Productivity and Labour Standards in Tea Plantation Sector in India

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1. Introduction

According to a definition provided by the International Labour Organisation, the term ‘plantation’ at first referred to a group of settlers or a political unit formed by it under British colonialism, especially in North America and the West Indies (ILO 1960: 6). With the colonisation of Africa and Asia by British and European entrepreneurs and colonialists the term acquired a broader connotation. It came to denote large-scale enterprises in agricultural units and the development of certain agricultural resources of tropical countries in accordance with the methods of western industry (Ibid: 9). In India, the Plantation Labour Act of 1951 provides the legal definition of a plantation. Section 1 (4) of the Act states that a plantation is “any land used or intended to be used for growing tea, coffee, rubber, cinchona, cardamom which admeasures five hectares or more and in which fifteen or more persons are employed or were employed on any day of the preceding twelve months…”

This paper attempts to examine the condition of the Indian tea plantation industry in terms of its productivity and labour standards. Though this industry is not as central to the economy of the country as it is in other major tea producing countries such as Sri Lanka and Kenya, it is nonetheless significant. This is India’s oldest industry in the organised manufacturing sector and has retained its position as the single largest employer in this sector. The total number of workers in the organised manufacturing sector is 7.3 million (Datt 1997: 5) and tea plantations employ a little more than a million permanent workers. In other words, one out of seven workers in this sector is a tea plantation worker. At the same time, despite their large numbers, the problems of tea plantation workers are often overlooked by those interested in labour or policy studies because these workers are in many ways marginalised. They are isolated in their
planted by low wages and poor working conditions. Their problems are rarely focussed in newspapers or journals nor discussed at workers’ forums. Neither the mainstream trade union movement nor the government has given much importance to this section of the country’s working class. We shall examine the problems faced by these workers in terms of wages and working conditions and the possible means of overcoming these.

The process of globalisation has affected the working class in general. In India, the Industrial Policy Statement placed before Parliament on 24 July 1991, was in tune with the global process of structural adjustment. This policy stressed the opening up the economy to the world market. India’s inclusion in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is seen as a prerequisite for this process to gain momentum. Besides promoting competition in the domestic market the WTO’s agenda included maintenance of labour standards through the Social Clause. However India, along with several other countries, vehemently opposed inclusion of any form of international labour standards. As a result, the Social Clause has been kept in abeyance. At the same time there are other forms of scrutiny on labour standards in the tea industry which mainly originate from certain importers in Europe. We shall assess the need for maintaining minimum labour standards through international organisations in this industry.

Another aspect of economic liberalisation that has caused concern for tea producers is the import of cheaper tea from the international market. Besides being the largest producer of tea, India is also the largest consumer. The industry is therefore expected to be more stable as it need not be dependent on a largely fluctuating international market for its survival. Other major tea producing countries such as Sri Lanka, Kenya and Indonesia are more dependent on exports to sustain their production. The domestic market in India has been growing steadily which, in turn, has contributed to the stability of the industry. The new ‘threat’ this industry faces in the era of liberalisation is of imports of tea from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh that are cheaper than domestically produced tea. We will explore the dimensions of this problem later in this chapter.

2. PROFILE OF THE TEA INDUSTRY

India produces approximately 750 million kg. of tea annually making it the largest tea producer in the world. In fact around 30 per cent of the world’s tea is produced in the country (Tea Board 2000: 180, 181 and Table 5.1). India is also the world’s largest consumer of tea. At the same time, export of Indian tea is lowest among the four major tea-producing countries in the world. Exports from Kenya, Sri Lanka and China are higher than that of India (see Table 5.2).

The four major tea-producing states in the country are Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Each of these states, with the exception of Assam, has two main tea
growing administrative districts. These are Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling in West Bengal, Nilgiris and Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu and Idduki and Wynad in Kerala. Tea is grown in almost all the districts in Assam. In West Bengal the two contiguous districts, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling, are divided into three tea districts. These are Dooars, the tea growing area in Jalpaiguri district, Terai, which constitutes the plains of Darjeeling district and, Darjeeling, comprising the hills of this district. Of these, Dooars is the largest. Tripura, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand Pradesh, Manipur, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Orissa and Meghalaya also produce limited quantities of tea (see Table 5.5).

Assam produces around 52 per cent of the total production and employs 56 per cent of the labour force. The second largest tea producer is West Bengal which produces 22 per cent of the country’s tea and employs 24 per cent of the labour force. Tamil Nadu is the third largest tea producer accounting for 16 per cent of the production and 11 per cent of the labour force. This is followed by Kerala, which contributes to 8 per cent of the total production and engages 7 per cent of the labour force. The other tea producing states collectively contribute to 2 per cent of the country’s production and engage 2 per cent of the labour force (see Tables 5.5 and 5.9).

Production of tea in India has been stagnant at around 750 million kg. for the past decade. This is a far cry from the optimistic projection in 1980 that India would produce one billion kg by the end of the twentieth century. Production increased to above 800 million kg in 1997 and 1998 (see Table 5.1) but in the next year it plummeted to the earlier trend. The need to increase production has been stressed in successive Five Year Plans for the tea industry starting with the Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-86 – 1989-90). However, performance has fallen woefully short of expectations. For example, the Eighth Five Year Plan had projected that production in 1994 and 1995 would be 866 million kg and 900 million kg respectively (Tea Board 1989: 2) whereas production for these two years was 753 million kg and 756 million kg (see Table 5.5).

At the same time consumption has increased at a much higher rate than production. It is estimated that consumption increases at a steady rate of 15 to 20 million kg annually. Low growth in production along with an increase in domestic consumption has affected exports in recent years. One can see from Tables 5.1 and 5.2 that in 1997 and 1998 when production increased to over 800 million kg exports rose to over 200 million kg.

The main importer of Indian tea was the Soviet Union. After its disintegration in 1991 tea exports suffered a major setback. This, in turn, had created a crisis in the tea industry. Exports improved gradually after other markets, such as the Middle East, were developed. However the major constraints to increasing exports is the sluggish increase in production coupled with a buoyant growth of internal consumption.
Tea is the most popular drink in India. It is consumed by all sections of the population, including those who are poor. In this sense tea is regarded as one of the items of essential consumption. Hence stabilisation of its price in the internal market is necessary because an abnormal increase in price will affect the poor. Increase in production is the main means through which prices can be stabilised. Hence curtailment in exports becomes necessary so that enough tea is available for domestic consumption. This is the reason why in 1984 the government restricted export of tea to 200 million kg. It was then felt that if exports increased beyond that level, prices of tea in the domestic market would rise to high levels. Hence the solution to the problem of increasing exports while stabilising domestic prices lies in increase in production. This, unfortunately, is the major hurdle faced by the tea industry.

The common perception in the industry is that production can be increased only through higher labour productivity. This holds true to some extent, as tea is still a labour-intensive industry. At the same time, there are a number of other factors relating to this aspect which will be discussed later. In fact the substance of this paper focuses on factors affecting labour productivity. However, productivity can be improved if the material factors of production are improved. These include expansion of the area under tea cultivation, improvement in the age of the tea bushes and replenishing of ageing bushes. Let us examine the situation.

The total area under tea in the country has increased from 356,516 in 1971 to 434,294 hectares in 1997 (see Table 5.6) which is an increase of 18 per cent. If we take into account the period 1987 to 1997, the increase is a mere 4.6 per cent. If we look at the tea producing states separately, we find a variation. The increase in area under tea in Assam, the largest tea producing state, between 1971 and 1997 is 21 per cent which is higher than the increase at the national level. However, the more recent time span of 1987–1997 shows an increase of just 1.3 per cent. In West Bengal, the increase in area under tea is similar. The increase over the period 1971–1997 is approximately 15 per cent which is lower than Assam but during the decennial period 1987 – 1997 the increase is slightly higher at 3 per cent. Tamil Nadu in south India shows a more positive picture in this regard. The total increase during 1971 - 1997 is much higher than the two main states, at 27 per cent. This state presents a different picture when compared with the two states discussed earlier. The initial increase in the area under tea for this state was lower than in the latter period. During 1971 - 1987 the increase was hardly 4 per cent. However, in the latter period of 1987 -1 997, the area increased sharply by 24 per cent. The fourth state, Kerala, presents a negative picture. The area under tea has in fact shrunk. The other tea producing states have more or less shown hardly any increase in the area under tea.

The disturbing fact regarding the above data is that during the latter period, when internal consumption increased, expansion of the area under tea for the country as a whole
slowed down. During the period 1987-1997, as mentioned earlier, the expansion was of 4.6 per cent whereas during 1971-1987 it was at the rate of 14 per cent. A similar trend is noticed in the case of the two major tea producing states, namely, Assam and West Bengal. Tamil Nadu is the only state that shows a positive trend during the latter phase.

The age of the tea bush is an important consideration for its productivity. Normally the tea bush achieves its prime in terms of output of green tea leaves from the age of five years till 30 years. Table 5.7 gives a break-up of the age of tea bushes in the country and in the different states. It can be seen that 38 per cent of the tea bushes are over 50 years, which is considered as the uneconomic phase of the tea bush and 58 per cent of the tea bushes are above the age of 31. On the other hand, only 19 per cent percent of the bushes are below 10 years. This means that fewer tea bushes are being planted to replenish the older and less productive bushes.

The situation in Kerala is most depressing as 71 per cent of the bushes in this state are over 50 years old. This, coupled with the negative growth in its area under tea, indicates that the tea industry in this state is on the decline. West Bengal comes next in terms of older tea bushes. Nearly half (46 per cent) of the tea bushes in this state are over 50 years of age. This is mainly due to the large proportion of older tea bushes in the Darjeeling tea district of the state which is known for its high quality tea. Around 77 per cent of the tea bushes in this tea district are over 50 per cent years (Tea Board 2001: 26) and it is estimated that over half the bushes are over 100 years old.

In the largest tea growing state in the country, Assam, 31 per cent of the tea growing area is covered with bushes that are over 50 years old. At the same time, the percentage of younger tea bushes (18 per cent) shows some promise for the future. The most progressive state in this regard is Tamil Nadu. It is the only state where the tea growing area has increased substantially, as compared to the two larger tea growing states and, the age of its tea bushes are younger. The Nilgiris district of this state has shown the most promise in this regard. Besides having only one-fourth of the area under tea with bushes that are over 50 years of age, 27 per cent of the bushes in this district are less than five years old (Tea Board 2000: 29).

Generally, we find that the tea bushes in the country are on the older side, which implies that not sufficient importance is given to replanting and replacing the older bushes. This is one of the reasons for production stagnating at its present level. Hence, increasing efficiency of labour will have little effect when the tea bushes do not yield the optimum of green leaves.

We can now turn to another important aspect of productivity, namely, the yield of the tea bushes. While it cannot be doubted that the age of the tea bush is an important determinate for the yield, there are other factors too which determine the yield. Proper care of bushes, known as tea culture in planting parlance, through irrigation, control of
parasites such as pests, weeds, fungus, creepers, etc. contribute towards increasing or maintaining the yield of even the older tea bushes.

An important aspect of productivity is the yield per hectare. Table 5.4 shows the yield per hectare in four countries. India’s performance is next only to Kenya and is higher than Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. However, Kenya has shown a much higher growth in yield per hectare than India. Moreover, while India has had a steady growth since 1971, Kenya’s growth has been very rapid. Table 5.8 provides us with a comparison of the yields in the four tea growing states and also separately for north and south India. We can see that the yield per hectare in South India is higher than that of the North India. The two southern states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala have a higher yield per hectare than Assam and West Bengal. Even Kerala, with its high proportion of aged bushes, has a higher yield per hectare than Assam. This is probably due to better care of the tea bushes by the planters in the state.

In the case of West Bengal, the average yield per hectare is low because of Darjeeling. The tea produced in this tea district is of high quality but the yield of the bushes is low. In 1997 the yield per hectare was 566 kg. The yield per hectare of the other two tea districts, namely Dooars and Terai, were substantially higher at 1,864 kg and 1,943 kg respectively.

From the above discussion on the status of the tea industry it is clear that the production levels have not matched the growing rate of internal consumption. Production has hovered around 750 million kg per annum for the past decade. There are occasional spurts in production, as in 1997 and 1998, when production rose to over 800 million kg. However, in the subsequent years production fell to the previous level of 750 million kg. Consumption, on the other hand, has increased at a much higher level. According to the Tea Board of India’s estimates (Tea Board 1994: 118) internal consumption increased by 15 million kg annually till 1987. In 1988 it increased by 18 million kg and in the subsequent years consumption has increased at a steady rate of 20 million kg annually.

The above-mentioned situation resulted in demand being higher than supply and subsequently a rise in tea prices. As tea is an important item of consumption among all sections of the population, an increase in prices affects the economically weaker sections much harder. The government tried to overcome this problem by asking major packet tea companies like Brook Bond and Lipton to offer tea in economy packs in major India cities (Tea Board 1994: v). The help of the National Consumer Co-operative Federation was also sought.

Another means of ensuring sufficient supply of tea in the internal market is by curbing exports. As mentioned earlier, total exports were restricted to 200 million kg per annum. Such a measure may help stabilise prices in the internal market but, given the fact that Sri Lanka and Kenya are aggressively marketing their brands in foreign markets, India
is likely to lose its traditional markets abroad. This may have adverse repercussions if
the tea industry increases its output in the future. It may then find that it is unable to
export its surplus as it has lost its markets abroad. The Government is aware of this
problem and has tried to overcome it by allowing imports of cheaper quality tea from Sri
Lanka and Bangladesh. In this way, India will be able to export greater quantity of tea
as the shortfall in the domestic market, caused by the increase in exports, can be
covered by imports from the two neighbouring tea-producing countries.

The associations of tea producers, especially Indian Tea Association (ITA) and United
Planters of South India (UPASI), have strongly objected to the government’s decision
of importing tea, though the major manufacturers of packet tea have welcomed it.
In reality, the only solution to this problem lies in increasing the production of tea in
the country by making the existing tea plantations more productive. This will solve
the major problems faced by this industry. Increase in production will make this
industry economically more viable, and also result in better working conditions of its
labour.

The situation is, however, quite dismal. The government has initiated tea plantations in
the non-traditional states (states other than the four traditional tea producing states)
but this has not improved the situation. Table 5.5 shows that these states have not been
unable to increase their total production during the past few years. Further, Table 5.6
shows that the area under tea in these states has not expanded. Hence it appears that
productivity increase can be achieved in the traditional tea growing areas as they show
greater potential for growth, if the right conditions are provided. The current situation
shows that in three of the four major tea-producing states (Assam, West Bengal and
Kerala) production has hardly increased. The planters in these states are making little
efforts to either replenish the existing ageing tea bushes or expanding the area under
tea. The situation in Tamil Nadu is more dynamic as the tea growing areas have a
larger proportion of younger tea bushes, which certainly contribute towards increasing
productivity. Hence, it is necessary to encourage the planters in the other three major
tea-producing states to improve their plantations.

After having discussed the issues relating to production, we can now turn to the problems
of labour in this industry. In the next section, we will provide a brief background on the
origin of the plantation labour force followed by the structure of the labour force and its
specific characteristics.

3. ORIGINS OF THE LABOUR FORCE

The plantation as an economic system has a distinct form of production organisation
that gives rise to certain specific social relations. Historically, plantations all over the
world, were a result of colonialism and their produce were exported to the more developed
countries. Rubber and cinchona plantations were established to provide raw material for industrialised countries. In others, such as tea, coffee, sugar, cocoa found markets in the colonising countries. Hence, the rapid growth of tea plantations in India during the nineteenth century was due to the rising popularity of Indian tea over Chinese tea in Britain. Indian tea produced a thicker brew than Chinese tea and it became popular with the working class in Britain. Hence, plantations under colonial rule were basically international in character.

Development of plantations necessitated two basic requirements: large areas of land and a large labour force, and both were rarely available at the same time. Areas most suited for plantations were initially sparsely populated and during the formative years plantations faced shortage of labour. They had to depend on migrant labour whose migration had to be induced through foul or fair means. The early cotton plantations in the southern part of the USA, sugar plantations in Guyana, the Caribbean and Mauritius, rubber plantations in Malaysia, tobacco plantations in Indonesia and tea plantations in India and Sri Lanka depended on immigrant labour. The plantations in the USA, Caribbean Islands and Guyana were run on slave labour that was brought from Africa by British and French slave traders. Slavery and slave trade were abolished by Britain in 1848 and by France in 1856 and after that plantations started recruiting indentured labour. These labourers were mainly from the Indian sub-continent and some times from China (as in the tobacco plantations in Indonesia).

In the indenture system the worker had to agree to serve on the plantation for a specified period of time (usually four to five years) and were free to return home after that period. Though this system was an improvement over slavery, which implied a lifetime commitment without any rights, the long distance from their places of origin made it difficult, if not impossible, for workers to return home after the period of their contract ended. This was further mitigated by the low wages paid by the planters that left hardly any savings for the return journey. Hence, in most case's these people preferred to remain in the plantations even after the period of indenture, as they had nowhere else to go. Therefore, the plantation came to be associated not only with a resident labour force but more often than not with one of alien origin.

Coercion, low wages and immigrant labour were initially the three inseparable components of the plantation system as this ensured the planters their high profits. As plantations are labour-intensive industries, a reduction in the wage bill would increase profits. At the same time, the planters had to extract as much work as possible from their labour. Employment of slave labour or indentured labour ensured that both these objectives were met as workers were under the absolute control of the planters and they had to work on whatever remuneration was offered. In this way, the planters were able to obstruct the growth of a labour market and workers were deprived of a market wage. In the normal course, when the labour market is relatively free, the market wage
is determined by the demand for and supply of labour. When there is a shortage of labour, wages rise in order to attract more labour. However, in India, wages in plantations remained low even when the planters faced labour shortages. Instead, the planters, with the backing of the colonial government, resorted to various means to overcome shortage of labour without increase in wages. We will return to this aspect later.

The tea industry in India began with the founding of the Assam Company in 1839. The potential for growing tea was discovered earlier, in 1824, by Major Robert Bruce when he came across indigenous tea bushes in Assam (ITA 1933: v-vi). At that time the British East India Company had a monopoly over trade with China and it was not interested in opening other centres. In 1833 the British Parliament cancelled the Company's monopoly over trade with China. Its directors then decided to explore the possibilities of growing tea on a commercial basis in Assam, which had been annexed by the Company in 1925 (Bose 1954: 1-2). The first consignment of tea was sent to London in 1838 as a trial (Tinker 1974: 29). Within a short span of time Indian tea scored over its Chinese rival because of its thicker and stronger brew which, as mentioned earlier, increased its popularity with the working class. As a result, by 1859, there was a “mad rush to clear the hillsides of Assam for new gardens” (Ibid: 29). Subsequently, tea plantations were started in the Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts of Bengal, Nilgiris and Coimbatore districts of Madras (Tamil Nadu) and Idukki and Wynad districts of Kerala.

The areas suited for growing tea in India were covered with thick, unhealthy forests where malaria and black-water fever (kalazar) were rampant. These forests had to be cleared and the local population was unwilling to work under these hazardous conditions and the low wages offered. Wages of tea plantation workers in Assam and Bengal remained static at around Rs. 3 per month during the late eighteenth century and the early twentieth century (Griffiths 1967: 309-310). Wages of agricultural labour in these areas were more than double. The Sub-Divisional Officer of Karimgunj in Assam reported in 1883 that wages of tea plantation workers were “less than three rupees a month during the last season. Bengalis in the adjoining villages earned without difficulty rupees seven a month” (cited in Bose 1954: 87). Wages of agricultural workers in Jalpaiguri in West Bengal were between Rs. 6 and Rs. 7 per month in 1871, a year before tea plantations were started in this district (Hunter 1872: 278) whereas wages of tea plantation workers, in the subsequent years, were around Rs 3 per month.

Migrant labour was recruited for the plantations and the planters ensured that they worked only on the plantation at the low wages offered. Labour in Assam and in the tea districts of Dooars (Jalpaiguri) and Terai (Darjeeling) were recruited from the tribal people of Central India, namely, the Chotanagpur region of Jharkhand and the contiguous tribal belts of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh who had been reduced to penury due to frequent
droughts and famines (Bhowmik 1981, chapter 2). These hard working but poverty struck tribal workers were ideally suited for plantation work because they were able to withstand the hardships and rigorous work in the plantations.

The colonial government, eager to help the planters, enacted legislation which legalised the system of indenture. In 1859, the Workmen’s Breach of Contract Act was passed which stipulated that a worker had to work for a minimum period of five years once recruited. The Act rendered the worker liable for prosecution for any breach of contract, “but gave him no protection against the employers and laid down no conditions with regard to the arrangements of his transit to the tea districts.” (Griffths 1967: 269). The Inland Immigration Act of 1963 replaced the earlier Act and reduced the period of contract to four years, but it gave the planters the right to arrest erring workers. Workers were cruelly dealt with if they tried to leave or if their work was found to be unsatisfactory. Griffith notes that “The planter was bound by his contract to clear one-eighth of his land (leased to him by the government) within five years and he could ill-afford to lose his labour…short work was punished with flogging and absconders, when recovered, were also flogged.” (Ibid: 270). In other parts of the country, where these Acts were not enforced, workers found it difficult to leave their plantations as the planters used force to prevent them from doing so. The government too did not provide workers any means of redressal.

The planters encouraged families rather than individuals to migrate to the plantations. This served a dual purpose. Firstly, since planters wanted cheap labour they had to have workers who were permanently settled in the plantations and who had no opportunity for alternative employment. Therefore, by encouraging families to migrate they ensured that workers were cut off from the places of their origin and were settled in the plantations. The entire family—male, female and children—worked at wages determined by the planters. Secondly, family based migration ensured that labour could be reproduced, thus solving to some extent, the problem of future recruitment. During the present period, however, the notion of family employment has other implications which will be discussed in the next section.

Till the country became independent in 1947, the planters, with the backing of the colonial government, exercised total control over labour. Planters had their trade bodies to represent their interests, whereas, workers were prevented from unionising themselves. The report of Commission of Inquiry on the Conditions of Tea Plantation Labour in India and Ceylon set up in 1944 (also known as Rege Commission, after its chairperson) noted, “the employers are highly organised and powerful whereas the workers are all unorganised and helpless.” (Rege 1946: 96). The Commission recommended the necessity of trade unions but admitted that they were unlikely to appear in the near future (Ibid: 193). The report of the study group for the tea industry of the first National Commission on Labour noted that the main reason for the absence
of trade unions in the pre-independence period was because “Access to the plantations was difficult, if not impossible, and attempts to form trade unions before independence were seldom successful.” (NCL 1969: 64). Hence, the mechanism for collective bargaining did not exist till 1947 in this industry which, at that time, employed one and a quarter million workers.

4. POST-COLONIAL SITUATION

Though plantations are historically linked with colonialism, they are not structurally, or inevitably, linked with it. As colonies free themselves from colonial rule and become independent states, a new set of production relations develop. Political pressure forces these governments to provide protection and security of employment to plantation workers. Coercion is relaxed and trade unions begin to function among the workers enabling them to fight for their rights. Therefore, the changes in the plantation system in all parts of the world began when plantation labour began organising itself to fight for their rights and influence the affairs of the state.

In some countries, such as India, plantation labour also benefited from the struggles of other sections of the working class. In the initial post-independence period, plantation labour got the benefits of the laws granting protection to workers, mainly because of the struggles of other sections of the working class that had pressurised the government to pass these laws. Later, as a result of this protection, plantation labour was able to organise struggles on its own.

After attaining independence in 1947, the character of the Indian state changed. The new government’s attitude towards the working class was more favourable than that of the earlier colonial regime. It tried to impose some regulations on the class of employers while granting some protection to the workers, hence trying to find a via media between the two.

At the Indian Labour Conference held at Delhi in 1951, the representatives of workers put up a strong plea for rational fixation of wages. The Conference decided to set up committees in various industries to formulate the statutory minimum wages in each industry, including tea. In 1952, for the first time, the statutory minimum wages were fixed for tea plantation labour (Government of India 1966: 13-14). This guarantee of a minimum wage provided some protection for plantation workers. The planters could no longer fix wages according to whims or merely on the weak bargaining power of the workers. They had to now accept the concept of a living wage and any violation would result in prosecution under the Minimum Wages Act of 1948.

Subsequently, other Acts were passed granting some facilities to the workers. Some of these Acts, such as, Payment of Bonus Act and Acts providing for Provident Fund and Gratuity affected the working class in general. There were other Acts too which were
passed after independence such as the Industrial Disputes Act of 1947 and the Factories Act of 1948 which granted security of employment and conditions for safety at the workplace. These Acts were initially ignored by the planters as there was no check on them and the state apparatus to enforce them did not exist. In the early 1950s the state governments set up labour bureaus headed by a labour commissioner and labour officers were appointed in different regions to ensure implementation of the provisions and deal with conciliation between labour and management. Labour Tribunals were also set up to decide on disputes.

All these changes resulted in the formalisation of relationships between the planters and the workers. The planters started losing the tight grip they once had over their workers and their relationship changed from the existing master-servant relationship to that of employer and employee. The latter was now not wholly dependent on the mercies of the employer as she/he had some legal protection.

Amongst the legislations affecting plantation workers, the most important is the Plantation Labour Act of 1951. This is the only Act that seeks to raise the living standards of plantation workers. It contains several provisions related to housing conditions, health and hygiene, education and social welfare. This Act, along with the Factories Act, regulates employment, working conditions and working hours. The Act provides for compulsory housing and lays down that every year eight per cent of the houses have to be converted into permanent structures (viz. walls of brick and mortar and tiled roofs). There are provisions for sanitary facilities and water supply in the labour residences (known as labour lines), crèches for infants and primary schools for children. The Act, therefore, has a great deal of potential for improving the working and living conditions of plantation labour. However, despite the several decades since the act was passed, there is possibly no tea plantation in Assam or West Bengal that has implemented all the provisions. The plantations in the southern states have a better record. We shall discuss these in detail in a later section. But before that let us briefly examine the organisation of work.

5. ORGANISATION OF WORK

The plantation system has a distinct work hierarchy which maintains the class structure of workers and management. There is a vertical hierarchy with skilled supervisors and managers at the top who direct the masses of unskilled workers at the bottom. The hierarchy in the plantation comprises broadly four categories of employees, namely, management, staff, sub-staff and worker. The management comprises the manager, assistant managers and the factory manager. The staff comprises the white collar and sub-staff comprises the lower level supervisors. Workers who work in the field and factory comprise the bulk of the population in a plantation.
The Plantation Labour Act divides workers into three categories, namely, adults, adolescents and children. According to the Act (Section 2) adult means a person who has completed his/her eighteenth year, adolescent is a person who has completed his/her fourteenth year but not completed eighteenth year and child means a person who has not completed her/his fourteenth year. Employment of adolescent and child labour as permanent workers is a special feature of the plantation industry. This aspect and its ramifications will be discussed in a later section.

Another feature in this industry is the high number of women workers employed. Women constitute over 50 per cent of the total labour force (see Table 5.9). This is the only industry in the organised sector that employs such a high proportion of female labour. In the other traditional industries, such as textiles and jute, the proportion of female labour has shrunk to practically non-existence whereas in the tea industry the proportion has remained the same practically since the inception of the industry. The large-scale employment of women is due to reasons that are specific to this industry. We shall elaborate on this in a subsequent section.

Work on the plantation is basically manual in nature. The factory, which processes the green tea leaves, is mechanised but it employs less than 10 per cent of the total labour force. Field workers are engaged in plucking and activities related to the maintenance of the plantation and its tea bushes. These include hoeing, weeding, pruning of the bushes, drainage, etc. Women are mainly engaged in plucking of tea leaves and in light maintenance work. The men too pluck tea leaves but in addition they are given more strenuous agricultural activities. Adolescents do more or less the same work as the adults but they are also engaged in spraying of pesticides, which can be harmful to their health. Lastly, children are supposed to be given lighter work but are they often engaged in the same work as adults. Hence, even though one finds gender-specific and age-specific categories, the nature of work remains largely similar.

The hierarchy in the work organisation is quite elaborate. There are several intermediaries between the manager and the workers, most of whom belong to the sub-staff category. In fact, many of these strata exist only to relay orders from the top and widen the social distance between management and workers. The management of a plantation is based on maintaining social distance between the top and the bottom rings. In this sense there is an inherent contradiction in the plantation system. Though plantations constitute an industry, the relations between management and workers have remnants that are pre-industrial. While visiting any large plantation one can notice the stark difference between the luxurious life styles of the management and the frugal living conditions of the workers and the sub-staff.

The intermediary layers, in a way, bridge the gulf between the worker and the manager. Without these intermediary layers there would be a glaring distinction between the
manager and his assistants on the one side and the workers on the other. The
intermediaries, with their ambivalent position, help to water down the glaring difference
between the two and also in maintaining social distance.

6. ASSOCIATIONS OF WORKERS AND EMPLOYERS

The report of the Rege Commission, mentioned earlier, had stated that the employers
in this industry are highly organised and their associations play an important role in
influencing the decisions of the government concerning the industry. The workers, the
report noted, were unorganised and helpless. The scenario changed to some extent in
the post-independence period when trade unions were allowed to organise tea plantation
workers. At present we find that the rate of unionisation is fairly high as compared to
other industries. In Assam, where the largest number of tea plantation labourers is
employed, there is one major union which represents the workers, the Assam Cha
Mazdur Sangha. This union is affiliated to the Indian National Trade Union Congress
(INTUC) and is regarded as the recognised trade union.

West Bengal, on the other hand, has a large number of trade unions operating among
the workers. A study on unionisation in this industry (Bhowmik 1992: 11-39) showed
that almost all workers were members of one or more of the existing trade unions. Out
of 149 tea plantations surveyed in this study, only four were found to have no union
among the workers. Multi-unionism is the main problem though. There are 26 unions
operating here. Almost all the national trade union federations have their unions operating
in this state. In addition, there are a number of smaller unions which have either broken
away from a larger union or they operate independently. The unions affiliated to the
Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) have the largest membership, followed by the
unions affiliated to the INTUC.

Despite the existence of multiple unions in the state, plantation workers have tried to
form a common front to take up issues on an industry-wide level. In 1962 the major tea
trade unions came together to form the Coordination Committee of Tea Plantation
Workers (CCTPW). This committee is an important forum for tackling issues such as
wages, bonus and other issues relating to industrial relations. Unions affiliated to CITU,
INTUC, All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), United Trade Union Congress (UTUC),
Hind Mazdur Kissan Panchayat (HMKP) are among its constituent members. This forum
provides a rare instance where divergent trade unions such as INTUC and CITU have
come together on a common platform.

The smaller unions have formed their own joint forum known as Committee for Defence
of Plantation Workers’ Rights (CDPWR). Though the number of constituent members
is higher than that of CCTPW, its influence among plantation workers in the state is
much lower.
In Tamil Nadu and Kerala too there are a number of trade unions among the plantation workers. In these states too the rate of unionisation is high. However there are not as many unions as in West Bengal. There are 22 unions among tea plantation labour in Tamil Nadu and the independent unions are popular, though the Hind Mazdur Sabha (HMS) has a good following. In Kerala, AITUC, INTUC and CITU are the main unions. Tea plantation workers are by and large aware of the benefits of unionisation and that is why one will rarely comes across a plantation where workers are not unionised.

The employers have their own associations to put forth their interests. In Assam and West Bengal, the India Tea Association (ITA), which is the oldest association of tea planters, is an important body. There are other associations as well representing other sections of planters in different tea growing areas or representing the interests of certain types of planters. These are the Indian Tea Planters’ Association in Jalpaiguri district, Terai Indian Tea Planters; Association in the plains of Darjeeling district and the Darjeeling Planters’ Association. The latter represents all tea plantations in Darjeeling hills. In Assam there are associations such as the Bharatiya Cha Parishad, Tea Association of India, Assam Tea Planters’ Association, etc.

In south India most tea planters are members of United Planters’ Association of South India (UPASI) which represents not only tea but other plantations as well. Just as in West Bengal where workers have formed their forum, the employers too have their forum. This is known as the Consultative Committee of Planters’ Associations (CCPA). Both UPASI and ITA along with most of the employers’ associations are members of this forum.

7. FEATURES OF TEA PLANTATION LABOUR

As mentioned earlier, almost the entire labour force in the tea plantations consists of immigrants and their descendents. Workers in Assam and Dooars and Terai tea districts of West Bengal are mainly from the tribal belt of Central India, namely, Jharkhand and the contiguous tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. In the Darjeeling hills, almost the entire labour force comprises descendents of migrants from Nepal. In Tamil Nadu too the workers are not the original residents of the two tea growing districts (Nilgiris and Coimbatore) but are descendents of immigrant workers. They mainly belong to the Scheduled Castes. All these workers are permanently settled in their respective regions with little or no contact with their places of origin.

The permanent settlement of workers in and around the plantations is mainly because recruitment of labour, as mentioned earlier, was family based. The entire family—husband, wife and children—worked on the plantation at wages determined by the planters. Plantations, thus, had four categories of workers: adults, comprising male and female workers, adolescents and children. At present there are no wage differences
between male and female workers. Till December 1976, when the Equal Remuneration Act came into force, women workers were paid lower wages.

While plantations in West Bengal and the southern states removed the wage difference between the sexes, plantations in Assam, which employed over half the plantation workers in the country, continued to pay lower wages to women workers till as late as 1990. In that year a new wage agreement was signed by the employers and the trade unions where the difference was removed.

7.1 Women Workers

Two specific features of this industry, as mentioned earlier, are firstly, the high proportion of women in the labour force and secondly, the employment of child labour. Women constitute more than half the labour force, which is quite contrary to the trend in other industries in the organised sector where the employment of women is declining. The main reasons put forth by the employers are that work on plantations, to a large extent, is gender specific; and that women are more efficient than men in plucking tea leaves. These are hardly convincing reasons, because men are also engaged in plucking, and alongside they carry out tasks related to maintenance of the bushes and the plantation. The category of sub-staff comprises almost exclusively of males.

In reality, the division of labour between the sexes is more a matter of convention or perhaps belief, rather than a scientific reality. The main reason for employment of a large number of women workers is to keep wages low. The employers have used the argument that since employment in the plantation is family based the criterion for fixing minimum wages should not be the same as in other industries. The Fifteenth Session of the Indian Labour Conference, held in July 1957, decided that the formula for fixing minimum wages for an adult worker should be based on the minimum needs of three units of consumption. Employers in the tea industry argued that since employment was family based the ratio of 1:3 was too high; and therefore only 1.5 units of consumption could be considered for fixing the need-based minimum wage.

It may be mentioned here that the Royal Commission on Labour in India had noted in its report that the employment of family members did not justify the extent of low wages in this industry (Government of India 1931: 311). Later in 1966, the Central Wage Board for the Tea Plantation Industry had found the planters’ argument baseless because the extent of family employment was not the same as it was in the earlier days of labour scarcity. In fact, there is a growing number of single-worker households. The Board had noted that: “The family system of employment cannot be considered as unique to the tea plantation industry and even if it had been so it is a matter of consideration it was justified of employers to claim benefit of it by way of low wages for male wage earners” (Government of India 1966: 68). The associations of planters have obstinately stuck to
their concept of wage determination. We shall elaborate on this in the subsequent section on wages.

7.2 Child Labour

As mentioned earlier, child labour forms one of the categories of the labour force in tea plantations. This is mainly a result of the practice in the colonial period of employing the entire family for plantation work in order to save recruitment costs. However, employment of children continued even after the problem of labour shortage was overcome by the 1950s. The Plantation Labour Act recognises the employment of children and, as mentioned earlier, it defines a child worker as one who is not over fourteen years of age. Workers employed as children are treated as permanent workers and they get all the statutory benefits provided for this category.

Unlike the other categories, namely adult and adolescent, the Act interestingly does not mention a minimum age for child labour. The Child Labour (Amendment) Act, of 1985, which regulates employment of children in the informal sector, stipulates 14 years as the minimum age of employment. In the formal sector, all industries, with the exception of plantations, are expected to employ only adults.

The number of children employed in tea plantations as permanent labour is given in Table 5.10. We can see that the bulk of child labour is employed in Assam and West Bengal. It is almost negligible in the two southern states. The figures given in the table relate only to those who are employed as permanent workers. If we take into account those employed as temporary workers the figure will be much higher. A study of the tea industry in Assam by Virginius Xaxa (1996) explores some of the aspects of this problem. He finds that the total number of children employed in the tea plantations of Assam, according to the report of the state government, was around 80,000 during the period 1991 and 1993 (Ibid: 20). The figure includes temporarily employed child labour. The same could apply to West Bengal as well and the number of child labour could be in fact much higher than what is officially reported.

The wide difference in the employment of child labour in the two northern states of Assam and West Bengal and the two southern states could be due to the difference in wages. In the southern states wages are substantially higher and children are paid two-thirds the wages of adults. In the northern states wages are lower and children are paid half the wages of adults. In fact, wages of child labour in the southern states are at par with the wages of adults in the northern states (see next section on wages). Therefore, it may not be ‘economical’ for planters in the south to employ children while it is so in Assam and West Bengal. The low wage rate in these states, in fact, encourages parents to send their children to work in order to increase the family income. Besides, educational opportunities (especially post-primary) are better in the plantations of Tamil Nadu than
in those in Assam and West Bengal. Availability of educational facilities is an important prerequisite for preventing child labour. Had these facilities been more easily available, employment of child labour may have been restricted.

The reduction in child labour in the tea plantations of West Bengal from around 10,000 in the previous years to 7,000 appears to signal a positive trend in reducing this category of workers. However, it is not clear why this reduction has occurred. The two conditions relating to the high rate of child labour in Assam and West Bengal, namely lower wages and lack of schooling facilities still exist, which makes it even more improbable for such a reduction to occur. The likely possibility is that the increasing attack from fair trade groups and other similar agencies in the importing countries in Europe on employment of children may have made the plantations in the state omit to record the actual number of children employed. This is especially the case in Darjeeling as tea grown in this region is mainly for export. Till 1991, the largest importer of Darjeeling tea was the Soviet Union. After the latter’s disintegration in 1991, other markets in Europe were sought. It is significant that the reduction of child labour in Darjeeling occurred during this period. In 1987 Darjeeling employed 2,356 children (Tea Board 1990: 152) and in 1992 the number fell to around 700 (Tea Board 1994: 144). In 1996 the figure was 579 (Tea Board 2000: 149).

8. WAGES

As mentioned earlier, wages of tea plantation workers are the lowest in the organised sector. The wages in the two northern states, which collectively produce 75 per cent of India’s tea, are lower than their counterparts in the two southern states. Table 5.11 gives a comparison of wages in the four states on 31 December, 1999. At present (since April 2001) the cash wage of an adult worker in Assam is Rs 39.55 per day and in West Bengal it is Rs 37.80 per day. Hence if a worker works for 26 days in a month his/her earnings will be Rs 1,280.30 in Assam and Rs 982.80 in West Bengal. A worker in Tamil Nadu earned Rs 62.63 per day in 1999 and in Kerala the wage was slightly higher at Rs 64.19 per day. During the same period, plantation workers in Assam and West Bengal earned around half the wages of workers in the south.

Plantation workers in Assam and West Bengal are entitled to rations of food grains at a highly subsidised rate. This forms a part of their wages. Each worker and his/her dependents (those between the ages of 12 to 18) get 2.25 kg of rice and wheat per week at Re 0.40 per kg. In case the worker is absent during the week, deductions in the rations are made accordingly. Workers in Tamil Nadu and Kerala obtain their requirements from ration shops in the plantations where food grains are sold at rates slightly below the market rates. This is the only difference distinguishing the wages of workers in the northern states and the southern states. However, even if we take into account the ration subsidy, wages of workers in Assam and West Bengal are lower
than those of their counterparts in the southern states. At an average, a worker in Assam and West Bengal gets 4.50 kg of cereals as ration. This amounts to Rs 60 per week. Hence, if we add this extra amount of Rs 10 per day the daily wage will be Rs 49.55 in Assam and Rs 47.80 in West Bengal. These are still lower than what workers in the south earned in 1999.

Besides the regular wages, workers engaged in plucking tea leaves are given an incentive wage for plucking above the fixed daily quota. This enhances the total wage. The incentive wage in West Bengal is Re 0.32 per kg and in Assam it is Re 0.27 per kg. The minimum load is not uniform in these two states and it varies among tea plantations and between the seasons. The workload varies between 24 kg per day to 28 kg. During the peak season (July to September) the load can be 30 kg or more. In Tamil Nadu and Kerala the minimum load is fixed at 14 kg per day. The incentive wage is paid in slabs. Workers who pluck above 14 kg but below 30 kg are paid Re 0.27 per kg. The incentive wage increase to Re 0.32 for each kg above 30 kg. Since the minimum workload is almost half that of workers in the two northern states, the total income is also higher. Another factor is that since tea is grown throughout the year in the plantations of Tamil Nadu, workers can avail of incentive wages during the year. Since plucking is stopped during three months in winter in the tea plantations of north India, workers do not get incentive wages during that time. Moreover, the yield of the tea bushes decrease in November and during the pre-monsoon months of March to May and though the workload is decreased, workers are unable to get the incentive wage as they can barely fulfil their quota during these periods.

The higher wages paid in the south, as compared to the north, are by no means high if we consider the cost of living and wages of workers in other industries in the organised sector. For example, the wage of a coal mine worker is more than three times the wage of a tea plantation worker in the two southern states. As mentioned earlier, wages of plantation workers have remained low because the planters have insisted that a need based minimum wage in this industry must be based on the minimum needs of only one and a half units of consumption and not three units of consumption. Though, as mentioned earlier, the report of the Central Wage Board for Tea Plantation Industry was critical of the employers’ view in this regard, it did nothing to rectify matters. In fact, on the same page where the critical comments occurred, the report stated that it “was not in a position to recommend wages in keeping with the present cost of living and in terms of the need-based wage formula of the Fifteenth Indian Labour Conference.” (Government of India 1966: 68). The report further stated that its watered down recommendations were necessary to avoid a sudden jump in wages.

The employers’ organisations have been stressing the fact that costs of production are high mainly due to the high wage component and low productivity. As far as productivity is concerned there are several factors, besides labour, responsible for it. As noted in
an earlier section, the age of the tea bushes, proper drainage, proper care of tea bushes all contribute to increasing or decreasing productivity. When a large section of bushes are old or they are not taken care of, their yield will fall. In such a situation, increase in labour productivity will not contribute towards increase in production.

Another important point is that wages of labour do not add to higher costs of production, as a study by M. Krishnakutty et. al (1993: 11) has shown. This study takes into account the share of wages to the total costs in 248 companies. The examination of the tea companies shows that the share of wages to total costs was 28.8 per cent in 1987-88 and this declined to 20.1 per cent in 1991-92. Wages of tea plantations increased twice during this period because of two tri-annual wage agreements. Yet, the share of wages to total costs has declined.

The study further notes that the share of wages as percent of value added worked out to 66.2 per cent in 1987-88 whereas it was reduced to 48.8 per cent in 1991-92. Another interesting aspect the study revealed is that tea companies have the highest personnel cost as per cent value of production as well as the total income ratio. In other words, this simply means that while wage costs have fallen, despite wage increases, the cost of the management has increased. This is borne out by the stark differences in life styles of the workers and the management in any tea plantation one visits. Hence, it is necessary to re-examine the existing belief that labour costs are solely responsible for increasing costs of production in this industry. On the contrary, we can argue that by increasing components of labour welfare and tea culture, productivity will increase and thus reduce costs of production.

9. LABOUR WELFARE: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLANTATION LABOUR ACT

In this section we shall try to assess the implementation of the provisions of the Plantation Labour Act of 1951. The Act has several provisions for the uplift of plantations workers. These include provisions relating to housing, sanitation, drinking water, medical facilities, canteens, crèches and primary schools for children of workers. These provisions, if implemented properly, can play a major role in improving the working conditions of labour. We shall try and examine the extent to which this act has been implemented. This section draws most of its data and analysis from a study conducted in 1996 in three of the tea growing states, namely, Assam, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. The study was carried out by V. Xaxa (Assam), Sharit Bhowmik (West Bengal) and M. A. Kalam (Tamil Nadu) (see Bhowmik et. al 1996).

We shall first deal with housing which, in this industry, has always been the responsibility of the employer. In the earlier days, plantation workers were allotted land in areas within the plantation that were demarcated as labour lines. The worker was given the basic materials for building and he was expected to construct his hut with the help of
family labour. These huts were temporary, and are known as *kuchcha* houses (this term is still used in Assam and West Bengal). The walls were made of bamboo and mud and the roofs were of thatch. The Plantation Labour Act laid down that workers should be housed in permanent quarters with walls of brick and mortar with roofs of tiles, corrugated iron sheets or asbestos. Since it would be difficult to convert all houses into permanent structures at one time, the Act noted that at least 8 per cent of the houses in each plantation should be converted into permanent structures each year. Hence by 1969 all houses of plantation workers should have become permanent structures.

In 1996 it was found that 30 per cent of the labour houses in Assam and 25 per cent in West Bengal were temporary. Repairing of existing permanent quarters was also not done systematically. The situation in Tamil Nadu was appreciably better. Not only were houses in the two major districts, Nilgiris and Coimbatore, permanent, but they were also repaired regularly.

If housing facilities are inadequate in Assam and West Bengal, sanitary facilities in these two states are deplorable. The Act lays down that there should be separate latrines and bathrooms in the labour lines. It has provided that there should be at least one latrine for 25 people and a bathroom for the same number. It also provides for separate bathrooms for women. Latrines in the labour lines are few in number and are badly maintained. In fact, most workers do not use them. In Darjeeling each house or a group of houses have a bore-hole latrine which has walls of cloth. A deep hole is dug and people keep filling it with mud after use. In the other tea growing areas, in West Bengal and Assam, it is common practice for labourers to use the fields or wooded areas for easing themselves. This causes filth to accumulate and become fertile breeding grounds for hookworms and other harmful parasites. In fact, anaemia caused by hookworms is a common ailment among tea plantation workers in these states. Bathing spaces are also not provided which becomes difficult for women. They have to use enclosures in their homes for bathing.

The situation in Tamil Nadu is considerably better. The sanitary facilities are adequate as each house or two houses share a toilet. There is also adequate water for flushing. In Kerala, the Plantation Labour Rules framed by the state government makes it mandatory for each house to have a toilet.

The study referred above showed that water supply was adequate in most of the tea plantations in Dooars and Terai tea districts of West Bengal. Darjeeling, however, faced problems. This is also because the whole region faces water shortage. The report of the labour department (Government of West Bengal 2000: 68, 70, 71) shows that in 1996, there were 28 plantations in the Darjeeling tea district and five in Dooars where water supply was inadequate. Plantations in Dooars and Terai districts had better supply
of water. Workers in these two districts got their water supply from shallow tube wells or, as in cases in Dooars, from reservoirs. In Darjeeling water is stored in reservoirs and supplied through pipes. Water supply in the tea plantations in Tamil Nadu was found to be adequate. In this regard Assam was the worst. Water supply was scarce and the labour lines had few taps. In most cases, workers and their families depended on streams and ponds for their supply of water.

The Act states that every plantation employing 1,000 or more workers must have a hospital with full-time doctors. Plantations with less than 1,000 workers must have a dispensary with qualified personnel. It also recommended that there should be group medical hospitals, covering a group of plantations, to provide treatment in specialised cases. It is ironic that such hospitals did exist till the 1970s but they were dismantled by the planters’ associations.

It was found that medical facilities in the three states were far from adequate. Most plantations having more than 1,000 workers did not have full-time doctors and they employed part-time doctors who visited the plantation for a few hours twice or thrice a week. Shortage of medicines and trained staff such as nurses and paramedics added to the problem. Most tea companies have either cut down on their budgets for medical facilities or have kept them constant though prices of medical supplies have increased. In general, the conditions were found to be far below the minimum stated in the Act.

The Act makes it mandatory for every plantation having 50 or more women workers, including those employed by contractors, to maintain a crèche for the children of these workers. The room used for this purpose should be clean and well ventilated and a trained attendant should be put in charge. The study finds that there are crèches in Darjeeling and Dooars but these are badly maintained. Quite often mothers have to leave their work to provide food to their children, as there is no proper attendant. The situation is worse in Assam as the number of crèches is small and no proper care is taken of the children. In fact, it is a common sight in the plantations to see mothers carrying their children on their hips or lap while they are engaged in work. They make a sling out of cloth and strap the child to it.

The managements’ apathy towards crèches cannot be condoned. While they may be able to justify the lack of doctors in the plantations by arguing that trained doctors are not willing to work on plantations, they cannot use any excuse for not having crèches. The trained attendants needed for running the crèches can be employed from the local labour as these women can easily be trained. The other expenses occurred would be, decent space and some funds for providing for milk and food for the children. If they are apathetic to this minor commitment we are led to believe that they are totally indifferent to workers’ welfare, especially that of the women.
The situation in Tamil Nadu is again different. Crèches do exist in most tea plantations and they are well maintained. In many cases, the employer provides two sets of clothes to the children every year.

Another major welfare measure for children is the provision for schooling. The Act states that any plantation having 25 or more children between the ages six and 12 must provide for compulsory education for these children. After looking at the overall situation in the three states one has to conclude that the employers’ commitment to education is perhaps the least. Primary schools do exist in Assam and Dooars but they are not enough to meet the requirements. The study on Assam shows that less than 25 per cent of the children in the plantations attend these schools. The two main reasons are, lack of teachers and inadequate space. One finds only one teacher in each school who has to teach children in four different classes. Moreover, the management must construct the school building. In most cases schools have one or two rooms to cater to all classes.

In Tamil Nadu too, which has a better record on most welfare measures than the other states, educational facilities are inadequate. The fault does not rest only with the employers. The employers provide the infrastructure—classrooms, furniture, etc.—while teachers are appointed by the state government. In West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, all teachers in plantation schools are appointed by the government while in Assam in most of the districts teachers are appointed by the government while in the other districts the teachers are appointed by the management. In most cases, there is inadequate number of teachers in the schools.

The situation is somewhat better in Darjeeling. The number of school-going children is higher than in the other tea districts. This is mainly because the Gorkha Hill Council has taken charge of primary education and it has ensured that schoolhouses are built in plantations where the managements have failed to provide adequate facilities. It has also ensured that there are adequate teachers in the schools.

Besides primary education, the children face greater problems in post-primary education. They have to attend schools that are located in places outside the plantation. Since most plantations are situated in isolated areas, transport facilities are not easily available reaching places outside the plantation. These children have to either walk long distances to reach the points where public transport is available or have to depend on the plantation management for providing transport. Some plantations in Dooars provide transport but in Assam and other states students or their parents have to make their own transport arrangements. As a result, enrolment of students in secondary schools is low. Further, in the case of Assam it is found that the dropout rate is as high as 98 per cent.

Lack of proper education of the children of plantation workers is bound to affect their occupational mobility in the future. Like their parents, these children will be doomed
to work on the plantation with little or no possibility of moving to better or skilled occupations.

Though the government has passed protective legislation aimed at job security and cultural development, it has not ensured that these are effective. The Plantation Labour Act, if implemented properly, could certainly lead to social and cultural development of the labour force and their future generations. However, though several decades have passed since this Act came into force, one is yet to come across a single plantation in which all its provisions are implemented.

The other major party in this scenario is the trade unions. It was mentioned earlier that unionisation is fairly high among the workers. This has helped workers in articulating their problems before management and government. The influence of trade unions on the lives of workers in this industry is fairly strong. The movement has initiated several major struggles for improving wages and conditions of employment. These movements have taken place within the plantation and at the state level as well. However, it is significant that there has never been any industry-wide movement for implementing the provisions of the Plantation Labour Act in any one of the major tea growing states. The sufferer is obviously the worker and his/her dependents.

10. MAINTAINING LABOUR STANDARDS: ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Since 1995, India’s tea industry has come under criticism due to its labour standards. International pressure has mounted to ensure that proper standards are maintained. These pressures have been carried out mainly by Fair Trade groups located in Europe. The pressure exerted by these groups are not necessarily for maintaining international labour standards, as stated in the Social Clause, but they stress more on the fact that the labour standards prescribed by the country’s law should be adhered to in plantations that export tea to markets in Europe.

The main regions that have come under this pressure are those whose products are marketed abroad. This mainly concerns Darjeeling, as the main market for its high quality tea is in Europe. Nilgiris too exports a section of its produce and the district has come under the scrutiny of importers.

Fair Trade organisations in Europe run chain stores that sell products manufactured in developing countries. Tea is one of the main items in these stores. There are other organisations which do not directly market tea but which label the tea as having been produced under fair labour standards. These organisations are known as Labelling Organisations and they exist in almost all countries in Europe. Their main aim is to convince consumers that they should purchase only those tea packets that have the label of the concerned organisation. This will ensure that the tea consumed is produced in plantations that have followed the labour laws of the concerned country.
The largest and most popular labelling organisation is the Max Havaaler Stichtung based in the Netherlands. Max Havaaler is the name of the protagonist in a popular Dutch novel on colonial rule in Indonesia. He was killed while fighting for the rights of plantation workers. Denmark too has a labelling organisation by the same name. These organisations purchase tea directly from plantations where statutory labour standards are followed. The fair trade organisations and the labelling organisations have a federation based in Bonn, Germany known as Fair Trade Labelling Organisation (FLO). These organisations have prepared lists of tea plantations where labour standards are followed and their representatives make periodic trips to the plantations to ensure that the process is ongoing. The main pressure for the elimination of child labour has been exerted by these organisations. A significant aspect of the fair trade movement is that the trade unions in these countries have provided support to them. Though the influence of these organisations are not very significant to the total imports of tea to these countries, they are nonetheless trying to make consumers aware that they should purchase tea which has been produced in plantations where workers are not brutally exploited. In this way, they are trying to protect the interests of plantation workers in India.

11. ISSUES IN LABOUR LAW REFORM

Plantation workers are already covered by an array of legislations that provide security of employment and regulate their working conditions. The problem, therefore, is not of increasing legislations but of making the existing ones more effective. Had the existing legislations been implemented the living and working conditions of these workers would have improved considerably.

The respective state governments have set up the machinery through a network of officials to oversee the implementation of the various Acts affecting plantation labour, especially the Plantation Labour Act. The state labour commissioner is given the additional charge of Chief Inspector of Plantations. He has a number of officials in the ranks of deputy labour commissioners, assistant labour commissioners and labour officer/inspectors, for assisting him in his work. These officials are posted in the tea districts in the respective states. These officials are expected to undertake periodic inspections of the plantations to ensure that the provisions of the Act are implemented. In case of violation, the officials file cases in the court of the judicial magistrate. They also act as conciliation officers in tripartite conciliation of disputes under the provisions of the Industrial Disputes Act. It would therefore appear that there is adequate government machinery to ensure that labour welfare legislation is implemented.

The existence of government machinery does not necessarily ensure that legislation will be implemented. The punitive action for violation of these laws is so mild that those violating them may prefer to get away by facing prosecution. For example, the Plantation Labour Act makes it mandatory for the employers to provide permanent houses to all
permanent workers. We have noted above that more than 25 per cent of houses in the Assam and West Bengal plantations are not permanent structures. In such cases the officials of the state government’s labour department conduct inspections and bring the matter to the notice of the court. The erring employers, if found guilty, have to pay a fine. The fine for the first offence is Rs 1,000 and Rs 1,500 for subsequent offences. Hence, an employer can plead guilty and get away with a nominal fine. This is true of all the provisions of this Act. Any violation invokes a minor fine. The Industrial Disputes Act too has such loopholes. If one were to follow the letter of this Act, stopping of work through strikes becomes very difficult, if not impossible. The workers and their unions are expected to go through a series of conciliations, adjudications, etc. before a strike can be legalised. Similarly, a lock-out declared by the employers is equally difficult to legalise. However, if a strike is declared illegal, workers lose their wages during that period. On the other hand, when a lock-out is declared illegal, the Act provides that the employer has to pay a fine of Rs 50 per day. The amount is so paltry that employers need not bother about the legality of a lock-out before they declare one. At the time of writing this paper a situation of this sort is developing in West Bengal. Trade unions and employer organisations in tea are unable to come to an understanding over the issue for bonus. The last negotiations held, in late September 2001, were inconclusive, as the employers could not reach an agreement to negotiate the quantum of bonus to be given during Dussera (in late October). It is interesting to note that right from the time the negotiations began, in early September, the employers’ organisations declared that if negotiations failed, they would declare ‘no work’ in the plantations. This would be similar to a lock-out, but they did not approach the Labour Department to verify if this action would be legal.

In fact, a more effective means of implementing the provisions is through collective bargaining. The successive sessions of the Committee on Plantations of the ILO have emphasised that collective bargaining should be regarded as a means of improving the living and working conditions of plantation workers. In most plantations it can be found that whatever little is achieved through these legislations it is because of workers’ collective action. These include demands for repair of houses, improving water supply in the labour lines, canteen facilities, etc. Hence, one of the means of ensuring implementation of the provisions of the Plantation Labour Act could be by strengthening bi-partite collective bargaining.

A major presumption for the above would be that both workers and their trade unions are aware of what the laws provide. Surprising though it may seem, very few of the actors involved are aware of what the Act actually provides for the workers. This came to our knowledge when, a few years ago, we (the author and two associates) wrote two manuals on the rights of tea plantation workers. This project was supported by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. The manuals lay down in simple language what the relevant
Acts provided. These included the Plantation Labour Act, Maternity Benefit Act, Payment of Wages Act, Acts relating to provident and gratuity and the Industrial Disputes Act.

We found, to our surprise, that though these manuals were targeted at the ordinary worker, it was the local trade union leaders who found these more useful because they too did not know the exact details of these Acts. Later, after circulating these manuals for a year, we held three-day training programmes for grass-root level trade unionists in Dooars and Darjeeling in which around 50 workers participated each year. We were convinced about the lack of information regarding these Acts. Women workers, we found, were particularly ill-informed about their rights regarding maternity benefits. Therefore, mere passing of legislations and leaving their implementation to the good offices of bureaucrats is not sufficient. Workers and trade unions must be aware of what the law holds for them; only, then can they ensure that the legislations have meaning.

A major absence in legal provisions relate to child labour and safety measures for workers. As noted earlier, this is the only industry where employment of children is legally permitted. There is an urgent need to ban the employment of children in the plantations. The official sources, relating to the permanent category of child labour, are around 50,000 (see Table 5.11). If we take into account children who are employed as temporary workers the figure may double. V. Xaxa’s (1996) study on Assam showed this trend. We will find that a hundred thousand children are employed in this industry.

Another problem facing plantation workers is that there is no legislation relating to protection while applying chemicals such as fertilisers, pesticides, weedicides etc. The Plantation Labour Act makes it mandatory for employers to provide protective clothing to field workers. These include umbrellas, canvas sheets that are wrapped around the waists to prevent damage of clothing while plucking, jute sacks or cane baskets to collect the leaves and warm clothes during winter. However, no provision is made for protection against the harmful effects of chemicals while at work. When the Act was passed in 1951, use of inorganic fertilisers and chemicals was not prevalent. During the past two decades the use of these have increased rapidly as a means of increasing production. Spraying of pesticides and other chemicals that are harmful to humans is done mainly by the adolescent workers. It is not uncommon to find these young people wrapping their noses with handkerchiefs while performing their work. These pieces of cloth hardly provide adequate protection to the workers.

In fact, in 1991 a Bill was introduced in Parliament which, if passed, would contain both provisions, namely, minimum age of employment as 15 years, and protection while handling chemical substances. However, the Bill has not gone past the stage of introduction. Though ten years have passed since its introduction, the Parliament has not thought it necessary to even have a cursory discussion on its provisions.
12. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS: THE BASIS OF A SOCIAL DIALOGUE

The present problems of plantation workers have their roots in the historic process of the plantation system. During the early years, plantations faced the problem of labour shortage but they did not allow a labour market to develop in order to keep wages low. Plantations preferred to employ a captive labour force that would be bound to work at the low wages offered.

In order to perpetuate such a system, the employers had to ensure that first, local labour, even if available, was not employed. These people would have better bargaining power and, if they felt the wages offered were not adequate, they could return to their previous occupations. Migrant labour was, therefore, seen as one of the means of having a captive labour force.

Secondly, the regions surrounding the plantations had to remain backward so that the labour force had no source of employment other than work on the plantation. Local industries, which would cater to the needs of the large labour force, could have developed but the planters did not encourage these. They preferred to import all their requirements from elsewhere. These included goods required by the workers such as umbrellas, canvas sheets, jute sacks, cloth, etc. This prevented the development of local industries which could produce these items. The only industry that did develop was transport. In this way the planters ensured that the regions outside the plantations remained undeveloped, and the plantations emerged as enclaves within a backward region.

The above methods may have served the objectives of the planters of having a captive labour force, but when this system continued even after labour shortage was overcome, it created new problems for plantation workers and their families. The large numbers of unemployed within the families of the workers looked towards the plantations for gainful employment. The employers were again at an advantage because now they could continue to keep wages low by employing family members of the workers. Many of these people work as casual labour on the plantations. The employers use this as another means of keeping wages low. They indicate to the permanent workers that if they demand higher wages the number of temporary workers will be reduced. Such a move will decrease the family income, as fewer members will be employed. Hence, even though there is a labour market, it is heavily tilted in favour of the employers.

This situation can be improved to some extent if some basic measures are taken. First, there is a need to create new avenues of employment for the family members/dependants of plantation workers. Education is an important means of achieving this and there is an urgent need for ensuring that educational facilities are made available in or near plantations. The lack of proper education of the children of plantation workers is bound to affect their occupational mobility in the future. These children, like their parents,
will be doomed to work as plantation workers, more often as casual labour, with little or no possibilities of their moving to better, or skilled, occupations.

It is also necessary to establish centres where technical training can be given to the new generation so that they can take up other activities. It is significant that there are no technical institutes like the Industrial Training Institutes in the plantation regions, though the younger generation urgently need these. Therefore, development of educational facilities, right from the primary level onwards, is an important issue which both trade unions and employers must urgently address.

Second, greater stress has to be laid on the development of the areas outside the plantations. This will create more avenues of employment near plantations. It will also reduce the isolation of the plantations. Here, too, trade unions and other development agencies, including the state governments, can play important role in pushing this idea through.

Third, the cultural development of plantation workers is a long-neglected area. Their living conditions need to be improved. The government needs to show greater involvement in this process. Most of the plantation workers belong to the Scheduled Tribes or Scheduled Castes. In Assam, they are denied this status despite the fact that these workers belong to these communities in their places of origin, namely, Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. Even in the other states where they have migrated such as West Bengal and Tripura they have been given the status of Scheduled Tribes. The communities we are referring to are Oraon, Munda, Santhal, Kharia, etc. In the early 1980s plantation labour were given the status of More Other Backward Classes, which basically denies their being tribal. There are no special programmes for the development of these people. In Tamil Nadu, a majority of plantation workers belong to the Scheduled Castes but the state government has failed to initiate special programmes for their upliftment.

Finally, while discussing the issue of social dialogue, the employers must try and understand the vulnerable position of the plantation workers. They should try and analyse why despite several decades of progress of the industry and a steady increase in the prices of tea, plantation workers have remained less developed and isolated. Several factors are responsible for this situation but the most important is the apathetic attitude of the employers towards labour welfare. Unfortunately, though managements by and large are recognising that labour can be an asset through development of human resources, managements in tea are still living in a pre-industrial age. They seem to be unable to comprehend that labour welfare is not a drain on their coffers. It could in fact lead to higher productivity which is something that this industry badly needs if it wants to increase production to meet the growing demand for tea.
Table 5.1: Production of Tea (selected countries)  
in 000 kg.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>780,227</td>
<td>810,613</td>
<td>870,405</td>
<td>749,417</td>
<td>784,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>258,969</td>
<td>277,428</td>
<td>280,656</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>53,406</td>
<td>53,495</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>593,386</td>
<td>613,366</td>
<td>625,000</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>257,162</td>
<td>220,722</td>
<td>294,165</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Tea Board 2001  
Source: Tea Board 2000: 180

Table 5.2: Exports of Tea (selected countries)  
in 000 kg

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>161,696</td>
<td>202,995</td>
<td>205,659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>233,573</td>
<td>257,273</td>
<td>265,305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>26,146</td>
<td>25,155</td>
<td>22,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>169,670</td>
<td>202,464</td>
<td>217,152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>244,226</td>
<td>198,375</td>
<td>263,023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Tea Board 2001  
Source: Tea Board 2000: 183

Table 5.3: Area under Tea (selected countries)  
in hectares

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>411,335</td>
<td>420,500</td>
<td>433,759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>221,498</td>
<td>221,619</td>
<td>194,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>46,588</td>
<td>47,677</td>
<td>48,587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>1,044,522</td>
<td>1,060,530</td>
<td>1,076,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>85,420</td>
<td>100,629</td>
<td>117,350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tea Board 2000: 179
Table 5.4: Yield per Hectare (selected countries)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1,070</td>
<td>1,221</td>
<td>1,461</td>
<td>1,794</td>
<td>1,861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>869</td>
<td>901</td>
<td>858</td>
<td>1,090</td>
<td>1,447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>821</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>928</td>
<td>946</td>
<td>1,146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>712</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>1,152</td>
<td>2,039</td>
<td>2,507</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tea Board 2000: 182

Table 5.5: Production of Tea in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>400,732</td>
<td>402,617</td>
<td>423,965</td>
<td>425,115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>158,825</td>
<td>157,522</td>
<td>164,768</td>
<td>170,158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>117,520</td>
<td>117,915</td>
<td>115,840</td>
<td>130,179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>63,127</td>
<td>64,778</td>
<td>61,581</td>
<td>69,776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other States</td>
<td>12,690</td>
<td>13,184</td>
<td>13,871</td>
<td>14,803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>752,895</td>
<td>756,016</td>
<td>780,140</td>
<td>810,031</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tea Board 2000: 11-12
* For total production for the years 1998-2000 see Table 1

Table 5.6: Area under Tea in Hectares

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>182,325</td>
<td>203,038</td>
<td>226,883</td>
<td>227,120</td>
<td>229,843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>88,409</td>
<td>93,971</td>
<td>100,971</td>
<td>99,967</td>
<td>103,008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>36,646</td>
<td>37,039</td>
<td>38,108</td>
<td>48,854</td>
<td>49,671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>37,271</td>
<td>35,039</td>
<td>34,688</td>
<td>36,817</td>
<td>36,817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other States</td>
<td>13,775</td>
<td>12,969</td>
<td>14,112</td>
<td>12,668</td>
<td>14,955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>365,516</td>
<td>383,629</td>
<td>414,381</td>
<td>425,968</td>
<td>434,294</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tea Board 2000: 5
Table 5.7: Age of Tea Bushes as Percentage of the Total (1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Below 10 Years</th>
<th>11 to 30 Years</th>
<th>31 to 40 Years</th>
<th>Over 50 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: computed from Tea Board 2000: 26-27

Table 5.8: Yield per Hectare (in kg)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>1,227</td>
<td>1,603</td>
<td>1,764</td>
<td>1,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>1,176</td>
<td>1,488</td>
<td>1,589</td>
<td>1,652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>1,661</td>
<td>2,262</td>
<td>2,406</td>
<td>2,621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>1,164</td>
<td>1,622</td>
<td>1,715</td>
<td>1,895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North India</td>
<td>1,175</td>
<td>1,526</td>
<td>1,679</td>
<td>1,749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South India</td>
<td>1,398</td>
<td>1,965</td>
<td>2,107</td>
<td>2,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1,221</td>
<td>1,605</td>
<td>1,768</td>
<td>1,865</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tea Board 2000: 15, 16

Table 5.9: Permanent Workers (India)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>559,801</td>
<td>567,398</td>
<td>572,311</td>
<td>579,803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>258,448</td>
<td>258,179</td>
<td>252,103</td>
<td>243,768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>114,105</td>
<td>110,749</td>
<td>107,091</td>
<td>113,036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>75,745</td>
<td>72,282</td>
<td>77,775</td>
<td>74,776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other States</td>
<td>20,595</td>
<td>20,179</td>
<td>20,371</td>
<td>20,884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1,028,694</td>
<td>1,028,787</td>
<td>1,029,651</td>
<td>1,032,267</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tea Board 2000: 145-146
### Table 5.10: Labour in the Four Major Tea Producing States According to Categories (1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Non-Adult</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>281,171</td>
<td>258,315</td>
<td>40,317</td>
<td>579,803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>113,926</td>
<td>122,233</td>
<td>7,609</td>
<td>243,769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>49,995</td>
<td>62,973</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>113,036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>34,365</td>
<td>39,592</td>
<td>819</td>
<td>74,776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India*</td>
<td>490,187</td>
<td>492,899</td>
<td>49,181</td>
<td>1,032,267</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes all tea growing areas in the country

### Table 5.11: Non-Adult/Child Labour in the Four Major Tea Producing States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>42,458</td>
<td>43,537</td>
<td>40,317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>10,616</td>
<td>10,956</td>
<td>7,609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India*</td>
<td>54,899</td>
<td>55,554</td>
<td>49,181</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes all tea growing areas in the country

### Table 5.12: Daily Wages of Tea Plantation Workers in Four States (in Rs/Paise) on 31.12.1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Adult</th>
<th>Non-Adult</th>
<th>Adult: 26 days</th>
<th>Non-Adult: 26 days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assam*</td>
<td>34.10</td>
<td>17.07</td>
<td>886.60</td>
<td>443.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal*</td>
<td>31.80</td>
<td>21.15</td>
<td>826.80</td>
<td>549.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>62.63</td>
<td>42.85</td>
<td>1,628.38</td>
<td>1,114.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>64.19</td>
<td>49.64</td>
<td>1,666.31</td>
<td>1,290.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Workers in Assam and West Bengal are given cereals at subsidised rates as part of their wages.

*Source: Tea Board 2000: 155-159*
REFERENCES


Tea Board 1989, *Eighth Five Year Plan (1989-90 to 1994-95)*, Calcutta, Tea Board of India


_____ 2001, Downloaded from [teaindia.com](http://teaindia.com), (2 September 2001).
