie in the direct assessment of health rather it is concerned with the factors which lead to ill health. This would be achieved by looking at social, economic and political factors having an impact on patterns of workers' health and illness.

Socio-Economic Discourse: Issues and Concerns of the Plantation Workers

One issue of prime importance while discussing tea plantations is that of wages. Tea garden workers have been fighting for their wages since time immemorial. While during the colonial times workers hardly complained about their low wages and had no voice in setting their wages, today, workers strike and protests against their low wages¹ despite tea plantations being included under the Minimum Wages Act (1948) in 1952. This shows that the workers are still dissatisfied by the wages they receive in comparison to the work they do in the gardens. The reason given by owners of tea gardens in response to increase in wages has always been the increasing costs of productivity. However, it is seen that establishment costs, which include costs of personnel, are higher than labour costs.² It has been argued that by increasing components of labour welfare and better maintenance of tea bushes, productivity will increase and thus reduce costs of production.³

¹ Bhowmik, Sharit 2005. *Tea Plantation Workers' Strike*. Economic & Political Weekly. Vol. 40. No.38. pp. 4103

² Ibid. pp. 4105

³ Ibid. pp. 4105

Despite provisioning of various services over and above the wages of the plantation workers like housing, electricity, water supply, education and health by the Plantation Labour Act (1951), very few of the tea estates have provided these amenities even at a very basic level.⁴

Studies have revealed that the social amenities are far from satisfactory and are pronounced in case of drinking water, housing and medical facilities. Tea workers in India are highly dependent on plantations for food, drinking water, housing, education and healthcare.⁵ Raman (1986) stated that in most areas undertaken in his study the water was found to be unfit for consumption, houses were sub-standard several without toilet facilities and that there were inadequacies in every aspect of health as well. Bhadra (1992) in her study on women workers' in tea plantations in India also discusses that despite there being a crèche and dispensary within the confines of the Chandmoni Tea Estate (Terai region of North Bengal) the workers did not get much use out of it. The crèche was said to have a bad atmosphere with no proper supply of milk, food water, etc and scarcity of medicines was a common feature of the dispensary. She also reports on the issues of gender in plantation system by exploring the women tea plantation workers work, social and family life. She points out that the women workers are committed workers and are valued more for their loyalty than efficiency. Sadly, they remain throughout their lives as daily-rated workers and are never considered to be recruited in the category of sub-staff (supervisory role).

Bhowmik, Xaxa & Kalam (1996) in their book on tea plantation labour also state similar findings from their study in tea estates of Assam, West Bengal & Tamil Nadu. It was found that 30 per cent of the labour houses in Assam and 25 per cent in West Bengal were temporary, in terms of sanitation facilities latrines in the labour lines were few in number and were badly maintained and not all labour houses had toilet facilities. Similar findings were also revealed about the medical facilities which were found to be

4 Sharit. Bhowmik. 2002. *Productivity and Labour Standards in Tea Plantation Sector in India*. in Sivananthiran. A. & Ratnam. Venkata C.S. ed. *Labour and Social Issues in Plantations In South Asia*. International Labour Organisation (ILO). India. pp. 144 & pp. 156

5 Goddard. Samantha. 2005. *Tea Break: a crisis brewing in India*. Action Aid,

far below what was required by the statutory regulations (lack of medicines and qualified medical practitioner).

In terms of health problems that a tea garden worker is subject to there are several studies that have been undertaken. Studies have revealed two categories of illnesses- respiratory and water borne diseases, which account for 60-70% of the diseases of the plantation workers.⁶

Biswas et al (2002) highlight the nutritional status among the tea garden workers of Assam. The study revealed that there was a high degree of under nutrition among the tea garden workers and females were the worst sufferers. Also the labour force was said to suffer with chronic energy deficiency which may result in the huge loss of work capacity.

Chaudhary and Verma (2002) explored the perceptions of tea plantation workers in Duars region of Jalpaiguri district on health and medicine through oral history. They found that despite the administration of 'modern' medicine for the last two or three generations and the presence of estate hospital the attitude of workers towards modern medicine is complex and ambiguous. Besides the indigenous system of medicine the workers also relied on Ayurvedic medicines procured from the weekly *haats*⁷. It was seen that there was reluctance among workers to visit the garden doctor. The authors found some foundation to this as the small gardens employed registered medical practitioners (RMPs) who were found to be inefficient and were found to frequently defer cases to district hospital resulting in greater wage loss. The study also reveals that there is a disjuncture between rules and their implementation and that the medical facilities provided varied from garden to garden. Group hospitals were still to be only on paper and figured prominently in the workers' demands. Hygiene and sanitation in the labour lines were seen to be in a pathetic state, leaving the workers vulnerable to frequent diseases and epidemics.

⁶ Sivananthiran. A. and Ratnam. Venkata. C.S. 2002. *Introduction*. in Sivananthiran. A. and Ratnam. Venkata. C.S. ed. *Labour and Social Issues in Plantations In South Asia*. International Labour Organisation (ILO). India. pp. 2

⁷ Weekly markets usually held in rural areas of India

Medhi, Hazarika and Mahanta (2006) highlight the rapid rise in tobacco and alcohol related disease in people in the tea industry in Assam. They also stated that records indicated a higher prevalence of hypertension among this population in comparison to other studies. It was also found that compared to other communities in Assam, prevalence of alcohol and tobacco use is higher in the youth working in tea industry and that though a small proportion smoked tobacco most indulged in non-smoked tobacco.

Rajapandiyan et al.(2011) studied the magnitude and pattern of intestinal parasitism in rural communities in tea tribes of Northeast Assam. The study revealed intestinal parasitosis to be very high among the sample selected and it was concluded that the high prevalence of intestinal parasites in the study area indicated poor quality of life and that much work was needed to be done to improve the health of the village population including improvement in sanitation, drainage and safe drinking water supply.

Thapa (2012) examined human development status of plantation workers corresponding to their employment statuses namely permanent, casual and self employed status. Its key finding indicates that the small growers engaged in self-employment had a better social standing in terms of asset ownership when compared to the permanent and casual workers. It was seen that land ownership was possibly a key enabling factor for the small growers. Another interesting finding was that a great percentage of permanent workers had relatively bad health status when compared to the self-employed and casual workers and had suffered major ailments. This study too seriously questioned the effectiveness of the PLA (1951) in terms of provisioning of basic amenities. Hence it was seen that wage workers irrespective of their permanent or casual work status were found to be worst off in comparison to the small growers.

These studies do clearly show that the tea garden workers are a vulnerable group due to their low wages and poor implementation of the Plantation Labour Act (1951) thereby making them victims of various health and environment related problems. With scanty opportunities for education, inhuman living conditions, poor hygiene and health care facilities, the tea plantation labourers are made to 'bleed where no wounds exist'. The

tea garden owners-big, medium or small, the trade union leaders, and the elected representatives at the district, state and the national level tend to ignore these plights of the tea plantation workers despite their dependence on these workers as substantive vote banks. This indicates that the people's representatives have been found to be consistently lacking both willingness and wherewithal to place the deteriorating condition of the tea workers before the respective legislative institutions.

Public Health Concerns

Many scholars have postulated health as being socially produced. Some of the earliest studies in public health point out that health should not be merely seen from a medical perspective i.e. only in the parlance of disease/illness and cure/prevention rather it should also be seen as a product of various social factors such as poor sanitary & living conditions (Snow, 1855). It was established that the health status of a population is linked with improvements in overall living conditions (McKeown, Brown & Record, 1972). McKeown put forth the view that growth in population from the late 1700s was due not to life-saving advances in the field of medicine or public health, rather a result of improvements in overall standards of living, especially diet & nutritional status, resulting from better economic conditions.⁸

Public health care includes services and resources which affect health indirectly too and are beyond health care services provided in care centers. These include access to safe drinking water, proper sanitation and drainage, proper hygiene and good housing (Acharya, 2010). Nair (1999) said health is an integral constituent of development. The concern about the lack of rural health services in developing countries gave birth to the concept of Primary Health Care (WHO, 1978). The Alma Ata declaration was a turning point in connecting health and development. The dominance of medical model was increasingly criticised as often ineffective, culturally inappropriate and inaccessible for poor rural communities. UNICEF & WHO developed the community health care concept which was adopted by International Conference on PHC in Alma Ata in 1978. This was the first international declaration underlining the importance of primary health

⁸ Colgrove. James 2002. *The McKeown Thesis: A Historical Controversy & Its Enduring Influence*. American Journal of Public Health. Vol.92. No. 5. pp. 725

care (PHC). PHC approach considered as key to achieving 'Health for All'. Baru et al (2010) suggested that access to health care in India has been quite unequal among regions with several variations played into by factors such as caste and class. Even availability of health services has also been unequal in India which has been held responsible for widening the differentials in health outcomes. Regulatory and institutional mechanisms for promoting accountability to consumers of health services are also extremely weak in public sector health facilities.

Studies like Banerji and Anderson's (1963) that brought out the sociological dimensions of tuberculosis also point out social factors influencing health-seeking behaviour. Tipping and Segall (1995) outline two approaches of health seeking behaviour studies: studies emphasising utilisation in terms of *health care seeking behaviour* and studies emphasising process in terms of *health seeking behaviour* (illness response). Hence it is seen that health seeking behaviour is a response to presence of illness or ill health whereas health care seeking behaviour addresses the entire gamut of healthcare services such as people's utilization of vaccine services, childcare, nutrition, maternal healthcare, preventive healthcare etc. Banerji (1998) reiterates this by stating that the struggle of the masses in India to gain access to health services is only a part of the wider struggle to improve their health.

The Black Report (1980) in many ways strengthened the field of public health as it highlighted the differences in health status across classes and thereby highlighting issue of health inequality. Loewenson (1989) identified the factors undermining social, economic and health status of communities living in the plantation sector and emphasised that they be recognised in social, economic and health policy. Nayar (1997) also delineates three sets of factors i.e. housing, water-supply, sanitation & hygiene; and non-health factors which influence health status, namely: medical intervention, health promoting factors such as economic and social factors.

Inequalities in access to health care services has been attributed to factors like social identity, economic differentials and regional disparities (Claeson et al 2000; Gwatkin 2000; Subramanian et al 2006; Deaton and Dreze 2009; Baru et al 2010). In India, caste

has emerged as an important determinant of deprivation and socio-economic inequalities in access to health care (Acharya, 2010, 2013).

Qadeer & Roy (1989) argue that decline in mortality in Europe and England during 18th century and later in India were due to advances in agriculture in the former and laying down of railways in India due to increasing food supplies. These experiences focus upon role of socio-economic processes in determining health of the population. Qadeer & Roy (1989) go on further to state that the poorer and the more exploited classes are therefore more vulnerable. Social aetiology of health and working conditions of tea plantation labourers has also been examined and this has led to the conclusion that plantation workers suffer from unique vulnerabilities (Rasaily, 2003). There is even a growing awareness among economists that health is not only an important determinant of individual wellbeing but nature, content and orientation of macroeconomic growth as well.⁹

It has been seen that inaccessibility of health service is not the only cause of ill health rather it adds to the burden of ill health of the deprived sections as their basic problem also lies in the environment in which they live. This is best explained by Zurbrigg (1989) who discusses the state of health of India's population through *Rakku's Story*. In this story we find Rakku's struggle- a woman daily wage-worker to save her youngest child's life when he develops diarrhoea. Being a poor worker with bare minimum income to survive and feed a family of five the struggles she faces at every turn in seeking health care for her sick child is manifold. Rakku has no time to breastfeed her youngest child, the family cannot afford rice and survive on millets, needs to borrow money from moneylender to seek better healthcare, miss a day of work and forgo her daily wage, reach a hospital only to find the Out-Patient Department closed and despite all efforts she loses her child. With the help of this story Zurbrigg (1989) highlights the fact that most ill health in India is not just caused by germs and infection rather it is caused by poverty, unemployment, unequal wages, patriarchy as well as a lack of basic necessities such as housing, proper food, water, sanitation, etc.

⁹ Luke. N. and Munshi. K. 2007. *Social Affiliation and the Demand for health services: Caste and Child Health in South India*. Journal of Development Economics. Vol 83. Issue 2. p. 256

Qadeer & Roy (1990) also state that the matrix created by socio-economic and political factors in a given biological and physical context constitutes the environment which adds to the burden of ill health. Healy and McKee (2004) discuss the various barriers to access and use of health services that cause their own sets of problems for the population groups that seek to use the various health services. These barriers are:

- Physical in terms of geographical inaccessibility or remoteness or being inaccessible for the disabled. This also leads to a lack in health service professionals and specialists due to their reluctance in going to rural or remote areas.
- Financial in terms of increasing pressure of costs by providing universal coverage and most of the time free treatment or subsidised treatment costs. Hence due to lack of funding services may lack in quantity as well as quality.
- Procedural in terms of attempting to ration services there can be barriers such as restrictive eligibility (eg only permanent workers are eligible for health benefits while casual worker is not), restricted hours thereby making individuals to choose between health and wage (as some might have to skip their job on the particular day of visit), complex procedures, etc.
- Social barriers may arise due to social/cultural ignorance, breakdown of communication between patient and provider, discrimination, medical ignorance on part of the provider (presence of compounder whereas patient requires doctor or specialist), patriarchal attitudes amongst health providers may discourage workers especially women workers from approaching health service provider.

Thus, the discourse on public health has identified various factors that influence health and health choices of an individual

Women, Work and Health

In any study that deals with health of workers, gender discrimination with respect to wages and work becomes an enigmatic issue that must be dwelled upon carefully as done so in the past (Bhadra, 1992; Rasaily 1998; Bhattacharya, 2012). Contemporary traditional India, is still predominantly a society based on the norms of patriarchy, i.e. a

society ruled by an ideology of female subordination based on the Confucian Three Bonds of Obedience- to father when young, to husband when married and to the son when old- the tenets as same as the ancient Hindu laws. The economic controls of the society, i.e. of land, capital and labour processes of women and children are firmly held by male hands and interwoven with social-status hierarchy.¹⁰ This confines women to certain kinds of work and excludes them from certain others. As early as 4th century BC, the *Arthashastra* prescribed equal wages for equal work for both men and women artisans and also laid down measures to protect women artisans from sexual harassment by male supervisors.

If we see the beginnings of the tea industry and its wage system the men and women were paid different rates. While today there is equal pay for equal work to workers of either gender there still exists the limits in the potential health benefits of waged work for women as they still retain the sole responsibility for domestic labour and thus become emotionally and physically exhausted. Women are seen to handle the double burden of being producers as well as reproducers wherein as producers they are involved in economic activity and as reproducers they are seen to have non-economic activity of bringing up children and to look after their household activities (Kingshuk, 2015; Bhadra, 2004). Hence due to gender inequality women whether employed in agriculture, construction, organised or unorganised manufacturing remain ‘sufferers’ due to the nature of society even at present.

The wages given in the tea industry is some of the lowest in the states where the industry exists confirming the dependency of the industry on exploitation of cheap labour. This is further facilitated by the putting out system that operates on price-rate basis (so that workers receive less than what the minimum wage act might prescribe). Plantation work is highly labour intensive but remains one of the most poorly paid occupations of which women form the major part of the labour force (Bhadra, 2004). Women have been seen to have a long-term advantage of self-reproducing and stable workforce and they are thus as reproducers of labour a critical factor in the recruitment

¹⁰ Kalpana Bardhan. 1985. *Women’s work, welfare and status- Forces of tradition and change in India*, Economic and Political Weekly. Vol XX, No. 50. Dec 14. pp 2207

taking place in plantations (Bhadra, 2004). Also as tea industry involves limited mechanisation and low skill of the women workers are understood to be best suited keeping in mind the physical strength of women labourers (Bhadra, 2004). Tea plucking should be seen as involving some skill and should therefore be considered as at least as semi-skilled work (Sarkar, 2015). Indian tribal women and the migrant Nepali women workers in North Bengal are seen as submissive and less organised (Bhadra, 2004) as compared to the women workers in South India especially Kerala. This was seen to be true as in the case of the women workers who came together to protest in the Kanan Devan Hills Plantations by forming an informal labour group the women workers handled their demand for increase in their wages and their bonuses with political acumen and will power to withstand the powers exhibited by the management (Kamath & Ramanathan, 2017).

The tea industry has been studied from different angles and can be classified into:

1. Studies examining the implementation of the legislative measures safeguarding the tea plantation workers and conditions of work.
2. Studies primarily looking into the scientific aspects of tea production, economic trends in the tea industry.
3. Studies about the processing and marketing of tea and ways to improve the same.
4. Studies on tea plantation and their workers in Assam, Dooars, Terai, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Thus, it can be said that the various studies on the tea plantation industry have emphasised on the various tea regions of India. A few studies have highlighted the plight of the tea plantation workers across these same regions. There has however been a dearth of studies on the the impact of various social determinants of health that may impact the health choices among the tea garden populations. The tea plantations of Darjeeling have been studied less as compared to the other tea growing regions despite having a dedicated international market fetching it the highest price in the tea market. With the ever present interest in Darjeeling tea and the high prices it fetches it is most

important to highlight the plight of the workers and to understand what can be done to improve their conditions.

Purpose of Study

The present study endeavours to understand how the tea plantations of Darjeeling differ from those in the other parts of the country in terms of legislative measures, market mechanisms and current political scenario. It also attempts to delineate the consequences of the differentials in the tea trade and institutional structure on one hand; and socio-economic and health conditions of the workers on the other. It endeavours to examine health seeking behaviour of the tea population workers and their dependents. The differentials in the characteristics will be examined on the axes of nature of plantation (traditional or organic); work hierarchy and gender. Hence, the study is an attempt to understand the tea industry as a whole and how the various factors interact with one another to influence the workers' health choices. The health seeking behaviour of the worker influenced by a multitude of factors would define the health choice keeping in mind the affordability, accessibility and availability of health care.

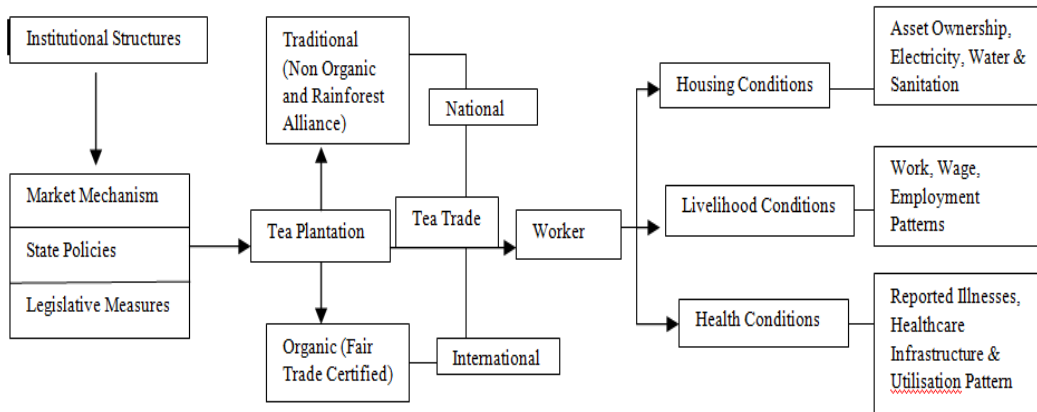
1.2 Conceptual Framework

A range of factors such as unemployment, wage, class, caste, poverty, education, availability, accessibility and affordability of health care systems influence the health and the healthcare choices of an individual or community. The present study endeavours to examine the tea plantation workers and the interplay of factors like work and state policies, marketing mechanisms, legislative regulations etc leaving the tea plantation worker vulnerable to ill-health. A look at the literature in this area suggests that the tea plantation workers are not only isolated and marginalised but rather they have very low wage which further exacerbates their living conditions. These multitudes of factors within their life's system and society they live in not only influence the living standards of the tea plantation populations but also their health (seeking, promoting and care utilisation) behaviour.

Hence, it becomes imperative for the present study to understand the situation of the tea industry at two levels. At one level it proposes to profile the tea regions of the country. At the second level, it endeavours to detail the understanding of the Darjeeling tea industry by examining; tea plantation workers, their socioeconomic conditions and differential access to resources and utilisation of health care services in particular. It attempts to understand the market mechanism linked with quality of tea and how it affects the workers and how the institutional structure of tea industry affects the plantation worker. Thus, an enquiry into the legislative measures and market operations; the working conditions, social facilities and civic amenities (housing, electricity, water, sanitation) that the workers can access was also carried out. It is also important to understand how market operations are affecting the branding of high quality Darjeeling tea and in the development and welfare of the marginalised workers. This can be seen clearly in the figure 1.1 below.

The study, therefore, attempts to understand the different tea regions and the institutional structures that impact on the tea industry. This would further help to understand the provisioning of the workers in Darjeeling tea industry, its growth and expansion. In order to recognise the influence of the market on the tea trade the study has attempted to look at two different tea estates in terms of their functioning: Traditional Vs Organic tea plantation. Wherein the tea trade of tea produced in traditional tea plantation is predominantly meant for national market as fewer certifications are required and organic products are not in high demand. While the produce of the organic tea plantation is predominantly meant for the international market. Thus, this study has attempted to understand the flow of tea from the estate to the cup and the various institutional structures such as market, legislation and state plays a role in influencing the functioning of the tea plantation which differ in their nature of production i.e. traditional estate producing non-organic tea and the non-traditional estate producing organic tea.

FIG 1.1: Conceptual Framework of study

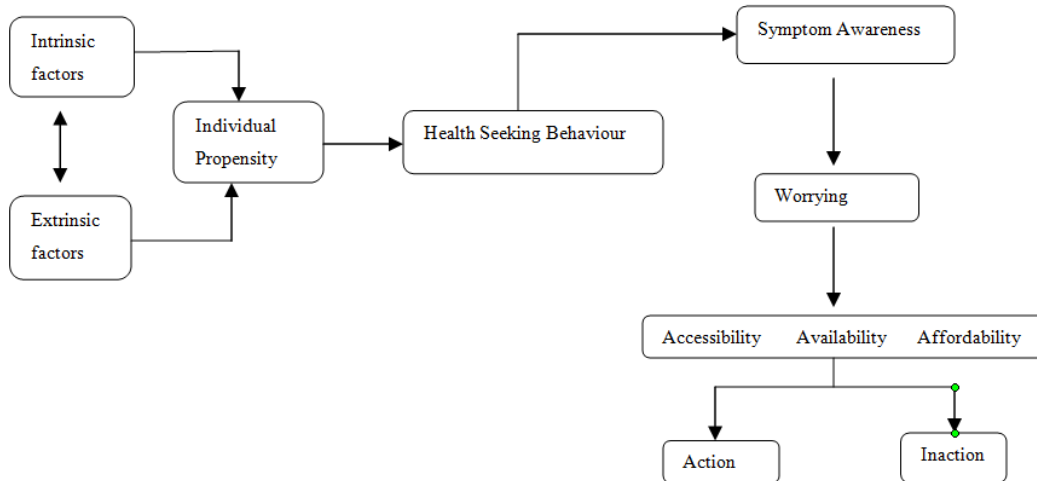


This study also endeavours to understand the different forces at work in influencing plantation workers health seeking behaviour thereby it is an empirical study trying to understand the health culture of the plantation economies as well as the individual workers health choices. The health seeking behaviour leading to symptom awareness and worrying is therefore linked as seen in the model developed by Banerji (1982) and adapted for this study. Fig 1.2 explains that a lack of access to health services causes much distress and anxiety which acts as an obstacle in the way of people’s struggle for health while acquiring improved standards of living. The present study studies the factors that lead to health or ill-health among the workers in the tea estates. The study also aims to understand the barriers to action or inaction of an individual with regard to symptoms of ill health and health care utilisation. Means of livelihood, working conditions, accessibility, availability and affordability of and to basic services, for instance, play an important and definitive role.

One of the most important factors determining the health and well being of the workers is their own individual propensity to seek good health and good health care services. This individual propensity is seen to be further determined by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. These factors are influenced by the various conditions as shown in fig 1.1. The present study is situated in the health culture discourse of public health. Health

culture is best understood in the works of Banerji (1963; 1973; 1982) stating that the health culture of a community is shaped by the interplay of a number of social, political, cultural and economic forces.

Fig 1.2: Conceptual Framework for understanding health



It is imperative to understand how extrinsic and intrinsic factors interact with each other and influence the decision of the plantation workers for health seeking behaviour. The Banerji Model (1982) of access demonstrates the pathway from appearance of symptoms leading to worrying which leads to action taking behaviour in response to the identified symptom. The framework proposed by Banerji (1982) extends an explanation to the various layers in the Indian context.

In the present study the ‘action taking behaviour’ is understood to result in either action or inaction determined by enhancing factors and constraints respectively. These are governed by the propensity of the individual as well as the larger context in which the individual and the services providing facilities are located (extrinsic factors). Hence, the present study has also explored how health choices of the tea plantation workers are dependent upon the accessibility, availability and affordability of healthcare. These health choices are also seen to be dependent upon the socio-economic, livelihood and political conditions of the environment in which the workers are located.

Intrinsic factors refer to the factors which influence the workers' perception of and difference between good health and ill health such as his/her own individual decision making abilities and drive to seek better health. Extrinsic factors refer to factors that are relatively beyond the individual's control and are existing in his/her work and social environment.

The study considers 3 major sub-heads under extrinsic factors namely: market mechanism, legislative measures and state policies which define the conditions of work and the environment in which the workers live. These 3 sub-heads emerge from the institutional structures that describe the context in which the individual worker as well as the service providing facilities are located. These are further understood to influence the socio-economic conditions would include caste, family structure, position in organisational hierarchy, income, education, etc. The work conditions as outlined by the state policies and legislative measures to safeguard the workers. The political situation of the study area (disturbed as in the case of Darjeeling and its continued demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland) and the state provisioning in terms of health, housing, sanitation, water supply, education etc is also to be studied. The market mechanism is seen from the lens of 'Fair Trade' that is said to ensure worker welfare and empowerment under the market driven 'social justice' regime.

It is imperative, therefore, to examine- (a) issues related with management driven factors such as implementation of the Plantation Labour Act in the light of poor working conditions and inadequate social facilities and civic amenities; market mechanism of the tea industry for an understanding of its impact on improving workers' lives; closure and sickness of tea gardens and frequent change in the ownership patterns; (b) issues related with state driven factors such as the current political state of the region, healthcare service provisioning, etc.; and (c) socio-economic conditions of the workers. All these together combine to determine the vulnerability of the workers.

1.3 Rationale of the Study

Health is a complex phenomenon which is governed by both biological and socio-genic factors. While health condition is said to be biological in origin the disparities in health

status between nations and between social groups are largely determined by the way society is organised along economic, social and political axes. Historically, Darjeeling has been a tea growing region, contributing a major share to the state GDP. The altitude and the temperature of the region endow the tea grown here with rich aroma and texture rated as best in the world and prized as high as thousands of rupees for a kilogram. This attribute has led to the adulterating and labelling of tea from other regions as 'Darjeeling tea' leading to branding fraud.

The tea industry of the region has provided livelihood to a large share of the district's population despite closure of the gardens and change in ownership of gardens as well as industrial units. Notably, also in the recent few decades, it has also experienced the turmoil arising out of the quest for the political identity. Plantations being commercial enterprises it is derived that providing welfare for the workers is not their top priority. Among all the regions producing tea, Darjeeling is best known to produce the best quality tea with a dedicated clientele in the international market. In recent years, the tea industry has experienced a marked kind of tea produced under the label of 'organic tea'. The present research locates the study in two plantations i.e. one traditional plantation and the other being an organic plantation in order to understand the differences between the two and its reflections on the workers.

The literature reviewed reflects that several factors have been important in outlining the institutional structure of tea industry in context of the Plantation Labour Act (1951) and fair trade. It is also evident that a number of factors influence workers' health status and access to health care. However there is a paucity of academic enquiry on the similarities and differences between the different tea regions of the country. There is also a paucity of literature comparing the socio-economic status, working conditions and health situations of the workers in the traditional and organic tea plantation in Darjeeling. A gap is also evident in the literature to reflect on the linkages between fraudulent branding of Darjeeling tea and the livelihood which is largely associated with closures of tea estate and market operations and is likely to influence the health of the workers. The present political state of the region also accentuates this. In addition, a critical element in the plights of the workers is the quality of health support both from the

governmental institutions and from the tea estate management. However, it has also been seen that the quality of these services vary in relation to the ownership pattern of the tea gardens.

The brief overview of the Indian tea industry is seen to be a contrasting study as their characteristics despite being same in terms of the industry's function and organisation reveal a varying picture. This study would take up this issue and delve deeper into the Indian tea scenario via north-south (two major tea regions) comparison and zero into the scenario of Darjeeling.

It is imperative to understand the implementation of the regulatory bodies which govern the PLA. The study also endeavours to outline the differences, if any, to providing these amenities (to the workers) among the various types of owners and the status of health amenities. The nature, dimension and contents of health related issues that pervade the tea workers in this hill location and the geographical difficulties and issues of accessibility, affordability and acceptability have also been dealt with in the present study. Against this backdrop only, the research questions have been framed which are placed below.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the nature of tea industry in India? And what is its geographical expanse?
2. What is the uniqueness of the tea plantations of Darjeeling?
3. How is the implementation of the Plantation Labour Act 1951 and the Plantation Labour (Amendment) Act 2010 happening on the ground?
4. What are the factors affecting the socio-economic and health conditions of the tea plantation workers in traditional and organic garden and how much do they spend on health care?
5. What are the differences, if any, among the workers of the traditional and organic tea plantations in terms of work and working conditions?
6. Where is the tea plantation workers' health and well being located in the current political agenda of the region?

1.5 Objectives

1. To understand the legislative environment for the tea plantations.
2. To understand the market mechanisms in terms of fair trade labelling, ownership and institutional structure.
3. To understand current political situation and its association with the tea plantation workers.
4. To examine the socio-economic status and working conditions of workers in traditional and Fair Trade tea estates.
5. To understand their access to basic amenities and utilisation of government schemes and programmes.
6. To examine the patterns of illness, care and out of pocket expenditure on health among the workers.

Thus the present study aims to delineate differences across workers to understand the impact of various factors on the health conditions that define the health choices of the plantation workers. The attempt has therefore been to understand how the various factors in the tea industry interact and impinge upon the socio-economic, health, work conditions of the workers through the market, state and legislative systems. Hence, an attempt has been made to understand if the nature (traditional or organic) and structure (hierarchy) affect the workers and their conditions.

1.6 Key Concepts

Fair Trade

Fair trade emerged from the activities of alternative trade organisations (ATOs) which purchase and market goods on behalf of disadvantaged producers in developing countries¹¹. Fair trade labelling can be understood as a separate strand to ATO initiatives, with guarantees of fairness being encapsulated in the form of an intangible trademark, as opposed to being defined by the ATO itself.¹² The advent of Fair trade

¹¹ Pritchard.B & Neilson, J., 2010, 'Fairness and ethicality in their place: the regional dynamics of fair trade and ethical sourcing agendas in the plantation districts of South India', *Environment and Planning*, Vol. 42, pp 1836

¹² Ibid, pp 1836

labelling, with the establishment of Max Havelaar Foundation in the Netherlands, took place in 1988; and by 1997 the three major international Fair trade labels (Max Havelaar, Fair Trade Mark and Transfair) were harmonised under the umbrella of Fair Trade Labelling Organisation (FLO). The Fair Trade network emerged and was developed in the context of changes in the international trade in order to benefit the Southern producers (Fridell, 2006). For the purposes of the study, Fair Trade is defined as the international certification acquired by tea estates to be able to attract foreign buyers and access markets that demand sustainably, ethically produced tea while looking after the welfare of their workers.

Tea Plantation/ Estate

The Plantation Labour Act (1951)¹³ defines ‘plantation’ as any land used or intended to be used for growing rubber, coffee, tea, [cinchona or cardamom] which measures [5] hectares or more and in which [15] or more persons are employed or were employed on any day of the preceding twelve months.

For the purpose of the study the terms plantation and estate have been used interchangeably. Tea estate is used to refer to the land used for the growth of tea as well as to mark the area in which those employed in the growth and production of tea are residing

Worker

The plantation “**worker**” is defined in the Plantation Labour act (1951)¹⁴ as a person employed in the plantation for hire or reward, whether directly or through an agency to do any work skilled/unskilled/manual/clerical. Hence the “**permanent worker**” in the present study is one who has a permanent position either in the field or factory and does the majority of the manual labour in the plantation like plucking, pruning, manuring, spraying, weeding, packaging and sifting of dried tea leaves. Acc. to the Plantation

¹³ The Plantations Labour Act (1951),
http://www.teaboard.gov.in/pdf/policy/Plantations%20Labour%20Act_amended.pdf, accessed on 20th June 2010, pp 1

¹⁴ The Plantations Labour Act (1951),
http://www.teaboard.gov.in/pdf/policy/Plantations%20Labour%20Act_amended.pdf, accessed on 20th June 2010, pp 3

Labour (Amendment) Act, 2010¹⁵ a “worker” is defined as a person employed in the plantation for hire or reward, whether directly or through an agency to do any work skilled/unskilled/manual/clerical and includes a person employed on contract for more than sixty (60) days in a year. The term “**tea industry**” is used to denote plantation, production and trade.

Health

In terms of worker’s “**health**” the researcher will not only be looking at occupational diseases but also at the worker’s overall health. WHO defines health as “*a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*” and occupational diseases are those that are caused due to various work hazards as exemplified in Qadeer and Roy (1989).

Illness

Illness denotes perceived and reported illness. Wherever possible the information was verified with available documents such as health cards or doctor prescriptions. The reported illnesses have not been diagnosed but denote the ‘felt’ illness by the respondents.

Health Seeking Behaviour

According to Ward, Mertens & Thomas (1997) **health seeking behaviour** can be defined as any activity undertaken by individuals who perceive themselves to have a health problem or to be ill for the purpose of finding an appropriate remedy. Hence for the present study “**health seeking behaviour**” is defined as any action taken by individuals who recognises ones symptoms of ill-health leading to worrying. A precondition of most health seeking behaviour is said to be recognition of symptoms.

1.7 Research Design and Methodology

In order to understand these issues a cross-sectional study was carried out by evolving answers to the research questions and testing the proposed hypotheses, the researcher

¹⁵ The Plantation Labour (Amendment) Act. (2010).http://www.commonlii.org/in/legis/cen/num_act/pla2010294/ Accessed on 21st June 2012, pp 2

undertook the analysis of secondary data on the Indian tea industry. It was also deemed essential to carry out a survey of the plantation workers to understand their socio-economic and health conditions. Hence a study on the basic features of the tea plantations in India with special focus on Darjeeling was carried out to elicit primary data. An insight into the functioning of tea gardens, factors that were responsible for tea production and their health status and barriers to access and use of health services was undertaken through primary and secondary information.

Study Area

The study was conducted in two phases. The first dealt with the tea plantation regions of the country for secondary analysis and, Darjeeling for the primary analysis. The second phase oriented itself to a field study in Darjeeling to be conducted in two types of plantations a) traditional tea estate and b) organic tea estate. The selected plantations are as follows-

1. **Namring Tea Estate** (Traditional TE: Traditional Tea Estate) dates back to around 1855. It has one of the oldest and largest factories in Darjeeling and is the second largest tea estate in Darjeeling. This tea estate has three sub-divisions (gardens) namely Namring, Poomong and Jinglam. It is owned by Darjeeling Impex Ltd. and is the only estate owned by this company in the region.

2. **Singell Tea Estate** (Organic TE: Bio-organic Tea Estate) it is operating since 1862 and currently owned by Tea Promoters of India pvt. ltd. This is a fair trade certified and has been biodynamic and organic since 1994.

Study Sample and Sampling Frame

The study aims to highlight the tea plantation workers' conditions across the country with special emphasis on the tea plantation workers of Darjeeling. The sample population of the multi-sited study has primarily been drawn from the lowest level of the employee pyramid of the tea plantations. This was because this is where most of the employees of a tea estate are placed. There are four categories of employees in a tea estate, namely:

- Management: At the top of the employee pyramid
- Staff: White collar office staff subordinate to the management
- Sub-staff: Supervisory watch and ward staff
- Workers (Field & Factory): at the bottom of the employee pyramid subsisting on daily wages

The management comprises the manager, assistant manager (field) and assistant manager (factory). The staff comprises the factory clerk, wages clerk and other office staff and sub-staff comprises of the lower level supervisors commonly referred to as watch and ward staff who deal with supervising the workers in the field and factory as well as those who are assigned jobs to protect the plantation as guards (*chowkidars*). Hence we see that a plantation is characterised by a hierarchy at work and the largest bulk of the hierarchy i.e. the daily wage worker is at the bottom and these workers at the plantations are categorised as:

- Permanent and Casual workers
- Factory and Field worker
- Male and Female worker

Data Sources

Primary Sources:

The primary data was obtained from the field work conducted in the two selected tea plantations and data were collected from 200 households in each tea garden. Workers were interviewed using a structured interview schedule. In addition, the researcher carried out 8-10 in-depth interviews with the garden workers, using a semi-structured interview schedule. About 8-10 key informant interviews were also held with the other levels of employees in the tea estate (staff, sub-staff & management) as well as other key informants like health workers, village ASHAs, ANMs and the CMO of PHCs. Observation and social and notional mapping were also used.

Secondary Sources:

The researcher collected secondary data available from sources like Ministry of Labour & Employment, State labour welfare department, Tea Statistics published by Tea Board of India, Economic Survey, District Census Handbook, Census of India 2011, Gazetteer of West Bengal, Plantation Records, data with the medical officers and other personnel at the PHCs and sub-centres and other institutions functional in the study area.

Technique	Tools	Participants
Individual Interview	Interview Schedule	100*2 (200)
Key Informant and In depth Interview	Interview Guide	15
Case Study	Open ended Questions, Check List, Observation	10 Unique narratives
Field Diaries	Factory visit, healthcare centre visits, Field Observations	From all the levels of the employment hierarchy in the plantation system
Group Discussion	Checklist	3 with 10 participants in each discussion

Observation checklist: to guide researcher in the process of observation during field-study. Observation categories included the health centres frequented by the workers, socio-economic condition of the workers, type of health services available, health seeking behaviour

Analytical Framework:

The data thus collected was analysed using quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Qualitative Analysis

An in-depth scrutiny of the data was carried out to identify the important themes emerging from the narratives of the respondents.

A number of analytical themes were identified for systematic assessment of the data in order to carry out content analysis. The important themes were identified from the narratives of the respondents whose case studies were undertaken.

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative data collected for the study were processed using Excel and SPSS and then analysed using suitable statistical techniques like cross tabulations

The data thus collected was synthesised to enable inferences. Some simple statistical techniques were employed to do so. Content analysis of the semi-structured interviews was also done for a meaningful interpretation of the field data. Data triangulation was done to corroborate information gathered through the qualitative and quantitative approaches.

1.8 Ethical Consideration

1. Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents is central tenet of ethics in social science research.¹⁶ Participation of each individual in the study was anonymised. During data processing and report writing codes were assigned for analysis.
2. Free and informed consent of the informants
3. Confidentiality of their responses was ensured and maintained.
4. Right to refuse to answer any question was respected and they were free to withdraw participation at any stage of interview or discussion process
5. Made clear that there should be no expectation of any *quid pro* or any such exchanged between researcher and respondent for the latter's participation in the study.

¹⁶ National Committee for Ethics in Social Science Research in Health (2000). Ethics in Social Sciences and Health Research: Draft Code of Conduct. Economic & Political Weekly. Vol.35.No. 12. Pp.987-991

6. Any questions posed to the researcher by prospective respondents pertaining to the study were fully entertained by the researcher.
7. The researcher has tried her utmost to remove personal identifiers from the information presented in the report to further prevent any breach of confidentiality (Kaiser, 2009)
8. The institutional ethical review board (IERB) of the university has given clearance to the proposed research vide letter IERB Ref. No. 2015/Student/72 dated 14/12/2015

1.9 Limitation of the study

Despite a thorough literature survey, extensive field survey and discussion with experts to fulfil the objectives of the study and also While the study tried to answer all the research questions posed for the present study, there were a few that it could not answer. It was considered important to note these and to delineate some of the drawbacks of the study:

1. Seasonality of the work and illness are likely to influence the outcomes. Therefore, the time of the data collection is likely to have influenced the empirical evidences.
2. The findings cannot be generalised to the other tea growing regions of the country as the data collected was only from a specific geographical area.
3. Political interference in the field was experienced as the researcher was informed by the estate workers that they were asked by the local ‘political’ members not to help the researcher with the survey. At Namring tea estate the *chowkidar* who took the researcher on the rounds was issued threatening and at Singell tea estate the management asked the researcher to not discuss political issues with the estate workers as it was a sensitive topic that could raise suspicions about the purpose of the study.
4. Tea estates are complex units of production and hence the researcher felt it best to approach one tea estate at a time for the purposes of a study in order to have an in-depth analysis and to be able to cover all stakeholders of the plantation system. This would help the researcher to wholly understand the plantation

system as well as generalise their findings in order to bring out more robust policy suggestions.

Chapter Scheme

The thesis is divided into 8 chapters. Chapter 1 begins with the a brief background delineates the conceptualisation of the thesis. It outlines the theoretical and empirical work of the plantation industry. The public health perspective is also outlined in the same chapter as it links the issues of health, economy and state policy with the plantation system. Chapter 2 presents the profile of the Indian tea industry tracing the birth of the plantation system as well as its growth and current crisis. It also discusses the conditions of North Indian and South Indian tea plantations. Literature and secondary data North India and for the South India tea plantations has been incorporated to illustrate similarities and differences.

Chapter 3 presents the case study of selected tea plantations of Darjeeling. It begins by tracing the history of Darjeeling and its tea plantation industry. It also presents details of the politico-administrative set-up of Darjeeling discussing its disturbed nature. Chapter 4 gives detailed description of the profile of the study sites along the organisational flow. It also discusses the unique feature of Fair Trade in the organic TE and the rural infrastructure of the study sites. Chapter 5 details the findings from the field outlining the social realities of the plantation workers. It discusses across the two sites the socio-demographic profile, wage, work entitlements, socio-economic conditions and access to basic amenities factors affecting health and livelihood of the tea plantation workers. Chapter 6 describes the reported illnesses, health care utilisation patterns and the health infrastructure across the two sites. Chapter 7 highlights the role of gender in the tea plantations with some supportive narratives from the field. Chapter 8 ends with summary and conclusion of the thesis with the aim of weaving together the highlights arising from the study. Lastly, some policy suggestions arising from the study are discussed.

Chapter 2

Locating India in Global Tea Economy: History, Trade and Expanse

2.1 Historical Overview

India had a connection with the tea industry long before we started growing and manufacturing tea on the sub-continent. The East India Company (EIC) exchanged silver for tea with Chinese merchants. By mid- 1700s when trade had reached its peak the EIC could no longer offload any more silver bullion.¹⁷ But the demand for tea was ever increasing among the British.

With acquisition of Bengal territory in 1760s and after signing of the ‘Treaty of Allahabad’ (1764) the EIC collected taxes (*diwani* rights) from those in the annexed territory and reinvested the revenue in buying Indian textiles, handicrafts, opium etc. The Chinese accepted Indian goods like opium, ivory, indigo and raw cotton for trade. Hence the EIC started exporting these Indian materials to Canton in China and the proceeds from this sale were reinvested in tea by the British. Hence we see that the trade tactics of the EIC led to the triangular trade which was known as Calcutta, Canton, Britain trade¹⁸. In this trade India was the only way for the British to continue with their supply of tea from the Chinese.

The first plantations to be developed in India were indigo, then tea, coffee, and, much later, rubber.¹⁹ The growing demand for tea in Britain and with suitable geo-climatic conditions in North-East India, tea seeds were imported from China to India in 1774.²⁰ In 1778, the Company asked Sir Joseph banks to prepare a series of notes on the

¹⁷ Besky. Sarah . 2014. *The Darjeeling Distinction: Labour and Justice on Fair Trade Plantations*. University of California Press. California. pp.4

¹⁸ Singh. Abhay Kumar. 2006. *World Trade in Bengal's Proto-Industrial Goods 1650-1800*. In Singh. Abhay Kumar. *Modern World System & Indian Proto-Industrialization: Bengal 1650-1800*. Volume II. Northern Book Centre. New Delhi. pp. 479 & 482 ,

¹⁹ Savur, Manorama. 1973. *Labour and Productivity in the Tea Industry*. *Economic & Political Weekly*. Vol. 8. No. 11. pp 551.

²⁰ Economic & Scientific Research Association. 1983. *Growth and Potential of Tea Industry in India*. Economic & Scientific Research Association. Calcutta. pp 2.

cultivation of new crops in which he advocated the cultivation of tea in India.²¹ In spite of the enthusiasm shown in the report not much was done to start a tea industry in India for a considerable period.

The tea industry in India began with the founding of the Assam Company in 1839. The British Parliament had cancelled the East India Company's monopoly over trade with China in 1833. Therefore the company's directors decided to explore possibilities of growing tea on a commercial basis in Assam which had been annexed in 1825²². Later in 1833, Lord William Bentick appointed a Tea Committee to explore the possibility of tea cultivation in India.

The cultivation of tea began in India after the first Opium War (1839-42) when procurement of tea from China started becoming difficult.²³ By 1839 there was a "*mad rush to clear the hillsides of Assam for new gardens*"²⁴. A small lot of Indian tea was also auctioned for the first time publicly in London. Most importantly, Indian tea scored over Chinese tea due to its thicker and stronger brew thereby gaining popularity with the masses²⁵. By 1862, Assam had 160 gardens owned by 57 private and five public companies.²⁶ In 1834 around 2000 plants from Calcutta were despatched by the Tea Committee (1833) which was set up by Lord William Bentick to Coorg, Mysore, Nilgiris and some parts of Madras to be planted as a subsidiary crop in the coffee estates.²⁷ However only in 1872 the tea industry emerged in South India²⁸. In 1840 when Superintendent Dr. Archibald Campbell was transferred from Kathmandu to Darjeeling there started the experimental growth of tea.²⁹ However, only in 1856 was the

²¹ Ghosh, Tushar Kanti. 1987. *Tea Gardens of West Bengal: A Critical Study of Land Management*. B.R. Publishing Group, New Delhi

²² Bhowmick.S.K. 2011. *Ethnicity and Isolation: Marginalization of Tea Plantation Workers*. Multidisciplinary Global Contexts. Vol. 4. No. 2. pp 238

²³ Besky, Sarah 2014. *The Darjeeling Distinction: labour and justice on fair trade tea plantations*. University of California Press. California. pp. 5

²⁴ Bhowmick.S.K. (2011). *Ethnicity and Isolation: Marginalization of Tea Plantation Workers*. Multidisciplinary Global Contexts. Vol. 4. No. 2. pp 238

²⁵ Ibid. pp238

²⁶ Economic & Scientific Research Association. 1983. *Growth and Potential of Tea Industry in India*. Economic & Scientific Research Association. Calcutta. pp 4

²⁷ Ibid. pp 2

²⁸ Bhowmick.S.K. (2011). *Ethnicity and Isolation: Marginalization of Tea Plantation Workers*. Multidisciplinary Global Contexts. Vol. 4. No. 2. pp 240

²⁹ O'Malley. L S S. 1907. *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*. Logos Press. New Delhi. p.72

industry established as a commercial enterprise in Darjeeling.³⁰ Soon India had verdant slopes primarily covered with tea bushes in the North East region of Assam and in West Bengal responsible for supplying more than 50% of the finished product to both the national and international market.

Tea plantations have also seen as isolated enclaves where the workers have little mobility and due to their remote location, difficult terrain, the characteristics of the plantation economy and the colonial state informed the medical praxis (Bhattacharya, 2012). The context of medical care in the plantations in the initial years was greatly influenced by colonial capitalism and distinct habitations for the management as well as the labour (Bhattacharya, 2012). However, health and sanitation were not the most important or the only reason for the formation of the colonial enclaves rather scope of economic, political, security, class and race considerations appears to have contributed to the formation of colonial enclaves across British India. The British began the development of Darjeeling as a colonial enclave not only to escape from diseases of tropical medicine but also as a vista for growing and supplying its most loved beverage ‘Tea’.

According to Silva (2013) tropical medicine discourse influenced the formation of colonial enclaves in three ways:

1. Hill stations were established as an escape for the British from the dust, disease and dirt of the plains. And the higher elevations were seen as suitable locations for recuperation and revitalisation.
2. The environment of such enclaves was kept guarded to control tropical diseases in order to give protection to the European settlers, planters and tourists.
3. Europeans seemed to be in a better position to protect themselves in the enclaves as the movement of the ‘natives’ (seen as the carriers of disease) was regulated and those who entered were subjected to disease control measures of various kinds.

30 Ibid. p. 73

While production increased, flavour types multiplied, markets expanded; the workers in the gardens did not experience much change in their socio-economic conditions. At present it is felt by many working in the tea plantations that the ‘*gora sahibs*’ have simply been replaced by ‘*madisey sahibs*’ whose aim is only to earn profit from the finished tea and not consider the betterment of the workers.

Tea Industry and Trade: A Situational Analysis

Tea has an immense network of people connected to it apart from the consumers alone. These are the growers, pluckers, manufacturers, suppliers, brokers, sellers, traders and retailers which eventually impact the well being of millions across the globe. Therefore tea industry remains an important area to be studied in all areas of research. At present, cultivation of tea is spread over more than 36 countries of the world. The main tea producing countries are located in Asia and Africa of which the five largest are China, India, Kenya, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. The 59th Annual Report of the Tea Board of India states that global production and consumption remains finely balanced since the estimated global production of tea in 2012-13 was said to be 4625 million kg while world absorption was observed to be around 4440 million kg. In 2017, as per the tea board of India, the global production of tea was 5698 million kg while the world absorption was 5488 million kg. Thus we see that there has been a constant oversupply of tea in the world markets by at least a 100 million kg thereby keeping prices in check.

Tea has a very expansive market and South Asia alone consumes over 900 million kg of tea per annum³¹ and this would only have increased. According to tea board of India, globally the consumption of tea has increased from 2014-2017 from 4879 (487 million kg) to 5488 (548 million kg) million tonnes respectively. A major share of the supply in global tea comes from India (Table 2.1). The tea industry employs a major share of the labour workforce in the region. Therefore, it is imperative to examine the status of the industry and its implications on those engaged with it.

³¹ Lama. Mahendra P. 2001. “*Integrating the tea sector in South Asia: New Opportunities In The Global Market*”. South Asian Survey, Vol. 8. No. 1. pp 67-96.

Three of the South Asian countries mainly Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka account for 52% tea production, 42% of exports and 36% of consumption.³² In 2001 India used to be the largest producer and consumer of tea.³³ Today China has gone ahead in production as can be seen from the latest data of the Tea Board of India, wherein China is producing 1623.21 million kgs and India is second at 1115.72 million kgs.³⁴ While is said to account for only 20% of the global consumption³⁵, due to its large population, the total consumption of tea in India is largest and almost 80% of the total production is said to be consumed within the country. Hence we see that despite other countries like U.K., Afghanistan, Kuwait, Ireland, Sri Lanka and Pakistan having a higher per head consumption of tea there is a huge market for tea in India itself.

India is still the second largest producer of tea in the world. However, while India remains as highest consumer of tea but it has lost its position as the highest producer of tea and has been overtaken by China. As can be seen from table 1.1 in 2013 India contributed 24.02% to the world production while in 2015 the share was reduced to 22.87% and in 2017 share of Indian tea in global tea again rose to 23.19%. Of the two largest contributors to the global supply of tea, today India contributes 23.19% while China contributes 43.81% to the global tea market. Hence, there is increasing competitiveness from both old competitors such as China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and from newly emerging tea producers such as Kenya. In 1980 Kenya lagged far behind India with an average yield of 1174 kg/hectare as against India's 1491 kg/hectare³⁶. However it is observed that in 2000 Kenya's average yield was 1933 kg/hectare while India lagged behind at 1679 kg/hectare³⁷.

³² Sivananthiran,A. and Ratnam, Venkata C.S. 2002. Introduction. In Sivananthiran,A. and Ratnam, Venkata C.S. (ed.). Labour and Social Issues in Plantations In South Asia. International Labour Organisation (ILO). India. pp 1.

³³ Khawas, Vimal (2006), Socio-Economic Conditions of Tea Garden Labourers in Darjeeling Hills". Council for Social Development, New Delhi. pp 9

³⁴ Tea Statistics (2010-2011). Tea Board of India. Pp12

³⁵ 59th Annual Report 2012-13. Tea Board of India. Kolkata. Pp. 14

³⁶ Tea Statistics (1987-88). Tea Board of India. Kolkata. Pp 188

³⁷ Tea Statistics (2000-01). Tea Board of India. Kolkata. Pp 192

TABLE 2.1: World Production of Tea 2013-2017 (Figures in Million Tonnes)

Country	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
China	2496412	2404947	2248999	2095717	1924457
India	1321760	1267360	1208860	1207310	1200410
Kenya	439858	473011	399211	445105	432453
Sri Lanka	307720	292574	328964	338032	340026
Vietnam	175000	18000	170000	175000	180325
Indonesia	134000	137015	132615	144369	136856
Others	823236	818733	796426	803435	781284
Total	5697986	5411640	5285075	5208968	4995811

Source: Global Tea Production (2014-18; 2012-16), Tea Board of India, Govt. Of India

The top five producers of tea are China, India, Kenya, Sri Lanka and Vietnam supplying 81.45% of the world's tea and are the major competitors in the world tea market. Therefore, while India is still a key contributor to the global supply of tea the wages received by the worker are still low which can be due to the oversupply of cheap labour in the country. It is important for India to regain its position by increasing supply of good quality so as to improve price which can then trickle down to improve the lives of the workers.

Tea Exports: Expansion of the Industry

India was not only the leading producer of tea at one point of time but she also remained the leading exporter of tea for many decades. In the world exports of commodities, India's share (%) of tea & mate in the world total exports was 33.4 in

1970, 27.7 in 1980, 22.1 in 1990, 14.0 in 2000, 11.1 in 2011 and 8.8 in 2012.³⁸ This implies that in 1970-1980 India remained the largest contributor of tea to global exports market after spices 20.5% and 14.5% respectively, in 1990-2000 after leather (13.4%) and precious stones (12.0%). However, in 2011 and 2012 it was seen that India's position as leading contributor dropped down to the 4th position as rice, spices, precious stone exports took over respectively. Therefore, it can be seen that tea industry which was the major foreign exchange earner has slipped to lower position but still contributes significantly to the global exports market.

Table 2.2 clearly shows the share of tea in exports and the foreign exchange earned. Although the foreign exchange earned has increased in absolute terms from US\$ 260 million to US\$831 million from 1960-61 to 2018-19, in relative terms the share of tea in total foreign exchange earned has decreased steadily and significantly from 1960-61 where it contributed 19.31% to the total foreign exchange earned to 0.25% in 2018-19. This is despite the fact that the quantity of tea exports has increased from 199.2 thousand tonnes in 1960-61 to 270.3 thousand tonnes in 2018-19.

Table 2.2: Share of tea in India: Total exports during 1960-2018

Year	Quantity (Thousand Tonnes)	Total Exports (\$ million)	Export of Tea & Mate (\$ Million)	Share of Tea & Mate in total exports (%)
1960-61	199.2	1346	260	19.31
1970-71	199.1	2031	196	9.64
1980-81	229.2	8486	538	6.34
1990-91	199.1	18143	596	3.28
2000-2001	202.4	44076	433	0.97
2010-2011	238.3	251136	736	0.29
2018-2019	270.3	330070	831	0.25

Source: Govt. Of India. Economic Survey (2018-19). Pp.A110-112; Share in total exports, calculated.

³⁸ Government of India 2014. *Economic Survey 2013-14* Statistical Appendix. Oxford University Press. New Delhi. Pp 91-94

Tea industry, therefore, continues to be of considerable importance to the national economy of India in terms of generation of income, foreign exchange and employment. However, it is of concern that the export earnings from tea are continuously falling. In 2014 it was observed that there has been a 9.8% drop in export earnings primarily due to lowered exports; drop in unit price of Indian teas and mainly due to increased output by Sri Lanka and Kenya³⁹. This is a cause for concern as the producers put forth a strong argument for increasing input costs in face of lowered profit and thereby curb wage increment for the workers in the plantations.

The foregoing discussion on global market of tea highlights that this is a major industry which contributes to the Indian economy while also providing livelihood to a large population. The main contributors to this industry are the tea plantation labourers (or workers) without whom the finished product in beautiful packages cannot be achieved and the tea leaves on the bushes will never reach the tea cups.

In India the plantation workforce is divided into four categories- management, staff, sub-staff and workers. It is the workers who are at the lowest rung in the hierarchy comprise the majority of the workforce. The nature of their work is back-breaking, low paid and least secure. Injuries are common, along with water-borne and respiratory diseases as well as various other health hazards which are faced due to the exposure to insecticides and pesticides⁴⁰.

2.2 Growth of Indian Tea Industry -Plantations and Labour

Once the tea industry had established in India, it grew consistently. The focus of this study is largely on the labour employed in tea plantations across the country and therefore this section deals with the discussion on labour, social security benefits available to them especially as those outlined in the Plantation Labour Act (1951) as well as the state provisioning for safeguarding the labour. With continuous expansion in terms of estates and area of production there was also a continuous increase in the

³⁹ Dutta. Indrani (2015). *Export earnings from tea drop by 10 per cent*. The Hindu. 26th February 2015

⁴⁰ Gothoskar. Sujata. (2012). *This Chay Is Bitter: Exploitative Relations in the Tea Industry*. Economic & Political Weekly. Vol. XLVII. No. 50. Pp. 34

quantum of labour required by this highly labour-intensive industry. Hence, tea industry is said to be labour intensive yet the wages provided are one of the least in the organised sector.

Table 2.3 shows the all India figures with regard to number of tea estates, area under tea & employment. There has been considerable growth in the number of tea gardens from around 6000 in 1951 to around 14000 in 2006 which is more than double in number over a period of 55 years. Similarly there is growth in terms of the area under tea as well as the number of labour employed. The labour is inclusive of all permanent resident workers, permanent workers but living outside and temporary workers but living outside the plantation.

Table 2.3: All India Data 1951-2006

Year	No. of gardens	Growth Rate (%)	Area under tea (Hectares)	Growth Rate (%)	No. of workers employed	Growth Rate (%)
1951	6214	-	316840		-	-
1961	9499	52.86	331229	4.54	-	-
1971	12015	26.48	356516	7.63	8,56,698*	-
1981	13410	11.61	383629	7.60	9,10,823**	6.31
1991	13873	3.45	420470	9.60	10,54,651	15.79
2001	116659	740.90	509806	21.24	12,32,150	16.83
2006	143217	22.76	567020	11.22	12,59,500	2.21
2016	147200	2.78	577477	1.84	11,31,942	-10.12

SOURCE: Tea Statistics 1969-70; 1982-83; 1993-94; 1998-99; 2001-02; 2005-06; 2016-17 (*Data of 1968; **Provisional)

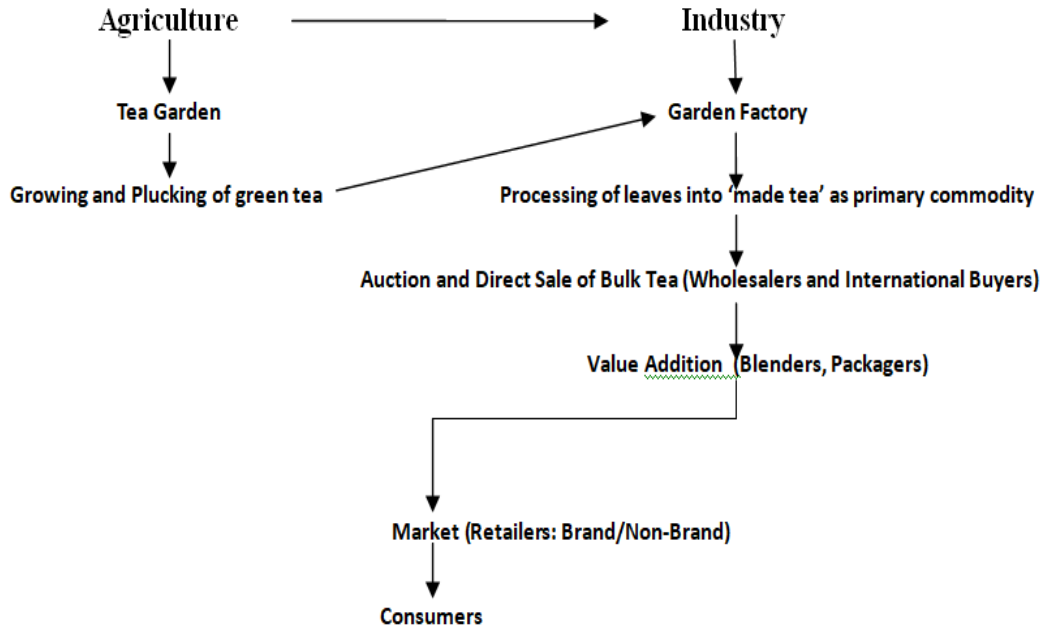
Thus, it can be inferred from the above table 2.3 that there has been increase in the number of gardens, area and labour. However, there has been a sharp increase in the number of gardens from 1991 to 2001 as there was a huge jump in the growth rate to 740.90 per cent. The area under tea did not increase as sharply as the tea gardens and neither did the number of workers employed. This could imply that there was growth of

smaller tea estates and while there was increase in number of garden the same did not translate into increase in area or number of garden workers. In fact in terms of workers employed in the gardens it can be seen that in 2016 there was negative growth and the number of workers employed in the plantations reduced.

There has also been a growth in the number of independent small growers in India and the figure seems to be only growing. Data from the Tea Board of India shows that while in 2016-17 there were 56% big growers (area more than 10.12 hectares) and 44% small growers (area upto 10.12 hectares) the numbers rose to 47% small growers in the year 2017-18. The small growers/farmers are different to the tea producers as they own smaller tracts of tea area and sell green leaf to bought leaf factories (BLFs) as they do not have factories. They are also not covered under the PLA (1951).

According to Joseph and George (2011) the plantation sector has been considered to be a major source of livelihood and employment for the population of the regional economies. Tea production is a combination of industry and agriculture. The production of the tea leaf is an agricultural activity while the processing part is an industrial activity. This can be clearly understood from figure 2.1 which explains how tea production involves both agriculture and industry. Workers are engaged in the tea industry not only at the estate level but many earn their livelihood from ancillary activities associated with production, value addition and the marketing of tea. The thesis focuses on the workers engaged in the tea estates and are working at the lowest rung of the employee pyramid earning daily wage. The workers in the tea estates are engaged both in the field for plucking, weeding, etc. and in the factory to help with the manufacturing of green leaf into made tea that is finally meant to be sold in the market as primary commodity. This primary commodity is further re-packaged to be sold in retail shops.

Fig 2.1: Tea Leaf Activity- from garden to cup



Source: Made by the Author

The plantation sector of India is seen to be located in the backward and rural regions of a few states in the country and is a highly labour intensive sector with a high concentration of women workers (54% in tea and coffee; and 42% in rubber)⁴¹. This sector comprises of labourers who have remained less developed, isolated, marginalised and vulnerable (Bhowmick, 2011); and is a source of livelihood for small holders whose numbers are rising over the years⁴². The tea workers are considered to be among the poorest and the most deprived section of organised labour in India. A large section of them is said to belong to the Schedule Tribe communities⁴³.

Tea industry attracts a lot of workers and is among the largest employers of workers in this sector. There are around 10 lakh permanent workers employed in 1,500 tea estates

⁴¹ Occupational Wage Survey (2006). Labour Bureau. Shimla. Government of India.

⁴² Thapa, Namrata. (2012). *Employment Status and Human Development of Tea Plantation Labourers in West Bengal*. NRPPD Discussion Paper <http://www.cds.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/NRPPDD11.pdf> Accessed on 10th Oct 2012

⁴³ Bhowmick. S.K. (1994). *Tea Plantation Wage Agreement: Worker's Interests Sacrificed*. Economic and Political Weekly. Vol.29. Issue 41. p 2645

in the country and another 6 lakhs are engaged as temporary workers.⁴⁴ Bhowmick (2002) stated that one out of seven workers in the organised manufacturing sector is a tea plantation worker. As per the tea statistics (Table 1.3) there were more than 11 lakh workers employed in the country.

Despite the fact that India is one of the leading exporters of tea in the world, the workers remain a vulnerable lot. The structure of the global supply chain is such that the lion's share of profits is captured by large multinational corporations. It is said that coffee, cocoa and tea are the three tropical commodities which are ideal vehicles for studying the structure of north-south inequality in the world economy⁴⁵.

Figure 2.2 : How earning from a cup of tea is shared across the production chain



Source: War on Want Tea Report (2010)

Tea Processing and Marketing

Tea is usually exported after primary processing in bulk form by garden mark and grade. This means that blending, final packaging and marketing – which are the most lucrative stages in the overall process – are mainly carried out by tea companies in the

⁴⁴ Bhowmik, Sharit. 2009. *Politics of Tea in the Dooars*. Economic & Political Weekly. Vol. XLIV. No.9. pp 21

⁴⁵ Talbot. John M. 2002. *Tropical commodity chains, forward integration strategies and international inequality: coffee, cocoa and tea*. Review of International Political Economy. Vol.9. Issue 4. P. 705

buyer countries⁴⁶. Hence it can be inferred that tea is a buyer-driven commodity wherein buyer driven commodity chains are those in which large retailers and marketers play pivotal roles (Saji, 2005). A very small proportion of the profits included in the retail price of a box of tea goes to the tea-producing country. Instead, multinational corporations reap large rewards while the tea workers are condemned to a life of penury. It has been observed that in the supply chain of packaged tea the maximum profits are concentrated at the point of value addition⁴⁷ and the workers who delicately pluck the green leaf and are responsible for the first point of manufactured product get least returns. As depicted in Fig 2.2 the retailers like supermarkets get more than half the share of earnings while the blenders like Typhoo, Tetley, Brooke Bond, etc. get about 33%. The processing factories earn seven percent. The tea auctioneers and brokers get one percent while the workers who pluck the leaves get less than once percent of the earnings. In India tea is largely still exported as a primary commodity thereby the share of profits is primarily taken by the retailers of packaged tea and very little of the profit comes down to the tea plantation workers.

The tea industry is such that the plantations are responsible for growing, plucking and manufacturing the 'made tea' as primary commodity which is essentially sold as bulk tea at auctions or through direct sale or through any other outlets⁴⁸. Many of the bulk buyers then do value addition to this tea and greatly benefit from the products. It is essentially done by reprocessing including the blending of the teas with various quantities of teas of different varieties or addition of flavours, herbs etc. And here at this level the earlier manufactured tea again becomes an intermediate item. In a way, it once again becomes a primarily commodity or a semi-finished product. This is then packaged into packet tea, tea bags and sold to boutiques/tea chains as well as supermarkets. The entire process is outlined in figure 2.1 wherein the journey of tea leaf from garden to cup is outlined.

⁴⁶ Wal. Sanne. V.D. (2008). *Sustainability Issues in the Tea Sector: A Comparative Analysis of Six Leading Producing Countries*. SOMO. Amsterdam. p24

⁴⁷ Talbot. John M. 2002. *Tropical commodity chains, forward integration strategies and international inequality: coffee, cocoa and tea*. Review of International Political Economy. Vol.9. Issue 4. P. 702

⁴⁸ Talbot. John M. (2012) & Hazarika. Kakali (2011) describe the 'commodity-chains' and how 'value-addition' takes place away from the plantation and it is this value addition in the tea commodity chain where the big companies (MNCs/TNCs) collect all profit margins.

Since the tea leaves need to be processed soon after plucking in order to maintain its character and flavour the initial processing stage needs to take place close to the point of production⁴⁹. Hence we see that this bulk tea has been the principal form in international trade shipped in 50kg chests⁵⁰. It has been observed that the tea producers in India are not essentially the marketers of the tea. Around 85% of the world tea is sold by few MNCs⁵¹. The two major tea companies dominating the consumption market are Unilever and Tata Tea (Talbot, 2012).

Key Organisational Features of Indian Tea Industry

The key organisational features of the Indian tea industry⁵² which have a bearing on the socio-economic conditions, livelihood and health of the workers in the plantations are as follows:

- The plantation system has a distinct, vertical work hierarchy that maintains the class structure of workers and management thereby maintaining the feudal relations of production.
- Women constitute majority of the labour force and this industry is said to be the only industry in the organized sector that employs such a high proportion of female labour. The female workers are mainly employed in plucking of tea leaves (requiring delicate handling in order not to bruise the tea leaves) and in light maintenance work.
- Employment of families is a special feature of the plantation industry⁵³. Historically the plantations had a system of indentured labour wherein planters encouraged families rather than individuals to migrate to the plantations. This served a dual purpose of cheap labour availability as there was no opportunity for alternative employment. And by encouraging families to migrate, they ensured that workers were cut off from the

⁴⁹ Talbot. John M. 2002. *Tropical commodity chains, forward integration strategies and international inequality: coffee, cocoa and tea*. Review of International Political Economy. Vol.9. Issue 4. P. 706

⁵⁰ Ibid. pp 713

⁵¹ Hazarika. Kakali (2011). *Changing Market Scenario for Indian Tea*. International Journal of Trade, Economics & Finance. Vol. 2. No.4. pp 286

⁵² Mishra.K.D., Sarma.A & Upadhyay.V. (2011). *Invisible Chains? Crisis in the tea industry and the 'unfreedom' of labour in Assam's tea plantations*. Contemporary South Asia. 19:1. pp 77

⁵³ Bhowmick.S.K. (2011). Ethnicity and Isolation: Marginalization of Tea Plantation Workers. Multidisciplinary Global Contexts. Vol. 4. No. 2. pp 240

places of their origin and were settled in the plantations for purposes of future recruitment.

- There is significant presence of casual labour on tea plantations. About one-third of the total labour force consists of casual labour in tea plantations. Kalyan (2012) also concludes his study on tea plantations in Assam by stating that there is high casualisation of workforce in the tea plantation structure especially in the hazardous and risk prone jobs.
- In comparison to other sectors, the rate of unionization is fairly high in the tea industry. But the effectiveness of these unions in securing and safeguarding the interests of the workers has not been very impressive. Their contribution in political mobilisation is comparatively higher.
- Wages of the plantation workers are lowest in the organised sector.

Provisions safeguarding plantation workers

Labour is a matter under the Concurrent List. Therefore, labour is governed by Central Acts as well as a few state specific acts for safeguarding the workers. The next section describes some important Central Acts put in place by the Government of India to safeguard the various industries as well as the workers. Of these the most important act for the plantation sector workers is the Plantation Labour Act (1951).

Year	Act	Content	Highlight
1947	Industrial Disputes Act (IDA)	Provides for the investigation and settlement of industrial disputes. “ <i>Industrial Dispute</i> ” is defined as any difference or dispute between employees and/or employers connected with employment and/or non-employment and/or terms of employment and/or conditions of labour.	A plantation is considered to be an industrial establishment and therefore comes under the gamut of IDA.
1948	Minimum Wages Act (MWA)	Enacted to ensure the payment of minimum wages to the employee in certain employments.	Tea plantations were included under this Act in 1952 in order to provide some amount of protection to the tea plantation workers ⁵⁴ .
1951	Plantation Labour Act (PLA)	The Act makes provisions for safeguarding the rights of the workers employed in plantations. It also imposes the responsibility of the workers’ welfare on the plantation management.	More directly providing for tea plantation workers and outlines the benefits to be provided to the workers
1952	Employees Provident Fund Act (EPFA)	Enacted to safeguard the employees especially after retirement. However it also provides the employees with various financing options. The act states that the employer and the employee both contribute to the fund at a fixed rate (1997 amendment) of 12% of the basic wages, dearness allowance and retaining allowance.	Assam Tea Plantation Workers Provident Fund & Pension Fund Act (1955) were enacted
1961	Maternity Benefits Act	Enacted to regulate the employment of women during	Maternity benefit legally introduced in Bombay

⁵⁴ Sharit. Bhowmik. 2002. Productivity and Labour Standards in Tea Plantation Sector in India. in Sivananthiran. A. & Ratnam. Venkata C.S. ed. Labour and Social Issues in Plantations In South Asia. International Labour Organisation (ILO). India. pp. 143

	(MBA)	her pregnancy period and to provide for maternity benefits. The employee is provided six weeks leave prior to delivery, one leave on day of delivery and another six weeks post delivery. The provisions state that pregnant women may request to not do tasks of arduous nature that may adversely affect her health. Payment of maternity benefit is made at the rate of the average daily wage for the period of her absence.	Legislative Council (1928) ⁵⁵ . Dr Ambedkar debated in the council the need for providing women with pre and postnatal rest. And the onus to provide this to the women lay with the government.
1972	Payment of Gratuity Act (PGA)	It is seen as a social obligation by an employer towards his employee. Gratuity is paid to an employee on his/her termination after rendering not less than 5 years of continuous service unless employment is terminated due to death or disablement.	
2010	Plantation Labour (Amendment) Act	It was introduced as Bill in 2008 and had to be re-introduced in 2010 which amended a few provisions of the PLA (1951)	Acknowledged and included in the Act the contribution of 'casual' labour. Making penal provisions more stringent.

Plantation Labour Act (1951)

The Plantations Labour Act (1951) It states that the owners provide the workers with housing, healthcare, water, sanitation facilities, rations and education for their children. Despite the several decades since the act was passed, possibly no tea plantation in Assam or West Bengal has implemented all of its provisions.⁵⁶ Not all the provisions are met in the tea plantations of India and even if some of the provisions are provided by the owners then the quality of the service is dismal. Therefore this study on the

⁵⁵ Moon. Vasant (2002) *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and speeches* Volume 2. Education Department. Govt. of Maharashtra. Sourced from B.L.C. Debates, Vol. XXIII, pp. 381-82, dated 28th July 1928

⁵⁶ Bhowmick.S.K. (2011). Ethnicity and Isolation: Marginalization of Tea Plantation Workers. *Multidisciplinary Global Contexts*. Vol. 4. No. 2. pp 243

health of the plantation labourers would also to some extent look into the gap in provisioning provided by the tea plantation management to the workers across India.

According to Besky (2008), the Plantations Labour Act (PLA) 1951 seems to be a positive legacy of an otherwise exploitative colonial regime. PLA could be understood to be positive as Makita (2012) states that the PLA reformed the master-servant relationship between planter and worker to an employer-employee relationship. Due to the exploitations and excesses that were meted out on the workers during the British Raj it was felt necessary by the government post-independence that a labour law must be enacted to safeguard the plantation workers. And since it is an act it is also legally binding on all the producers of tea and therefore it ensures and provides social security to the workers by providing housing, rations and other benefits. Besky (2008) also goes on to state that the strict adherence to the PLA (1951) made many owners as viable candidates for the fair trade certifications. Hence while to begin with the British established tea gardens may have been excruciatingly exploitative the PLA(1951) was established by the Indian government while also including some of the colonial labour policies into the act.

In recent times, an amendment bill to the PLA (1951) has been introduced in parliament namely the Plantation Labour Amendment Bill (2008) which was reintroduced in 2010. The PLA (1951) was amended vide Plantations Labour (Amendment) Act (2010). The amended provisions that have come into force w.e.f. 07.06.2010 are such that⁵⁷:

- Definition of ‘employer’ has been broadened
- Definition of ‘family’ has been made gender neutral so as to allow dependents’ benefits to both the families of male and female workers.
- Scope of definition of ‘worker’ has been enlarged by increasing wage ceiling from Rs 750/- to Rs. 10,000/- per month.
- Casual workers having worked for more than 60 days in a year have been included within the ambit of the Act.

⁵⁷ Annual Report (2010-11), Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India

- A new chapter covering all aspects on safety and occupational health of workers working in the plantations has been introduced. As well as safeguards to be adopted in the use and handling of agro-chemicals.
- Complete prohibition of employment of children below 14 years of age.
- Act instructs the State government to provide medical facilities and recover the costs from the defaulting employer.
- The act seeks to make penal provisions more stringent for effective implementation of PLA (1951).

These are some of the vital changes and additions that have been made to the PLA (1951) but their effective enforcements remains to be seen. The search for literature on the amended act and its provisioning led to the finding that apart from the Labour Bureau's annual report (2010-11) and PRS Legislative Research website neither the amended act nor has its effective implementation been discussed or reported elsewhere in the government let alone among the tea industry's workers. This study would like to further delve into the question of enforcement of the Plantation Labour (Amendment) Act (2010).

Crisis in the Indian tea industry

According to Mishra , Sarma and Upadhaya (2011) the Indian tea industry has been passing through a crisis stage since the late 1990s and the causes of this crisis have been many⁵⁸. There has been an emergence of new growers like Vietnam, Indonesia and Kenya and this has led to oversupply of tea in the international market. Since supply is more than the demand this has also led to the fall in tea auction prices. It has also been discussed that Indian tea is losing its position in the export market as a result of high production cost and poor quality. The increase in production cost has been a result of expenditure on fixed expenses like fuel, power and especially labour.

58 Hazarika, Kakali. 2011. 'Changing Market Scenario for Indian Tea'. International Journal of Trade, Economics and Finance, Vol.2., No.4

Notably, tea is mostly sold through auction in which price realization is doubtful as the brokers are said to be in cooperation with the big buyers to keep prices low. Existence of higher percentage of ageing bushes has led to decreased productivity and degradation in quality. There also appears to be a lack of sufficient and up-to-date statistics regarding the tea sector without which proper planning and fund utilisation is not possible. There have been closure and abandonment of tea gardens in plenty in the past leaving the tea garden workers in a quandary and state of hopelessness.

Despite the entry of marketing mechanisms such as Fair Trade, Ethical Trade Partnership, Rainforest Alliance etc that allow the producers to approach niche markets the conditions of the workers in the plantations does not seem to have improved much over the years. It is all the more important to understand the workers' social, economic, political and physical well being.

Since tea industry is an important for economy it is crucial to explore and understand how the workers of this industry are safeguarded and supported. The profits earned from the industry, which largely relies on the field workers for picking quality tea leaves need to reach the workers at the lowest rung of the hierarchy. The first and foremost argument put forth by the profit-making stakeholders to curb any increase in the wages of the workers has always been increasing social/labour costs. This study aims to underline and examine the vulnerability of the workers and to clearly identify whether wage cut or static wage in the ever increasing input costs in this industry is the only option available? Why despite the entry of social justice based marketing mechanisms such as Fair Trade does the worker remain at a disadvantage especially when it comes to accessing resources to improve their living standards, health, nutrition, etc.

In conclusion vulnerability of the plantation workers who form the backbone of this highly labour intensive industry needs special attention. The vulnerability of the workers is further exacerbated by the crisis being faced by the industry as a whole. The oversupply of tea in the global tea market has led to fall in prices and with a fall in prices there is further drop in profit margins and therefore the workers bear the brunt of the owners' cost-cutting tactics.

2.3 Tea Regions of India

Tea is a processed as well as a manufactured commodity. Therefore it placed under both the sectors of agriculture and industry as discussed previously. It is an agricultural crop which is processed in a factory and thereby also a manufactured commodity. Tea plantations are therefore, governed by both agricultural and industrial rules and regulations.

Agricultural operations like cultivation, plucking, manuring, irrigation, weed control, disease control, pest control, transportation of green leaf and uprooting are undertaken for growing tea. The final product of tea comes through various processing and manufacturing stages like withering, rolling, fermenting, drying, sorting, grading and finally packaging and weighing which takes place in a factory usually located within the tea estate.

This section presents an analysis of tea estates across India. It elucidates the concentration of tea estates and their characteristics. There is paucity of literature in comparative analysis between the geographical tea growing regions of India. The discussion draws from the secondary sources to reflect on this aspect. Tea plantation of south does not receive much attention in literature as their contribution to the tea industry is lesser than the north India tea plantations with Assam and West Bengal accounting for almost 98% of the tea produced in the country. Considering that much of the literature on tea has concentrated on Assam, Dooars-Terai and Darjeeling region. An attempt is made to understand the situation in other parts of the country.

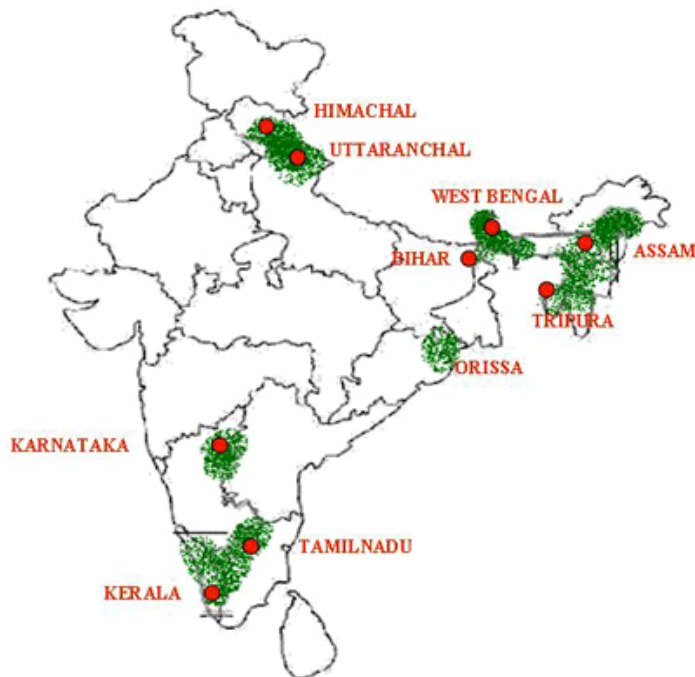
Major Tea Growing States

Tea is grown in 15 states in India of which Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala are the major tea growing states and today they account for 98% of the total production of tea⁵⁹ in India. The other tea producing states in North India are Himachal Pradesh, Tripura, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya. Hence it can be seen that the Indian tea industry can be segmented into two

⁵⁹ Annual Report (2015-16), Tea Board of India, p.14

geographical divisions- North East India (particularly Assam & West Bengal) and South India (particularly Tamil Nadu & Kerala). In West Bengal too the tea growing region is largely confined to North Bengal (Dooars, Terai, and Darjeeling) region wherein there has been a continued struggle for separate statehood and they consider themselves to be included as one among the North East states in order to have a larger share of the developmental pie. Literature also suggests that 92% of the area under cultivation and 98% of the total production of tea is accounted for by four major tea growing states viz. Assam (51%), West Bengal (23%), Tamil Nadu (17%) and Kerala (7%).⁶⁰

Figure 2.3: Tea Growing States in India



Source- Tea Board of India. <http://www.teaboard.gov.in/images/teamap.gif>

The tea sector in the country is largely organized as 72% of the total area under tea cultivation and 74% of the total production comes from the organized sector⁶¹. The

⁶⁰ 102nd Report on Performance of Plantation Sector- Tea & Coffee Industry by Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce (2012) . p. 2

⁶¹ 102nd Report on Performance of Plantation Sector- Tea & Coffee Industry by Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce (2012) . p. 3

remaining 28% of the area and 26% of the production is accounted for by the unorganized sector popularly known as small tea growers sector with more than 1.5 lakh holdings and the average size of the holdings being less than one hectare⁶².

The categories of tea produced in the major tea producing regions of India include orthodox (whole leaf tea: black and green tea) and crush tear and curl (CTC) tea. The processing of the two categories of tea is different and the plucking process for orthodox variety of tea is finer than the CTC variety. While both products result in tea however the quality of orthodox (whole leaf tea) is said to be higher than that of CTC tea. Of the 15 states that grow tea there are some states that produce only orthodox while others produce both categories of tea. Tripura, Bihar, Karnataka and Nagaland only produce CTC tea while Assam, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Meghalaya, Tamil Nadu and Kerala produce both orthodox and CTC. Sikkim, Mizoram and Himachal Pradesh produced only orthodox variety of tea. Darjeeling, Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh are renowned for their orthodox variety of tea in the international market which are known as Darjeeling, Assam Orthodox, Nilgiri Orthodox and Kangra Tea respectively.

History

One of the first tea plantations to be established in the north was in the Assam region in 1839 followed by Darjeeling around the same time. The tea industry began in Dooars around 1862 and Terai region in 1874 of West Bengal (Mitra, 1991). The tea industry in Southern states emerged around 1872.⁶³ The tea industries of the two regions (North East and South India) vary greatly in quantity as well as with regard to the price fetched at auctions.

Jayeeta Sharma (2009) gives a detailed historical account of how tea plantation system began in Assam and the conditions of work that were harsh on the '*coolies*' who were brought into Assam as migrant labourers. In 1836 the EIC's tea committee authenticated the discovery of tea forests in the eastern Indian region. This led to the

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Bhowmick.S.K. (2011). Ethnicity and Isolation: Marginalization of Tea Plantation Workers. Multidisciplinary Global Contexts. Vol. 4. No. 2. p. 240

British colonists to start an experimental venture of growing Chinese tea in the Assam region. Under Charles Alexander Bruce's supervision a batch of experimental tea was sent to London auction in 1838 and it fetched a record price which was 20 times the price fetched by the China variety of tea. This led to the establishment of the Assam Company (1840) by London merchants as the Charter Act of 1833 permitted land ownership in colonies annexed by the EIC and thus began the cultivation of tea in the upper regions of Assam. However, the merchants brought in Chinese tea manufacturers to help with the establishment of tea gardens and to learn the tricks of the trade. Once the British learnt to grow and manufacture tea the Chinese were dispensable. With the 1863 Transport of Native Labourers Act the colonial state passed several other acts that began the influx of migrant labour (from Central India) force into Assam. Hence it can be understood that while capital and management were brought from the imperialist countries, the land and labour was procured from the colonies as is the case with most plantation economies.

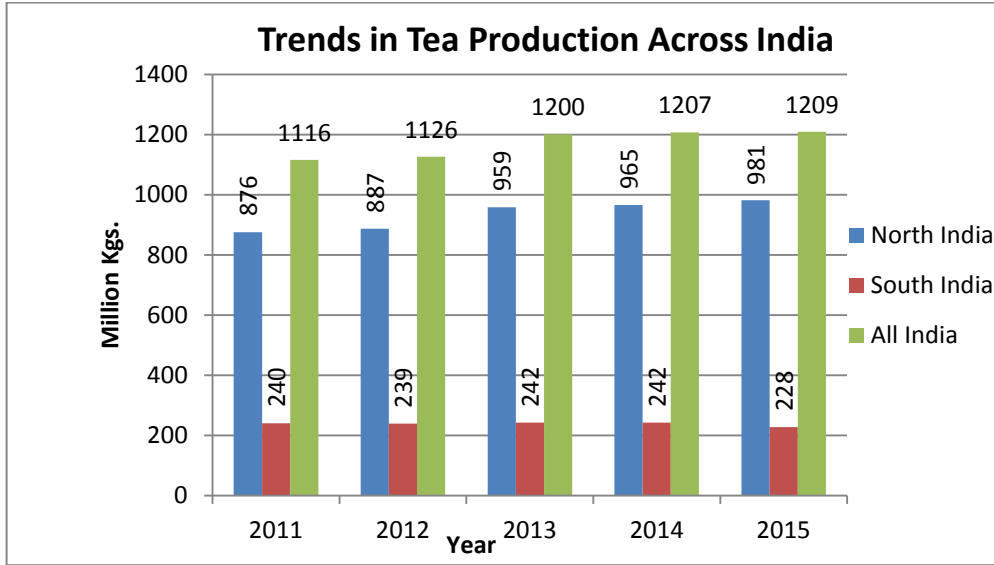
Production and Area under Tea

India is known to produce some of the world's finest teas- Darjeeling, Assam and Nilgiris famous for their distinctive flavour, strength and brightness.⁶⁴ The 58th Annual Report of the Tea Board of India states that during the year 2011, the overall tea production of India increased by 21.93 million kgs as production increased from 966.40 million kg in 2010 to 988.33 million kg in 2011. This increase was due to prevalence of better climatic conditions in major tea growing areas in North East India⁶⁵. However the tea production in South India saw a decrease of 2.5million kg from 243.37 million kg in 2010 to 240.87 million kg in 2011.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.13

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.13

Figure 2.4:



Source: Tea Statistics (2011-12; 2013-14); 62nd Annual Report, Tea Board of India

The all India production of tea (Fig: 2.3) reflects that there has been continuous increase in terms of production after the slump of 2010. After a period of decline in the production of tea in Southern India between 2011 and 2012, the southern tea industry appears to have picked up production in 2013 producing a quantity of 241.79 million kgs which was greater than the production of 2011. However it is clear from the Figure 2.4 that the north-east states are the greater contributors to the overall tea production in India amounting to 81.2% of total quantity produced as against 18.8% contributed by the Southern states in the year 2015. Although tea is grown in regions other than north-east India yet the study focuses on Darjeeling which is considered to be in North India.

In terms of area under cultivation of tea in our country, as can be seen from Table 2.4, the north east states have greater area under cultivation as compared to the southern states. Regarding percentages it is seen that 81.05% of area under tea cultivation is in north India. Hence we see that clearly the north Indian tea dominates the market with respect to quantity of tea produced. In terms of area under tea apart from Assam none of the other tea growing regions have expanded. However there has been considerable growth in terms of tea produced in the northern India but in the south we see that the

two greatest contributors of tea namely, Tamil Nadu and Kerala there has negative growth and their productivity has reduced from 2013 to 2015.

TABLE 2.4: India: Tea Area & Production 2013-2014 to 2015-16

State/Districts	2013	2015	Growth Rate (%)	2013	2015	Growth Rate (%)
	Area (Th. Hec)	Area (Th. Hec)		Production (M. Kgs)	Production (M. Kgs)	
Assam	304.40	307.08	0.88	629.05	652.95	3.79
West Bengal	140.44	140.44	0	312.10	329.70	5.63
Other N.Indian States	12.29	12.29	0	23.92	25.91	8.31
Total North India	457.13	459.81	0.58	965.07	1008.56	4.50
Tamil Nadu	69.62	69.62	0	174.71	161.46	-7.58
Kerala	35.01	35.01	0	63.48	56.63	-10.79
Karnataka	2.22	2.22	0	5.52	6.46	17.02
Total South India	106.85	106.85	0	243.71	224.58	-7.84
All India	563.98	566.66	0.47	1208.78	1233.14	2.01

Source: Tea Statistics (2013-14; 2015-16), Tea Board of India; Growth Rate calculated

Despite this the southern Indian tea and markedly the Nilgiris orthodox tea has a dedicated market. An interesting difference between the two regions is that while in south, tea is produced throughout the year, in North India tea production starts in the late March and ends in early December⁶⁶. The quality of tea from south India is considered to be of lower quality (Selvaraj and Gopalkrishnan, 2016) yet the wages are higher for the workers.

Auction System and Tea Price Mechanism

A Government of India Report⁶⁷ on the plantation industry reveals that while the tea prices have continuously increased in North India since 2006 the price realisation of South India has been much lower in comparison to the North. In 2013, while the tea of

⁶⁶ Arya, Nizara. 2013. *Indian Tea Scenario*. International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications. Vol 3. Issue 7. p.4

⁶⁷ 102nd Report on Performance of Plantation Sector- Tea & Coffee Industry by Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce (2012) . p. 12

North India fetched an auction price of Rs.139.95/kg in comparison the South India tea fetched a much lower price of Rs.98.75/kg.⁶⁸ There was an increase in auction price for both the regions in 2018 wherein tea from North India sold at Rs. 151.87/kg and tea from South sold at Rs. 103.15/kg.

Darjeeling tea due to its due to its exclusive geographical boundary and flavour profile enjoys a significantly higher price and prestige in the world of tea (Sen, 2018). Data also suggests that Darjeeling tea fetches the highest price in auctions. Since Darjeeling only produces orthodox tea if we compare the prices of orthodox varieties of tea produced across the country it can be seen more clearly. In 2018, Darjeeling orthodox tea's market realisation of Rs. 418.96/kg is the most as compared to North East India's (Assam, Dooars and Terai) orthodox tea which was pegged at Rs 201.83/kg. In comparison the price realisation for orthodox tea from South India is the lowest at Rs. 180.84/kg.

Labour, Wages and Benefits

Development of estates have two basic requirements — large areas of land and a large labour force⁶⁹. The labour in a tea estate is divided into permanent and temporary category. They are further also divided into field and factory. However the field workers constitute the bulk of the workers in a tea estate.

The Table 2.5 reflects that of all the tea producing states the north dominates with Assam and West Bengal being the largest employers. While in the south Tamil Nadu employs the most workers. This is also where the world famous Nilgiris tea is grown and manufactured.

With regard to workers on the rolls of the tea estates it is seen that 91% of the total tea workers of India are employed in North India.⁷⁰ Hence it is inferred that the Plantation Labour Act (1951) has a greater workforce to protect in the North Indian tea industry.

⁶⁸ Tea Statistics (2013-14), Tea Board of India.

⁶⁹ Bhowmik. Sharit. 2002. *Productivity and Labour Standards in Tea Plantation Sector in India*. In Sivananthiran,A.and Ratnam. Venkata. C.S. (ed.). *Labour and Social Issues in Plantations In South Asia*. International Labour Organisation (ILO). India.

⁷⁰ Annual Report (2011-12), Tea Board of India, p.74

However in a report⁷¹ by the National Advisory Council of India it was noted that the status of estate workers of southern Indian states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka were significantly better than those prevailing in West Bengal and Assam in terms of wages, welfare facilities and in general the implementation of the Plantation Labour Act (1951) was more effective. Enforcement of labour laws is thus fairly effective in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka, but somewhat relaxed in Assam and Bangladesh.⁷²

Table 2.5: Average Daily Employment

Major Tea Producing States	No. of Estates*	Avg. Daily Employment
Assam	829	4,49,047
Karnataka	11	2069
Kerala	86	39113
Tamil Nadu	295	40885
West Bengal	278	1,79,805

Source: Indian Labour Statistics. (2011). Labour Bureau. Ministry of Labour & Employment. Govt. Of India. Shimla/Chandigarh; * only plantations submitting returns under PLA,1951

In table 2.6 we see that the workers who toil the most to deliver the cups of tea enjoyed by most either sitting in plush interiors, common households or roadside stalls are paid very little. Although North India has greater area under tea as well as greater output in terms of production it is seen that they are paid lesser than their counterparts in South India. This being not only a new phenomenon but can be seen as occurring since the 1980s. This appears to be an odd phenomenon as seen from previous data that the prices fetched at auction by North Indian tea is also higher. Hence there appears to be a disconnect between the wages paid to the workers and the market realisation of the manufactured tea.

⁷¹ *Recommendations on Welfare of Tea Plantations Labour* (2014). Working Committee Report. National Advisory Council, New Delhi. p.8

⁷² Sivananthiran, A. and Ratnam, Venkata C.S. 2002. Introduction. In Sivananthiran, A. and Ratnam, Venkata C.S. (ed.). *Labour and Social Issues in Plantations In South Asia*. International Labour Organisation (ILO). India. P. 2

In West Bengal and Assam tea workers’ wages are determined by collective bargaining mechanism, the wages are not notified under the Minimum Wages Act (1948). While in Kerala and Tamil Nadu wages of the workers are notified by Minimum Wages Act (1948) preceded by tripartite consultation (Sarkar, 2016). However, Sarkar (2016) states that yet the wages are sub-optimal in the contemporary context and the implications is that despite being a part of the organised workforce the tea plantation workers remain in abject poverty and can be categorised as ‘working poor’.

Table 2.6: Rates of Daily Wage

States	Years				
	1982-1983	1999-2000	2005-2008	2014**	2018**
Assam	8.90	37.60	58.50	94	137
West Bengal	9.90	34.80	58*	95(90 in Darjeeling)	132
Kerala	12.20	66.17	72.26-89.78	216.53	321
Tamil Nadu	13.08	74.52	77-79	209.27	241

Source: Tea Statistics 1982-83,1999-2000,2005-2009;*2008-2010; **newspaper reports

The average plucking that workers are expected to pluck in a day in Tamil Nadu is 25kg/day and in Kerala it is 16kg/day (Pritchard and Neilson, 2010). While in Darjeeling as per the interviews held with the management at the two tea gardens visited it was reported that during peak season while in the traditional garden the workers have a task set at plucking upto 9kg/day depending on the type of tea bush (China variety 7kg/day; Clone 8kg/day and Assam variety 9kg/day). In the second fair-trade certified and organic tea garden visited the task for plucking was set at 8kg/day irrespective of season. Hence, we see that there is stark distinction between the north and south Indian tea plantations in terms of task assigned each day. This could also be explained by the fact that while Darjeeling tea involves a ‘fine art’ of plucking only the tips while the tea plucking in south allows for upto 4-5 big leaves below the tips as well.

In south India smallholders now account for 40% of south Indian tea production, vast majority of which are located in the Nilgiri hills of Tamil Nadu (Pritchard and Neilson, 2010). However the quality of the smallholder tea is inferior to estate-grown produce. In 2008 there were 25 fair trade certified tea producers in south India of which 23 were

large scale plantations. (Pritchard and Neilson, 2010). It is also to be noted that the Plantation Labour Act (1951) is not applicable to the small growers. Pritchard and Neilson (2010) state that fair trade certification not only needs to be understood as an act of corporate social responsibility but it should also be understood as an agenda to place its brand and reputation to the hilt within lucrative market segments. Hence we see that fair trade is only a means to an ends and they are the foreign ethical consumers who are ready to shell out dollars for ‘ethically and fair trade’ labelled tea. How much of the premium paid by the foreigners reaches down to uplift the workers’ is yet to be seen to have made much of an impact on the lives of the workers (Besky, 2014; Sen, 2018)

As discussed in the previous section the Indian tea industry is facing a crisis. Similarly the south Indian tea industry is also facing serious crisis. And it is seen from table 2.6 that despite the crisis the south Indian tea estate workers are paid a better wage as compared to those in Assam & West Bengal tea estates. Despite the south Indian tea industry having lesser price realisation⁷³ of the finished product the worker is getting a better wage along with the prescribed PLA entitlements.

The United Planters’ Association of Southern India (UPASI) describes the South India plantation sector as being in “one of the darkest phases in its history”.⁷⁴ Some of causes outlined for the **crisis in tea industry of South India** are:⁷⁵

- Downfall of international market prices of plantation products particularly tea and coffee.
- Basic structural deficiency in the organisation of large corporate plantations.
- Structural deficiency created through agrarian reforms in the post-independence era deepening to the extent that non-sustainability of the present plantation system in south India has become glaringly apparent.

⁷³ 102nd Report on Performance of Plantation Sector: Tea & Coffee Industry (2012). Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce

⁷⁴ Hayami. Yujiro & Damodaran. A. 2004. *Towards an Alternative Agrarian Reform: Tea Plantations in South India*. Economic & Political Weekly. Vol. 39. Issue No. 36. p. 3992

⁷⁵ Ibid

- Loosing international competition to China and Vietnam, countries where tea production is mainly based on smallholders. According to UPASI, 99 per cent of the tea producers in south India are smallholders although their share of tea land is only 41 per cent.
- Loss of competition both internationally and domestically as plantations in South India are said to bear high labour costs and the disadvantage of high labour cost is particularly serious for tea estates.
- Labour cost disadvantage in estates of south India are getting progressively larger over cycles of market fluctuations. This is because labour unions were able to achieve major hike in wages during boom from 1990-98 and in the downturn that followed tea plantations plunged in the worst crisis experiencing major deficits in consecutive years.

It is evident from the discussion on tea industry both country wide and region wise that there is crisis prevailing in the tea industry. A significant population depends on the industry for work and wage. Hence it is imperative to take note of the reality and try and arrive at solutions to bring the tea industry out of its crises. Hayami and Damodaran (2004) have highlighted the fact that the state of the tea industry in the South is primarily due to cyclical factors that have not been corrected over the years. They have said that there is structural deficiency in the large corporate estates and that the role of such estates will progressively become weaker not only in comparison to other states within India but also internationally. It has been highlighted by them that the solution to the problems faced by the south Indian tea industry (which can also be applied to the larger Indian tea industry) is the reorganisation of the plantation system into small holder system.

The vulnerable workers cannot be left in the lurch by the loss making estate owners but a solution should be arrived at by consulting all the stakeholders involved. It is important to note that there are several changes that need to be made in this lagging industry to not only safeguard the labourers but also save the face of the tea industry in the global market. The change may come in the form of increased mechanization,

greater replanting and replacing of old bushes, skilled development among the workers, etc.

It must be noted that Darjeeling tea has the distinction of being the first Indian product to receive a Geographical Indication mark which gives it an added advantage in the export market. Assam Orthodox tea and Nilgiri tea grown in the hills of Tamil Nadu also have the distinction of having the Geographical Indication tag while no such added advantage is there for tea produced in Kerala. Hence it is surprising to note that while in North India both Assam and Darjeeling orthodox tea have a distinct advantage of being 'exclusive' only one variety of tea produced in south India has a similar stature yet the wages in South India are much higher as compared to the North Indian tea gardens.

The political scenario is very unstable in the Darjeeling region due to their longstanding demand for Darjeeling tea while the political scenario has remained fairly stable in the Southern regions. This could be one of the reasons as to why the trade unions and the workers in the southern Indian regions have managed to have higher wages than their counter parts in Darjeeling. The political groups in Darjeeling have been said to be in connivance with the management and have taken a back foot when it comes to sitting in tripartite wage agreement committees.

Whether it be the workers of north or south Indian tea estates despite the stark differences in wages the provisions of the Plantation labour act (1951) are not fully implemented in either region. In both the regions the producers lament about high social costs especially due to the wage and labour component. While the unionisation is stronger in the southern states and that is perhaps why they have been able to garner higher wage while their counterparts in north India are still the least paid.

Chapter 3

Cultivation and Production of Tea in Darjeeling

3.1 Historical Account: Birth of ‘Darjeeling Tea’

Darjeeling is known for three Ts and any reference to it is incomplete without talk on tea, timber and tourism. The Darjeeling region is of utmost importance when discussing the history of tea in India. The Darjeeling hill region was developed by the Britishers as a hill resort for those officers recuperating from illnesses and was later found to be suitable for growing tea. In the beginning of the 19th century Darjeeling (known as “*Dorje*” meaning thunderbolt and “*Ling*” meaning land of) formed part of the dominions of the Raja of Sikkim. Under the treaty of Titaliya (1817) between the British and the Nepalaese Gurkhas, Sikkim including the present district of Darjeeling was a buffer state between Nepal and Bhutan (O’Malley, 1907). Later a deed of grant was signed by the Raja of Sikkim and Darjeeling was presented to the East India Company in 1835 (O’Malley, 1907). In 1861 the Britishers took complete control of Darjeeling and Sikkim no longer had any power over it. In 1863 trouble arose between Darjeeling & Bhutan and this was concerned with the area of Kalimpong and after some tussle this area (Kalimpong) was the last addition to the district of Darjeeling in 1866 (O’Malley, 1907). After this it was seen that the two most important factors that led to the development of the district of Darjeeling was the choice of the district as a health resort and the subsequent planting of tea in the hills (O’Malley, 1907).

The Darjeeling region has been cultivating, growing and producing tea for the past 160 years and more. Dr. Campbell is said to have been the enterprising brain behind the establishment of the Darjeeling tea industry and experimental tea growth was started in 1840 and by 1856 the industry began to be expanded on an extensive scale (O’Malley, 1907). At present, Darjeeling tea is world renowned for its “muscatel-light” tea. In order to ensure the supply of genuine Darjeeling tea in February 2000, a compulsory system of certifying the authenticity of exported Darjeeling tea was incorporated into the Indian Tea Act of 1953 (Ravindran & Mathew, 2009). This system would make it compulsory for all the dealers in Darjeeling tea to enter into a license agreement with the Tea Board

of India on payment of an annual license fee. According to Besky (2014) Darjeeling tea became the first of India's 150 registered Geographical Indication (GI) products.

The table 3.1 reflects on the significant decrease in total land under cultivation and also in the number of persons employed in the tea garden thereby also having an impact on the production of tea. In 2012-2013 (55 gardens), were reported to have produced approximately five million kilograms. At present, the tea produced from the 87 gardens in the region varies from approximately 7-8 million kilograms. If compared to the 2008-09 data, production has continuously declined and has remained stagnant 2010 onwards. This is evidence enough to suggest that the industry and its tea bushes which are more than 150 years old need revival and rejuvenation. The tea bushes have outgrown their economic life span and will only lead to lesser production as a tea bush is said to have an economic life span varying from 50-80 years approximately.⁷⁶ .

Table 3.1: Area, Production and Employment in Darjeeling District

Year	No.of Tea Garden	Total land under cultivation (Hect.)	No. of Persons Employed	Production (Thousand Kg.)
2008-09	97	21334.99	59047	7365.00*
2009-10	87	17828.38	51091	7364.50
2010-11	87	17828.38	51091	5476.54**
2011-12	87	18091.96	51485	5341.83 [#]
2012-13	87	11464.00	31730	5770.20 [#]

* Production figure of 70 gardens

**Production figure of 52 garden

[#] Production figure of 55 gardens only

SOURCE: District Statistical Handbook for Darjeeling (2013) table 5.3(f)

The Darjeeling district has two tea-growing areas—Darjeeling Hills (where the famous Darjeeling tea is grown) and the Terai, in its foothills. Darjeeling Hills has some 50,000-60,000 workers (Bhowmick, 2011; Sen, 2018) engaged in the tea industry. The

⁷⁶ Ghosh, Tushar Kanti. 1987, 'Tea Gardens of West Bengal: A Critical Study of Land Management', B.R. Publishing Group, New Delhi, p 18

Tea Board of India identifies Darjeeling tea as, “*tea cultivated, grown and manufactured in the tea gardens of Sadar sub-division, hilly areas of Kalimpong sub-division comprising of Samaebong Tea Estate, Ambiok Tea Estate, Mission Hill Tea Estate and Kumai Tea Estate excluding the areas in jurisdiction list 20,21,23,24,29,31 and 33 comprising Siliguri Sub-Division of New Chumta Tea Estate, Simulbari and Marionbari Tea Estate of Kurseong Police station in Kurseong Sub-Division of the district of Darjeeling in the State of West Bengal, India*”.



Figure 3.1: The Darjeeling Tea Logo

The first and second flush of tea provides for 70% of the annual revenue for the Darjeeling tea industry. It was reported that unavailability of second flush Darjeeling tea of 2017 in the international market was a major blow to the brand equity and caused permanent damage to the future market and value of Darjeeling tea. Darjeeling tea is highly prized in the world market and is known to fetch premium amount. However, the benefits of such premium do not reach the pluckers who toil daily to pick the finest leaves that reach the cup.

3.2 Growth of Organic Tea Industry in Darjeeling

This study is an endeavour to explain the vulnerability of the tea plantation workers of Darjeeling. Despite serving an international audience who are paying through their nose for quality produce, the workers, remain the least paid. Marx said work is not just an economic activity rather it is an essential human activity which could be a source of creative fulfillment and self-actualisation (Spencer, 2009). With poor wages and living standards it would be difficult to imagine the Darjeeling plantation worker as having

creative fulfilment and self-actualisation who do not even own the houses they live in and the next section shall look into these elements.

Historically, the traditional tea cultivation was devoid of artificial chemical fertilising agents. However, with technological innovations and deterioration of soil quality over a period of time especially since tea plantations practice monoculture there was the introduction of fertilising and high yielding agents. Chemical intensive and green revolution technologies were thus, adopted to increase productivity as tea was one of the major export commodities (Sen, 2018). In Darjeeling, Makaibari was the first to go organic in 1988 especially keeping in mind the demands of the international market. In the mid-1990s, due to the presence of high chemical residues huge shipments of Darjeeling tea were returned from Europe and Japan (Sen, 2018). This led to estates in Darjeeling adopting organic production methods. International certifications such as organic, bio-dynamic, Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance and Ethical Partnership were needed to trade across countries.

The international market has greater demand for organic products which emphasises on the quality and ecology of the tea leaves which is more important than the quantity. Thus, began the conversion of some of the gardens of Darjeeling to organic. However, organic production methods can never match the conventional methods using chemical-intensive techniques in terms of production volume (Sen, 2018). The expansion of organic farming in the Darjeeling tea gardens was done to appease the foreign buyers and to display a concern for bio-diversity and sustainable farming practices. Darjeeling is reported to have the largest number of estates with Fair Trade certification of any state in India (Sen, 2018).

Influenced by changing market trends the Darjeeling tea industry began conversion to organic plantations especially keeping in mind the international market that laps up 90% of the tea produced in the hill-region. Once the USSR split many players in the Darjeeling industry started turning to the European, American and South East Asian markets (especially Japan with its love for green and delicate teas) and where the demand was increasing for organic and 'social justice' labelled teas. However the international certifications like Fair Trade were brought in by the owners to the

Darjeeling tea industry to shorten the commodity chain. The producers could directly trade with the international retailers unlike in the auction system. It did not contribute being advantageous to the community of tea plantation workers (Besky, 2008). This could also be a way by which the owners can keep the profits away from the books of the Tea Board of India as records are maintained for the tea sold via the auction system. Today nobody knows how much the gardens are making in revenue as 90% of tea made in Darjeeling is sold via private sales held in Kolkata offices or direct garden sales where the buyers visit the garden personally (Sen, 2018).

These certifications are part of a social justice movement to have begun in the global north in order to protect the interests of those engaged in production of goods in the global south as a result of globalisation while moving (as a result of globalisation) goods from the north to the south. One third of the tea gardens in Darjeeling are organic and Fair Trade certified (Sen, 2018) but the wages of the workers still remain much below the minimum wage received by the agricultural worker in the state of West Bengal. This is understood to contradict the very idea of social justice based market mechanisms like fair trade.

According to Besky (2010), the key tenets of Fair Trade are:

1. Empower marginalised producers
2. Ensure participation of these producers in key decision-making institutions within their communities
3. Promote social justice
4. Focus on women empowerment

The Fair Trade promoters and activist consumers believe that ethical labelling will be able to accomplish these goals by channelling to the producers new resources and government mechanisms (Sen, 2018). Therefore, while on one hand the production market chain is deemed to have shortened, on the other hand, it should yield some positive outcomes for the workers too.

Although the images of the women tea workers are used in the Fair Trade labelling advertisements to sell the tea in the international market or the global north the

women's struggles and labour goes unacknowledged (Sen, 2018: 244). Such labelled tea have a privilege in first-world markets as they are said to be ecologically sustainable and there is certain pride attached to its consumers by their ethical consumption or of having made a contribution in the life of the worker toiling in the plantations. (Guha, 1997 in Besky, 2007) explains that green consumption practices arise from 'ecology of affluence' as compared to the 'environmentalism of the poor' that takes place in India signified by local conflicts and struggles as seen in the Chipko Movement or Narmada Bachao Andolan. However, Thurow (1980; in Besky (2007) argues that 'green consumerism' in the form of Fair Trade organic tea is a component of environmentalism by the affluent upper middle class located in the industrialised societies.

The brand of Darjeeling tea is not made popular for domestic consumption. On the contrary, it is largely for international consumption as the companies aim for foreign exchange earnings. Hence Darjeeling tea is sold in bulk in auctions or directly to private buyers as 'commodity'. The brand is made only further down the supply chain when value addition is done in the form of blending and packaging. The finished brand of Darjeeling tea in the supermarket aisles or on online stores has various social justice markers indicating their ethical sourcing. It is not sold by garden name, instead, it is sold under the brand of companies like Lipton, Unilever, Tata, Tetley, etc. These brands get the advantage of those faithful to Darjeeling tea for its flavor, color and '*terroir*'⁷⁷. The wage labourers however, rarely make it to the social scientific depictions of *terroir* food production (Besky, 2014).

This implies that while there is discussion on tea, *terroir* and trade that is further supported by tags like Geographical Indications (GI), the labourers are not provided any further protection nor are their conditions of work discussed. Therefore, while Darjeeling is identified by its tea and its tea gardens in the larger public view the individual gardens and the workers who toil in them every day to pick the perfect "two leaves and a bud" are lost in the transport of the commodity from the garden to the cup.

⁷⁷ Besky (2014) Foods with *Terroir* or 'taste of place' is a concept associated to artisanal foods produced by small farmers and due to the Geographical Indication (GI) tag that Darjeeling tea received in 1999 its taste too is now associated to a place.

Thus, shortening of commodity chain needs to impact not only the producers at the top of the tea production chain- the plantation owners and the tea companies but also the ‘producer’ at the lowest level of this hierarchy, namely, the garden workers. In India, Darjeeling has the largest number of plantations with fair-trade certifications than any other district/state in the country (Sen, 2018:7). And in promotional materials Fair Trade is said to refrain from using the term ‘plantations’ and instead refers to them as ‘hired labour organisations’, gardens or large farms (Sen, 2018:7). This was because the Fair Trade movement wanted to reduce the stigma of colonial tea trade and also Fair Trade repeatedly recited the tune of empowering the marginalised producers in the global economy.

Demand for Darjeeling tea continues to exceed its supply. From an economic point of view, this would imply higher prices because despite low supply the demand for Darjeeling tea has an established market across the world. Such a condition is every producer’s wish to maximise profit.

In the case of Darjeeling tea, there is increasing demand for sustainable and socially equitable produce. To fulfil this demand another trend is occurring in Darjeeling. Small-growers and cooperative farming is coming up in a big way⁷⁸. There are also studies (Besky, 2011; Sen 2018;) that have been conducted on the success of small tea farmers like in Mineral Springs Cooperative, Potong Tea Workers, *Sanu Krishak Sanstha* (SKS) or Small Farmers’ Organisation in the hill regions of Darjeeling. The future of tea estates might lie in small growers or cooperative farms where ownership lies with the individuals who pluck and sell their green leaf to tea producing factories. Since worker wages are not being increased despite their constant demand herein may lie the answer to their woes.

Traditionally the tea gardens of Darjeeling were started as a result of colonialism as discussed previously. Table 3.2 gives us an overview of the number of gardens that are operating in the three sub-divisions of Darjeeling district at present as organic,

⁷⁸ Interview with Mr. Harish Mukhia (tea consultant) on 7th July 2015

inorganic or both. There are 50 tea estates in North Bengal (Survey of Tea Gardens, 2014) producing organic tea exclusively of which 48 tea estates are located in the hills.

Table 3.2: Nature of Tea Gardens in Darjeeling

Nature of Tea	Darjeeling	Kurseong	Kalimpong	Total
Organic	29	17	2	48
Inorganic	14	8	3	25
Both	2	4	1	7
Total	45	29	6	80

Source: Survey of Tea Gardens, North Bengal Zone (2014)

Note: the North Bengal tea garden survey was carried out in 2012 on 81 tea estates of which Ringtong TE remained closed at the time of the survey.

There are at present 87 tea gardens operating in Darjeeling⁷⁹ while in 1999 there were said to be 70 tea gardens (Sharma, 2008, p.201). As per the Tea Board of India⁸⁰ in 2001 there were 17 tea gardens producing around 400 thousand kg of organic tea annually which was said to be more than 38% of the total organic tea production in India. And as can be seen from table 4.1 today the number of organic tea gardens stands at 48 of the 80 tea gardens in the district i.e. more than 50%. The percentage increase in the number of tea gardens is a whopping 182.35%. Literature also suggests it can be conclusively said that 96% of the organic tea made in West Bengal and more than 38 % of organic tea in India is sourced from the hills of Darjeeling (Sen, 2018).

However, literature and interviews with stakeholders indicate that the adoption of organic practices is not out of commitment to organic farming practices rather due to market compulsion and global demand (Tea Board of India, 2001; Besky, 2010; Sen, 2018) especially since international buyers insist on organic produce. Out of the 9 million kgs Darjeeling tea produced in the country 6.6 million kgs is exported and 3 million kgs is absorbed within India (that too secondary grade tea in the form of broken

⁷⁹ Data from Darjeeling Planters' Association in interview conducted on 10th June 2015

⁸⁰ Techno-economic survey on the Darjeeling tea industry. (2001). Tea Board of India

and fannings)⁸¹. Hence the Darjeeling tea industry can be said to be operating more for the international market demands than in India. This also can be said to expose the industry of the region to international market fluctuations and therefore the crisis that the industry experienced when USSR disintegrated and when producers from countries like Kenya, Sri Lanka, China started providing tea for exports at cheaper prices.

It can be said that if the Darjeeling producers of tea focus on capturing the Indian market then they have a huge possibility of protecting themselves from such fluctuations and crisis. Also while the producers of tea in India are investing in organic tea it is more for the consumption by the global north, a new form of colonialism (neo-liberalism at its finest) as we are still serving the global north only this time around we are being paid a handsome price while the workers at the lowest rung of the tea garden ladder are still being exploited. This phenomenon is best explained by Harvey (2005) who states that with neo-liberalism there was not only 'creative destruction' of previous institutional frameworks but also of the power of labour, deregulation of industry, agriculture, etc. He goes on to explain that in a neoliberal market the protective measures safeguarding workers is dismantled with increased flexibility, curbing of trade unions, domination of capital over labour.

The Labour Commissioner's report (2018) states that an unskilled agriculture worker in West Bengal receives Rs.244 per day, a full time unskilled worker engaged in Beedi leaf plucking is paid Rs 243.76 (Rs 6338 monthly) while the Darjeeling tea plantation worker is paid Rs 132.50 per day. The Darjeeling tea plantation workers despite being involved in the delicate art of plucking fine leaves and some even being a part of the social justice market mechanism schemes such as Fair Trade remain the lowest paid workers across industries within the state of West Bengal. The Fair Trade Labelling Organisations (FLO)⁸² international has also made an exception in the case of Darjeeling tea wherein the producers may partly finance the basic needs of the workers (housing, medical, sanitation, water) with the fair-trade premium due to the 'critical

⁸¹ Interview with Mr.P.C.Tamang, Tea Consultant and Executive Director at TPI

⁸² FLO is the abbreviation used for the umbrella term of Fair trade labeling organizations international which include initiatives like Max Havelaar, TransFair or the Fair Trade federation. FLO certified goods are guaranteed minimum price and include social premiums to assist producer communities.

economic situation' (this has not been described by FLO) in Darjeeling (Besky, 2010). These basic needs were to be provided to the workers by the producers from their profits as per the provisions of the PLA, 1951. But even today the producers are providing only the bare minimum and Fair Trade premiums have also not ensured better provisioning. Fair-trade or the institutions through which it operates, does not appear to recognise the workers' present condition. Despite several legislative measures, there has been poor implementation and poor adherence to the legislations by the producers. The goal of promoting social justice as enshrined by the tenets of fair trade, therefore, remains unfulfilled. And the market mechanisms thus proposed appear to be simply a way for the producers to gain access to the niche international markets. The shift from 'free trade' to 'fair trade' may not be the solution to resist the neoliberal hegemony of the global north.

3.3 Critical Issues in the Darjeeling Tea Industry

There have been numerous studies (Sarkar and Lama, 1986; Action Aid, 2005; Centre for Education and Communication, 2003; Kadavil, 2007) which have highlighted the tea industry crisis in the country. Hence the crisis also has had an impact on the tea gardens of the hill region and some of the major issues behind the criticality of the Darjeeling tea industry are discussed as follows:

Fraudulent Branding

Darjeeling produced 10 million kg of tea in the year 2007 but a much greater quantity was auctioned off in the name of Darjeeling tea. Sen (2018) has stated that about 40 million kilograms of tea is sold as Darjeeling tea in the world market which is not grown in the certified area. This concern has been raised both at the national and global levels in a very consistent manner in last many decades. In 2004, Darjeeling tea became the first product in India to be registered under the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act of 1999 (hereafter referred to as the GI Act). Despite this there are still reports of branding fraud taking place all over the globe. In order to maintain the Darjeeling tea brand name and quality, more stringent checks need to be put in place. In recent years, Himalayan tea (tea grown in Nepal) is said to have been

impacting the Darjeeling tea industry severely as their orthodox tea is similar and can be easily mixed with Darjeeling and sold as Darjeeling tea⁸³. In fact due to the 104 day long bandh in the hills in 2017 Nepal tea seems to have fetched a lot of money as buyers turned to Nepal tea when Darjeeling tea was unable to make its way out of the hills.

This also has an impact on the workers of the plantations because even if people pay premium prices for Darjeeling tea it does not revert to the Darjeeling tea industry. The worker is paid his daily wage irrespective of what price the tea fetches or how much profit is made in the market.

Rise in Cost of Production

The argument given by producers for the low wages of the workers in the tea plantation has always been the rising cost of production. There has also been increasing casualisation of the labour force (Mishra et al, 2011). With the decline or not so significant rise in the price of tea fetched it has been argued by the producers that to break even they need to keep wages low. However there are several studies that support the fact that the rise in costs of production can be outweighed by increase in yield and productivity (Sen, 2018; Bhowick, 2015; CEC, 2003). The rise in cost of production has been reported to be due to low re-plantation rates and lower re-investments of profits in the estates (Bhowmick, 2015). The yield of Darjeeling tea (from among the major tea producing regions) of India is the lowest (Tea Statistics, 2001-02). While the average yield per hectare in Assam is 1601 kg/hectare, West Bengal is 1662 kg/hectare, Tamil Nadu is 1893 per/hectare and Kerala is 1563 kg/hectare. In comparison the average yield in Darjeeling is 526 kg/hectare and the all India average is 1625.

The producers find it more expensive to replant and rejuvenate the bushes and many are also apprehensive about losing the quality of tea if and when they totally uproot and replant the several 150 year old tea bushes. A World Bank Report (1997) states that while the cost of production varies across the region of India it has been observed that the highest cost of production is in Darjeeling i.e. four times more than any other region. By keeping the yield low the supply-demand equilibrium is not balanced and

⁸³ Interview with a factory assistant manager at Glenburn Tea Garden, Darjeeling who had previously worked at a leaf factory (Gramin Chiya Udhog Pvt. Ltd) in Nepal. Interviewed on 10th March 2018.

hence the producers of Darjeeling tea can fetch higher prices for quality orthodox tea (especially since Darjeeling tea also has the GI tag) in the world market.

Closure and sickness of tea gardens

One of the major reasons for the closure of tea estates is the declining productivity and the tea bushes in Darjeeling tea estates are very old. A tea bush has an economic life span varying from 50-80 years approximately (Ghosh, 1987). It is said that about 66% of the total tea bushes in Darjeeling are 50 years old while more than 50% have been in existence for over 100 years now (Khawas, 2006). Tea statistics (2005-06) indicate that 39.8% of the tea bushes in north Indian estates are over 50yrs old while 47.1% in south India. In fact the bushes may well be over 100-150 yrs (as 50yrs and above is the last age bush category used by the Tea Board of India) which had been planted by the British. Hence we see that this lowers the productivity and therefore the labourers are also affected as they get less and less from the owners of the plantations as they claim losses in the market. In terms of plucking also while the workers could pluck more had the yield been more by plucking beyond the task assigned for the day (usually 6-8kgs). Some fifty-five tea plantations in West Bengal closed, leaving their workers with no wages or sources of income (Bhowmick, 2011).

Impact of climate change

The global climate change is affecting the Eastern Himalayas too. They have also been facing changes in the climate pattern. In Selimbong Tea Estate, for instance, in order to keep up with the climactic changes new irrigation mechanisms had to be installed in the winter months. Natural springs were drying up and that during the summer months new phenomenon of drought was being faced and hence there was increased expenditure on irrigation in the past 2-3 years (Lama, 2011). With increasing droughts and dry weather there is also the problem of pest and diseases that affect the tea bushes. The same was also reported in the two gardens visited as a part of the present study. The drying up of natural springs was not only problematic for the tea bushes but also for the residents of the estate. Most of the plantation population is dependent on spring water and is the most commonly available source of water supply in these isolated enclaves.

Frequent change in the ownership patterns

Frequent change in the ownership has left the gardens sapped of its energy as owners concentrated on profits without consideration for replanting and replacement. A critical issue that has been highlighted is that the quality of services provided to the workers are said to vary in relation to the ownership pattern of the tea gardens (Sarkar, 1986). A significant portion of the tea estates have frequently undergone changes in the ownership and in many cases the retention by an owner has been less than five to eight years (Khawas, 2006). Therefore, the frequent change in ownership has brought about uncertainty in livelihoods and disorientation in the social facilities and civic amenities and access to services including health. The provisions extended to the workers are also affected.

Working conditions in plantations, public facilities and civic amenities

Khawas (2006) noted in his study that of the many operating tea estates most delay payments to the labourers as well as the benefits provided to the labourers such as umbrellas, blankets, raincoats, boots, gloves, etc. Their conditions are appalling. In a lecture delivered to the Hill Employees Association (Kalimpong) Lama (2008) categorically mentioned that “*the world’s finest tea as well as the world’s poorest plantation workers are found in Darjeeling*”⁸⁴. The owners of tea estates have always refrained from increasing the wages on the pretext of the cost of production. However, it has been argued that by increasing components of labour welfare and better maintenance of tea bushes, productivity will increase and thus reduce costs of production (Bhowmick, 2005; Choudhary and Tayal, 2010). Although the Plantation Labour Act (1951) has made it mandatory on the part of the owners of tea estates to provide proper housing, water, education upto primary level, medical care and rations the provisioning is not satisfactory till date (Besky, 2014; Bhowmick, 2002).

Market and its benefits to the workers

There is disconnect between the market realisation and the benefits to the workers. Since time immemorial owners of the tea estates have been complaining about falling

⁸⁴ Special Correspondent. ‘Expert Tips for Darjeeling Tea’, *The Telegraph*, 8th March 2008 <https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/west-bengal/expert-tips-for-darjeeling-tea/cid/578359> accessed on 2nd Aug 2010

tea prices and their inability to make any profit. Hence, they absolve themselves from the responsibility of providing workers with some benefits. It has also been a major excuse for the producers to have kept the wages low as they project that the cost of production is higher than the market realisation. Increasing production costs, high taxes and low labour productivity is said to be the cause for lack of profitability (Selvaraj and Gopalkrishnan, 2016).

Political Situation

The political scenario in Darjeeling which is in the northern district of West Bengal, as in many other north-eastern states, has been deeply influenced by the politics of identity and difference. The people of Darjeeling have been demanding for separate statehood since more than a century. There have been statehood movements in the past (1986-88; 2013; 2017) with sporadic *bandhs* or calls highlighting the issue of separate statehood (2009-2017) and these have also impacted the tea industry as sometimes the supply of made tea from garden to outside is halted during peak seasons also. Tea plantation workers are said to be a large vote bank for the local political party and they are usually pulled into the strikes and *bandhs* by promises of wage raise, implementation of minimum wage, handing over of company house ownership to the workers. The politics of the region has played an important role on the tea plantation industry and this is dealt with in details in the next section.

At present, the Darjeeling Terai Dooars Plantations Labour Union (affiliated to the GJMM) is the sole labour outfit in most of the tea gardens across the Darjeeling district. While there also exists the Himalayan Plantation Workers' Union (affiliated to the GNLF)

These were some of the pertinent issues that arose upon reviewing literature pertaining to the Darjeeling Tea Industry. It shall be discussed in the concluding chapter of this study whether these issues still exist thereby leading to the precarious nature of the employment in the Darjeeling tea industry as well as the tea industry as a whole.

3.4 Demand for Separate Statehood & Its Impact on the Darjeeling Tea Industry

The communities living in the hill region of Darjeeling have been calling for rights and equal representation as well as the formation of a separate state as early as 1907 by the Hillmen's Association under the presidentship of S.W. Ladenla (Samanta, 2000). In 1917, the Hillmen's Association comprising of Nepali, Lepcha and Bhutia communities made a formal claim for native self-rule in the hills and thus began the call for ethnic autonomy by numerous organisations in the coming decades (Shneiderman and Middleton, 2018). Yet, despite the 100 and more years of struggle for a separate state is yet to bear fruit for the people of Darjeeling. Among them the tea plantation workers and those involved in ancillary activities related to the tea industry play an important role as they provide key support base to the regions' political parties every time there is a call for separate state. The tea estates and the workers are said to be prominent in the political discourse of the separate statehood movement (Besky, 2018). Darjeeling tea also provides the statehood demand with a larger audience as there are both national and international consumers of the tea grown in the region. Therefore, sometimes Darjeeling tea brings more recognition to the statehood demand than the political parties of the region.

The Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) under the leadership of Subash Ghising started a movement (1986-1988) for demanding "*Gorkhaland*" by separating the hill sub-division (Darjeeling, Kurseong & Kalimpong) from West Bengal. After a phase of violent struggle causing a large number of killings and destruction; and untold sufferings; the expectations of the people of Darjeeling for a separate state continued to soar (Wangyal, 2002). However, Subash Ghising dropped the demand for a state and settled for an "autonomous" Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) by signing a tripartite agreement between GNLF, West Bengal state & central government in August 1988. In the year 1988 the DGHC Act was passed and Subash Ghising was made chairman of the DGHC. In March 2008 Bimal Gurung's Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha (GJMM) party and its supporters demanded Ghising's resignation. GJMM immediately garnered a lot of support from the people of the Darjeeling hills as soon as it was formed in October 2007. However, the "queen of the hills" gradually slipped into

anarchy as their fight for autonomy continued. For over three years, bandhs, blockades, rallies organised by the GJMM and political violence had become a part of life in Darjeeling.⁸⁵

In July 2013 the call for a separate state of *Gorkhaland* was revived by the ruling party of the hills⁸⁶, namely the GJMM. This was because the Congress-led government at the centre considered creating a new state of Telangana to be carved out of the southern state of Andhra Pradesh and therefore the GJMM thought that it was about time the centre conceded to their demand of Gorkhaland. This unstable political environment with its frequent strikes and bands has crippled the proper functioning of the gardens as well as led to a neglect of the workers woes and the industry's crisis. The tea experts of the region are of the opinion that "*Because of these strikes in the last few years, tea gardens here have often failed to meet their commitment of supplying tea. The industry is losing reliability in the market because of this and the Nepal tea industry has been the most beneficial with these turn of events as their tea flavour is pretty close to Darjeeling tea.*"⁸⁷

In the run up to the 2014 elections, the BJP MP candidate with support from the GJMM unabashedly campaigned for votes by once again pulling at the emotional string of 'Gorkhaland' and gave assurances that if the BJP candidate wins the MP elections then BJP would seriously look into the demand of the separate state. The GJMM through its party workers spread in the tea gardens gave more strength to the BJP by saying that once BJP wins and grants Gorkhaland the 'tauzi' (Land rights) department would come under purview of Gorkhaland Territorial Agreement (GTA) and hence the land on which the workers' houses are built could then be in the name of the workers themselves. Hence once again BJP won with the promise of '*Gorkhaland*'. However, in 2017 after many rounds of discussion with the state and with the centre not giving any solutions to the call for separate statehood GJMM launched an unprecedented 104 day

⁸⁵ Pradhan, Keshav. 'Darkness over Darjeeling', *Times of India, The Crest Edition*, February 26th 2011

⁸⁶ Bhaumik. Subhir. 'Gorkha strike disrupts life in India's Darjeeling hills'. BBC News, India. 29th July 2013 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-23486558> Accessed on 30th July 2013

⁸⁷ Basak. Probal "State against a new state, the Gorkhaland story". Business Standard. 7th September 2013. http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/state-against-a-new-state-the-gorkhaland-story-113090700647_1.html Accessed on 8th September 2013

long strike which brought the tea industry to a striking halt and that too at the time the 2nd flush was to have left for the markets. Besky (2010) states that most gardens in the region are said to recover their costs with the sale of the 1st and 2nd flush of teas.

Darjeeling Terai Dooars Plantation Labour Union (DTDPLU) is the trade union operating in most of the tea gardens of Darjeeling hill region and the union is affiliated to the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJMM). It was also reported by the North Bengal tea garden survey (2014) that of the 81 gardens surveyed 70 of the gardens have the representation of a single union i.e. DTDPLU. And same was also true for both the tea gardens that formed the sample of this study. Hence every time a statehood movement arises maximum mobilisation of people is from the tea gardens of the region.

During the 2017 statehood agitation the tea gardens remained closed and were badly affected⁸⁸. The *bandh* started on 16th June 2017 and lasted till 27th September 2017 (a total of 104 days). This badly affected the supply of tea and lot of consignments had to be cancelled by default (movement of tea was restricted from garden to outside). Also due to non-plucking of leaves it was reported that the Darjeeling tea industry could hardly produce 30% of previous year's crop. It must be noted that May-September is peak plucking season for tea in the hill regions. Sadly, the loss was not only to the industry and its profits but in terms of wage and welfare the workers who were pulled into the *bandh* suffered the most due to non-payment of wages, non-distribution of ration as well as inflation during the time of *bandh*. Out of the 104 days 86 days were effective working days including paid holidays and hence the wage for the workers was deducted for 18 days which may not amount to much but for a household primarily dependent on the plantation this could be huge blow to their economic security. However the management and essential services like medical/ambulance driver/ward and watch staff were excluded from the *bandh* and they received their salaries⁸⁹. This indicates that at the time of the strike the most affected in the tea plantations remained the workers who to begin with are the least paid in the plantation hierarchy.

⁸⁸ Telephone Interview with manager of Traditional TE in March 2018

⁸⁹ Telephone Interview with Manager of Traditional TE in March 2018

When the time came for payment of bonus during the *Puja* season the newspapers reported the fact that the tea producers were facing major losses due to inability to sell the 1st and 2nd flush tea (said to recover the expenses of the garden for the entire year) during the *bandh* and therefore the bonuses of the workers would be reduced and/or delayed⁹⁰. The bonus which is at 20% of the annual earnings of the workers was reduced to 19.75% while statements were made that once again the tea gardens of the region were facing major revenue loss. It must be noted that with any crisis in the region especially those that are political in nature (statehood demand) have led to instability in the tea industry of the region.

The producers have always alleged that with every statehood movement in the region the tea industry is impacted especially in the international market due to the inability of making any sale. When the region is calm without any statehood agitations no notice is brought to the fact that the industry is running well or how much profits are being raked in by the producers. In fact all the sales and marketing of the Darjeeling tea is held in Calcutta head offices and auction centre (Bhowmick, 2005; Besky, 2010). Hence it may be a convenient position for DPA and the owners of the tea gardens to justify low wages and/or bonus cuts every time there is a statehood movement thereby making political instability of the region a factor influencing the lives of the tea plantation workers of Darjeeling.

⁹⁰<https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/west-bengal/gardens-to-delay-hill-due-bonus-pay/cid/1452912>

Chapter 4

Profile of the Study Sites: Namring and Singell

The foregoing analysis has established the realm in which tea industry is functioning at present. India is the second largest producer of tea yet faces stiff competition in the international market from countries like Kenya and Sri Lanka. The discussion also reflected on the continuum which tea lays out from agriculture to industry as a finished product. In this continuum, the role of workers in the plantations is crucial to ensure the end product is delivered. However, the end product brings in profits for those in the higher rung of the production chain; those at the lower rungs, often remain neglected. The present chapter endeavours to engage in understanding the profile of the study sites along with the organisational flow, rural infrastructure and the social hierarchy in the two study sites.

The two sites have been selected purposively based on the following criteria:

1. Permission from the tea estate owners
2. Distance and Accessibility
3. Availability of personnel
4. Feasibility

In order to critically understand and illustrate some of the issues being faced by the tea industry and its workers in Darjeeling the researcher chose to study two tea estates in the Darjeeling hills of North Bengal. The choice of these estates was made keeping in mind that it might be assumed that a traditional would have certain differences from a non-traditional (organic and fair-trade certified) tea estate. The unique feature of Fair Trade certified estate and what it entails is also described as understood from the field study.

Table 4.1: Study Sites and Participants

Study Sites	Gender	Type of Worker		Total
		Worker	Sub-Staff	
Traditional TE	Male	22	12	34
	Female	66	0	66
Organic TE	Male	22	15	37
	Female	58	5	63
Total		168	32	200

Source: Field work carried out in 2015

As evident from Table 4.1 of the total participants of the study 84% were workers while 16% were from the sub-staff category. It was observed during the social mapping that the number of casual workers was less. It was important to study the sub-staff as they were promoted from the ranks of the workers. The effort was to understand the characteristics and differences if any between the two groups.

4.1 Traditional Tea Estate: Namring, Rangli-Rangliot Block, Darjeeling sub-division

Namring was located approximately 30 kms from any big town establishment. The estate is traditional as it is employing non-organic methods of tea production. The present owners had taken over the estate in 1990 and had been running it since then. It also had the Rainforest Alliance certification which does not provide premiums (like Fair Trade) rather emphasises on conserving biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods. In terms of workers' welfare the certification hardly lays down any rules for the producers.

The estate was reported to have the biggest factory in the district of Darjeeling. According to the Tea Board of India's techno-economic survey this estate was also one of the largest tea estates in the hills in 2001.

- **Area, Production and Employees**

The total plantation area is 1068 hectares of which 772 hectares is available land and the area under tea is 450 hectares (58.29% under tea). It was interesting to note that one of the management staff at this estate was noted as having said “*sau acres chiya ta Tea Board lai bhaneko nai chaina*” (100 acres of tea area has not been declared to the Tea Board)⁹¹. This also reflects on the fact that it is easy to dupe the Tea Board of India and there is no effective monitoring by them. They have an average production yield of 600kg/hectare.

The estate is divided into three sections/mini-plantations wherein the areas are slightly different and hence there is difference in the number of workers employed in each division. The estate only keep records of the permanent employees and casual workers are employed only during peak plucking that too only if necessary. However, there is no record maintained of the casual workers employed in the estate from time to time. Table 4.2 provides the details about the area under tea in the three divisions of the tea estate. It also provides us with the total number of permanent employees working in the three divisions of the estate. While plucking takes place in all the divisions of the estate the processing of the green leaf takes place only in the Namring division as the factory is located there. The other two divisions send green leaf to the factory for further processing.

Table 4.2: Tea Estate divisions, areas and employees

Estate Divisions	Area (in hectares)	Total Permanent Workers*
Namring Divison	143	336+83 [#] +168 ^{##}
Jinglam Division	145	374
Poobong Division	162	437
Total	450	1398

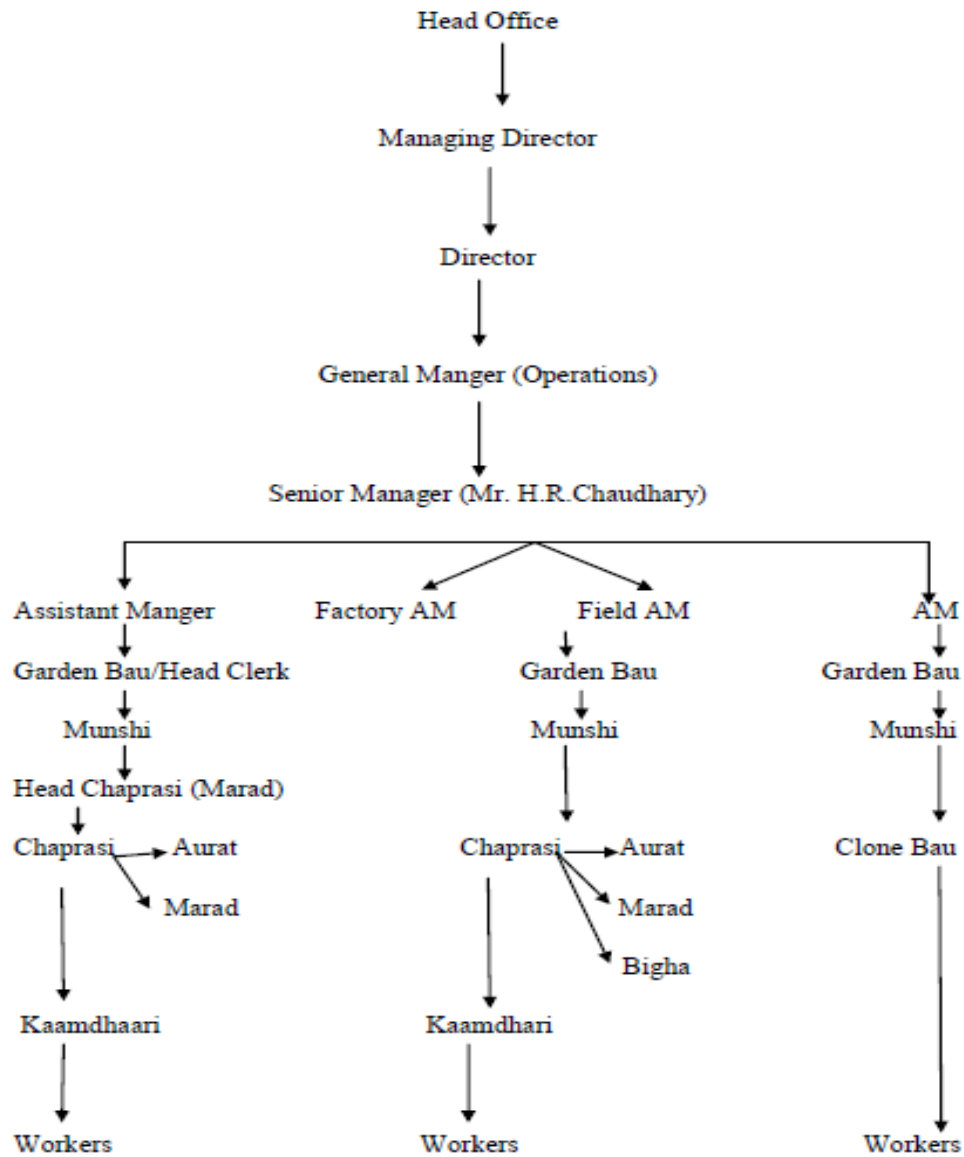
Source: Tea Estate Office Records 2015; *Does not include management; [#]Factory+Others; ^{##}Sub-Staff+Staff

⁹¹ KI2: Key Informant interview with assistant manager at Traditional TE

For the purposes of the present study and in order to have similar labour population and be able to draw comparisons between the two selected tea estates the researcher visited the Namring and Jinglam divisions of the tea estate. Since the factory was located in Namring some of the factory workers who formed a part of the study sample were interviewed from Namring while the majority of the workers who formed a part of the sample for Traditional TE were randomly drawn from the Jinglam division.

Figure 4.1 outlines the organisational structure of the traditional tea estate. But unlike most other estates, since this estate has two out divisions namely Jinglam and Poobong there is a lot that the senior manager is handling on site. The General Manager is based in Siliguri but rarely visits the estate and primarily deals with sending the made tea to the head office located in Kolkata. While there are four assistant managers (**AM**) with two in Namring as the factory is located there. There is only one senior manager who has been at the helm of things at Namring TE for the past 25 years (since 1991) while he started as an assistant manager himself at Namring in 1981. During his tenure he reported not to have had any trouble with the workers however he did complain about ‘upward mobility’ of the workers’ children in terms of education and aspiration thereby making it difficult for the estate to get new or casual workers. While it may be so that due to better education people had greater aspirations but it must be noted that the wages in the estate are not as attractive and there is no alternative livelihood in the estate villages.

Figure 4.1: Organisational Flow Chart for Namring TE



4.2 Organic Estate: Singell, Kurseong Block, Kurseong Sub-division

This estate located very close to the town of Kurseong. Driving from Siliguri (NJP or Baghdogra being the two most commonly used entry points for anyone travelling to Darjeeling) on the national highway towards Darjeeling one first passes by the Terai region of North Bengal tea estates with its large Assam variety of tea bushes. One slowly ascends the hills and we get the first glimpses of the verdant slopes lush with

perfectly aligned table-top of tea bushes (mostly of the China variety with delicate smaller leaves). Along the way one also sees signs and posters stating the regions' long standing demand for 'GORKHALAND' at several places along the bumpy and steep highway.

Just off the highway in the Kurseong sub-division a huge sign indicates the entry way for the tea estate with the name of Traditional TE which was an area of field study. On the sign board along with the name of estate we see the Tea Boards logo for Darjeeling tea, the Fair Trade logo (the green and black yin-yang) as well as the logo for bio-dynamic (lady bug on a leaf). The estate was started in 1862 by Mr. James White⁹² and in 1978 the government took over its running as it was struggling for survival. It was reported that the estate has been running as organic since 1991 and the present owners (ROU⁹³ Group) bought the estate in 1990 as it was abandoned and streamlined it. The estate got fair-trade certified in 1995 and been so since. The ROU group also own four other tea estates in Darjeeling with a total area of 730.1 hectares under tea production within the district.

- **Area, Production, Employees**

The estate comprises of three divisions and the village closest to town is the Upper Division also commonly referred to as *Kothidhura* (Kothi translates to bungalow and Dhura refers to labour line) as the manager's bungalow is also located in the same village. Hence upon entering the tea estate the prime flat land in the estate is occupied by the factory and the adjoining manager's bungalow. This also signifies the importance given to the manager in an estate as the entire village is named after his bungalow. The tea estate covers a total area of 555.54 hectares of which area under tea is 242.46 hectares (43.65% under tea) and the average yield of the estate is about 221kg/hectare.

⁹² Government of West Bengal (1980) West Bengal District Gazetteer Pp 228

⁹³ Name of the group changed to maintain confidentiality (as requested)

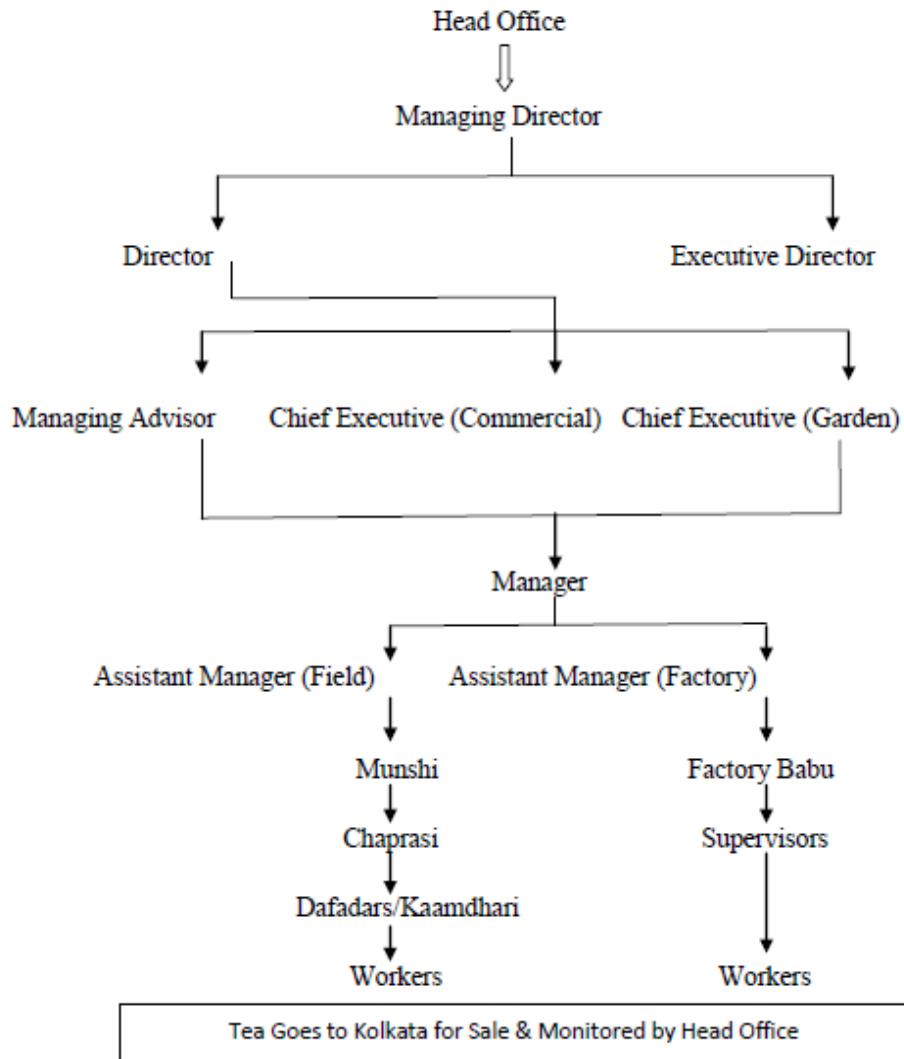
Table 4.3: Population of tea estate employees and villages

Estate Divisions	Male	Female	Total Permanent Workers*	Total Village Population
Upper Division	127	152	279	1485
Lower Division (Kaafebari)	74	174	248	719
Karbia Division	44	108	152	612
	245	434	679	2816

Source: Tea Estate Office Records 2015; Note: * does not include management (three in total)

Table 4.3 gives us the division of employees across the Organic TE estate as well as the total population. It can also be seen from this same table that there is a greater female workforce i.e. they comprise 63.91% of the working population of the estate. As can be seen in comparison to Traditional TE there are lesser number of employees in this estate due to the size of the estate and while the estate is divided into sections they are not out divisions with different assistant managers. The management comprises of only three with the manager leading the entire team of workers assisted alongside by one field assistant manager and one factory assistant manager.

Figure 4.2: Organisational Flow Chart for Singell Tea Estate



As evident from figure 4.2 the organisational structure of the tea estate is such that there is a top down flow of authority. It is only the Manager and those below him that are located within the tea estate in Darjeeling and the rest of the upper echelons of the management are based in Kolkata or outside the estate. The executive director and the managing advisor are based in Darjeeling but only make visits to the estate from time to time. It is interesting to note that while the executive director would make frequent visits to the estate the organisational flow chart has been made in such a manner that the director of the company continues to preside over the employees below him. Since the director was the son of the owner and the executive director was a consultant who hails

from the Darjeeling hills it could be said that he was meant to have a supervisory role while the final call would be taken by the director. This is also indicative of how nepotism exists in the upper echelons of the tea industry management especially in family-owned proprietorship. Perhaps this could be a reason as to why some of the retired workers who were interviewed would lament that the *white sahabs* have been replaced by *madisey*⁹⁴ *sahabs*. The chief executive (garden) is based in Siliguri and comes for a visit from time to time to check accounts and discuss key financial matters. Hence the major responsibility of running the estate rests on the Manager of the tea estate.

Fair Trade

Another important organisational feature observed at the Organic TE tea plantation was the formation of the FLO (Fair Trade Labelling Organisation) joint body also known as the Fair Trade Premium Committee (FTPC). This committee was a joint body comprising of representatives of both the management and the other employees of the tea plantation through a democratic voting process. There was also another group, namely, Tea Action Trust Executive Committee (TATEC) which was a central committee comprising of the Joint Bodies of all the tea estates that are owned by the ROU group. While interviewing a few of the women workers who were involved in the FTPC and as a part of the joint body would have to go for meetings especially the TATEC meetings which were held offsite complained about the late nights. Although they said they were happy to be included in these meetings but these meetings went on till late at times and these women were ‘talked’ about in the village for returning home late to look after their homes and children.

In terms of using the Fair Trade premium for developmental and welfare activities there are two fund accounts, namely:

1. Annual FTP Fund : This mainly pertains to the premium that is received over and above the price of the finished tea for the social and economic development of the workers’ community

⁹⁴ Nepali term used to identify those who are not from the hills or non-Nepali individuals.

2. Annual Rolling Fund : This mainly pertains to the loans that are recovered or amount that has been deposited in term deposits as well as income from the rental of Joint Body Assets.

The work plans are made by holding consultative assemblies amongst the members and decisions are in consultation with the members of the FTPC (Fair Trade Premium Committee) also known as the Joint Body (JB) however the last word rests with the manager who is the President of the committee.

During the time of the field visit there were a total of 25 members in the committee of which 18 were women. The members of the committee are changed every 3 years but the President is usually the manager of the estate. Although FLO mandates that this committee specifically look after the welfare of the workers' community by introducing various developmental measures like setting up educational facilities, loans for micro-finance businesses, community centers, vocational training camps, women upliftment programs and making improvements in the plantation area and on the rare occasion some workers facing hardships are also provided loans.

In an interview with the manager it was revealed that of the total sale of made tea only 10-15 per cent is sold through fair trade. When further questioned as to why the owners pay handsome amounts for certification despite small percentage of sale two reasons were highlighted, namely:

- Cost of production is being recovered even from the small percentage of tea sold through fair trade.
- A handsome price for the tea is guaranteed through Fair Trade sale.

Hence it can be said that these international certifications are being incorporated by the tea plantation industry of Darjeeling at a huge cost to the planters/owners because they are targeting the first-world market and for profitability. The argument therefore arises that why then the owners/planters refuse to invest in the workers (by increasing wage component) without whom they will have nothing to sell to the 'green consumers' of the first world when they can so easily afford to invest in international certifications thereby accruing a premium price and premium market for their product.

The most significant changes brought about by the development committee as reported by the management was the involvement of the workers in the decision making process by allowing them to voice their issues and concerns and take decisions on fund utilisation as well as reducing the gap between the management and the workers. However, a woman member of the JB reported that *“it is sometimes difficult to put our point of view across as we cannot speak in a voice louder than the managements’ and I have heard of too many instances of people being served with show cause notices across our estate so sometimes I grudgingly agree to what is put forth in the JB meetings”* (Case Study 5, female, 41 years old). She has also been a member since 2008 and the JB centre caretaker.

The same worker reports *“The meeting is supposed to take place 3-4 times in a year but it mostly happens once at most twice in a year. The AGM meeting is either held in Selimbong, Seyok or Putharjhora. The union does not work with the joint body committee. Although earlier children of the workers used to get merit scholarship it has been discontinued and so have the loans. Despite being a member of JB she felt that the union has more clout while talking to the management and making demands for the workers. There is an annual gate meeting every year in front of the Godown which is called by the union to ask about workers’ grievances. Yet there is little change in our conditions of work or living.”*

4.3 Rural Infrastructure

Namring Tea Estate

The main road which was a part of the highway as well as the road leading upto the factory from within the Namram division were well maintained however upon entering the estate area from the Jamram division and the road connecting Namram to Jamram from within the plantation area was rough and patchy. Movement of vehicles could only be done one at a time while entering into Jamram and while moving from Jamram to Namram and if you were unfortunate enough to be greeted by another vehicle from

front there was a ‘rule’ or *estate dastur*⁹⁵ to be followed. The one entering the estate would have to reverse till the point there was space for two vehicles (this does not occur often as most vehicles heading to town leave early morning and return around dusk and so all are usually heading in the same direction). The Jamram division of the plantation had a ropeway that had been established for easy transport of green leaves from the estate straight to the factory. Hence the maintenance or improvement of the motor-able road did not appear to be a priority of the estate. There was also the issue of who would invest in the making of the road as the plantation is a private property and they need to take care of their roads. However it was reported that the road was not a top priority for the management as it would increase the movement of people from the plantation to the outside and this would spoil the ethos of the estate. On a later visit in 2016, while the road condition was bad at the time of the field visit in 2015, the road had been constructed under the aegis of the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) and a wider asphalt road had been constructed.

Road construction is an important part of the rural infrastructure in the hill region as it provides connectivity thereby creating opportunities for the workers to move out of the estates. However the producers/owners of the estates are not keen on a proper motorable road as that would allow the workers to be exposed to life and better opportunities outside of the estates thereby making the workers question the estate’s provisioning. Apart from the road the tea estate is developed in such a manner wherein the factory is the epicentre and there are villages scattered around. However something unique about Traditional TE was that there being 3 divisions of the estate the manager who is at the top of the employee pyramid was located in the division where the factory was located and he had with him two assistant managers one to look after the field and the other to look after the factory. The manager had the biggest villa in the estate to himself and the estate hospital was also located in this division. The two out divisions were located about 2-3 kms away from the other two divisions. The villages across all

⁹⁵ Garden *dasturs* (tradition/ritual) vary from garden to garden. They could refer to any social, cultural, political or even work related goings on.

three divisions are spread out in such a manner that the management level staff is at the centre of the estate.

Singell Tea Estate

It was seen that the connectivity of the second tea estate was much better as compared to Traditional TE as they were close to the highway as well as town and there were plenty of conveyance options for the estate workers especially those who were located in the upper division. However mobility is an issue in the hill regions and in case of ill-health often times it is difficult to find immediate access for transportation. As compared to Traditional TE this estate was more accessible and the population appeared to have greater access to town facilities and schools. However a drawback of being well connected to the highway and hence the town was there were a few reported cases of accidents and the management reported that there was greater degree of absenteeism among the workers as it was easy for them to find a daily wage job that would pay them more than the estate. Also another drawback that the management pointed out was that the workers in this particular estate were politically very active and especially during statehood movements the estate could come to a standstill. Some of the workers would also continually threaten the management time and again to listen to their demands or they would give a bad feedback to the visitors from Fair Trade thereby jeopardising the estate's certification.

It has been reiterated several times in the hills that while the MNCs have managed to reach their products such as L'oreal shampoo, Coca Cola, Kit Kat Chocolates, Nescafe coffee and Tata CTC tea etc to these 'isolated enclaves' it takes the government schemes several years post their launch to reach these same villages.

4.4 Social Hierarchy

- At the managerial level while it is rare to have a Nepali manager it was very much the case in Organic TE where the Nepali manager had been working as assistant manager in one of the other estates owned in Darjeeling by the same group. At Traditional TE as tradition has been in the Darjeeling hills the manager hailed from Rajasthan which is in North India. It has been seen in the

past that the presence of Nepalis in the managerial post has been insignificant⁹⁶. This was also reiterated by the Executive Director of Organic TE and said even today the practice is not very common as the owners feel that if a Nepali is kept at the highest post (managerial) in a estate then he will easily concede to the demands of the workers.

- The workers, staff and sub-staff are all descendents of Nepali workers who had been brought by the British when they first opened tea estates in Darjeeling.

It is noteworthy that in the tea estates, the personnel at higher positions of work hierarchy are mostly from outside the region. The local population is usually hired for positions at low and subordinate levels only. While it is said that one of the aims of fair trade is to reduce the gap between management and workers on field the reality was different. However there is still considerable gap between management and the workers; and not as much between the Staff, Sub-Staff (Supervisory) and Workers.

At Traditional TE the factory workers and staff (work in the factory office) have their worksite in Namram division. In Organic TE the factory is located in the same worksite where the workers pluck leaf. A unique feature at Organic TE was that they were buying green leaf from Teesta Small Tea Farmers (54 farmers) and Potong Tea Workers Welfare Committee (343 farmers). These are both small farmers' cooperative and since they do not have any factory of their own for processing they are provided manufacturing services wherein their green leaf is bought and processes at Traditional TE. These farmer cooperatives are also provided with technical knowledge as well as infrastructural support to transport the green leaves to the factory. They also receive funds from the fair trade premiums earned at Traditional TE.

⁹⁶ Rasaily, Rinju (2003) *Labour and Health in Tea Plantations: A Case Study of Phuguri Tea Estate*. Unpublished PhD thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Chapter 5

Social Realities of Plantation Workers

The exploration of social realities in the lives of the workers was done by focusing on the plantation worker in Darjeeling. Located in the northern part of West Bengal, the district is known for its high quality tea the world over. Yet, the workers receive wages much lesser to their counterparts in the southern tea producing regions of India. Therefore, the endeavour, in the present chapter, is to focus on the status of the workers in Darjeeling. It examines their livelihood through wage, working conditions, entitlements and access to basic amenities.

This chapter is, therefore, an endeavour to explain the vulnerability of the tea plantation workers of Darjeeling who remain poorly paid despite serving international consumers paying a high price for quality produce. Marx said work is not just an economic activity rather it is an essential human activity which could be a source of creative fulfillment and self-actualisation (Spencer, 2009). However, it shall be seen in the next sections of the study how the workers are yet to achieve either despite toiling in the tea gardens across generations.

5.1 Socio-demographic profile of the study sample

Table 5.1 reflects on the socio-demographic characteristics of the study population. The socio-demographic profile of the study sites explains the population dynamics through age, sex composition, marital status and educational attainment. It was observed that majority of the population in both the sites were in the age group of 31-50 years of age. There were a few cases wherein there was age discrepancy at the time of induction in the tea estate. These workers lamented that they would retire before they turned 60 since their year of birth was noted incorrectly at the time of induction. This indicated the vulnerability of the workers and the lack of any grievance redressal mechanism. When asked if the workers' union would be able to intervene on their behalf, it was reported that the union would hardly involve themselves in such cases as they were mostly active during wage negotiation periods (which occur once in three years) or

when they wanted to garner votes from the public for assembly and general elections (FGD 1 and 3). A worker at Traditional TE (Case Study 4, male, 43 years old) also reported “*the union asks for birth certificate as proof of age but we have no official proof of birth. They simply wash their hands off of our troubles and give excuses to not be involved when they have to struggle with our demands. They just call general meetings for the sake of it and to show that the union is concerned about workers’ rights.*” Also in the case of Organic TE the Joint Body (JB) formed under the aegis of Fair trade was meant to look into worker welfare and unionization was not encouraged. In FGD 1 held at Traditional TE, one of the workers remarked “*whether it is Ghising or Bimal or Mamta at the end of the day there is nobody on our side. We continue to struggle for our daily lives with poor pay while the leaders get wealthier by using the statehood demand as an excuse*”.

Table 5.1: Socio-demographic profile of the study sample (Percentages)

		Traditional TE		Organic TE	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
Age (in years)	11-20	2.9	0	0	0
	21-30	11.8	18.2	8.1	23.8
	31-40	47.1	33.3	37.8	25.4
	41-50	23.5	31.8	35.1	30.2
	51-60	14.7	16.7	18.9	20.6
	Total	100	100	100	100
Marital Status	Married	91.2	75.8	89.2	77.8
	Unmarried	5.9	9.1	10.8	9.5
	Separated	2.9	3.0	0	3.2
	Widowed	0	12.1	0	9.5
	Total	100	100	100	100
Education	Not Literate	5.9	25.8	5.4	27.0
	Functional	5.9	6.1	13.5	15.9

	Literate				
	I-IV	5.9	18.2	13.5	3.2
	V-VIII	50.0	37.9	40.5	38.1
	IX-XII	32.4	8	24.3	15.9
	Graduate	0	0	2.7	0
	Total	100	100	100	100

Avenues of education are limited in tea estates as they are in remote and inaccessible locations with poor infrastructure which keeps the area underserved. Table 5.1 clearly indicates that 50 percent of the males and 37.9 percentage of the female workers were educated up to class eight at Traditional TE and an equivalent percentage of 38.1 percentage of women workers and 40.5 percent of the male workers were educated up to the same level in Organic TE. It was reported by the workers that they could not study further due to lack of educational institutions closer to where they were living as well as due to the abject poverty of their parents who were unable to educate them further. It was believed that there was a ‘dearth of jobs’ and it was no good to study further due to ‘since plucking tea leaves did not require high education levels’. They could survive with their limited education. Thus, cost of education and lack of an educational facility along with the understanding that educational attainment will not get them a job proved to be the disincentives towards it. However, they said that they were making sure to educate their own children so as not to engage them in the tea estate work as they did not want their kids to toil as much as they had in their lifetime with very little returns.

There was also a unique case in Organic TE of a male worker who despite being a graduate was working in the tea estate that too at the level of worker in the field. On being asked why he was working in the estate his response was *“there is nobody other than me who could take up my mother’s job when she was retiring. We have been living in the house provided by the tea estate for the past several decades. We did not know where else to go and we neither have the means. Hence, despite being a graduate I was*

asked by my parents to join the tea estate. Since I did not have any job offers what else could I do but give in to my parents' wish." (Case Study 7, male, 25 years old)

Thus, as regards, age group, most of the workers are aged 31-50. Only one male worker is aged below 20 years. With an ageing workforce in the near future, new lot of workers would be required. Considering that most of the workers did not want their children to work in the tea estates as it required hard labour while the pay was a pittance replacing the present workforce is likely to pose problems. It was also reported by the management in both the tea estates that it was increasingly becoming difficult for them to find casual/bigha workers during peak season.

Majority of the study sample was also married in both the study sites and as can be seen from the Table 5.2 in both the study sites majority of the families had 2-3 dependents. It was interesting to note that in Organic TE there were greater number of households with either none or just one dependent (33%) while in Traditional TE 35% of the households had 4-5 dependents which could be indicative of the fact that there was greater pressure from the families to earn more as there were more mouths to feed.

Another inference that can be made from Organic TE is that there were a greater number of households with fewer dependents i.e. ranging from 0-1 as there was greater opportunity for family members to move away from home as they had easy access to the town and therefore more opportunity to work and greater mobility as they were not living in as isolated an enclave as Traditional TE. A woman worker in Organic TE reported *"since we are close to town there is greater chance of one of us to move out of the estate and explore better work opportunities. My son has completed his schooling and speaks good English I am sure he can get a job in one of the several hotels in town. Many of us have also sent our kids to Darjeeling to study and look for work as there are more opportunities there rather than being wasted in the estate."*(Case Study 9, female, 40 years old)

Table 5.2: Dependents in Households

Number of Dependents	Traditional TE	Organic TE
0-1	10	33
2-3	49	54
4-5	35	12
6-7	5	1
>8	1	0

Given the age distribution and number of dependents Traditional TE appeared to have younger workers and households with lesser dependents compared to Organic TE. As regards to gender composition, there are more women than men employed on both sites. Higher share of male workers are married as compared to female workers. About 40-50% of males in households have attained up to middle school (Class VIII) education while that share of women is 38%.

5.2 Distribution of Population by Social Groups

The caste distribution in the two study sites were such that while in Traditional TE there were a greater number of ST workers that too all of them belonged to Tamang tribe while in Organic TE there were greater number of general caste workers. This has been depicted in the table 5.3 below wherein 40 % of workers including sub-staff belonged to ST in Traditional TE and only 29% in Organic TE belonged to ST.

Table 5.3: Distribution of Population by Social Groups

Social Group	Traditional TE		Organic TE	
	Worker	Sub-Staff	Worker	Sub-Staff
General	19	2	33	7
OBC	30	6	20	7
SC	3	0	4	0
ST	36	4	23	6
Total	88	12	80	20

Caste does not really play a big role in the everyday lives of the plantation workers or work conditions yet workers at both sites reported that some of them had made the effort of getting a caste certificate hoping to get some benefits. But they were of the opinion that it was just another paper for them as they did not know what to do with the certificates. In some cases they had got it made because their neighbour told them about caste certificates or in some cases their relatives told them about the importance of getting caste certificates for at least their children if not themselves. A worker in Traditional TE (Case Study 3, female, 38 years old) said *“I do not have a caste certificate but I got one made for my daughter who is in school thinking it might be of some use to her. They say it helps with college admissions and government jobs.”* This also indicates the aspirations of the tea workers who wish to do as much as possible for their children to have a better future.

5.3 Wage Structure, Nature of Work and Pattern of Employment

At both the tea estates the timing for work is from 7am to 4pm with an hour long break during noon. Before the workers disbursed for lunch, they need to get the green leaf plucked weighed and noted. However there was a difference in the quantum of task assigned at the two tea estates.

The task assigned to the workers at Traditional TE was 7kg/day for China variety, 8kg/day for Clone variety and 9kg/day for Assam variety and the Extra leaf price (ELP)⁹⁷ was fixed at Rs. 6/kg. In the group discussion held in Traditional TE with ten workers it was reported that since the tea bushes are so old especially the China variety (which have never been uprooted since they were planted in 1859) it was sometimes difficult to pluck even the task rate assigned post peak plucking season. It was reported that occasionally union sits in to decide on the task and ELP but rarely raises any concerns.

⁹⁷ Extra leaf price is the price paid to the pluckers over and above their daily wage for each kilogram of green leaf plucked above the daily task. This works as an incentive for the workers to improve their productivity and pluck beyond their assigned task.

There was only one task assigned i.e. 8kg/day at Organic TE. The ELP was set at Rs.12/kg. It is to be noted that the ELP at Organic TE was double what was being paid at Traditional TE. Thus the incentive structure for the workers at Organic TE was better than that of Traditional TE. This could probably be attributed to Organic TE being a fair trade certified estate. The manager reported that the ELP and the task rate had remained so for the past three to four years thereby indicating stability in the estate as well the higher wages being received by the worker.

He said *“Unlike the other tea estates in the region the ELP in our estate and other estates owned by our company the ELP is relatively higher. This is due to the fact that we are honest with our workers and due to the premium received by our tea and to encourage better plucking we provide a much higher ELP. The ELP, however, has remained constant for the past few years as there have been no changes in the prices fetched by our tea and our production has also remained the same.”* (KI 10).

It is important to note that the pluckers who pluck the leaves delicately so as to not pluck any more than ‘two leaves and a bud’ are considered as ‘unskilled’ workers. This paradox is an example of exploitative nature of the relationship between management and workers wherein the ‘skill’ of plucking goes unnoticed and most times unrewarded. Hence they receive wages which are not sufficient to provide for a decent living. Mostly the women are involved in plucking as it is perceived that they are more adept at handling the delicate art of plucking two leaves and a bud.

The employees in a tea estate can be divided into two groups on the basis of their salaries/wages which is paid monthly in the case of the management, staff & sub-staff. Those at the bottom of the tea workforce pyramid were being paid weekly at Traditional TE and fortnightly at Organic TE. The amount to be paid is determined on the basis of the value of a day’s wage.

Table 5.4: Employees and Wage Structure

Employee Category		Number of Employees		Monthly/Fortnightly
		Traditional TE	Organic TE	
Manager		1	1	Monthly
Assistant Manager	Factory	1	1	Monthly
	Field	3	2	Monthly
Total		5	4	
Super Staff/Staff	Clerical (Head Clerk, Divisional Clerk, Factory Incharge, Compounder, Technicians)	26	13	Monthly
Sub-Staff	Chaprasi, Kaamdhari	142	84	Monthly
	Clone Bau	26	-	Monthly
Workers	Factory	52	31	Fortnightly
	Field (Pluckers, Sprayers and Bungalow Servants)	1147 (374 + 336 + 437)	551	Weekly in Traditional TE Fortnightly in Organic TE

Table 5.4 shows us that only the upper echelons of the employee pyramid get paid monthly while the management has no particular grade and are paid their salaries. It is the super and the sub-staff on which the (Other Monthly Rated Employees) OMRE grades apply. The OMRE staff have various grades namely, A, B and C and they distinguish among the grades depending on seniority and work and are paid according to the particular grade they fall under which ranges from Rs. 3000 to Rs.7000 per month. However the management at the different sites were being paid differently and it was reported that the management is paid differently across the estates depending on the owners willingness to pay.

On comparing the two estates it was observed that the pay of post i.e. extra pay given for certain daily wage posts was lesser in Traditional TE as compared to Organic TE.

The pay of post was also different for sprayer and bungalow servants in both the sites, while in the former they received the same amount (Rs 2.50) it was different for sprayers and bungalow servants in Organic TE (Rs 8.50 & Rs 7.50). The justification given for the pay of post was that the sprayer is given extra so as to provide better nutrition as he has to carry heavy equipment and spray chemicals (only in Traditional TE since in Organic TE they only used naturally derived and bio-dynamically prepared mixes suitable for organic cultivation).

Plantations must provide ‘living wage’⁹⁸ to the workers rather than just ‘subsistence wage’ (Bhowmick, 1996). It was seen that the wage structure and timings were same for the two estates. Another difference was that workers at Organic TE complained more about the burden of work as they said being an organic tea estate there was more work involved in terms of making vermi-compost, maintaining cow pad pits, mulching and application of organic methods of cultivation, etc. In addition the Organic TE estate was also practicing bio-dynamic method of farming. This method entails making of special preparations using natural herbs and follow certain methods (stuffing stag bladder with manure mixed with herbs buried for certain number of days) and follow the moon cycle for application of these special preparations.

- **Field Operations**

The field operations in a tea estate are mainly comprised of the women workers and they are involved in plucking (from March-November) while the remaining months they are involved in pruning, tipping, weeding, mulching etc. There is also the task of spraying in tea estates and this is always handled by the men who form the remainder of the field workers. In terms of field operations there were significant differences between the two estates as one was an inorganic estate while the other was an organic estate. Thereby there was lesser exposure to harmful chemicals especially for those involved in spraying pesticides and insecticides. However, it was reported that the work, in Organic

⁹⁸ In an interview with Mr.P.C.Tamang (Executive Director, TPI) the author was told that the concept of ‘living wage’ has never been floated in the tripartite wage agreement meetings and that only Fairtrade Labelling Organisation was working on deciding ‘living wage’. The workers have always been said to be paid subsistence level wages which has remained below the minimum wage (agricultural and/or beedi workers) within the state and/or outside.

TE i.e. the organic estate, is more difficult as there is greater work involved for weed control, vermi-compost preparation, carrying and application of bulky manure and preparation and application of special concoctions prepared following the bio-dynamic methods of farming. For example, as explained and shown by the manager at Organic TE, one of the special preparations that was applied to the tea bushes was soil mixed with herbs that was stuffed in a stag bladder and then buried for a couple of months and then the soil would be taken out and applied to the tea plants.

In Organic TE there were some additional roles for the both the male and female field workers in the form of maintaining cow pad pits (used to prepare chemical free manure and to provide. Two cases of women workers at Organic TE in the lower division especially merit discussion here. Their daily task was of handling manure to be mixed well so as to be transported to the vermi-compost bins constructed in another part of the tea estate. These women had no masks and only thin plastic gloves which only covered a short length of their arms while they had to go elbow deep in mixing the manure. When questioned about their task and how they felt about it, one of them was overwhelmed and could not respond. The other (IDI 8) said :

“Who likes to handle this much quantity of manure and it is not even for our personal use it is for the estate to be able to show the foreign visitors and auditors that the tea being grown on this estate is truly organic. But who sees our woes and struggles? We work so hard and are surrounded with manure yet we need to return happy to our homes to prepare food for our families. What else can we do if the ‘sahib’ has assigned us this job? The only advantage is that the worksite is close to our home and we can quickly go back home at the end of the day to wash off this stench” (IDI 8).

In all the conversation, the other women endorsed all that was reported by her colleague. Both seem to have resigned to their destiny and remained satisfied that at least they earned something. It was also reported by these two women workers that during field visit, the auditors and other fair trade officials they were never brought to visit the area where the women were handling manure.

Both workers and sub-staff are involved in the field operations wherein the sub-staff are only involved in maintaining attendance, supervisory role and doing weighment twice a day wherein the workers bring in the green leaf plucked pre-lunch and then at the end of a workday. Sub-staff are also workers who have been promoted up based on their seniority. While at Traditional TE, there were no females in a supervisory role i.e. at the sub-staff rank whereas in Organic TE there were women among the sub-staff. Five of them were a part of the study. The head clerk at Organic TE was a woman employee. This is of significance since this post is just a step below the managerial positions (manager and assistant manager). Hence, in terms of women in positions of decision making at higher hierarchy of work, Organic TE had greater agency as compared to Traditional TE. This could also be attributed to the fact that one of the tenets of fair trade was women empowerment and thus the tea estate was bound to promote women in the supervisory roles. The head clerk at Organic TE was a woman because of her seniority had achieved the said position. However, it must be noted that it is rare to see women at sub-staff levels and even rarer to see one at the post of head clerk (staff level).

At Traditional TE upon inquiring with the manager it was seen that there were no females in either the sub-staff or any other level above the workers. Hence Traditional TE fell within the general notion of the tea plantations that are known to employ women only up to the worker level.

- **Factory Operations (March-November)**

In tea estates there is also a factory and there too the same workers from the lowest level are employed to do the factory work. During the peak season these workers have the added burden of doing overtime. The work involved in the factory ranges from withering, rolling, fermentation, drying, sorting and packaging. The women are mostly involved at the sorting stage and most other jobs at the factory are carried out by males especially since the other jobs entail handling of machinery. There is greater exposure to dust at the factory floor as the made tea is sorted and although the workers are provided with masks it can get stuffy while working in the closed quarters of the factory. As reported by some of the factory women at Organic TE who were much more

vocal and forthcoming with their views it was noted that sometimes even when they do not want they are forced to work overtime during the peak season and the overtime pay is not commensurate with the work and they were not even sure how much overtime they were eligible for the work put in. The factory workers at Traditional TE were limited to a specific number i.e. 53 and they had quite a burden of work as they were the processing site for the two out divisions as well (Jamram and Pamram) and in all they were processing green leaf from 450 hectares of area under tea. The women workers at Traditional TE factory were less forthcoming with their views regarding the nature of their job and said they are just used to the work and although the tea dust and working in closed quarters bothers their eyes and throat there was not much that they could do about it. This goes to show that the workers are resigned to the fact that their health is bound to suffer due to continuous exposure to dust and lack of fresh air. Since most of the times they are sole income earners, and sometimes an additional earner who contributes income to the household they continue suffer in silence.

Wage Pattern & Entitlements

Income is an important determinant of living standards and hence it also has implications on the workers' education, housing, health and health seeking behaviour as well. Income in many ways determines their ability to access resources, opportunities and services and to prioritise their needs.

As regards the workers in the tea estates, the last wage agreement was signed in 2014 and the new wages came into force from 1st April 2014. Before April 2014 the wage rate was Rs. 90 per day which was increased by Rs 42.50 for the next three years i.e. till 31.03.2017. At the time of field work the workers at Traditional TE were supposed to be receiving a wage of Rs 122.50/day. Table 5.5 indicates the distribution of the increment in wage after an agreement had been reached in 2014. The amount of Rs. 42.50 was not increased in one go rather it was broken down with a subsequent increase in wage every year as shown in table 5.5. This system of increment also causes loss of wage to the workers in each subsequent year per worker per day. As can be seen in table 5.5 since the Rs. 42.50 wage increment was not made effective immediately the workers were losing Rs. 20 in the year 2014 each day (Rs 132.50-112.50). While a worker was

losing Rs. 10 each day in the year 2015 (Rs. 132.50-122.50). This was yet another form in which the workers' wage was kept low despite the tripartite agreement.

Table 5.5: Wage Increment Agreement

Timeline	Old Wage	New Wage	Loss of Wage Per Worker Per Day
01.04.2014	Rs. 90	Rs.90 + 22.50 = 112.50	Rs. 20
01.04.2015	Rs.112.50	Rs.112.50 + 10 = 122.50	Rs. 10
01.04.2016	Rs.122.50	Rs.122.50 + 10 = 132.50	-

The wage agreements are signed for a period of three years and therefore the above mentioned rate were valid till March 2017. The wages are the same for all the tea estate irrespective of their type i.e. traditional, organic or both and therefore the wages were the same for the workers at the study sites. It was peculiar to note that most workers reported that their fortnightly wage was Rs.1350/-. Despite the 2014 wage agreement, the workers were being paid at the rate of Rs. 112.50 whereas they should have been receiving Rs. 122.50 per day. Therefore, the fortnightly salary should have been Rs. 1837.50 every fortnight instead of Rs. 1350. The workers said they were receiving their arrears but in installments and none had much idea about how much they should be receiving in arrears. The difference in reported wages could be due to their absences from work or their inability to complete their daily task then wages could be deducted for the day. Hence it could not be ascertained whether the wages are being paid as per the wage agreements.

Newspaper reports suggested that on 24th Feb 2018 an interim wage hike⁹⁹ was arrived at wherein the workers' wages increased by Rs 17.50 bringing the daily wage amount received by each worker to Rs. 150/ day. However, the GJMM backed trade union issued a statement that the first flush tea will only be allowed to leave the estate once the bonus dues were cleared. Four rounds of meetings were held till March 2018. The trade unions were demanding minimum wage as per the Minimum Wage Act (1948).

⁹⁹ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/tea-workers-wageshiked/articleshow/63293303.cms>
<https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/west-bengal/interim-tea-hike-accepted-on-210948>
<https://www.thestatesman.com/cities/govt-plans-wage-hike-planters-reluctant-1502664619.html>

However the planters were not willing to pay minimum wages because of the contention that tea plantations were already being governed by the Plantation Labour Act (1951). This Act was applicable in the tea estates and hence the three year wage hike agreement remained at an impasse. In order to verify whether the interim wage hike had been implemented by the management, the evidence from the two study sites visited during 2015 suggest the contrary. As of 3rd March 2018 workers at both the tea estates were receiving daily wage at the rate of Rs 132.50/day (KI 2 and KI 6). It may also be noted that while wages may have increased the cost of living has also increased over the period of time and hence it is still difficult for the workers to make ends meet.

Workers in the estates are entitled to certain perks and concessions pertaining to income, health care, food security, fuel, protective gear, blankets and tea. These have been listed as evident from Table 5.6.

Table 5.6: Entitlements

Category of entitlements	Provision Reported	According to Workers	Remarks
Provident Fund	Yes	Yes	12% and company contributes equal amount
Bonus	Yes	Yes	20 % since 2008 after 6 months of minimum service
Gratuity/Arrears	Yes	Yes	Delay, Re
Medical	Yes	Yes	Maternity leave, sick leave 2/3 rd of daily wage, dispensary, reimbursement of expenses incurred at any government health institution if provide receipts.
Ration ¹⁰⁰	Yes	Yes	2 kg rice, 4kg atta (worker and dependent spouse) Minor dependents (upto age 16 years) 600 gms rice, 1kg atta
Firewood	Yes	Yes	8 mann per year to the worker & 12 mann to sub-staff (1 mann=40kg) at

¹⁰⁰ Provided at concessional rate of 47 paise/kg for both rice and wheat

			Traditional TE Rs 280 for workers & Rs 450 for sub-staff (Organic TE)
Kerosene	Yes	No	1 litre to the staff only
Umbrella	Yes	Yes	Once every 3 years
Raincoat	Yes	Yes	Instead of Raincoat workers were given <i>tirpal</i> ¹⁰¹
Apron	Yes	Yes	Once a year to factory workers only
Mask	Yes	Yes	Once every 15 days to factory workers (Organic TE only)
Gloves	No	No	
Gumboot	Yes	Yes	Only given slippers once in 3 years at Traditional TE. Instead of gumboot the worker is handed Rs. 80 to buy a pair but in 2015 Organic TE provided gumboots
Blanket	Yes	Yes	Once in three years
Tea	Yes	Yes	At Traditional TE workers given 250 gms Grade 8 tea of the estate itself. Sub-staff receives 1/2kg and staff 1kg. At Organic TE 300 gms black CTC tea per month to workers 500 gms black tea per month to sub-staff & 1kg to staff

The entitlements received by the workers in the two study sites vary. There are some differences in terms of firewood, mask, gumboot and tea. While at Traditional TE the workers were being given ration of firewood the workers at Organic TE were being given money to buy their own firewood Rs 280/annum while the sub-staff was

¹⁰¹ Tirpal: Thick plastic sheets that the workers tied around their waists while working in the fields

receiving Rs 400/annum. Only the factory workers in Organic TE were being provided with masks whereas no such provisions were there in Traditional TE. This could also perhaps be a benefit of the fair trade certification as it was reported by the manager in Organic TE (KI 10) “*earlier we did not provide masks as the women who are in the sorting section would wrap their duppatas around their mouth but the fair trade visitors and auditors insisted we provide the workers with mask so irrespective of which section the worker is in the factory all have been provided with masks.*” In Organic TE it was observed that the factory workers especially the sorters were provided with proper gear as they were handling the finished tea. They had been provided not only with masks but aprons as well as hair and shoe caps to keep the workers safe as well as to avoid any contamination of the made tea. However apart from the sorters the provisions of masks, aprons, hair and shoe caps were not uniform. While all the sorters had them all the others engaged in withering, rolling, drying and fermenting wither did not have masks and shoe caps. All the factory workers had been provided with aprons.

While the workers at Traditional TE were provided with slippers the workers in Organic TE were provided with gumboots however this too was a recent edition as prior to which they were being given Rs. 80 to buy whatever footwear that they wished to purchase. There was also difference in the tea being provided to the workers at the two study sites while the workers were provided with the lowest grade tea but manufactured within the estate in Traditional TE, in Organic TE the workers were being provided with CTC that all the workers knew was being brought from a estate the company owned in Dooars. However it was also stated in both the estates that if a worker skipped 4 days in a month then they would not be given any tea. This was disheartening to note as it was these same workers who toiled so hard to make the finished product and many lamented in both the sites that “*we ourselves have never tasted the tea that we make and that is sold at very high prices*” (FGD 1 and 2). This also indicates that the workers had an idea about the high prices being fetched by the tea they made but that they would probably never be able to taste the same.

The pluckers are the backbone of the estate and one of the most important jobs on the estate is that of carefully selecting and plucking the green tea leaves which are then

weighed and transported to the factory for manufacturing into made tea. However the industry does not consider their work to require any particular skill and hence they are the most lowly paid among the tea estate employee hierarchy as they are considered to be unskilled daily wage labour.

5.4 Patterns of Recruitment and Nature of Work

Intitally *Sardari system*¹⁰² was the only system of employment or agency of labour recruitment in the plantations across the Darjeeling hills. Families were enticed to migrate and settle in the tea estates of Darjeeling. With surplus population in the 1930s, there was retrenchment of workers in the estates. This was locally known as the *Hatta Bahira*¹⁰³ system. With the passing of the PLA (1951) workers were recruited from within the estate population or Darjeeling hills and no longer did the *Sardars* have to attract workers from Nepal or other neighbouring regions. After 1964, the *Hatta Bahira* system was abolished wherein the workers could be ousted from the tea estate for the smallest of errors such as indiscipline, excessive unionisation. The *Badli* (substitute) system was introduced wherein dependent members of the workers would replace the retiring workers (Sharma and Das, 2008).

In terms characteristics of the work, it was seen that majority of the female workers were employed in the field and there was limited role for the female worker in the factory. This is because the female workers were only involved in sorting the tea leaves at the factory while the rest of the processes of withering, fermenting, drying, rolling and packaging is carried out by the male workers. As can be seen clearly from the table 5.7 there was greater representation of women in the factory as well as field in Organic TE compared to Traditional TE and this was also because there were a few female sub-staff workers in the factory as well who did supervision related works. More male workers were engaged in the factory.

¹⁰² Each estate used to have a team of sardars who would recruit labourers from neighbouring Nepal often belonging to their own respective castes. Once the labourers arrived in the estates the *Sardars* would receive a recruiting bonus amount. (Sharma & Das, 2008, p 202; Sarkar & Lama, 1986)

¹⁰³ Sharma and Das (2008) p 203

Table 5.7: Nature of Work (in percentages)

Site and Nature of Work		Traditional TE		Organic TE	
Site		Male	Female	Male	Female
	Factory	35.3	6.1	21.6	19.0
	Field	64.7	93.9	78.4	81.0
	Total	100	100	100	100
Tenure	1-10 yrs	23.5	33.3	27.0	39.7
	11-20yrs	35.3	37.9	40.5	34.9
	21-30yrs	32.4	19.7	24.3	20.6
	31-45yrs	8.8	9.1	8.1	4.8
	Total	100	100	100	100
Employment	Badli*	85.3	92.4	67.6	58.7
	Hardship**	2.9	1.5	2.7	7.9
	Bought***	2.9	1.5	21.6	19.0
	Company Employed	8.8	4.5	8.1	14.3
	Total	100	100	100	100

Note: **Badli*: denotes in exchange of retiring worker; ***Hardship*: denotes when management grants employment in extreme cases of poor population residing within the estate; ****Bought*: denotes when the retiring employee sells his post to another by providing a letter stating the individual seeking work to be the next of kin.

As can be seen from table 5.7 there were a greater number of workers from Organic TE who had bought their jobs i.e. 21.6 percent of the males and 19.0 percent of the females had bought their jobs as compared to the 2.9 percent males and 1.5 percent females at Traditional TE. This indicates that the system of *Badli* is still prevalent in the tea plantations wherein jobs are passed onto the next of kin once the worker reaches retirement. However there is a new trend of buying and selling of jobs as well as indicated by the ‘bought’ nature of employment in table 5.8.

There is buying and selling of permanent jobs which is increasingly replacing the *Badli* system especially in Organic TE and even the management was aware of the custom. However, it appears the management is not against the custom as long as the labour supply is undisturbed. The ‘bought’ jobs are also more among the worker class which include the pluckers, sprayers. It was also observed that the workers in Organic TE were able to sell their jobs (union was in the know how) as a plantation job at Organic TE was in high demand due to it being close to town and the retiring workers’ next of kin were either engaged in private jobs or they wanted nothing to do with a estate job. Yet the retiring worker was not vacating their house rather the new worker was being given a portion of their kitchen estate area. Thereby there was increasing pressure on the tea estate land. In Traditional TE which was the traditional tea estate the system of ‘badli’ was still very much in place and there was only one case of buying ‘the job’ that cropped up in the sample interviewed.

5.5 Socio-Economic Differentials Across Workers

It has been previously discussed that in order to understand socio-economic conditions of individuals we try and look at their house as a unit and get a sense of their standard of living. In order to fulfil our second objective we have tried to see if there exist any differences between the workers and the sub-staff across the two sites in terms of their household characteristics such as household size, number of plantation worker in each household and the earners in each household including the plantation worker. The sub-staff is above the level of the worker in the employee pyramid of a tea estate also receiving a higher wage. The table 5.8 depicts the same across the two study sites.

Table 5.8: Household Size, Plantation Workers and Income Earners

Characteristics		Traditional TE		Organic TE	
		Workers	Sub-Staff	Workers	Sub-Staff
HH Size	1-2	6.8	0	17.5	5.0
	3-4	38.6	41.7	47.5	40.0
	5-6	40.9	25.0	32.5	50.0
	7-8	13.6	33.3	2.5	5.0
	Total	100	100	100	100
No. of Plantation Workers per HH	1	64.8	41.7	71.2	70
	2	31.8	50.0	27.5	30.0
	3	3.4	8.3	2.5	5.0
	Total	100	100	100	100
Earners	1	42.0	58.3	25.0	25.0
	2	48.9	25.0	48.8	65.0
	3	8.0	8.3	21.2	10.0
	4	1.1	8.3	5.0	0
	Total	100	100	100	100

At Traditional TE it was seen that most households among workers i.e. 40.9% had family size of 5-6 members, while most of the sub-staff workers households 41.7% had 3-4 members. It is significant to note that in Traditional TE there were also 33.3% of households with a family size of 7-8 which is a large family to support thereby increasing the economic burden on the earning members. At Organic TE it was seen that 47.5% of the worker households had a family size in the range of 3-4 members while 50% of the sub-staff households had family size of 5-6 members. On comparing the two sites we see that there was a greater percentage of worker households in Traditional TE (40.9%) that had a large family size as compared to Organic TE worker households (32.5%). While at the sub-staff level in Traditional TE there was a greater percentage of households with 3-4 members whereas in Organic TE there was a greater percentage of households with 5-6 members i.e. 50%.

Further it is also evident that there was the pressure on the household in terms of generating income and thus the economic burden. It was observed that in Traditional

TE, among the worker households there was mainly one plantation member (64.8%) while 50% of the sub-staff households had at least two plantation members among the earning members. In comparison in Organic TE, the majority of the worker households 71.2% and sub-staff households 70% there was only one plantation member in the household. This is of importance as it goes to show that there is no longer a family employment system in place wherein the spouses of the permanent workers are also on the roll in the estate. Rather there may be better options of employability outside of the estate with better pay and thus the family members who could earn would look for work outside. This point becomes clearer when we see the number of earners in each household. As can be seen from table 5.8 there were at least two earning members in 48.8% and 65% of the worker and sub-staff households respectively, in Organic TE. However, at Traditional TE we see that 48.9% of the workers had two earning members while 58.3% of the sub-staff households had just one earning member in the household. This is also indicative of the fact that household income being higher in a sub-staff household may lead to lesser inclination for the other family members to go in search of jobs.

As can be seen from the table 5.9 majority of the household income is limited to Rs 10,000 or below per month. If we look at the differences across the two sites, that in Traditional TE majority of the households reported income between Rs 3000-6000. Among the workers, a little less than 30% households and among the sub-staff more than 33% households had income ranging between Rs.3000-6000. While among the workers in Organic TE most households (34%) had income between Rs.3000-6000, the sub-staff reported Rs.6000-10000 where most households (45%) were stacked. Hence it cannot be said for certain that with an improvement in rank at work there is significant difference in household income. Although in Organic TE the gap between worker and sub-staff is more than in Traditional TE. This highlighted the fact that the tea estates are still only providing subsistence level of income and this makes the estate job one in which the worker has limited resources for upliftment. As for the few households that did report their household income above Rs.10000 it was seen that they had at least one member who had enlisted in the army.

Table 5.9: Percentage Distribution of Household Income

Household Income	Traditional TE		Organic TE	
	Worker	Sub-Staff	Worker	Sub-Staff
<3000	27.3	25	22.5	5
3001-6000	29.5	33.3	33.8	40
6001-10000	20.5	25.0	28.8	45
Above 10001	22.7	16.7	15	20
Total	100	100	100	100

Employment in tea estates is mostly family-based (Besky, 2014; Rasaily, 2013). People are recruited from within the plantation population as there are limited alternate livelihoods available. It is evident from the discussion in earlier section that most households in both Traditional TE and Organic TE had only one family member working in the tea plantation. In terms of standard of living (access to assets, finance and insurance) also there are not significant differences between the two study sites. Hence, it can be seen that there while there was a slight difference between the two ranks at work (Worker and Sub-Staff), Organic TE appears to be doing better from among the two sites in terms of socio-economic conditions with regards to household income.

The table 5.10 discusses the access to assets, finance and insurance facilities of the study population. The asset ownership of the households is deemed to denote a higher standard of living. The assets taken into consideration varied from land and livestock ownership. Life insurance, health insurance and whether the workers had a savings bank account reflected on their financial conditions. The land which the workers referred to was a patch of land that was provided by the management along with the house. The PLA (1951) refers to this vacant strip of land adjoining the accommodation for maintaining 'kitchen garden'.

As can be seen from table 5.10 it was observed that 91% of the population at Traditional TE owned land and it was also significant to note that all the sample

interviewed from the sub-staff category in Traditional TE had land i.e. 89.8% of the worker households and 100% of the sub-staff households owned some land. The same could not be said of the population in Organic TE. As can be seen less than 50% owned any land and of the total 20 sub-staff workers employed only 13 i.e 65% owned any land. While 42.5% among the workers owned only 65% of the sub-staff had any land which is significantly lower than the sub staff category workers in Traditional TE. This goes to show that there is increasing pressure on land at Organic TE and as was informed by the management the workers who sold off their jobs at Organic TE did not vacate their houses rather they just gave away the land that had come with their housing site. The workers use the land for cultivating fruits and vegetables mostly for personal consumption. Some houses that have the possibility of expansion have cleared some forest land to cultivate vegetables that can be sold in the market or weekend markets (*haats*) held nearby the estates.

It was interesting to note that while only 58% in Traditional TE and 53% in Organic TE owned any livestock (pigs/goats/cows/hens). While those who did not own any livestock complained either lack of space or that they had no time neither any family member to care and provide for the livestock some even lamented about the fact that *'we barely manage to feed ourselves how do we keep and feed the livestock'* (Case Study 10, female, 37 years old). Of those who did own livestock it was reported they did so to provide additional income (in case they owned cow/pig/goat) especially to provide for school fees for their children or to make additional income during the *puja* season. Of those houses that owned hens it was reported that they did so as it was also an additional source of nutrition for their family. It was reported

"if we do keep livestock it is for purposes of extra income as our wages do not suffice. Some we sell to the butchers especially during Puja season or we sell within the estate. This is the case with keeping pigs and goats. Hens are kept so that there is steady supply of eggs for the family to consume, keeps us full for longer and it is also good for health as it gives strength. Sometimes the hens also are a part of our dinner if they multiply too much." (FGD 1)

Table 5.10: Access to Assets, Finances and Insurance

Access	Traditional TE		Total	Organic TE		Total
	Workers	Sub-Staff		Workers	Sub-Staff	
Kitchen Garden	79	12	91	34	13	47
	89.8%	100%	91.0%	42.5%	65.0%	47.0%
Livestock Ownership	48	10	58	39	14	53
	54.5%	83.3	58.0%	48.8%	70.0%	53%
Life Insurance	1	0	1	5	4	9
	1.1%	0%	1%	6.2%	20.0%	9%
Savings Bank Account	42	8	50	67	20	87
	47.7%	66.7%	50%	83.8%	100%	87
Health Insurance	0	0	100	0	0	100
	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	100%

Note: Total Workers and Sub-staff in Traditional TE: 88 & 12 respectively; Workers & Sub-staff at Organic TE: 80 & 20 respectively

In terms of savings and securing their future the majority of workers did not have much avenue for investing in life insurances. There was only 1% who had life insurance and rest of the 99% had no life insurance at Traditional TE. At Organic TE although not a large percentage yet there were 9% of the population that had life insurance and this could be attributed to the fact that there was awareness among a few and they had managed to do so as they had agents from the life insurance company visit their estate. As explained by a male worker at Organic TE

“an agent had come visiting the village and explained the benefits of having life insurance. A few of us decided to invest as we could afford to do so. Not every house is able to spare the money. For me it is probably because me, my wife and our son are all working. It is saving for the future once I retire and after a continued period of paying the money I was told I could also apply for a loan using the insurance papers” (IDI 10)

This was probably because the Organic TE estate was located very close to the town which had an insurance office and the estate was easily accessible. However, it must be

noted that it is due to the poor wages and high cost of living that the majority of the workers in tea estates are unable to afford social security in the form of life insurance. With regards to health insurance none of the workers surveyed reported having health insurance of any form apart from the health services that are provided by the management in the form of dispensary/hospital and reimbursement which will be discussed at length in a later section.

It was interesting to note that 87% of the population in Organic TE had a savings bank account while only 50% had the same in Traditional TE. All the sub-staff members interviewed in Organic TE has an account, while the same could not be said of the sub-staff at Traditional TE. Workers at Organic TE revealed that in 2014 after the introduction of the ‘*Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana*’ there had been a drive to enroll as many workers as possible. This was an active step that the management took at Organic TE that was beneficial for the workers as some had thought of starting savings. It was reported by a woman worker

“when the new bank program was announced under the prime minister’s name the management said that all will have to have bank accounts in their names even if it was a zero balance account. Now I sometimes deposit 500 in a month if possible so that I can have some money in case of any emergency. The more money I keep with me in cash it all ends up getting spent” (Case Study 10, female, 37 years old).

5.6 State Response: Schemes & Programmes for Workers

There are many schemes and programs for the welfare of workers in the organised sector. However, due to the unique status of tea plantations (involving both industry and agriculture) evading implementation of relevant schemes is evident from the field. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the state’s role in the life of the plantation workers and the welfare schemes that the workers had access to; for eg. education for children, healthcare, housing, electricity, water, finance and insurance.

In order to understand what the state provides to the tea plantation workers in order to safeguard their health and living conditions it was considered important to ask the workers about the same. In terms of healthcare provisioning it was seen that although

the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) had been rolled out in 2008 the enrolment is only available for unorganised sector workers. Hence, despite the poor status of the tea plantation workers schemes such as RSBY that could provide a security net exclude the workers in the tea plantations completely. However, it was interesting to note that two workers in Organic TE had RSBY cards issued in their name.

The government has put in a lot of effort for mother and child health and even introduced the Janani Suraksha Yojana to ensure institutional delivery and to ensure the safety of the mother and the child. It was seen that in Traditional TE there were only 4 worker households that had availed of the program and had institutional deliveries while at Organic TE there were 17 households that had availed of the services and also received money in their bank accounts. This information was generated from the response to the question asked about any pregnancy that took place in the five years preceding the field survey.

It must be noted that neither of the two estates had any ASHA worker and it was reported by the ANMs working in the sub-centres in the two estates that the ASHA worker scheme had only been implemented in the plains and was yet to reach the hill region. While most of the sub-centres were known for their mother and child health services there was an interesting case in point at Organic TE. A woman worker reported that she was currently pregnant despite having birth control pills and when she had approached the sub-centre the ANM directed her to the sub-district hospital where she was informed that she was too weak to undergo an abortion. She lamented:

“I already have a child and it is tough to survive on the money me and my husband make (husband is a private labourer). We did not want another child and despite taking birth control pills I got pregnant. The nurse at the sub-centre said I could get an abortion but the doctor at the hospital said I was too weak. I am 6 months pregnant now and till date I have got no scanning done the nurse has given me some pills for strength and nutrition (iron folic pills).I was too weak for an abortion yet I have to go for work everyday. Once I am on maternity leave I will only receive half pay and it will be tough on our household. How is life fair?”(Case Study 6, female, 27 years, old).

It was sad to see the worker in this state as she was clearly not ready for another child and on observation also she looked weak. She already had a three year old child and it was understandable why she was under stress to have another child. Her circumstances (low wages, poor lifestyle, poverty) and the health care system had clearly failed in providing her with any option other than to take her pregnancy to term. The case also reflects on the gaps in the implementation of programs. Registration for antenatal care is important and needs to be mandated. It is also important to also note that the worker who was found to be ‘too weak to abort’ yet has to work to earn a living is not considered ‘too weak to work’ since the wage from work is important for their survival.

Since the tea estate population is a major vote bank for the political parties of the region and they are the ones who are mobilized due to their sheer number in the hills especially during elections it was seen that majority of the population had voter ID cards i.e. 96% in Traditional TE and 93% in Organic TE. Workers at Traditional TE who did not have voter ID cards when asked why they did not have them a few retorted by saying

“the leaders only come to ask for votes and shower fake promises and once they have the votes they do not bother about our conditions. The voter card ensures nothing so we have not bothered ourselves with getting one.” (FGD 2)

It was repeatedly reported by the management as well as other key informants from the Darjeeling tea industry that there is increased absenteeism ever since the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005) came into effect as the workers receive more wage and they choose to skip work in the tea estates to be better paid through MNREGA. In 2015 the MGNREGA worker was being paid Rs 179 per day while a supervisory job under MGNREGA would pay Rs 225 per day. However, it was difficult to get a job card for MNREGA. Many of them had to wait for getting paid for the job done.

It took upto 4-6 months for the workers to receive their wages. In Traditional TE 94% of the workers had job cards and in Organic TE 84% of the workers had job cards.

However, the workers were also of the opinion that the extra income was always useful in the house and therefore they had willingly signed up for the job cards.

In terms of provisions for the workers food security it was seen that while some workers had ration cards there was a considerable number that did not have ration i.e at Traditional TE 75% of the workers did not have ration cards while at Organic TE only 33% of the workers did not have ration cards and were only dependent on the rations provided by the plantation management. As for the rations provided by the plantation management the workers at Organic TE reported that sometimes the rations were of such poor quality some of them who owned livestock, used it as feed for their animals. Hence we see that quality of rations was an issue and needs to be addressed.

This is suggestive of the poor mechanism of the Plantation Labour Act (1951). The West Bengal government has also included the same in the West Bengal State Plantation Labour Rules (1965). Therefore, it becomes imperative on the state to ensure implementation of legislative measures. It is evident from literature as well as from the field data of the present study that implementation of the provisions of the Act and Rules is very weak.

5.7 Access to Basic Amenities

The PLA(1951) ensures that the tea producers are to provide basic amenities to the plantation workers. However, the empirical evidence from the field data suggests otherwise. This section, attempts to understand the access to basic amenities like housing, cooking fuel, water and sanitation, among the workers in the two study sites. It also endeavours to examine any difference between the workers and the sub-staff as they work at different levels of the employment hierarchy.

Housing

Although the houses are provided by the tea plantation, many workers presume that the house is owned by them. In fact, it is only a leasing of the house to the workers till the time somebody from the house is employed in the tea plantation. Therefore, it was important to assess the number of workers who were under the impression that their

houses were privately owned. While majority of the workers and sub-staff clearly knew that the houses were provided by the company; there were also a number of workers who reported as the house being privately owned. As shown in table 5.11

The assumption of private ownership is probably made by the workers as they have invested in the upkeep and expansion of their homes and therefore some of them exclaimed that *“of course its private ownership after giving so many years to the plantation and after investing on the upkeep and expansion of the house how can we give it back to the management. There will be somebody or the other who we will find to join the estate job if and when the time comes for retirement”*. (FGD 1 and 2)

A worker at Traditional TE reported:

“all the houses are company owned. But they should give us the ownership rights especially since we have invested our bonus money or money from our savings for the upkeep and maintenance of the house. Had we depended on the management to improve the conditions of the houses we would still be living in the dilapidated houses that were not repaired since ages.” (IDI, 3)

While at Organic TE, an interesting narrative was provided by a sub-staff worker:

“only last year we got our house repaired by the materials provided by the management. We received the material only after writing several letters to the management. That too was possible as I have a relative who works as the office staff and is close to the manager. The management hardly repairs or maintains houses. Most workers pay out of pocket for the upkeep and maintenance of their houses. It should be made illegal to evict workers from their houses once they retire. It is because of the particular rule, that once a worker retires they are supposed to leave the house, that the retiring worker insists on some family member or the other to replace him/her at work. Otherwise who would want to continue doing this back-breaking job. From my house it would probably be my daughter-in-law who will take up my employment as my son earns more in his private job.” (IDI, 7)

Some of the material that was provided to the above worker included two bags of cement and a tin sheet. It is interesting to note that even minor contribution from the management for the upkeep of the houses is sought with obstacles and very few are able to avail. This too was only noted in Organic TE where a few houses had been provided with material to maintain their houses or to replace deteriorating parts of the structure.

In terms of housing, it is interesting to note as even Besky (2017) talks about ‘fixity’ of the worker to the land and Makita (2012) also points out about workers being tied to the land as they are provided with houses. Hence while on the one hand the workers are educating their kids so as not to have to join the plantation work on the other hand the workers are also saying they do not want to give up their houses and that it has been for generations in their family. This marks the aspirations nurtured for the younger generation as much as the uncertainty of alternate occupation in the absence of adequate skill and training. Having invested in their houses the worker feels ‘ownership’, although the reality is not so.

Hence we see that in Traditional TE while 67% workers reported the house being company owned there were 33% workers and sub-staff who reported their houses as being privately owned. At Organic TE also there was a similar finding wherein 64% of the workers reported their houses as belonging to the company while 36% of the workers and sub-staff reported their houses as being privately owned. At both the tea estates when it was discussed with the workers as to why they thought the houses were private properties they replied

“the company hardly repairs the houses after so many years of working in the estate most of us still have semi-pukka houses and whatever expansion and upkeep has been done has been done with our hard earned money or our bonuses. How can we give up on our houses after investing so much will the management reimburse us if we vacate?”
(FGD 1 and 3)

Table 5.11: Provisioning of basic amenities

Housing Characteristics		Traditional TE		Total	Organic TE		Total
		Workers	Sub-Staff		Workers	Sub-Staff	
House	Company	61	6	67	52	12	64
	Private	27	6	33	28	8	36
	Total	88	12	100	87	13	100
House Type	Kutcha	4	0	4	18	4	22
	Semi-Pukka	71	9	80	52	9	61
	Pukka	13	3	16	10	7	17
	Total	88	12	100	80	20	100
Kitchen	Separate	11	1	12	15	5	20
	Separate Space Inside	10	0	10	30	6	36
	Separate Space Outside	67	11	78	34	9	43
	No Space	0	0	0	1	0	1
	Total	88	12	100	80	20	100

Majority of the houses were semi-pukka i.e. 80% in Traditional TE and 61% in Organic TE. It is noteworthy that 22% of the houses in Organic TE are kutcha which may not be much but one would expect that in a estate that is 'fair trade' certified, receiving fair trade premiums the management would have managed to convert all kutcha houses to atleast semi-pukka. This despite the fact that Organic TE has been fair trade certified since 1995 and yet they have been unable to convert the shanty houses made using mud and bamboo into semi-pukka or permanent houses (pukka). It goes to show that even 64 years of the PLA (1951) and 20 years of receiving fair trade premiums. Thus, it points towards the assumed advantage of Fair Trade certification for the workers.

Table 5.12: Cooking Fuel in Households of Workers (in percentage)

Type of Cooking Fuel	Traditional TE		Organic TE	
	Worker	Sub-Staff	Worker	Sub-Staff
LPG	2.3	0	16.2	20.0
Firewood	44.3	58.3	10.0	5.0
LPG & Kerosene	2.3	0	17.5	20
LPG & Kerosene & Firewood	2.3	0	33.8	25
LPG & Firewood	47.7	41.7	21.2	30
Kerosene & Firewood	1.1	0	1.2	0
Total	100	100	100	100

It was interesting to note that the plantation workers still relied heavily on firewood as a source of fuel for cooking purposes especially in Traditional TE i.e irrespective of their rank at work the employees at Traditional TE were primarily dependent on firewood as a major cooking fuel source. In Organic TE there was also a reliance on kerosene (to fuel their stoves) while they also used firewood and in some cases LPG cylinders. It is of significance to note their cooking medium especially for those households who have space for cooking within their living quarters. The smoke can have an impact on the health of the workers and their family.

Since both the tea estates have expensive international certifications such as rainforest alliance (Traditional TE) and fair trade bio-dynamic (Organic TE) it was surprising to note the people still relied on firewood which is not the most sustainable form of cooking fuel. However, it does indicate the issue of affordability as LPG cylinders were much more expensive and therefore to save costs the workers resorted/depended on firewood to supplement their needs. As seen under the section on entitlements while workers at Traditional TE received firewood for the entire year the workers at Organic TE received an amount so as to be able to buy firewood for the year (Rs. 280) but it was reported by the workers that they usually stock up on wood from the forest if a tree falls

or they go wood cutting (although the management informed that tree cutting was not allowed as the estate already had a thin forest cover). Many workers also claimed that during *Dasai and Tiwar* (Dussehra & Diwali also known as Puja holidays) when they had guests over they would primarily depend on LPG stove as they did not want to look primitive by using firewood. This is of significance as the workers were keen to keep up the image of having raised their standard of living while in reality they had to resort to other cheaper mediums of cooking fuel in order to keep living costs low.

Electricity

Data collected showed that 98% of the houses in Traditional TE had electricity connections of which there was one house that did not have a direct connection but had pulled a line from his neighbour's house and paid a fixed amount to the neighbor. There were two percent of houses that had no electricity connection in Traditional TE. In Organic TE it was seen that 100% of the houses had electricity. None of the electricity connections were plantation provided but were all government provided and the workers had electricity meters installed in their houses. However it was observed that the management level employees all were provided with proper houses and electricity connection as part of their job profiles over and above their wage compensation. This also indicates the distinction in provisioning for the upper echelons of the plantation employee pyramid and the unfairness to the lower level workers. While those with low pay (workers and sub-staff) had to arrange to pay for their electricity consumption out of their own pockets the employees in the highest position were provided with free electricity.

Water & Sanitation

Housing and the living conditions are known to affect health of the worker. Therefore, it was imperative to study the workers living in the tea estates. It was considered necessary to investigate about the water and sanitation facilities available to the households as well as in the work sites.

As can be seen from table 5.13 more than half of the houses in Organic TE i.e. 70% had supply of water to their houses (either direct to home or public tap) and less reliance on spring water or '*dhara*'. In Traditional TE less than half of the house i.e. 43% had water

supply. It was seen that they relied heavily on spring water. There was awareness among the workers to boil water before consumption as they said it would keep them disease-free. Both the study sites reported high percentage of workers using boiled water for consumption.

At Traditional TE, a worker said:

“earlier when we were kids we hardly bothered about the treatment of drinking water. But with growing awareness and to avoid falling sick we have been using boiled water for our consumption. Obviously, if we boil water to such high temperatures it should kill all germs. Yet my son had diarrhoea a few months back I suppose even if you do everything right sometimes sickness cannot be avoided.” (IDI 2)

At Organic TE, a worker said:

“although most houses use boiling method to treat water for personal consumption and we also carry the same at our work sites. But sometimes when we run out of water while working we resort to drinking water from the springs and sometimes that too is not available especially during summer months when some springs dry up.” (Case Study 8, female, 45 years old)

This was a noteworthy case as we see that while the workers are careful about consuming boiled water at their houses the same cannot be said about the work sites. Thus, their work sites could make them vulnerable to water-borne diseases.

In order to understand why workers in Organic TE had greater access to water facility than Traditional TE it was inferred from the key informants interviews that the public health engineering department (PHE) along with the plantation management had constructed water tanks across the estate and provided piped water to most houses or made community taps in case pipeline could not be constructed directly to the workers' houses. Only a few houses especially those in the farthest of villages within Organic TE relied on spring water. In Traditional TE there was more of a problem with respect to water supply as many villages did not have piped water to their homes also since there was no evidence of the public health engineering department of having worked for the

estate. It was reported that most of the houses that had piped water in their homes had managed to do so by coming together as a community or were reliant on the management of having made some provisioning of piped water but the true source of this water supply was natural springs that are common across the region.

Table 5.13: Source of Water Facilities and Its treatment (percentages)

Water Facility & Treatment		Traditional TE	Organic TE
Water Supply	Available	43	70
Water Source	Piped to home	34	50
	Piped to public tap	8	21
	Spring water	58	29
Water Treatment	Chlorinate	1	0
	Boil	93	99
	No treatment	6	1

It was also reported by the households in Traditional TE that they had difficulty in fetching water especially during the summer months as the natural springs would dry up. In fact even the assistant manager’s house in Jamram division of Traditional TE had major water troubles in the summer and the male workers would sometimes get the duty of carrying water from far off places to fill the overhead tanks at the assistant manager’s house. On interviewing one such water carrier, he retorted:

“At least sahib has the privilege of having someone else carry water for his house. At my house we have to use water frugally during the summer months as we do not have anybody to carry the water for us and we have to report to duty early in the morning and sometimes we only have enough drinking water in the house and no other to spare” (IDI 5).

Although it appeared that all the levels of employees experienced water shortage in Traditional TE the issue was much more precarious for those below the management as they could not afford to hire anybody to carry the water for them.

As regards the sanitary conditions in terms of usage of toilets among the estate workers we see that there is a slight difference between the two estates. In Traditional TE there were 94% of worker households that have a toilet facility available and of the remaining that said they did not have toilets, they were sharing with another family. While in Organic TE there were 82% of the households that have toilet facility while the remaining who said they did not have any toilet facility meant they were either sharing or they actually did not have one. While earlier it was common to find open defecation prevalent in the hill region. With recent thrust of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan one would think that the practice was expected to have completely vanished. But there were 3% of the workers had no option other than open defecation. This is of significance as it is not in the traditional estate rather in the fair trade certified estate that the workers are still practicing open defecation. In Organic TE toilets were being added in houses that did not have them and this was probably why the 3% reported to be practicing open defecation. It was reported by the management that in collaboration with a local NGO and from fair trade premium funds the workers were being helped with the toilet construction. On discussion with the workers it was reported that since 2012 up till 2014 toilets were being built for worker households with premium funds along with local NGO support. However only basic raw material was being provided i.e. 2 bags of cement, a toilet pan, few iron rods and 2 tin sheets and the rest of the money was asked to be put in by the workers out of their pockets and 2 workers from the estate were being provided to help with the construction. The workers lamented that despite funding from two agencies (Fair trade and NGO) they were still expected to generate their own funds and masons to build a functional toilet.

Table 5.14: Sanitary Conditions (in percentage)

		Traditional TE	Organic TE
Toilet Facility	Yes	94	82
Toilet Location	Inside House	11	11
	Outside House	80	72
	Shared	9	14
	Open Defecation	0	3

Toilet Structure	Concrete	66	64
	Concrete Base only	20	26
	Kutchha	14	7
	None	0	3
Disposal System	Septic Tank	74	51
	Pit Toilet	18	5
	Piped to Open Drain	8	41
	Unaware	0	3

As can be seen from table 5.14 that 41% of workers at Organic TE had not invested in constructing a septic tank for disposal of waste generated from the toilet rather they had chosen to have simply a pipe connecting to an open drain or ‘*jhora*’. This implies that there could be a chance of contamination especially during the monsoon season when the rainfall is heavy in the hills and since there are houses which are dependent on spring water. It maybe so that the open drain could spillover onto the natural spring route.

At Traditional TE there was integrated waste management policy displayed on the factory walls wherein it was noted that there would be no open air disposal of waste or open air burning. However the data collected states that 74% of the workers interviewed reported that they were burning their waste. This despite the fact that the estate was Rainforest Alliance certified which encourages sustainable forms of living by transforming land-use practices. At Organic TE it was seen that only 33% of the worker households burnt their household waste while 62% of the households reported that there were common designated spots for garbage disposal. This indicates that the garbage disposal was more contained in Organic TE thereby keeping the surroundings clean and sanitary. However, this raises the question of the fact that such disposal sites can become breeding grounds for insects and especially during rainy season they can be very unhygienic.

A worker (Case Study 2, female, 37 years old) at Traditional TE exclaimed:

“while there are small dustbins put up in a few spots these are only for cosmetic purposes as they are put next to the roadside on which the cars of the audit people ply

when they come visiting. We have to deal with disposal of garbage ourselves and so we prefer to burn our garbage so as to avoid the dumps becoming breeding grounds.”

Hence we see that there is awareness among the workers about garbage dumps being breeding grounds and to keep their surroundings dry and clean.

While houses of the workers had toilets constructed for their use it was observed that there were no facilities at the site of work especially for the field workers. Despite the provisions stipulated in the PLA (1951) till date both the estates had no toilet facilities for the workers to relieve themselves while they were at work. Some workers reported to using the open fields to relieve themselves but they said it was difficult with the male supervisors around and usually they would just wait till they were off duty or if things got too tough they would request to go home (rarest of rare cases).

There were greater number of houses that had their toilet waste connected to the open drain in Organic TE and this could have implications on the population as already the management had reported ‘over-crowding’ in the estate as there was more of ‘selling of jobs’ than ‘Badli’ and in such cases the new workers were adding their houses in the kitchen estate area of the pre-existing houses. As evident from the discussion, in the previous chapter there was greater land under housing and forest as compared to the area under tea.

This chapter thus outlines the profile of the two estates studied as well as the work and living conditions of the workers employed. It discusses the differences in the two sites sites as well as some differences across the work hierarchy with respect to the workers and sub-staff. It was evident from the field that there were differences in the two estates in terms of dependents in each household as in Organic TE there were fewer dependents per household as compared to Traditional TE. With regards to payment of wages while the rates were same the workers at Traditional TE were paid weekly while those at Organic TE were paid fortnightly. An important difference between the two study sites was the presence of female workers in supervisory roles at Organic TE and therefore there were greater in number at the factory. As a result of ‘Fair trade’ this appears to be an implication on the increased representation of women and the active role of women

in the affairs of the estate as their participation was also important in the Joint Body meetings. There were greater similarities between the two study sites in terms of housing, living conditions and other basic amenities. The next section of the study discusses the health conditions and implications of work on the health of the workers in the two tea estates as well as the healthcare provisioning and utilisation.

Chapter 6

Health Choices and Illness: Patterns of Provisioning and Utilisation

The health seeking behavior is said to determine the health choices of individuals. And the health seeking behavior is dependent on the sections discussed in the previous chapter. Socio-economic conditions, level of education, wage, access to potable water, proper sanitation are some of the determinants of health. The state provisioning also impacts the health choices of an individual. In India health is a state subject. And as per the WHO (1948) definition health is, “*a state of complete physical, mental and social well being. It is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.*” Hence, this chapter discusses the issue of accessibility, availability and affordability of health services that establish the health choices made by the workers in tea estates.

In order to understand the patterns of illness and healthcare provisioning and utilization the worker was asked about the plantation’s provisions for healthcare as well as the state provided services. In this section we discuss the morbidity and mortality patterns among the workers and their household at the two study sites. The workers were also asked about whether they had any chronic diseases separately in order to understand the extent of lifestyle disorders afflicting the tea garden population and how they dealt with them. Rather than a direct association of health with the work conditions the study has tried to highlight the status of health conditions of the workers in the two study sites in order to understand the pattern of illnesses in tea estates.

Tea garden work requires hard labour and it is a back breaking job. In an attempt to understand the implications on the health of the workers due to their environmental and work factors there emerged various chronic and acute illnesses suffered by the workers. Just as a tea bush needs continued care and maintenance so do the human lives that spend all their time on the job bent over these tea bushes. This section describes the ill health experienced by the workers and the action taken by them as a response and if they access any curative services. We also try and describe the preventive techniques adopted by the workers in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

While observing the work patterns and characteristics of the garden workers it was seen that they had a busy schedule with little rest in between work and even had to work through sunshine, rain and/or storms. They had an early start to their day leaving little time to prepare or afford elaborate and nutritious meals keeping in mind their wages. This also had an impact on the workers immunity but ill-health was something that the workers could not pay too much attention to as they had to earn a living and skipping work would entail loss of wages. Thus, accessibility, affordability, availability were an issue when it came to addressing illness.

6.1 Reported Illness among Workers and their families

If we combine the variables of reported illness of the workers and the reported illness (in past one year) among any other member of the household we see that 69.5% in Traditional TE had nothing to report while 30.5% households had reported illnesses in the past one year. In Organic TE, 73% of the worker households interviewed had nothing to report. However, nothing reported was not considered to be a total absence of disease as the FGDs and some in-depth interviews revealed that there was an internalization of ill-health. FGD 1 and 2 held at Traditional TE and Organic TE respectively revealed:

“We have become used to some discomforts regarding our health. Aches and pains are the part of a plantation workers life. As we get older these health problems become more evident especially eyesight weakness is a major problem among the pluckers. We do not even consider fever, coughs and colds as illness our constitution is probably weak as we have poor diets and we use most of our strength in doing our jobs. Once we return home, while the men can rest, women also have to bear the burden of housework.” (FGD 1 at Traditional TE)

“We are engaged in strenuous work on a daily basis and we depend on daily wages for our subsistence. We do not have time to consider minor aches and pains as health problems. Being poor is a curse and we in the tea estates are worse off as there is no access to doctors. The dispensary is run by a compounder who just hands out the same medicine for all complaints. Why does the company not employ a doctor? Even if they

cannot give us higher wage they should atleast provide us with good facilities.” (FGD 2 at Organic TE)

As can be seen in table 6.1 there is greatest percentage of illnesses that fall under the category of others. In Traditional TE, these 14.5% reported illnesses were those that were not already listed. If we disaggregate the reported illnesses under ‘others’ it was seen that there were more than one case of gout followed by gall bladder stone, tumors (neck/stomach/nose), kidney stones, urinary tract infection, fainting spells, liver jaundice and the rest were one case each of cancer, asthma attack, chicken pox, mumps, bronchitis, shortness of breath, fall, tongue ulcer.

Table 6.1: Reported Illness in Plantation Sites (in percentages)

Reported Illness	Traditional TE	Organic TE
Joro	2.0	1.0
Gastric	3.5	1.0
Pneumonia	1.0	0
Stomach Ache	1.0	0
Ear/Eye Problem	1.5	1.5
Hand/Leg/Back Ache	3.0	4.0
Fracture	2.0	0.0
Vomiting	0.5	0.0
Malaria	0.5	0.0
Skin Problem	1.0	0.0
Diarrhea	0.0	1.0
Jaundice	0.0	0.5
Typhoid	0.0	1.5
Others	14.5	16.5
Nothing Reported	69.5	73
Total	100	100

In Organic TE 73% of the houses had no reported illnesses while 27% had reported illnesses in the past one year of which 16.5% of the households reported illnesses apart from those mentioned in the pre-existing list. There were more cases of kidney stones, gout, gall bladder stone, asthma attacks, excessive bleeding and stomach ulcer. There

were single instances of kidney infection, eye infection, allergic reaction to a bee sting, liver jaundice, prostate problem, tumor in throat, cataract, eye infection, weak eyesight, tumor in eye, nosebleed.

Hence in terms of morbidity among the garden population at both the sites some of the commonly reported health problems that emerged are as shown in the table below:

Table 6.2: Common Health Problems

Health Problem	Reported Symptoms
Eye pain/Headache	Watery eyes, headache, weak vision
Hand/Leg/Back pain	Aches and pains
Hypertension	Headache, high blood pressure, vomiting
Gastric	Gas, heartburn, indigestion, headache
Gout	Pain or Swelling in joints
Gall Bladder Stone	Sudden pain in right side of body and nausea

One of the staff clerk in Traditional TE when asked about what appeared to be the most common health problem replied that if a tea plantation employee does not complain of suffering from ‘gastric’ problems then he/she cannot be a Nepali. This indicates that this was a common problem faced by most of the plantation workers and in order to understand what causes this problem a few workers were asked to provide their daily routine. The day to day routine of the worker could get us a glimpse into the lived experiences of the worker as well as provide us details about their nutritional intake.

In order to understand the gravity of the precarious situation of the workers’ health some of the case studies revealed significant narratives:

“I had woman problem once. It used to burn when I urinated but I was ashamed to mention to anybody and since I could not miss work I suffered in silence for about a week. But then things got very tough for me as I could not even sit properly. I then had

to skip work and go to the block health center. But the doctor who looks after such cases was not available. It was in vain that I went so far and also lost my day's wage. I again went after two days as I was told the doctor would be available. I was told that I have an infection. I was asked about the frequency of urination and whether I would avoid urinating and holding back for long periods. It is difficult when we are in the field. Where should we relieve ourselves? There are male supervisors who oversee our work so its difficult to relieve ourselves just about anywhere. Such situations complicate matters for us and then we end up spending money on a problem that could have been easily prevented.” (Case Study 2, Traditional TE, female, 37 years old)

The above case is indicative of the fact that the worker sees the conditions of work to be the cause of her problem. Also the presence of male supervisory staff appears to hinder her ability to even attend to the ‘call of nature’.

Another worker lamented:

“my sister also worked in the estate along with me. She came down with fever once and we thought it would go after running its course of a couple of days. But her condition started worsening after three days. We had shown to the jhakri but it did not help. We then approached the sub district hospital in town. She was admitted in the evening and at midnight she breathed her last. The blood reports also came the next day after her death but no cause of the fever was detected. You see in our situation a simple illness like fever can also be deadly. But what can we do? We tried to avoid going to the hospital because the estate ambulance was not available since its only for very serious patients.” (Case Study 6, Organic TE, female, 27 year old)

A point to ponder upon in the above case is that in an era of technological and scientific advancements in all fields there are still cases of people dying due to simple illnesses like fever. Also in such situations who decides the severity of the patients conditions to be considered for availing the ambulance facility in the tea estate.

6.2 Lifestyle Induced Illnesses

This section discusses some of the commonly reported lifestyle induced illnesses that the workers reported to be experiencing and/or for which they were on medication.

Table 6.3: Percentage of Reported Lifestyle Illnesses

Reported Lifestyle Illnesses	Traditional TE	Organic TE
Diabetes	4	2
Hypertension	15	34
Diabetes & Hypertension	3	6
Low Blood Pressure	38	25
None	40	33

It can be interpreted from the above table that in Traditional TE there were 38% workers who reported to have been dealing with low blood pressure and when asked to elaborate the workers reported feeling dizzy, experiencing fatigue and sometimes also feeling faint. This could be attributed to their poor diet lacking in nutrients as well as the hard work they put in everyday thereby making them feeling weak and having a low blood pressure (also could signify anaemia). In Organic TE the percentage of workers experiencing low blood pressure was 25% much lower than in Traditional TE. However this too signifies that 1/4th of the sample in Organic TE also had poor diet and hard working conditions. When probed further about their action taking it was reported by those in Traditional TE that in case they did approach the garden hospital they were provided with Vitamin syrup or tablets and asked to improve diet and to include animal protein. Those in Organic TE reported to not being provided any medicine but advised rest and proper diet by the management provided dispensary. In both situations the offered solutions were not conducive. The diet could not be improved given the wages nor could they afford to 'rest' as it would entail wage loss. It is also noteworthy that what was reported as 'low blood pressure' (the symptoms) could actually indicate anemic conditions.

Thus we see that despite feeling weak and tired the workers continued their work as they did not pay too much attention to their ill-health. This also signifies the importance of work over health for the workers in order to earn a living to be able to afford to eat.

It can also be seen that a significant proportion of the workers at Traditional TE and Organic TE reported having hypertension (high blood pressure). There were 15% in Traditional TE and 34% in Organic TE. This is also indicative of the fact that the workers in Traditional TE were a tad bit healthier when compared to Organic TE while those in Organic TE are more prone to other health complications due to high blood pressure. Another reason that also emerged in discussions with the workers was that due to the heavy nature of work in plantations many were in the habit of consuming alcohol (country made mostly) to ease their aches and pains after a hard day of work irrespective of gender.

However it is important to note here that at both tea gardens the workers were on both ends of the blood pressure spectrum thereby making the workers vulnerable to further ill-health. In all 60% of the workers in Traditional TE and 67% in Organic TE reported suffering from one lifestyle disorder or the other. Thus it is important to note that the plantations should provide better health services not only for diseases but also have awareness programs about diet and nutrition and how to manage lifestyle disorders. The PLA (1951) amended in 1960 under the section on welfare mentions that the plantations should provide the workers with a canteen and food sold therein should be at minimal rates. However, neither of the two study sites visited had any such canteen. The workers all carried their own food and which would be cold by the time they sat down to eat in the field among the tea bushes or by the side of a pathway. However, the management at Organic TE reported and it was also seen on the ground by the researcher that there were concrete sheds being built in the garden area which were referred to as canteens wherein the workers would be able to sit away from the sun and/or rain during their meal time.

In terms of treatment seeking among the workers for the reported illnesses 35% in Traditional TE and 43% in Organic TE reported to have approached the plantation

provided garden hospital/dispensary in order to have check-up for their blood pressure or blood sugar and to mark their sick attendance.

However the quality of care provided to the workers at the plantation level i.e. management provided is dismal as they are only provided medicines for common ailments such as fever, cough, cold etc and that too there are no qualified professionals.

6.3 Preference of health service provider

It was seen that in Traditional TE the most preferred service provider was the garden hospital i.e. 69% of the households reported visiting the garden hospital as it was the closest and provided decent services and medicines as well as 14% reported preferring the private practitioner while at Organic TE there was a close competition between the sub-district hospital (32%) and the traditional healers (34%). There were also 29% of the workers that reported the garden dispensary as their most preferred health service provider. Hence it was seen that in Organic TE there was greater dependence on the state provided services and local healers rather than on the estate provisioning.

However it must be noted that at both sites the workers clearly stated that they had full faith in traditional healers and depending on the time of the day they would choose their provider. The traditional healers were especially sought after hours as there was no way of approaching the formal health services.

If we look at the above discussion on the reported illnesses as well as the preferred health service providers and the dietary habits of the tea plantation workers we are able to have a glimpse into the 'health seeking' as well 'health care seeking' behavior among the plantation workers. It was observed that the workers were aware and worried whenever they experienced any discomfort regarding their health and to keep ill health away they always approached the local traditional healer of their choice and when they could not be taken care of by the local healer they approached the dispensary or garden hospital.

It shall also be noted that although there were a greater number of households that did not report any illnesses in the past year could also be because symptoms like headache,

backache, eye pain, fever were seen and understood as part and parcel of their nature of work. In the group discussion with the workers it emerged that many a times they would not pay much heed to such symptoms as they had work to do and these symptoms would go away in a day or two.

A worker at Traditional TE said that *“we do try and approach the garden hospital when illness is of a serious nature but we wait it out for a day or two hoping for the symptoms to vanish as most times it is because we get little rest and have to engage in hard labour throughout the day.”* (Case Study 1, female, 32 years old)

When asked about some of the major complaints among the hospital’s visitors it was reported by the BMOH that most common cases with the tea plantation workers were skin disease, cut injuries, diabetics, patients with hypertension and liver cirrhosis. However it was reported that the hospital was not equipped to deal with very complicated cases or severe diseases such as liver cirrhosis and hence referred them to the district hospital at Darjeeling.

Also being financially constrained it has been seen that workers defer treatment despite the display of symptoms. At both sites there were cases of workers who had been declared to have poor eyesight when they went for a check up as they had frequent headaches. At both sites they had approached a private ophthalmologist but even after a year and a half of diagnosis they were yet to make themselves a pair of glasses. The worker from Traditional TE had to traverse a long way for her eye check up and she dreaded making the trip again as it was a costly affair. The trip along with her eye check up had cost her Rs.300/- and she was dreading how much the spectacles would cost her if she decided to buy one. She also pointed out that it would be difficult for her to work in the field while wearing sunglasses and so she chose not to wear spectacles. Also being the only earner in her household and sending her kid to school she said she could hardly make ends meet.

6.4 Mortality Experiences

The workers interviewed were also asked if any death had occurred in the house in the past one year and 73% of the houses in Traditional TE reported no deaths while 85% in Organic TE reported no deaths. Although a significant number of houses reported no deaths a few houses that did report deaths it was seen that one of the major causes in both the study sites had been diabetes i.e high sugar. There were two cases in Traditional TE and three cases in Organic TE. It was derived that while the Traditional TE patients had been taking medicines yet due to not having their diets under control could have been a primary cause as well as their age and the deceased had not been taken to any hospital to state cause of death definitely. At Organic TE the member of the household had been taken to the district hospital where the cause of death had been stated as high blood sugar. Another major cause of death in Traditional TE had been liver cirrhosis (due to alcoholism) i.e. 3 households reported this as the cause of death while no such death was reported from Organic TE. It must also be noted that there were a at least three houses across the plantation in Jinglam division of Traditional TE that were illegally selling homemade alcohol that was locally known as '*Jaar*' and one shopkeeper was said to keep country made liquor but could not be verified as they would not entertain an outsider however a key informant interview revealed the above information.

It was seen that in most of the deaths at Traditional TE it was either the compounder who had declared the dead or the family had just accepted the death without getting a death certificate from any health care provider. While at Organic TE all the deaths had been recorded at the sub-district hospital and most had passed away while under treatment at the sub-district hospital which was located close to the Organic TE plantation. Hence, accessibility is one of the major reasons why most deaths go unreported in such isolated enclaves. It has been studied that cost, distance, cultural beliefs, education and health facility inadequacies (absence of doctors, irregular drug supply, etc.) impact the health and health care utilization of populations.

Health seeking behavior of a community is understood by its utilization of healthcare services and health outcomes of the individuals. As seen above it was seen that there was still heavy dependence on traditional healers and there were strong magico-religious beliefs among the workers. In discussion with a group of workers in both the tea garden sites it emerged that irrespective of presence of illness the household would consult a traditional healer.

There were both company provided and government provided health care services available at both the plantations which are explained in details in the next section.

6.5 Infrastructure facilities for health available at Traditional TE

The plantation is approximately 30 km from main Darjeeling town and falls in the Rangli-Runliot block. It is also very close to another town settlement area known as Takdah (6-8kms) where the block primary health centre (BPHC) serves a population of 30,000 which includes the garden population as well. The plantation has infrastructural facilities provided both by the tea estate management as well as the state government.

- Management provided: In accordance with the PLA (1951) the plantation has provided certain infrastructural facilities serving the employees of the plantation.

Dispensary: The garden dispensary is located near the assistant managers' bungalow. It remains open from 7:30am-10:30am operating from Monday-Saturday at Jinglam division. There is another dispensary that is located in the third division of the garden (at Poomong which was not a part of this study) and most workers visit while on their way to their work. It had three rooms whereby one serves as the consulting room, one as the pharmacy and store and the other is an in-patient room with just one bed. The pharmacy provides free medicines from their list of medicines to the workers and their dependents and gets its supply of medicines once every week. There were a few IEC materials displayed on the walls of the dispensary regarding pulse polio dates, HIV/AIDS awareness and a poster in the local language about proper disposal of needles.

The dispensary is manned by three functionaries- two nurses and a male support staff. It has no compounder or doctor visits but has two nurses (paid worker wage) and another male worker who is their assistant and had recently joined the dispensary (5 months ago) working his way up from being a field worker. The male worker had completed a diploma in community health services from the Red Cross. He still had to start his career as a field worker. Both of the nurses had worked their way up from being a leaf plucker for five years and then had been asked to work at the dispensary. While one had two years prior training in a nursing home in Siliguri prior to joining the garden the other nurse had worked at a nursing home for one year before joining the garden. It was reported that the workers had to have worked as garden labour for minimum five years before joining the dispensary and that too with prior approval from the trade union. It is noteworthy that persons trained in specific skill (such as nursing) had to work at the lowest level of tea plantation work in order to get work which was more conducive to their training. It also reflects on the influence of the trade unions on the internal recruitment process in the tea plantations.

Their duties primarily involved sick attendance and to maintain a medicine inventory. According to the group discussion with the dispensary staff it was noted that June end to August were the sick season especially due to rains and workers mostly complained of fever, diarrhea, tonsillitis. They also reported of prescribing medicines for three days only after which they were advised to send the patient to the garden hospital.

Garden Hospital: Since Namram tea garden employed more than 300 plantation workers as enshrined in the PLA (1951) they had to have a garden hospital. This was in the Namram division of the plantation and its location was near to the guest bungalow in the garden. It was a big building with 30 in-patient beds and those admitted were also provided with two meals in a day namely morning and evening. The hospital was open from 8:00 am to 12 noon and then from 3:00pm to 5:00pm. However this too was manned by a compounder. He was sent to the district hospital in Darjeeling by the plantation management where he received training for six months. The compounder had been serving at the hospital for five years. In all there were 12 workers employed at the garden hospital.

The compounder also discussed some of the common ailments of the tea workers. He said:

“there is seasonality involved in the patterns of illness experienced by the workers. During the rainy season the most common complaints are diarrhea, fever, cold, typhoid and cough. There is also an increase in the number of workers with complaints of diabetes and hypertension. We also treat the children of the workers upto the age of 18 years. Winter months are relatively disease free but there are still cases of fever and pneumonia. Irrespective of season the workers often come with cuts and insect bites that they get while working. Earlier there used to be cases of tuberculosis among the tea estate workers but there have been no cases in the past two years.” (KI 4)

The responsibilities of the hospital staff included record-keeping of staff attendance, referral cases (to district hospital or BPHC), Outdoor and Indoor patients, Death and Birth records. It was reported that they provided primary treatment to all population in the three divisions of the garden which led to serving population of about 15000 plus. Common complaints included diabetes, high blood pressure, dental problems, cough, cold and gastric. In fact the compounder also retorted “*gastric ko bina nepali nai hoina*” which translates to ‘there is no Nepali without gastric complaints’.

Creche: There was no creche in this tea garden in any of the divisions. When the management was asked why there was no crèche it was reported that there used to be a crèche near the garden hospital up till 2013 but due to low utilization the centre had been closed. While some workers who had utilized the crèche in the past said that it was in a dilapidated state and instead of improving the infrastructure the management had shut it down indefinitely. The kids who were being left at the crèche were being provided with only 200 ml milk till it was functional. This was a clear violation of the provision of PLA (1951) than mandates crèche facility in order to safeguard the women workers.

- Government services

Block Primary Health Centre (BPHC): As part of the study after much effort an interview could be arranged with the Block Medical Officer of Health (BMOH) which

was serving the population at Traditional TE. The BPHC was the facility serving the population at the traditional tea estate. This was done to delve deeper into understanding the healthcare provisioning to the people in the hills who are engaging in the arduous nature of their livelihood on the tea estates and their dependents. The BMOH reiterated that while in the plains a primary (PHC) serves a population of 30,000 in the case of the hills the block primary healthcare centre (BPHC) was serving a population of 20000. It was also noted that while a sub-centre serves a population of 5000 in the plains, in the hills they served a population of 3000. The norms have been stipulated keeping in mind the remoteness and terrain which restricts easy access.

The BPHC was a 30 bedded hospital and while it had sanctioned posts for 8 doctors there were only 3 that had been appointed and were on duty. While two were employed as permanent the one doctor was employed on a contractual post under National Rural Health Mission. And of all the appointments, none were women-constraining the access of women. The BMOH reported that he could see the hesitation among the female users of the hospital about approaching a male physician. The First Referral Unit was for the sub-district hospital at Kurseong which was 22kms away and this was a big hurdle for the patients as transportation is an issue in the hilly region. As for the support staff there were 7 nurses, 10 General Duty Assistants, 2 night guards, 3 sweepers and 2 data entry operators. It was reported by the BMOH that while there was residential quarter for the nursing staff (made at the cost of 66 lakhs by the Gorkha Territorial Administration) the doctors were yet to have any quarters and were staying in rented accommodation. The BMOH complained about works being left incomplete by the Gorkha Territorial Administration wherein some construction works had begun and alleging dearth of funds the construction of the doctors quarters was left incomplete. This indicates the ineffectiveness of the state machinations to provide suitable conditions for the functioning of the health care centre which was vital for effective service provisioning.

Sub-centre: The sub-centre was located in Khandukey dhura. This was at the centre of the estate village and not the periphery but was located in a precarious location which involved a steep climb. It was reported to have serving population of 4000 as people from both the worker and non-worker households in and around the estate visited the

sub-centre. The sub-centre was supposed to remain open from 9am-2pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The remaining days were for field visits. The sub-centre had a total staff of four comprising of a 2nd ANM, a dai (also acting as the DOTS provider) and a male Health Assistant who was a contractual worker. There was no ASHA worker in the hills and this was also reiterated by the ANM. It was also reported by the Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) that she had to maintain multiple records and attend meetings with her supervisor and the Deputy Chief Medical Officer Health (DCMOH) which led to an increased burden of work apart from delivering health services to the population.

There were two rooms of which one served as the waiting room cum examination room while the other served as a store-room. There was only one bed without any linen in the centre. There were plenty of IEC posters both in the local language as well as in Hindi and English. There was a weighing machine as well as a neo-natal weight machine, an ice-box for vaccines (injectible medicines were not stored but only vaccines used for immunization for only one day as there was no refrigerator). However the blood pressure measuring machine had been out of order for the last 2 years and the ANM had been using her personal kit. They had plenty of cabinets for the storage of medicines and other consumables at the sub-centre. The sub-centre was also a semi-pucca structure as it was constructed half of cement and the rest of wood. There was an absence of electricity, water supply, toilet and an ANM quarter. For the disposal of wastes and injections they had constructed a pit using the untied funds.

Services provided by the sub-centre ranged from both preventive and curative services and included immunisation, ANC & PNC, family planning and counselling, IEC and record-keeping of vital events like birth and death. As reported by the ANM health camp was held once a month and a doctor would visit from serving BPHC. However for the past year there was no doctor visiting the sub-centre. The sub-centre also provided free available medicines to its users. The supply of medicines was done once in a month and sometimes once in three months. It was reported by the ANM that supply of medicine was erratic and there was little fund for the upkeep of the sub-centre.

ICDS Centre/Anganwadi: There were three ICDS centres serving the eight villages of Jinglam. Since there was no crèche facility available for the workers some of the workers who found it convenient to send or drop their kids to the different centres did so. However the centres only opened at 9:30 am and some mothers complained that it was difficult to drop off their kids as they had to report for work at 7:30am. Two of the centre had been operational since 2008 while the third had been operational since 2010. They all were functioning out of rented structures. One of the ICDS centres visited had 11 children coming to the centre at the time of the field visit. The children were being taught alphabets and numbers. Their ages ranged from 6 months – 4 years. The centre keeps children from ages 0-6 years.

The AWC was serving one meal everyday to the children. This meal comprised of khichidi (pulses, vegetables and rice cooked together with sometimes soya nutrella added) and milk. From 2009 to 2012 there had been no supply of food material to the centre by the government. The angandwadi worker informed the higher authorities about the delayed supplies. She was asked to pay for the meals and then submit bills to the district headquarters. However due to financial constraints the anganwadi worker could not manage to spare money from her household expenses and that too without any certainty of being refunded. It is impractical to expect an anganwadi worker to spend the money for procuring the rations for the AWC. The rations had started coming again since 2013 but the supply was still erratic. There were records of the attendance of the children coming to the centre, their weight and height records but these were also not up-to-date.

It can be thus inferred that the ICDS centre was not especially reliable in terms of providing nutrition to the children who were coming to the centre. However it was seen that in the absence of a crèche the working mothers usually relied on the grandparents or neighbor in the village who looked after her child and thereby putting the worker in a precarious state of mind while at work especially when leaving the child with a non-family member.

- Private services

Private Clinic: There was a private clinic in the Namram division of the garden which was frequented by the population of the three garden divisions. On enquiry it was discovered that he was a registered pharmacist and had worked as the garden hospital compounder for 44 years. Upto 1974 there had been an MBBS doctor who had been serving at the garden hospital and the private practitioner had been under his tutelage for about 10 years. However despite being only a registered pharmacist apart from setting up a chemist shop he also had a clinic set up next to the shop. His consultation fee ranged from Rs 50 for children and Rs 100 for the adults. The most common complaints with which the garden population approached him ranged from measles (among children), cysts (among adults) which he would cut and drain, plastering of fractures, diarrhea, dehydration, anemia. The private practitioner also reported that cases that could not be handled at the garden hospital were sent to him and he then depending on the case refer them to the district hospital.

This reflects on the lack of trained healthcare providers especially doctors in the rural hilly regions. The health of the population is in the hands of untrained professionals thereby exposing their lives to various health risks. In the absence of trained doctors the garden population is obliged to approach the nearest healthcare provider and due to lack of awareness and any other option they choose to visit such quacks.

- Informal health services

The informal health services refer to the use of treatment services from the local healers who are not trained within the system as health care professionals. In order to keep away the ‘evil eye’ and to prevent illness from striking them the tea plantation workers were seen to rely heavily on the traditional healers available in the garden. This was also because of the difficult terrain and economic constraints.

Traditional Healers: There were five *Matas*¹⁰⁴ and one *Jhakri*¹⁰⁵ in the plantation village. Also since the majority of the garden population was belonging to a particular

¹⁰⁴ *Matas*: They are women who are said to be possessed by female deities who in turn give them power to cure any ailment and to bless the house/individual with boons.

¹⁰⁵ *Jhakri*: Local Shaman

sub-caste (Tamang) there was also the belief in *Lamas*¹⁰⁶. The Jhakri was also a worker in the garden it was found that while four of the matas were garden workers the remaining were unemployed women who lived in the plantation. The workers still hold strong magico-religious beliefs and in most cases (as was also reported by the health care providers in the plantation) do not approach the formal health services until and unless they have once tried the local healer.

The *Jhakri* is supposed to keep the 'evil eye' and illnesses attributed to the evil eye away. They are also called irrespective of any illness symptoms as a precautionary step to ward off evil and any illnesses. In case of treatment although the Jhakri was not too forthcoming on what herbs, treatment procedures he uses he did reveal that he makes his own potions and medicines using herbs and roots that he goes and scavenges from the dense forests in and around the plantation. He also makes amulets to keep children safe from ill-health.

The Matas, individually, were called atleast 4-5 times in a year to perform pujas in the various village households to keep away evil and any sickness. They did not particularly charge anything but it was reported by their users that the puja would cost them Rs 50-60 approximately. No payment had to be made to the Mata in cash but depending on the household the Mata would be paid in cash or kind amounting to Rs 50-60 approximately.

The Lamas are brought in to read their mantras and these too are said to keep the evil eye away and to keep the individuals safe and avoid any illness occurrence. One Lama who was interviewed said that they usually go to families in group to do the prayers and read their mantras and so 2-3 Lamas visit at once.

It is interesting to note the blind faith and belief in these non-formal systems of health. The tea garden population is also probably keen on approaching these systems of health care as they are more affordable and they can be called to the house or easily visited without incurring much expense. They also provide their services irrespective of the hour and perhaps it could be another reason why the workers approach them.

¹⁰⁶ Lamas: Buddhist Monks

6.6 Infrastructure facilities available at Organic TE

The plantation is approximately 20 kms approximately from main Darjeeling town and falls in the Kurseong block. It is closest to the town where the sub-district hospital is located that is also serving the garden population. The plantation has health care infrastructural facilities provided both by the management as well as the state government.

- Management provided: In accordance with the PLA (1951) the plantation has provided certain infrastructural facilities serving the employees of the plantation.

Dispensary: The garden had two dispensaries one was located near the managers' bungalow known as Kothidhura village while the other was located in the farthest lower division also known as Kaafebari. While the upper dispensary was open from 7:30am-11:00am and from 2:00pm-5:00pm operating from Monday-Saturday. The one located in the lower division was open from 2:30pm-5:30pm only. There were fewer workers in this division and they were serving a small population of about 1000 people (worker households).

The Kothidhura dispensary had a compounder who had been serving as compounder for past eight years prior to which he had served as medicine carrier for five years and had been in the field for ten years. He had a male and female helper as assistants. While the compounder had done a community medical service course, the other two assistants had no particular medical training apart from learning on the job. There were two rooms whereby one served as the consulting room and the other was serving both as an in-patient and store room. The pharmacy provides free medicines from their list of medicines to the workers and their dependents and gets its supply of medicines once every month. There were a few IEC materials displayed on the walls of the dispensary regarding pulse polio dates, HIV/AIDS awareness and couple of posters in the local language about '*Scrub Typhus*' as there had been an outbreak in 2013. It is important to make note of this as the dispensary staff reported which was also reiterated by the management that they had to act swiftly and keep the spread of '*Scrub Typhus*' under wraps as that would affect their fair trade certification. In collaboration with the sub-

district hospital at Kurseong the spread was quickly kept in check and there had been no cases since 2014.

It was reported by the compounder that although no patient is admitted in the dispensary for any treatment the bed was placed for emergency care and examination. The dispensary also has ambulance at its disposal which has been bought using funds from the FLO joint body. Primarily workers came with complaints of fever, cough, cold, injuries/cuts, aches and pains. The dispensary also kept the sick register wherein the workers who were taking sick leave had to come and sign.

Creche: The crèche is located near the garden dispensary. Since both the dispensary and crèche are located near the factory area where all the workers gather in the morning before starting their field duties it is convenient for the parents to drop their children on their way to work. The crèche is open from 7:30am-1:00pm during winter works and from 7:30am-3:30pm during the summer works. The crèche is under the responsibility of one lady caretaker and in case there are more than five children one of the children's mothers is asked to help for the day. At the time of the visit there were five children being kept at the crèche. The workers are allowed to keep their children in the crèche till they attain the age of three years. The management only provides 250 ml of milk for each child and two biscuits. Food for the children is brought by their mothers. The management provides 5 litres of kerosene per month for the purposes of heating the milk and food. The FLO joint body had provided the crèche with six swinging bamboo baskets. There is absence of electricity, water supply and toilet facility at the crèche.

Computer Education Centre: This centre is located right behind the manager's bungalow, next to the JB office and had been established since 2014 with the help of funds from the FLO joint body. This centre was established for the purposes of imparting knowledge to the workers and their dependents about computers and how to use them. However at the time of the field visit the centre remained closed and as reported by the workers and management had been closed after six months of functioning due to the lack of availability of a trained computer professional in the garden area and the previous computer trainer as quit citing low pay.

- Government services

Sub-centre: The sub-centre was also located in Kothidura right next to the management provided dispensary. This was at the centre of the estate village and not the periphery. Similar to the sub-centre in the traditional tea estate this too served a population of 4000 as people from both the worker and non-worker households in and around the estate visited the sub-centre. The sub-centre operated from 9am-2pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and the remaining days were for field visits. The sub-centre had a total staff of three comprising of a female ANM, a 2nd ANM (also acting as the DOTS provider) and a male Daily Attendent Duty worker. No doctor visited the sub-center. It was interesting to note that the 2nd ANM had been selected in 2010 but due to the statehood movement her appointment letter was delayed and she had only joined the sub-centre in December 2014.

There were only one room which served as examination room and store room resulting in crowding within the centre. There were plenty of IEC posters both in the local language as well as in Hindi and English. There was a weighing machine and an ice-box for vaccines (injectible medicines were not stored but only vaccines used for immunization for only one day as there was no refrigerator). They also had a blood pressure measuring machine and a glucometer but the supply of the test strips for the glucometer had stopped and so the workers were referred to the sub-district hospital or were asked to get their sugar tests done from any private service provider. They had plenty of cabinets for the storage of medicines and other consumables at the sub-centre. The sub-centre was a pucca structure and had been constructed with help from the tea plantation management. There was still an absence of an ANM quarter and the toilet had no water supply.

Services provided by the sub-centre mainly revolved around services for the women and children. These included immunisation, ANC & PNC, family planning and counselling, IEC and record-keeping of vital events like birth and death. As reported by the ANM health camp was held once a month and a doctor would visit from serving PHC. The sub-centre also provided free available medicines to its users. The supply of medicines was done quarterly. It was noteworthy that unlike in the traditional estate there were

visits by the doctor atleast once in a month. This could probably be because the estate was located close to town and therefore, easy to approach for the government doctor.

Anganwadi/ICDS/SSK (Sishu Siksha Kendra): There were two SSKs operational in Organic TE and they were working within the ICDS centre. SSK was a program started by the Panchayat and Rural development department of West Bengal in order to provide primary education in rural villages. The centre that was most frequented by the workers' households had been functional since 2000 and they had 20 students coming. They provided education upto class IV and they also had children upto the age of 3 years coming to the centre as it was also an anganwadi centre. All the children were provided with meals and the supply of raw materials came for four months together. They provided meals which included rice and vegetables or *khichidi*. They provided non-vegetarian meal once a week and served egg once a week. There were two rooms and a kitchen which was built by the panchayat. But there was no toilet or water supply. They openend from 9:30am to 1pm.

- Non-formal health services

Traditional Healers: There were three Matas and one Jhakri in the plantation village. The Mata interviewed was also a sub-staff (supervisory) worker and she said that as a group the Matas came together only once a year during *Baisakh* (April-May) to perform their main puja wherein “*we pray to about 33 deities and ask them to bless us with the powers to heal and help other people and to rid them of their suffering.*” She also reported that during the annual puja lots of people came and that the management also cooperated and she was provided with her wage despite being absent from work for the two days of the puja.

Individually the matas were called atleast 4-5 times in a year to perform pujas in the various village households to keep away evil and any sickness. They did not particularly charge anything but it was reported by their users that the puja would cost them Rs 50-60 approximately. No payment had to be made to the Mata in cash but depending on the household the Mata would be paid in cash or kind amounting to Rs 50-60 approximately. The Mata interviewed reported that while there are some matas that

accept alcohol this particular mata did not accept any alcoholic beverages in kind. She also reported that she went into a trance when the '*dewta*' comes in her and that time she does puja to be able to cure people. Although she did not make any medicines she only did '*Jhaar Phoonk*'. She said that people preferred to come to traditional healers before they visited doctors. She said she herself also visited a doctor since not all illnesses could be cured by just a traditional healer. Her guru taught her when she was in the sixth grade and she was a year under training before she was allowed to practice on others.

There was also one *Jhakri* in the plantation village and he resided in Kothidura. He was also a worker in the plantation and worked in the factory. He said his grandfather had also been a shaman who had taught him everything that he knew and been under training since the age of seven years. He reported that he also visited patients at the sub-district hospital who called him to ward off the evil eye. Within the plantation he worked after 4pm as he was doing his factory duty till then. He exclaimed a 100% cure rate and that he had cure for aches and sprains to fever and vomiting. However he also said that if he viewed some cases as being extremely difficult then he would refer to the sub-district hospital.

Hence the above description gives us an idea about the provisions of health care available in the tea plantation while an anganwadi and crèche may not directly have an impact on health but it is seen that it does have an indirect impact on the children's health in terms of care and nutrition especially in the case of the working women in the plantations who may not be able to provide care to her ward as she has to work. Workers are dependent on the crèches in tea estates as it is difficult to drop their children to anganwadi centres as they open much after the workers report for duty. Due to the mismatch in their timings the anganwadi centres have only a handful of children to serve.

In terms of health seeking behavior it can be inferred from the above discussion that the workers have internalized conditions of ill health and are not concerned with their state of complete well being. For workers who need to subsist on daily wages concerns about health appears to be a luxury. Despite several health care facilities in and around the tea

estate there was a problem of accessibility especially for those workers who were residing in the traditional tea estate. However, the workers were heavily dependent on traditional healers as they could be approached at time of the day while the same could not be said of the other services provided by the state and tea estate management. There also appeared to be a complete absence of any preventive or health promoting activities that could be done on the part of the state or the tea estate management. In Organic TE there were awareness camps that had been held in the past but there had been none in the past three years.

In conclusion, a direct causality cannot be said to be occurring among the tea plantation workers in terms of their conditions of health and work especially if we look at the reported illnesses. However, it is noteworthy that an individual's health choices and health conditions is a result of their immediate environment as well as their socio-economic conditions. There is multiplicity of health care institutions that are available for the workers but none provide a complete set of services. Despite having a garden hospital in the traditional tea estate due to the absence of a qualified doctor it would be odd to call it a hospital. It appeared to be a glorified version of a dispensary. While in the organic and fair trade certified garden it was expected that provisions for health care would be better it was the same as the other study site. There was no doctor and the workers even had trouble with medical bill reimbursements. Thus, it can be said that the workers are in a vulnerable position in both the tea estates irrespective of their nature of functioning. While fair trade highlights the fact that the premiums received would serve for the welfare of the workers it did not appear to do so on the ground. Fair trade has not been able to provide even basic health care which is considered to be a part of welfare. Thus, in 'hired labour' situations certifications like fair trade do not ensure the welfare of the workers but it appears to be more of a market mechanism promoting trade in the international market.

Chapter 7

Gender Dynamics in Tea Plantations

7.1 Women in Tea Cultivation

The tea industry in India is one of the oldest trades. It employs the largest share of workers in the organized sector. Over twelve hundred thousand permanent and almost the same number of casual and seasonal, workers are employed in the tea industry. Over 50 per cent of the workers, and in some operations like tea plucking, are women (Bhowmick, 2002). The tea industry in the organised sector is the only industry employing these many women workers. But women workers and their role in the tea plantations have received meagre attention in literature despite the fact that they are pivotal to the tea industry. In spite of their contribution, women workers are consigned to the lowest strata of socio-economic structure. Their labour is cheap, abundantly available and their work is considered to be unskilled. This undermines them as a source of specialised labour- of plucking the right kind of tea leaf with their 'nimble fingers'. Tea plucking is an arduous and repetitive work. The tea pluckers, predominantly women, are required to work from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. six days a week bent over the tea bushes. The workers in the plantations earn meagre incomes (Table 5.5). They are poor and cut off from the mainstream due to the geographical location of the tea estates. They suffer from low levels of health care and personal well-being. Considering the geographically secluded nature of the tea plantations, the law mandates that employers provide some basic health, housing, education and recreation facilities to the workers. In reality however, only token services exist, if at all.

For example, instead of providing hospital facilities, the owners just provide a visiting doctor and that too only for a specified number of days in a week (Chatterjee, 2003). In both the study sites irrespective of the nature of the estate there were no doctor visits. While there was a garden hospital in the traditional tea estate its functioning was nevertheless limited as there was no doctor but only a compounder.

Women workers are marginalised on multiple fronts- casualisation of the workforce, limited upward occupational mobility and political space in trade unions. Sometimes multiple trade unions exist on a single garden and some of these trade unions are militant in nature. Due to their multiplicity, management finds it difficult to choose one to communicate with in case of a conflict and this often goes against the latter. There is also a possibility that the management uses this multiplicity to their benefit. The trade unions are also known to form a cartel among them and make deals with each other and with the management that work against the workers. The workers, particularly women, are afraid to unite against the unions for reasons such as (Bhowmik and Sarkar, 1998).

This chapter analyses gender relations in the tea trade, their status and role in sustaining the structure of the tea plantation economy. It attempts to understand women's location in the existing system of tea production and examines their position in the light of the changes in the relations of production and labour processes. Based on in-depth interviews and case studies, this chapter of the study analyses women's status in the production process embedded in patriarchal and cultural norms that invisibilise women's roles in economic processes (Boserup, 1970; Agrawal, 1998).

7.2 Status of Women Workers Women in Tea Cultivation

Discrimination of women based on sex, with women doing most of the fieldwork, working longer hours than men have been noted in estates. Up until 1976 when the Equal Remunerations Act came into force the women workers were paid lower wage than the men (Bhowmick, 2002). Representation of women in trade unions is limited, trade unions in tea producing countries being weak and labour rights easily side stepped are also some of the vulnerabilities reported. Since the colonial times, planters exhibited an interest in women workers because of long-term advantage of a self-reproducing and stable work force (Bhadra, 2004). Most workers in the tea plantations are also accompanied by their family. Often, in the absence of employment in the tea gardens, the family members engage in other employment such as, running a shop in the nearest town outside the tea estate, painting, masonry, etc.

A worker in the traditional TE reported:

“I work in the assistant manager’s bungalow as cook but the wage is not sufficient to provide for the entire household. A few years back I took a loan against my PF and started a shop selling groceries within the estate. It does good business as the town is far and it costs more to travel outside the estate with limited transportation options. My son who did not want to study anymore after he finished his schooling runs the shop. My husband sometimes works as a mason when somebody in the estate requires any construction or maintenance work. These additional incomes make life a little more comfortable for us.” (IDI 1, female, 41 yr old)

Another instance highlighted how the additional income is used for house repairs, providing cost of education for the children of the workers as well as improved standard of living.

“My eldest son works in Siliguri in a hotel. He sends money back home regularly. This has enabled me to repair and maintain my dwelling. My daughter also studying in an english medium school in Kurseong town. We would not be able to afford all these expenses without the additional income. I am satisfied with the fact that my children would not be dragged into this life of penury in the garden job.” (IDI 7, female, 38 years old)

Contrary to these instances there were also families which were large and had just one working member as unemployment is also high in these isolated enclaves. The condition of the house bespoke of their poverty. The family members appeared impoverished and undernourished. The unemployed especially men had drinking habits and this was an issue of concern for their working wives or other family members.

This is indicative of income inequality which could be embedded in social identity such as caste and ethnicity. While the workers gave politically correct responses regarding social identity, but there are chances that such disparities were present. Families belonging to different social groups- caste and ethnicity, for instance, stayed in separate residential blocks. In the organic tea estate there was a village settlement that was named ‘Sarkidhura’ and upon discussion it was ascertained that this labour line had

been setup during the time of the British. *Sarkis* are considered to be belonging to the SC community among the predominantly *Nepali* population in the Darjeeling hills. Literature also corroborates that such residential segregation is likely to be an outcome of the erstwhile colonial arrangement (Chatterjee, 2003). About 90 per cent of the workers comprise of tribal, SC and OBC populations with origins in central Indian Plateau and Nepal. They are settled here for generations, but are still viewed as immigrants and suffer from social discrimination similar to that of landless farming population. There is a sense of indifference towards them. The geographical separation between the tea estates restricts cohesion among the workers. In addition, social identity accentuates bonding between women workers. Geographical remoteness obstructs access to means to learn diversified skills, especially for the young children. There are periods when there is no active employment on the gardens. Opportunity to enhance skill can be useful for such times (Kadavil and Chattopadhyay, 2007).

In the study sites, more women than men were engaged in tea plantation as workers. There were more women in the rung of pluckers and lesser of them as sub-staff (Table 4.11). In spite of the institution of labour laws and the PLA, women workers have remained deprived and exploited. The main labour-intensive activities include harvesting, fertilising, weeding, pruning, soil conservation, control of pests and diseases are carried out by the male workers. Women are concentrated in plucking operations and light maintenance work that form up to 70 percent of the work in tea production. Workers are on their feet for hours at a time, a basket at the back holding harvested leaf irrespective of the weather conditions. Till 1976 women were paid less than men. Though things have improved since, women continue to be subjected to long working hours and heavy workload. However, often times PLA provisions are not adhered to and at times grossly violated especially for women workers who sometimes remain unheard or unrecognised (Koshy & Tiwary, 2011). The majority of temporary workers are women. For these temporary women workers, social welfare benefits under PLA like maternity and medical benefits do not exist.

However, ninety-five percent of the labour, mostly unskilled, is employed in operations like ploughing, sowing, watering, fertilizing, weeding, pruning and harvesting. These

essentially are agricultural operations. The consideration of plucking activity as being unskilled is also debatable especially for Darjeeling plantations. The plucking of the prized tea involves only 'two leaves and a bud' therefore, it involves fine plucking to make the orthodox variety of tea. The plucking of bigger leaves also leads to the supervisors reprimanding the worker. This is one of the reasons for the non-implementation of mechanised plucking. The women workers also complain of pain in their fingers, bruising in their nails, poor eyesight, etc. due to the fine art involved. Alas their work goes unrecognised while their 'nimble fingers' are romanticized in brochures and advertisements.

The remaining workforce, skilled, is employed in processing of green leaves (an industrial operation) as operators of machines in the factory, tea makers, drivers, loaders, cleaners i.e. industrial operations. Further, when it comes to paying taxes, the tea owners pay the agricultural tax for sixty per cent of their income because the produce is essentially agricultural in nature.

There are two major deterrents to the education of the workers. There are inadequate schooling facilities on the tea estates and it is expensive to send their children out of the estate due to their low wages. Schooling is available only till the lower primary level and that too not in the tribal mother tongue. Further, the ethnicity and the social marginalization of tribals prevent them from accessing reservation facilities in educational institutes. As a result, the children of tea workers on completion of primary schooling are forced to join the tea industry as unskilled workers with little education and no alternative employment opportunity. Generation after generation they remained tied to the tea gardens. To some extent, they may be compared to a modern day version of bonded-labour. It must also be stressed that few cases were observed where the children were enrolled in graduate programs. However, this was more out of volition and self-help rather any direct aid from the community or the plantation owners or the government. It is doubtful whether such an experience could be replicable across the community yet such instances are indicative of the aspirations of the workers.

7.3 Gender relations

This section deals with understanding the relationship between men and women in the roles they play and the balance of power between them in their differential access to resources (Boserup, 1970, Agrawal, 1998). The gender relations between male and female workers in the tea industry, based on discussions with workers from two study tea estates suggest that traditionally, women have depended on men: economically, socially and culturally. Men are assigned to work outside and earn the money, while women are designated to look after the home and cater to the needs of the family. Women only supplement the earnings to feed, clothe and educate the children. In the agricultural economy this was evident. But plantation crops changed the balance. Families were brought in to provide a steady supply of labour.

Women in the families began working to supplement incomes or become principal wage earners. For workers the estate becomes home, children grow up on the estate, then turn employees, while older workers retire. They continue to reside in the same houses, if the house gets allotted to the child who takes up the work responsibility upon the retirement of the permanent worker. Marriages between children of workers evolve kinship, and workers form a large interconnected community within the estate. So when women work in estates, it is within the comfort zone of the estate that is home to them, where all men and women working is the norm.

Women are employed on their own merit. They are given a contract letter that promises equal wages, and support for child care, education and health care, has fostered economic parity and social empowerment among women workers. Earlier, the motivation for women to work was to supplement the family income. However, the productivity linked differential wages have changed this. Women's economic contribution has given them a voice on how money is spent in the family.

Men, on their part, have accepted women's position as equal contributors, though not necessarily equal partners. At the household level, women continue to retain their role of home-maker, leading to an unequal sharing of domestic responsibilities.

A woman worker highlighted this:

“For us women the work is not over after the last bell is rung in the estate indicating an end to our work day. Once we reach home there is lots to do as we need to prepare meals for our families, wash and clean utensils and clothes. For those that have some livestock have to gather fodder and they go to collect grass in the nearby forests. My husband is unemployed yet I am left to do all the household chores while he spends his day sleeping and roaming about aimlessly.” (Case Study 8, female, 45 years old)

The payment of wages to a tea worker comprises of cash and kind component, unlike for an industrial worker but like agricultural labourers irrespective of whether they are employed in the field or factory. The cash component is less than the agricultural and industrial worker. The non-cash component, chiefly comprise of the following-

1. Subsidized ration- Workers are provided subsidized ration provided caters for dependent spouse and children (upto 15 years of age) and in case of a female worker it caters only to dependent children. There is, however, distinction in the quantity between the ranks of the employees.
2. Protective gear for workers (mostly once every 3 years), firewood and tea.
3. Housing entitlement of pucca and non-pucca houses- Tea estates are leased by the owner from the government at nominal rates for provision of these houses. While the non-pucca house is built by the worker himself, the government provides subsidies for building the semi-pucca house. However, in recent years no subsidies from the government has provided either restricted or no upgradation or new constructions. Thus, considering both the cash and non-cash component the daily wages would amount to approximately Rs. 142.50 per day (Bhowmick, 2015) which is below the minimum agricultural wages for West Bengal. Therefore, there is need for revision of wages (which was last done in 2014) or implementation of Minimum Wage Act (1948) and a mechanism that guarantees the payment of the same.

Although the owners are mandated by the PLA to ensure these provisions, there are either irregularities or complete violations on many of these subsidy provisions.

A significant portion of the women workers suffers from anemia, tuberculosis and malaria. A very small proportion of the tea garden population is considered economically active after attaining 60 years of age. The maternal, infant and child mortality is high, far above state and national averages (Bhadra, 1992). There are threat from wildlife attacks but no or very little protection is provided for the same. Workers who apply pesticides are not provided protective clothes or mask to protect them from the ill effects of pesticides. Any reaction to these conditions is more often than not, results in being denied work and the deduction of subsequent subsidies for a period of a week or more (on account of their status as daily-rated labourers).

The Equal Remunerations Act, 1976 (ERA) guarantees protection against gender-based discrimination in recruitment and promotions and a Committee advises the Government on providing increasing employment opportunities for Women (Equal Remunerations Act, 1976). Small tea growers are not covered under the Plantation Labour Act, labour and employment and equal remunerations acts, as individual small holders and their operations fall below the minimum numbers specified in such acts.

The most tenacious threat to the tea-workers, especially women, across the country is abandonment of estate and neglect of communities engaged in the field operations in the tea industry- majority of whom are women (Sivaram, 2000; Neilson and Pritchard, 2009). During the period of low tea prices from the late 1990s, the tea planting districts across South India were '*sites of human misery and suffering*' (Mitra, 1991, 154). Many estates closed or were abandoned by the management, which has left workers without wages and facilities. Between 1997 and 2006, tea production (ex-factory) fell from 23 million kg to 8 million kg (Tea Board, 2015). Though the crisis affected the whole industry, the green leaf market and workers in tea producing areas, mostly women, were the worst affected. Across the country they suffered wage cuts and delays in payment, worsening living conditions, increasing job insecurity and casualisation, loss of welfare benefits such as sanitation, healthcare and education leading to rise in malnutrition and starvation (Sivakumar et. al., 2018). In tea plantations in Tamil Nadu, a rise in malnutrition among children and increased cases of anemia among pregnant women

were reported. In Idukki district of Kerala, plantations with over 25,000 workers closed down, leaving workers in dire straits without work and wages.

Status of smallholders and women workers

Tea is cultivated in small gardens and large plantations across the country. Major states include Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttaranchal (Uttakhand), Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala (Fig 2.3). Growers holding up to 10 hectares (25 acres) fall under the category of small growers, and big growers denote all growers with land holdings above 10 hectares. However, smallholders include marginal farmers owning and cultivating less than an acre while large estates or plantations can be anywhere between 100 and 1,200 acres, often part of a chain of estates owned by large corporations (Kadavil and Chattopadhyay, 2007). Most estates have their own tea processing factories on the estate, where green leaf is processed into dry tea leaves, either Orthodox or CTC. Small growers on the other hand, sell their green leaf to Bought Leaf Factories (BLFs). Producing tea, either on smallholding gardens or tea plantations, is predominantly done by women, but the

In South India, over 50 percent of small tea growers are registered and have access to financial assistance and subsidies. Most small grower families work in their gardens and employ women workers during peak season for plucking leaf, often paying lower than minimum wages (Elson and Pearson, 1981; Dacholia, 2003). Children at times help their mothers collect leaf to increase the earnings. In West Bengal, many workers, mainly women and children, turned to stone-crushing for survival, while others migrated, once the peak season is over. Poverty, children out too of school, nutritional deficiencies, malnutrition and vulnerability to water borne-diseases characterizes workers in small tea gardens (Gurung and Mukherjee, 1999; Chaudhuri, 2013). Often, women workers too, are ignorant of their right to fair wages and social security measures under labour laws, or relief schemes initiated by the Tea Board or the Government. In the peak season, most workers are hired by estate gardens so small growers face a shortage of labour. However, due to the crisis small tea growers are unable to maintain their gardens; hence demand for workers is dwindling. Since tea growing areas are geographically isolated with little scope for other jobs, workers have

to migrate in search of employment, women to garment industries and men to small-scale industries.

The PLA mandates a number of welfare measure for the workers in the tea plantations. A stark comparison may be drawn with Assam which addresses the welfare of tea and ex-tea garden tribes through the Directorate for Welfare of Tea Garden and Ex-Tea Garden Tribes established in the year, 1983. The Directorate has been implementing various schemes in the state (Nag, 1990; Borgohain, 2013). Since women are most affected and the PLA has the scope to extend itself for implementation of welfare schemes, the following may be taken into account. Either the existing structure with PLA or a new body may be created for execution of such schemes.

Table- 7.1 Welfare Schemes- Lessons learnt from Assam

Assam	Darjeeling
Family Oriented Income Generating Scheme (FOIGS)	
To provide assistance in the form of Government Grants-in-aid to the Tea Tribes families living below the poverty line with a view to enable the families to enhance their annual income.	Women workers may be prioritized for such grants as they are known to be more meticulous in utilizing the grant judiciously and returning (in case of loan) with lowest failure rate.
Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarship	
Economic assistance is provided to poor Tea Tribes students who are pursuing Pre-Matric and Post- Matric Courses and encourage them to pursue their further studies.	Similar provision should be mandated for Darjeeling workers. Girls may be given preference. Additional support to improve learning process may be considered in the form of
Grants for Non-Government Educational Institutions	
To create educational environment amount Tea Tribes Students Educational Institutions by providing financial assistance to such Institutions for purchasing reaching instruments, books, furniture and major repairing as well as extension of the school building.	Considering that the public sector schools and colleges are not available and often considered not feasible in the remote areas where the tea garden are located, incentive needs to be given to NGOs and individual for capacity building towards this.
Grants for Cultural Activities including Education Tour	
Financial assistance is provided to the Cultural Organisations of Tea Garden and Ex-Tea	Darjeeling is part of the same contiguous region which exudes music and culture.

Garden Tribes for development of their cultural heritage, which includes purchase of musical instruments, holding of cultural functions and exchange of cultural troops etc.	Moreover, cultural heritage deserves to be preserved and promoted. PLA and through other institutions women's groups can be formed for the purpose as women are considered to engage in conservation naturally and intuitively.
Grants for Non-Government Organisation	
To assist the Non-Government Organisations such as <i>Mahila Samitis</i> , Association, Clubs, and Libraries of Tea Tribes Community, which are rendering services for all round development of the community.	NGOs, particularly local, may be encouraged to engage with the tea plantation workers and form groups for community participation.
Grants to Patients suffering from T. B. and other malignant diseases	
Under the scheme financial assistance is provided to poor Tea Tribes Community people suffering from various malignant diseases like Cancer, Tuberculosis etc. for their treatments.	Similar scheme is needed especially for the elderly and for women. This will release the burden of disease which is accentuated by poverty and unemployment (particularly during lean season).
Grants for Purchase of Text-Book and Uniform	
Under the scheme, financial assistances is provided to poor Tea Tribes students for purchase of their books and School uniform.	Considering that geographical inaccessibility marks the location of tea gardens and women work from morning till evening, the NGOs and/or stationery shops in the nearest town can be assigned the responsibility for bringing the books and the uniform to the educational facility.

Source: Fieldwork; Koshy & Tiwari (2011)

7.4 Issues to be Addressed

Women are concentrated in the lower rung of the tea industry. They are abundant in the field operations. In this background, therefore, there can be some issues which need to be addressed so as to enhance women's position as a crucial link in the tea industry chain (Nag, 1990; Bhowmick, 2002; Koshy and Tiwary, 2011; Gurung and Roy, 2018)

- **Place women in supervisory position and at higher levels:** Women supervisors have proved their effectiveness in leading positions. Therefore, women as women

field officers, and at management levels needs to be promoted. Women need to be assertive which requires inputs on personality development. Men, on the other hand, need to be sensitized on gender and being supportive of women's choices.

- **Protective equipment for women:** Women pluck leaves all day long. To facilitate their arduous work, comfortable shoes which can support negotiation on undulating terrain and reduce accidents. In winter and rainy season, women need sweaters and windcheaters to protect them against the cold. While women buy these articles, men are provided protective clothing for spraying as recommended in the standard codes of conduct.
- **Representation of women workers in committees:** Women are underrepresented. Roles and responsibilities of joint working committees should be expanded, along with the awareness on the role of trade unions.
- **Equal opportunities for housing for single women:** Tea Estates prefer families for living in the estate houses. Single women are often denied housing on the pretext of optimum use of available accommodation, and lack of security for women in geographically remote tea estates. But this amounts to discrimination based on marital status.
- **Enable women participation in meetings and trainings:** Women attend the household chores in addition to work on the tea plantation. This leaves them with little time and choice for participating in meetings and trainings. Their mobility is also affected as public transport is not always available at convenient times. Therefore, the meetings may be planned at timings and locations convenient for women.
- **Provide opportunities for leadership:** Associations are generally seen as political spaces 'owned by men.' Women are underrepresented in decision making bodies, hence inclusion of women as office bearers, and their active participation needs to be emphasized and made mandatory at all forums, so that women's needs and issues get asserted and expressed.
- **Enable women to form SHGs** to promote opportunities for income generation among women. SHGs can promote training for women on tea cultivation to build their skills.

- **Promote the sharing of domestic responsibilities:** Both men and women are complacent about their unequal relations; women carry the burden of domestic and associated responsibilities as well as fulfilling society's expectations of ideal women. Sensitizing men on equitable gender relations and sharing of responsibilities is important.
- **Assure gender balanced audits:** Inspections and audits should be done by men and women teams, to create access to gender sensitive information.

Conclusion

The tea industry is expanding in terms of area under cultivation and output in Darjeeling. However, the most important link responsible for this growth of the tea industry- the women who work in the tea garden are the worst sufferers. Lack of education and assertion also enhance their vulnerability to ask for their rightful wages, and in time. No or very little medical facilities and inadequate house to live in accentuates their vulnerability to illnesses induced by work, crowding and personal hygiene. There are reports of maternal and infant mortality being higher in the tea gardens as compared to populations outside the gardens (Gurung and Mukherjee, 2018; Koshy and Tiwary, 2011). There are various measures which the governments and concerned bodies have taken but the women workers in the tea gardens are yet to experience the fruits of development (Chaudhuri, 2013). Hence a very focused determination is essential to bring the women workers in the tea gardens at par with their counterparts in other sectors.

Chapter 8

Summary and Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to understand the intersection of working conditions, standard of living, access to basic amenities and health conditions of tea garden population as health is understood to be a socially produced phenomenon. In order to do so it was felt necessary to compare a traditional tea garden with a fair trade tea garden so as to examine whether such 'social justice' based market mechanism provide any sort of upliftment and empowerment of the workers. While Darjeeling tea possesses a well known flavor and quality which has garnered it premium prices in the international market the workers at the lowest rung remain to be poorly paid. This leads to their inability in accessing quality living standards so as to protect their overall well-being.

In comparing the tea plantations of North India with those in South India it was seen that there was a stark difference in wages, area under production as well as in the quantum of tea. North India accounts for 76 % of the tea produced in India and South India only accounts for 24% of the tea. In terms of area under production, North India has 81.15% from all India area under tea while South India only has 18.85% of area under tea.

Despite lesser area and production of tea as well as the price fetched by the tea in the two regions the wages were higher for the plantations in the South. This indicates that the workers in the tea plantations of the North India are at a loss in terms of wages. Hence, it can also be said that there is scope for increase in the wages of those working in the North Indian tea plantations.

The tea industry in Darjeeling saw an exponential growth from the time the British discovered the environment suitable for growing tea. This has provided employment and also boosted tourism in the district for many years. Historically the workers have remained enslaved within the plantation systems in a state of poverty with limited welfare facilities that were promised to them and mandated under the Plantation Labour Act (1951). With poor conditions in Nepal under the monarchy the Britishers and their

appointed Sardars were able to convince many to be employed with their families and to settle in the green hinterlands with the promise of a better life. Thus began the development of the tea industry of Darjeeling prior to which it was mainly functioning as an army base, summer retreat and sanatorium for the British.

With development across the country the district has continued fighting for its statehood since time immemorial stating 'step-motherly' treatment from West Bengal. However despite being promised by many national leaders of considering their statehood demand it has yet to see '*Gorkhaland*' being carved out of Bengal. With the statehood movement flaring from time to time and gathering the tea plantation population as their support base with the promise of a better future the workers are swayed by the promises alas the statehood is yet to be achieved. Till then the workers are puppets in the hands of the tea plantation owners and when need be in the hands of the political leaders of the region.

The services provided by the management and government do not adequately address the needs of the workers. Often times there are multiplicity of infrastructure provided by the plantations and the state. However, neither provide complete set of health care or social services to the tea garden populations as discussed in chapters 4 and 5 illustrated through empirical evidences.

It was considered that traditional tea garden would be less sensitive to the needs of the workers as compared to the non-traditional tea garden. This would result in better conditions in an organic and fair trade certified estate as opposed to a traditional tea estate. This was found to be untrue as it was seen that the conditions with regards to housing, toilet facilities and employment patterns were better in the traditional tea garden. The health conditions in both the gardens were the same and the workers had a greater burden of work in the organic tea garden.

It was also considered that the political situation in Darjeeling that was fighting for a separate state had its own implications on the lives of the workers. It was understood that the statehood movement created hurdles in the lives of the workers every time the movement erupted. The statehood movement also created hurdles in the movement of

the finished tea outside of the tea estate especially during bandhs and strikes. This, as reported by the management in both the gardens, resulted in a loss in the market and the 'brand' of Darjeeling tea also suffered.

8.1 Major Findings

Health Conditions

The health conditions were examined through reported illnesses among the workers' households. It was observed that *Joro/Fever* is still most reported illness and is recurring in nature. This also indicates weak immunity which could be due to poor nutrition at the household level and also due to fatigue by working in harsh conditions irrespective of hail or sunshine. As seen in table 6.1, in chapter 5, 69.5% and 73% in Traditional TE and B responded as no illness suffered in the past one year it was on further discussion understood that most workers did not consider fever, cough and cold or even aches and pains as being health problems. It was inferred from discussions held at both Traditional TE and B that these conditions of ill-health were understood as being part of their occupation. The workers understood that they had poor diets as they could not afford nutrition rich food and thus they had come to terms with the fact that they would suffer from minor illnesses. Thus, we see that the tea estate workers understand poor health as being a part of occupational hazard and have come to terms with this fact. As elaborated in the works of Qadeer (1989) , Bhowmick (1996; 2002) and Rasaily (2003) it is seen that socio-economic and political conditions in a particular environment adds to the burden of ill-health and leads to unique vulnerabilities.

Respiratory and water-borne diseases still form majority of the disease suffered and reported by the workers. However along with infectious diseases we also see an increase in lifestyle disorders such as diabetes and high blood pressure. It was also seen that there were a high number of cases of low blood pressure which is an indication of weakness and ill-health. However it can be understood that the workers are unaware of the fact that their low blood pressure in fact indicates anaemia which is due to their poor nutritional intake. Gothoskar (2012) reports in her study that workers and their families often emphasize on the fact that anaemia is endemic in tea estates.

The medical provisions are such that the workers are said to be provided with reimbursements for any medical expense that the plantation dispensary or plantation hospital is unable to provide. On inquiry and in discussion with the workers at both sites it was reported that the workers faced many hurdles in getting compensation. While at Traditional TE the workers could get reimbursement for both treatment and medicines but in Organic TE it was understood that the workers could only be compensated for medicines. An additional clause for the workers at Organic TE was that they had to have bought the medicines from a specified vendor in the Kurseong market. Hence it can be seen that the conditions are such that the workers face difficulty in accessing health care and this too largely depends on affordability.

There were no crèches in Traditional TE and they were only dependent on the state provided ICDS centre whereas in Traditional TE there were two crèches in the garden (lower and upper division). Although there was a garden hospital in Traditional TE it was seen as being under the supervision of a compounder and there was no resident doctor. Hence most cases were being referred to the BPHC in Takdah. KI 10 revealed that most cases that came to the BPHC were difficult to treat and came late as the garden hospital would only refer cases to the hospital once the case became complicated. It is thus seen that the estates provides bare minimum and while a garden hospital may be understood as being a boon in an isolated area if there is no qualified doctor it is seen as a major lacunae in health care provisioning.

Health systems are highly context specific and there are no single set of best practices that are applicable to one and all. If we look at some of the causes of mortality especially in Traditional TE it was seen that there were two cases wherein the death had been caused due to fever. When one of the cases (Case Study 4, male, 43 years old) was probed further the respondent replied that *“fever is only an excuse for death in a tea garden. We are living in such difficult terrain it is difficult to take the patient to the hospital in time and the nearest hospital to us is the garden hospital that has no qualified MBBS doctor. Who do we turn to at the hour of need?”* This must be highlighted as we see that a simple illness such as fever that can be cured with timely intervention and medication but it becomes a cause for death when left untreated and is

responsible for taking away the life of a person in a tea garden setting being isolated and no professional medical professional. It is difficult to arrange for a car to carry the patient as there are not many in a garden and public transportation is non-existent. Hence in case of emergencies the individual is stuck between a rock and a hard place. In Organic TE there were mostly old age and complication related to diseases related deaths such as prostate, stomach tumor and terminal diseases. In case of complications, the workers and their dependents did not approach the dispensary rather straight away approached the sub-district hospital which indicates that they had greater mobility.

It was also noted that there was an ambulance, in the Organic TE, for any emergencies in the garden to ferry patients and there was also a taxi stand within the garden site which was functional from 7am to 4pm. A one way ride till Kurseong town cost Rs 20/- per person and in case the patient was very serious the cars charged Rs. 300/- to book the entire cab for one way.

The health choices made by the workers in the tea estates can thus, be seen to be primarily dependent on affordability. The availability of health care infrastructure in the tea estate is basic and the workers have to struggle to access the health care system by moving out of the estate which costs them a day's wage as well as induces out of pocket expenditure.

Therefore, it can be said that in terms of health conditions and provisions for health care there is still a long way to go for the tea estates for providing proper care to its workers. The workers are vulnerable not only because of the conditions in which they work but they also have no accessibility to affordable and quality care especially in cases of emergency. As was seen the workers are resigned to the fact that they would suffer some ill-health due to their work and nutrition and they had least control in such matters.

Economic Conditions

Wage is an important component There were differences in terms of wage patterns in the two tea gardens with respect to the extra-leaf price paid to the field workers at the two sites who were involved with plucking leaves. In the discussion held with the

workers in Organic TE it was ascertained that the workers felt a greater degree of burden due to the garden being organic as they had to do additional work in terms of applying organic manure and natural pesticides. Weeding was a tougher task in the organic garden where unlike the Traditional TE garden they could not apply weedicide but had to do the weeding by hand during their winter work period. The workers also reported reduced productivity in Organic TE thereby reducing their additional wage with ELP during plucking season. As it is understood that over and above the daily wage for every kilogram plucked over the assigned task weight the workers are provided with additional price for every kilogram plucked.

While there is a fixed task assigned to the workers above which they are paid extra for each kilogram it was seen that the task assigned in the organic TE was double that of the traditional TE. This was understood to be an increased burden of work by the researcher. However in discussion with the workers at Organic TE it was reported that they had a lower task assigned because the leaf productivity in the estate was lower as it was organic. In comparison a traditional garden with the application of artificial fertilizers can have greater productivity. Thus it was seen that while Organic TE was a fair trade estate the premium that was provided for the product was but natural as there was lowered productivity due to garden being organic. Thus the higher price paid for the product was in compensation for the lowered productivity which would in turn provide for the provisions as mandated by the PLA (1951). Hence it can be said that the workers at Organic TE were at a greater loss while on paper the picture appeared to be more beneficial. Fair trade thus could be understood as being more beneficial to the consumers and the owners as the workers remained poor with low incomes and poor access to resources like health care and schooling.

Life on plantations across India reminds us that fixity is a key form of both, participation in global capitalist projects and of sustaining systematic exploitation and exclusion (Besky, 2017). This can be understood in terms of housing provided to the workers as mandated by the PLA (1951). A point to be pondered upon is that despite low wages why is it that workers continue to engage in tea plantation work in the Darjeeling region? And the answer lies in the provision of housing which ensures a roof

over the head of the poor workers. This leads to fixity of the workers and their dependent families within the estates and ensures the supply of labour to the estates. The next of kin of a retired worker is supposed to take up the estate job in order to keep the house within the family or vacate if there is no next of kin. In Organic TE there was a case of a graduate working in the estate and the reason provided was that there was no next of kin other than the graduate son who could join the estate job as his father was retiring. They could not afford to move out of the estate housing therefore, the graduate son had to join the work. Since his father had retired as a worker the management had to employ the son as a worker too. The only perk that his college degree allowed him was that within a year he was assured of being promoted while it was pointed out that it took years of work in the field to be promoted. There is little else in terms of occupational mobility for the workers and they appear to be tied to the land as the houses are handed down from worker to worker and hence the familial tie with the house is difficult for them to break. It is this 'tying down' of the workers to the land that the producers of Darjeeling tea exploit for their own purposes. It may therefore be proposed that in cases such as these, the compensatory jobs should be offered keeping in mind the educational qualification of the incumbent.

Buyers dictate the terms in the industry (demand for social justice tea with labels like fair trade, ethical partnership, rainforest alliance, organic, bio-dynamic, etc). It was categorically stated by the managers in both the sites visited that the certifications etc were not as a result of the owners' enthusiasm or eagerness to follow international quality standards rather a business investment in order to attract buyers and expand their international market reach. It's the buyers that insist on these certifications. Although standards are important to maintain good quality product there is no point in having multiple certifications. It was also observed by the researcher that despite having several international certifications due to annual checks and audits the producers still manage to cut corners in the production process and these certifications do not ensure workers' rights and benefits.

Darjeeling was developed and seen as a place of colonial leisure and it still has that 'distinctness' it enjoys in the global market. However the socio-economic and health

conditions of the workers are 'distinct' in a way that is shameful because despite the product accruing high monetary value the lives and conditions of the workers remain neglected.

State Policies

The state has an important role to play in ensuring the safety and well-being of the workers. Hence, while there exist legislative mechanism to ensure the same the state is the key player in ensuring the proper implementation.

When it comes to engaging a labour welfare officer in the plantations as mandated by a 1971 amendment as reported by Besky (2014) it was the same in the two gardens visited during field. While at Traditional TE it was the assistant manager of Jamram division who was also the labour welfare officer at Organic TE it was the manager himself who had been appointed as the labour welfare officer. Hence it is seen that even at the managerial level the employees are over-burdened. In fact at Organic TE the manager complained about being over-whelmed with looking after the manufacturing along with maintaining detailed audits of the Fair Trade premiums that he said he had hardly played a role of a labour welfare officer.

Thus, it is seen that even if a legal obligation exists, the general tendency within the management has been to comply with the minimal requirement, the motto being: thus far and no further. In the process, the true spirit underlying the legislation tends to get vitiated. This observation is yet another feature concerning legislation and implementation.

A common link through Darjeeling Dooars and Terai region is the relatively weak enforcement. The reasons are several- relatively less number of inspectors, inadequate training and lack of motivation of the inspectors, remote location of estates. The penalty for breaking the legislation is also minimal if and when and ever convicted

The field study conducted in the tea estates of Darjeeling corroborates the findings from previous studies that highlighted the poor conditions of the tea plantation workers across India. It is surprising to note that even after 67 years (upto 2018) of the Plantation Labour Act (1951) the living conditions of the workers are still poor and they

still live in isolated enclaves as seen in the case of Traditional TE. While Organic TE has seen some progress in terms of town development close to the garden but this was not looked at as being a positive feature of development by the management and owners of the tea garden. They felt and reported being close to town provided many distractions to the workers and the workers had become callous with their jobs thereby reducing the productivity of the garden. On the other hand the workers highlighted the fact that the productivity of the garden was reducing not because the workers were distracted rather it was because of the old age of the tea bushes. Thus it can be said that rather than bringing in new marketing mechanisms under the garb of providing ‘social justice’ the state should ensure the proper implementation of the PLA (1951) as it mandates conditions for the welfare of the workers.

The state’s role in safeguarding the women workers who are in large numbers in the tea plantations is almost non-existent. However, Darjeeling and Terai region in the Darjeeling district the women are said to outnumber the male workers (Bhadra, 2004).

It was also observed that the region has been facing a separate statehood movement for the past several decades and therefore there were major challenges in the functioning of the state machinery within the region. Although the state profits from the tea and tourism industry of the Darjeeling region there is little evidence of the role played by the state in order to improve the conditions of work or the lives of the workers engaged in tea plantations. It was only in 2014 that the wages in tea plantations across Darjeeling hills were made to be at par with those in the Terai and Dooars region of West Bengal (Bhowmick, 2015). The wages were lower in the hills as compared to those in the Terai and Dooars regions. The tea plantation workers of the region have been demanding for the implementation of the Minimum Wage Act but the wages agreed upon continue to be made under the tripartite wage agreement between owners, workers’ union and the state.

Separate Statehood Movement

Since the separate statehood movement time and again erupted in the region and most of the workers and their dependents were called for rallies it was seen that there were

significant impinges on the lives of the estate workers. The workers were enticed with the fact that if separate statehood is achieved then they would become the owners of their tea estate house and the land on which it was built. However there were instances where the workers and the general population were getting tired of getting their lives being disrupted every time the statehood movement erupted. KI11 in Traditional TE exclaimed that

“the thugs employed by the party threaten us to join the rallies whenever the statehood movement is started. I am yet to see any progress and I wonder if we will ever attain statehood. More than the government officials it is the poor like us who suffer the most during such strikes and bandhs. Time and again the party leadership ends up colluding with the state and the demand for separate state is dropped.”

In Organic TE the FGD 3 it was reported by the workers that

“while statehood is important as it will lead to greater development in the region and increase jobs specially for the educated. We have worked very hard to provide education to our children but with the way things are going it is difficult to say if we or the next generation will be able to see a separate state. We join the rallies thinking the leadership will not disappoint if they see there are large numbers joining their fight. Alas the party leaders are always swayed with money and special posts as we saw with the formation of Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA).”

Hence it was seen that while the statehood movement had an impact on the lives of the workers the impact was more negative in nature. The workers at Organic TE appeared to be more aware of the political situation which could be due to the fact that they were close to a township and had greater access to information and newspapers. The management at Organic TE also reported that the estate was politically active and while they did not play much role in interfering with the estate work during statehood movement work became troublesome. There is blurring of lines between union activity, political parties as well as the Panchayat. It was understood from the case studies of workers and a few key informant interviews with the union members and executives in the two tea gardens that the larger population in general identifies the union, party and

panchayat as one and the same. Dissenting voices or those speaking against the GJMM and Since all the posts barring some in the panchayat offices are all held by members of the GJMM who promote the party and for those they are unable to persuade with words they use ‘coercion or physical threats’ to subsume the workers within the party. There is excessive politicization rather than unionization in the hills. Drinking water still remains a problem (Sharma & Das, 2008, p 308) and *pukka* houses are not being diligently constructed at the rate of 8% every year.

Besky (2014) has argued that while the GI tag improved the brand of Darjeeling tea and the price it fetches especially in the global market. However, the Gorkhaland movement was having a negative impact on the brand and buyers were sceptical about long term contracts due to the political instability in the region. Women who make up 50% of the permanent workers are least inclined for union activities due to the dual pressure of work and family; in the case of international certifications the burden is further increased as they need to appease the additional duties that come along with the certifications. In the fair trade gardens they need to create awareness about the objectives and advantages of Fair Trade premiums as well as entertain the voluntourists¹⁰⁷ (Sen, 2018) and the inspection officers, audit teams, foreign buyers, etc. Hence there is a distinction in the idyllic notions of tea estates and the lived-experiences of the workers making one of the finest teas in the world.

Role of Gender

Women workers in the tea plantation sector engaged primarily in activities like plucking, light maintenance and sorting comprise majority of the plantation workforce. Since colonial times women workers have been given preference as they brought along with them their families thereby ensuring a supply of labour for the tea estates. In spite of their contributions, women workers are consigned to the lowest strata of socio-economic structure. Their labour is cheap and abundantly available. In the study sites, more women than men were engaged in tea plantation as field workers and their work in the factory was limited to sorting only. There were more women in the rung of

¹⁰⁷ Voluntourists can be described as volunteers, especially foreigners, who volunteer in these estates for experiencing the work and lives in tea estates in the region especially those that are fair trade certified.

pluckers and lesser of them as sub-staff indicating a lack of vertical mobility for the women workers within the plantation employee hierarchy. A positive of the fair trade certification in the organic estate was that there were women who had been promoted to the level of supervisory staff from among the pluckers. They also were members of the Joint Body and took part in decision making.

The women workers are engaged in arduous and repetitive work which is considered unskilled and they subsist on daily wages. They are also faced with double burden of work as they not only are engaged in economic work but are also engaged in household affairs. However, a positive takeaway is also that women's economic contribution has given them a voice on how money is spent in the family.

8.2 Inferences and Suggestions

Minimum Wage and Proper Implementation of PLA (1951)

Every time the wage agreement is up for a renewal there are the same cries by the owners regarding their inability to increase the wages of the workers. Sick industry, no profits, high social costs have become the top reasons that the producers give for their inability to increase wage or even implement minimum wage.

It was only in 2015 that for the first time the wages of the hill plantation workers was at par with those in Dooars (Bhowmick, 2015). The Darjeeling industry producing one of the world's highest quality tea still pays the least to their workers (Bhowmick, 2015). And according to the last wage revision which completed its term on 31st March 2017 the workers are receiving Rs. 132.50 per day in Darjeeling. There have been several tripartite discussions and till date (June 2018) no agreement has been reached upon and the workers are still receiving wage that was hiked in 2015. The Union Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitaraman after her visit to West Bengal in 2016 especially to understand the problems in the tea sector reiterated the fact that the PLA (1951) must be re-examined and also emphasized on the possibility of implementing minimum wage (25th Jan 2016, *The Hindu, Bengal tea industry sees ray of hope in Minister's visit*).

Hence the only way forward that can be best suited for the upliftment of the workers as well as for the long-term survival for the industry is legislated minimum wage along

with housing and health care to be provided by the tea plantation management. The state and central government are providing rations in the form of PDS. However the government must ensure timely and quality rations. The owners argue that if minimum wage is provided then the other conditions as mandated by the PLA (1951) should be removed. However for the years of work put in by generations of workers, health care and housing should be provided for by the tea plantation management which can be further augmented with the state services.

While the producers complaint of low prices being fetched at auction and from the market they must take into consideration that its not only because there is flooding of tea from other producers rather it speaks a lot about the quality of the tea. How do the owners expect premium prices for tea made from bushes that are more than 150 years old? Rather than complaint they should act and invest in uprooting of old bushes and replanting new ones. Besky (2014) reports that a Darjeeling plantation makes all of its annual money before the start of the monsoon (end of May) and of the finest teas (first and second flush) do not even make it to the auction and are a directly sold to buyers from abroad. Therefore, the state must demand fair wage on behalf of the workers as their voices are ignored by the owners.

Marketing Mechanisms as ensured under Fair Trade

Fair trade must translate into something material and till the workers are being paid wages below the minimum wage inequality will continue to exist in the system and in the workers' lives. With increasing cost of living and with aspirations rising among the tea plantation workers and their dependents it is tough to imagine how much of a change fair trade has brought into the lives of the workers. As was seen in the previous chapters there was not much difference between the two estates in terms of wages, socio-economic conditions, illness experience and health care utilization. However in terms of making the future of the workers secure it so emerged that the workers were made aware of saving for the future and 87% of the population had a savings bank account. In fact the management at Organic TE also reported that using the fair trade premiums for those workers who had worked for at least 220 days in a year a small amount of Rs 2000/- was invested for each worker i.e. 550 out of the 679 workers in a

National Savings Certificate for the year 2013-14 and the lock-in period for the certificates was five years. However, when this was discussed with a group of workers it was reported that none of the workers had any idea about this and they would not believe the management till they actually saw the certificates with their name on it.

In the traditional TE there was no such premium accorded to the finished product and therefore the provisioning for the welfare of the workers was only as stipulated by the PLA (1951).

While elsewhere in South Asia, tea factories have switched to diesel or electric processing equipment the Darjeeling tea factories still are coal-based as it is reported to be essential for the 'muscatel' flavor (Besky, 2014:53). Darjeeling tea has always been associated with exclusivity and luxury (Besky, 2014:58) however despite being a luxurious commodity the workers have remained poor, neglected, isolated and voiceless.

Living wage is something that is discussed in fair trade literature and it highlights the importance of providing the workers with a decent wage to be able to sustain themselves. However it was seen in the case of the estate studied that they were providing the same wage as the other tea gardens in the region.

The assistant manager interviewed at the Rainforest Alliance (RA) certified garden also mentioned that RA is only concerned with biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods but social development is not an important attribute. In the previous chapter the workers in Traditional TE were still highly dependent on wood as a source of cooking fuel and a majority of the worker households interviewed revealed that the primary method of solid waste management was burning of waste. These do not appear to be very environment-friendly practices to ensure biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods. Whereas the RA website states that their mission is to conserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihood by transforming land-use practices, business practices and consumer behavior. It does not matter to the auditors of Rainforest Alliance whether the garden is organic or non-organic. Yet it is understood that the conventional tea production methods are harmful to the environment and the

workers due to their high dependence on chemical intensive technologies to keep productivity high.

At Organic TE it was reported by the workers (FGD 3) that while some of the workers had bought cows using the loans given by the joint body from the fair trade premium it was no longer possible as the company had stopped giving out loans. Rather at the time of field visit the major works done using the fair trade premium had been used for buying an ambulance, building a computer centre (dysfunctional at the time of visit as the computer teacher had quit) and a couple of sheds were under construction (called canteen but were for purposes of providing the workers with a covered area to eat their lunches). This was interesting to note as it appeared to be that the Fair trade premium to be used for the workers' upliftment was being used to provide for infrastructure that should have been provided for in the first place as per the Plantation Labour Act (1951). As for the investment in a computer centre it hardly seemed appropriate and more of a waste of the premium money as reported by the workers it remained functional only for 6 months in 2014 after its construction and had remained shut since the teacher had left.

Fair trade standards are routinely violated by the producers of Darjeeling tea as was also seen in the case of Organic TE. The certification had little to no impact on the workers wages and labour standards. This could be clearly seen as a traditional (non-fair trade certified) garden was compared to a fair trade certified garden and there was little to no difference in their provisioning for the workers and the wages provided was also the same. In fact the fair trade certified garden had expanded its reach in Darjeeling and had under its belt the green leaf bought from Potong and Teesta farmers' cooperative which were processed in the factory at Organic TE. This tea was also separately labeled and sold under fair trade and the premium received thus had to be shared with them too.

Fair trade premium is being used to expand/diversify their business and to fulfill the government prescribed provisions. For eg. The Organic TE garden that was visited it was seen that the Potong & Teesta Small Tea Farmers' were selling their green leaf to the garden at Rs 62/kg and both these farmer associations were being provided with technical know-how regarding organic tea production and providing some welfare measures to the farmers like ambulance, expansion had happened using the fair trade

premium that was meant for Organic TE garden workers. Atleast to begin with i.e. the Potong garden had been bought an ambulance with fund meant for Organic TE garden. It was difficult to clearly understand how much money was coming in the form of fair trade premium and it was difficult to distinguish where the profits from sale of made tea and the fair trade premium was being utilized. Had the owners been honestly providing all that is mentioned in the PLA (1951) as well as pumping the premium earned from fair-trade solely for the development of the worker community there would not be a dearth of workers or the problem of absenteeism as most owners complain.

Plantations are socio-ecological systems that grew out of colonial control and they still exist in a global market which demands ethically sourced tea. Geographical Indication (with respect to Intellectual Property Rights) and Fair trade were to provide justice to the workers but they have hardly made any difference to the lives of the workers. However, Besky (2014) concludes that fair trade is more of ‘solidarity seeking’ consumption movement for the retailers and consumers which is a market-driven justice selling dreams of an equitable relation in empirically unequal productive conditions and sales are booming. With the increase in this market for justice the certifying organizations are reaping benefits in the form of increased certification fees. The successes of the Joint Body also hinged on an illusion that owners and workers on fair-trade plantations share common interests in securing and distributing fair trade premiums (Besky, 2014). As was also seen in our field work that there still existed considerable gap between the owners (their role being played out by the managers in the Joint Body) and workers and the process of spending the fair trade premium was not as democratic as envisioned by the Fair Trade Labelling organization.

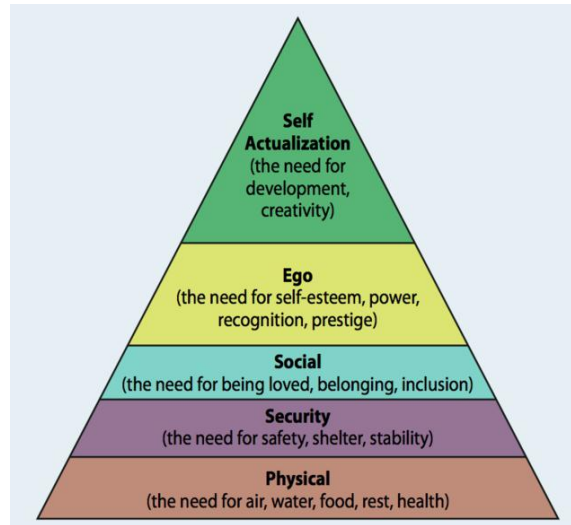
Hence, Fair trade’s growth and evolution appears to be more so in response to increasing levels of disquiet amongst the consumer segments in the West regarding the social and environmental implications of globalisation. Hence, a tea company’s investment in Fair trade certification needs to be understood as an act of corporate social responsibility and with an overall agenda to position its product and reputation within lucrative market segments (Neilson and Pritchard, 2010).

Unmet Needs of Workers

There is increasing discontent among the workers across the levels of employees in a plantation. In the key informant interviews from among the staff and management level employees and the case studies of the workers and sub-staff it was inferred that they were tied to the job due to the sheer lack of alternate livelihood. A factory clerk in Organic TE said that the job in a tea garden was '*Badhyata ko kaam*' which translates to 'obligatory work'. He meant to explain the fact that him and those before him from his family had been working in the garden because when his forefathers moved to Darjeeling to join the tea garden they were provided with housing. In order to keep the house within the family and due to lack of any other employment opportunity he had also joined the same line of work and quit his education after the tenth grade. This is an instance of repeated in many households in the tea gardens wherein just to retain the houses any member of the house is convinced to join the plantation for work under *Badli* system.

As can be seen from the figure 6.1 below Maslow states that individual's needs are hierarchical in nature. If we try and look at the work in the tea plantations especially of the workers they are mostly stuck in trying to fulfill the lowest rung of the need pyramid and that too they are hardly able to attain fully. They are resigned to the fact that they may never be able to afford a pucca house, the food that they can afford may not provide them with the nutrition required by their body to function optimally while doing hard labour in the garden thereby also impacting their health.

Figure 6.1: Maslow's Hieracrchy of Needs



And in order to fulfill their second level need of 'security' they continue to work in the tea gardens as they are eager to retain housing that has been in their families for generations and they have invested for its upkeep.

Vertical Mobility is lacking within the plantation hierarchy of work especially for the women workers. Despite the fact that women form the majority of workers involved in the tea plantations it was seen that most remained at the lowest rung of the employee pyramid. Whereas the men involved in tea plantations had more agency to be promoted from worker to the sub-staff level and above. In Traditional TE there were no female workers who had been promoted to any supervisory roles (sub-staff) or above whereas in Organic TE there were female workers in the supervisory roles (sub-staff) as well they formed majority of the Fair Trade Premium Committee (FTPC) and in fact the head clerk (Staff level) was also a lady.

Increasing dearth of labour

Although the management at the two gardens visited lamented about shortage of labour and especially casual labour there appeared to be no dearth of unemployed individuals among the garden population. In fact it can be assumed that it is not the shortage of labour rather the shortage of 'willing' labour to work for a pittance that is the actual

problem. With better pay available in MGNREGA which everyone locally refers to as ‘100 days’ the unemployed population is silently protesting the low wages being given by the tea industry in Darjeeling like elsewhere in the North of India. Also the management interviewed at both the gardens complained about the ‘deteriorating work culture’ and ‘increasing absenteeism’. However, it appears to be negligence on the part of the management and primarily the producer and/or owners who never invested in the workers and their welfare as enshrined in the PLA (1951) which would have ensured a motivated and healthy workforce. Hence it is the owners rather than the workers who are to be blamed for the deteriorating work culture while telling the plantation workers that they must carefully tend to and diligently work in the gardens as it is they who have to permanently live and earn from the garden while the management may change hands and so will the owners.

Thus, we see a trend towards a reduction in permanent employment and an increase in casual labour, who are employed on a seasonal basis on many estates to cope with peaks of production. Although casual workers receive the same wage, they are not entitled to any benefit enjoyed by the permanent workers. Not only do they have no job security, the temporary workers are not entitled to subsidised food-grains, medical facilities, housing facilities, firewood, dry tea, protective clothing, etc. The women workers are not entitled to maternity benefits and the children cannot study in garden schools.

Reinvestment of Profit

There appears to be no way of verifying how much the producers are earning. This was reported by both the owners association and a tea consultant in Darjeeling. Hence there appears to be no transparency even the managers at the two estates had no idea how much their finished product was being sold at in the final transaction. This was because all sales take place in the Kolkata offices. Hence we see that the owners maintain a clean distinction between the estates and the market keeping the estates out of the purview of the monetary transactions. Thus, while the estate workers and management ensures the delivery of a quality product they are never revealed the value of their work and it is only hearsay that they depend on to know that ‘*Darjeeling Tea*’ is a product that demands high value especially in foreign shores.

It must be noted that in interactions with key members of the Darjeeling Planters' Association (DPA), which is an association of producers and/or owners of the tea gardens in Darjeeling, at the time of field visit upon asking whether the Darjeeling tea industry can be labelled as a 'sick' industry as claimed by management time and time again of several tea estates the idea was shot down immediately. The members vehemently emphasised on the fact that they did not feel that the industry was in any crisis in terms of market realisation as there is huge demand in the international market for Darjeeling. The members also stated that how owners could use the label of 'sick' industry if gardens were still being bought and companies had been expanding. It was reported by the president of the Darjeeling Planters' Association (DPA) as well as the Secretary of the DPA that the Lohia Company began by owning one tea garden and have expanded to owning 13, while the Bansals today own 14 tea gardens in the region and Jayshree also has 4 gardens under it. If the industry was truly sick in nature why did these companies choose to expand and buy more gardens in the region? Hence we see that while the owners have managed to expand their businesses in the region the workers are yet to reap the benefits of making the '*prized Darjeeling tea*'.

Industry experts predict that the Darjeeling tea industry may hobble along for another 50 years. All these companies and proprietors made and/or are making their profits without really pumping considerable amount back into the industry. They may be expanding their businesses elsewhere but the truth of the matter is that majority of the tea bushes in Darjeeling are more than 150 years old and with each passing year yield per hectare is falling. The producers/owners of these tea gardens also do not regularly replant the old bushes especially the China variety and rather they expand into the marginal areas (forests and *jhoras*¹⁰⁸) which is said to have visible and increasingly detrimental effects on the landscape (Besky, 2014: 61). While the yield at Traditional TE was 600kg/hectare, at Organic TE the yield was 220kg/hectare. Hence we see that the yield at Organic TE was much lower as compared to Traditional TE. The survey of north Bengal tea gardens (Govt. of West Bengal, 2014) revealed that only 34 out of the

¹⁰⁸ *Jhora* is a ravine which is mostly used as a dumping site for waste or path made by which dirty water flows

81 gardens surveyed in Darjeeling had a yield of 500kg/hectare while the standard average should be 500kg/ hectate and those in Dooars and Terai should have standard average yield of 1900kg/hectare. Hence we see that the tea gardens in the hills have ageing tea bushes which have an impact on the yield and therefore on the earning of the tea garden workers.

8.3 Conclusion

The pursuit of profit, the building of the tea empire and social apartheid together created the tea plantation industry of Darjeeling and elsewhere within the country. This tea plantation model was developed on the much maligned economic and social theory based on exploitation – of the land, environment and labour. Unfortunately this plantation model has remained the same. This plantation model over the years has created a plantation culture of dependency and poverty amongst the plantation society. The children born have rarely got the opportunity to move out from the social and economic class they are born into.

The State Government of West Bengal has failed totally in developing and integrating the plantation societies. They are only interested in collecting the revenues from the region and to maintain their political and cultural hegemony. Their lack of progressive policies has further alienated the peace loving people living in these areas. Even though since independence the tea plantation industry of the region has created immense wealth, very little of it trickled down to the plantation workers and their families. There has always been massive flight of capital from the plantation industry. Rarely has this capital been reinvested to develop the plantation industry and its resident population.

By ensuring decent wage and proper provisioning of the welfare measure the stakeholders of the tea industry would be helping the workers improve their conditions of living and well being. This would in turn help India successfully move in the direction of achieving the sustainable development goals of which ‘decent work and economic growth’ resonates most with the tea industry. In helping the workers attain their potential with dignity while also ensuring equality would also put India effectively on the path of Agenda 2030.

Hence, a new development strategy must create ownership space either by including land rights or through stakeholder participation for the tea plantation workers that will therefore improve the economic access of the tea estate workers; ensure that its proposed solutions are conducive to local milieus and are efficient in welfare-terms rather than merely in productivity terms, and that these bring economic productions into closer consonance with the natural ecosystems. In practice, such solutions demand social innovation by re-orienting economic activity towards human development rather than towards technological developments.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Worker's Household Interview Schedule

A. Respondents' Profile

1. Name of the Respondent
2. Age
3. Sex (Male-1, Female-2, Other-3)
4. Caste (Jaat)
5. Education

B. Work Profile

1. Type of Worker: (Permanent-1, Casual-2)
2. Site of Work: (Factory-1, Field-2)
3. Rank at Work: (Worker-1, Sub-staff-2, Staff-3)
4. Tenure:
5. No. of working Days in a week:
6. No. of working hours in a week:
7. No. of days allotted for sick leave in a year:
8. No. of days allotted for maternity leave:

C. Details of the household (Socio-Economic Profile)

S.No. (1)	Name (2)	Relationship with Head (3)	Age (4)	Sex (5)	Marital Status (6)	Work Status (7)	Education Status (8)	Inco me (9)

Sex: Male-1, Female-2, Other-3; **Marital Status:** Married-1, Unmarried-2, Divorced-3, Separated-4, Widowed-5; **Work Status:** Working-1, Part-time-2, Unemployed-3, Studying-4; **Education Status:** Primary-1, Secondary-2, Higher Secondary-3, Vocational-4, Graduation-5, Post-graduation-6

D. Household Characteristics

1. House Ownership: (Company-1, Private-2, Rented-3, Others-4)
2. If private, do you have any record/legal document of the house/land?
(Yes-1, No-2)
3. If rented, amount paid as rent (INR):
4. Type of House: (Kutcha-1, Semi-Pucca-2, Pucca-3)
5. No. of rooms in the house:
6. Electricity:
(Yes-1, No-2)
7. Electricity Connection from: (Govt-1, Neighbour-2, Management-3, Others-4)
8. Average monthly electricity bill, if answered 1 for previous question:
9. Cooking Space Separate: (Yes-1, No-2)
10. If yes: (Separate Kitchen-1, Separate space inside-2, Separate space outside-3)

11. Type of cooking fuel: (LPG-1, Kerosene Stove-2, Firewood-3, Coal-4, Cow dung-5, Others-6)

12. Area of agricultural land (Kitchen Garden):

13. Livestock Ownership: (Yes-1, No-2)

S. No. (1)	Type of Livestock (2)	Number (3)

14. Household Assests

Name of Asset (1)	Number (2)
TV (LCD/LED/Box TV)	
Cable/DTH	
Cellular Phone	
Cooking Gas	
Radio	
VCR/DVD player	
Health Insurance	
Life Insurance	
Savings Account	
Vehicle (2 wheeler/ 4 wheeler)	

E. Water & Sanitation

1. Water Supply: Yes-1, No-2)

2. Source of Water (Piped to home-1, Piped to public tap-2, Hand-pump-3, Spring Water-4, Others-5)

3. Cost of Water per month:
4. Treatment for drinking water: (Electronic-1, Tap Filter-2, Chlorinate-3, Boil-4, Others-5)
5. Distance required for travelling to fetch water:
6. Toilet Facility: (Yes-1, No-2)
7. Location of toilet: (Inside house-1, Outside for only family-2, Outside shared-3, Public toilet-4, Open Defecation-5)
8. Structure of Toilet Facility: (Concrete-1, Only Base is concrete-2, Makeshift-3)
9. Type of disposal: (Septic Tank-1, Pit Toilet-2, Dry Latrine-3, NA-4)
10. Water Supply to toilet: (Tap with flush-1, Tap only-2, Stored Water-3, No water-4)
11. Disposal of HH waste: (Space outside house-1, Space away from house-2, Common designated spot-3, Municipality-4, Others-5)
12. Type of drainage: (Covered-1, Partially covered-2, Open-3, No drainage-4, Others-5)
13. Is the drain cleaned: (Yes-1, No-2)
14. If yes how frequently: (Daily-1, Once a week-2, Twice a week-3, Once a month-4, Twice a month-5, Others-6)

F. Benefits provided by the employer

Name of the benefit (1)	Yes-1, No-2 (2)
Provident Fund	
Bonus	
Gratuity/Arrears	
Medical	

Rations	
Electricity	
Water	

In case of Leaf Plucker/Factory Worker

Name of Item/facility provided (1)	Yes-1, No-2 (2)
Raincoat	
Umbrellas	
Slippers/Shoes	
Blankets	
Boots	
Tea	
Kerosene/Firewood	
Creche	

G. Health Profile

1. Diagnosed Non Communicable Disease: (Diabetic-1, High BP-2, Heart Disease-3, Stroke-4, Cancer-5, Chronic Respiratory disease-6)
2. Is there a company provided health facility: (Yes-1, No-2)
3. Type of health facility:
4. Location:
5. Distance from home to health facility:
6. Mode of transport:
7. How often do you visit this facility:
8. Approx. waiting time (as per last visit):

9. Approx. time given by the health provider:
10. When was your last visit to this facility?
11. Reason for last visit: (Joro-1, Marqee-2, Gastric-3, Diarrhoea-4, Dysentry-4, Pneumonia-5, Stomach Ache-6, Fibroid-7, White discharge-8, complication in pregnancy-9, complication in childbirth-10, TB-11, Jaundice-12, Polio-13, Ear aches-14, Leg/hand/back pain-15, Fracture-16, Vomiting-17, Typhoid-18, Malaria-19, Kalazar-20, Skin disease-21, Arthritis-22, Others-23 specify)
12. Who is the most preferred? (Sub-Centre-1, PHC-2, CHC-3, Private hospital-4, Private Practitioner-5, RMP-6, Traditional Healer-7)
13. Why:
14. Government Healthcare programs/schemes available in the plantation:
15. If enrolled in RSBY? (Yes-1, No-2)
16. If availed JSY? (Yes-1, No-2)
17. Do the health workers visit? (Yes-1, No-2)
18. Do you know about the village ASHA? (Yes-1, No-2)
19. Last Pregnancy in household:
20. Place of delivery: (At home-1, Hospital-2)
21. Last death in the household: (One year ago-1, three years ago-2, five years ago-3)
22. Cause of death:

H. Morbidity Pattern and Treatment in last 12 months									
Ref: HH	Composition (1)	Reported Illness (2)	Duration (days)(3)	Mode of Treatment (4)	Reason for choosing that treatment (6)	Expenses Incurred (7)	No. of Work Days lost (8)	Mode of Transport (9)	Satisfaction (10)

Joro-1, Marquee-2, Gastric-3, Diarrhoea-4, Dysentery-4, Pneumonia-5, Stomach Ache-6, Fibroid-7, White discharge-8, complication in pregnancy-9, complication in childbirth-10, TB-11, Jaundice-12, Polio-13, Ear aches-14, Leg/hand/back pain-15, Fracture-16, Vomiting-17, Typhoid-18, Malaria-19, Kalazar-20, Skin disease-21, Arthritis-22, Others-23 specify; 4. Sub-Centre-1, PHC-2, CHC-3, District Hospital-4, AYUSH-5, Private hospital-6, Private Practitioner-7, RMP-8, Traditional Healer-9

I. Government Schemes/Benefits under various schemes

1. Ration Card: (Yes-1, No-2)
2. Type of Ration Card: (BPL-1, APL-2, AAY-3, Annapurna-4, Others-4)
3. Colour of Ration Card:
4. Voter ID: (Yes-2, No-2)
5. Caste/Tribe Certificate: (Yes-1, No-2)
 - I. If No, why?
 - II. If Yes, what procedure followed?

6. If anybody in HH receives benefits of Pension Scheme: (Old Age-1, Widow-2, Ex-servicemen-3, No Benefits-4, Retired Garden Worker-5, Others-6)
7. If anybody in the HH enrolled for MGNREGS? (Yes-1, No-2)
8. Do they have job card? (Yes-1, No-2)
9. If any difficulty faced in getting job card?

Appendix B: Key Informant Interview Schedule

Name of Respondent:

Age:

Sex:

Educational Qualification:

Occupation:

1. History of the plantation
2. Number of owners in the past 10 years:
3. How many permanent workers are employed in the plantation?
4. How many casual workers are employed in the plantation?
5. What are the categories of employees? What is the hierarchy?
6. What is the ratio of local & non-local employees at the plantation?
7. What is the caste distribution like among the workers of the plantation?
8. How many households in the plantation?
9. What are the various type of workers? Adult/Adolescent/Child
10. What is the nature & extent of seasonal employment?
11. What is the wage structure & pattern of the workers?
12. What benefits & provisions are available for the workers?
 - a. Housing
 - b. Sanitation
 - c. Medical facilities

- d. Electricity
- e. Water
- f. Crèches
- g. Educational facilities
- h. Rations
- i. Insurance (health & life)
- j. Provident fund
- k. Bonus
- l. Special items to leaf pluckers

13. What government health facility is available to the people of the plantation?

14. How satisfactory are the services? In terms of

- a. No. of services
- b. Distance
- c. Cost
- d. Provider

15. What are your views about the standard of living of the people of this particular plantation?

16. What are your views about the health conditions of the people of the plantation?

17. What is the most common ailment & disease?

18. What government schemes are available to the people of the plantation?

19. Is there a labour welfare officer appointed in the plantation?

20. What are the various kinds of welfare schemes available to the employees of the plantation?
21. Do any trade unions exist?
22. What role do they play in the workers life?
23. What political party do the majority of the people of the plantation support?
24. Why?
25. What in your view has been the political situation like in the past 10 years?
26. How has it affected the industry?

Appendix C: FGD Guideline

FGD	Discussed Topics	Place of discussion and participants
FGD 1	<p>What are the issues you are most concerned about in your tea estate? Describe your work-related activities? Are the provisions mandated by PLA (1951) fulfilled? Work and Wage Patterns? Access to basic amenities and healthcare? What has been the impact of Statehood movement?</p>	<p>Tea Estate Field, Men and Women Workers at Traditional Tea Estate</p>
FGD 2	<p>What are the issues you are most concerned about in your tea estate? Describe your work-related activities? Are the provisions mandated by PLA (1951) fulfilled? Work and Wage Patterns? Access to basic amenities and healthcare? What has been the impact of Statehood movement?</p>	<p>Tea Estate Field, Men and Women Workers at Organic Tea Estate</p>

FGD 3	Do you understand Fair Trade? How has it affected work, wage and life? Is there role of Trade Unions in Fair trade garden having a Joint Body? What expectations from Fair Trade and how has it brought about change?	
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