CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Millions of people of the world today begin their days with fresh and steaming cups of tea. It is because tea is the cheapest, non-alcoholic but stimulating beverage, causing insignificant or no harm to human system. India happens to be the largest producer of this beverage. It is an invaluable asset to this country. It provides employment to millions of Indians. It earns considerable amount of foreign exchange for the country.

Tea holds a position of paramount importance in Indian economy. It is an export commodity produced in the agricultural sector of the country. It is an important item of her industrial production. The output of hundreds of thousand pounds of tea annually is a mass production by any standard and represents a money value of several million rupees. In terms of employment, it provides work to more than a million people. The excise and export duties, income from local taxes and also the income tax, contribute several million rupees to the State exchequer. Moreover, in the field of foreign export and foreign exchange earnings which are so much indispensable for the future development of the country, the annual contribution of tea has only been surpassed by jute. Tea earns about one-fifth of the
country's total annual foreign exchange earnings.

Tea is a plantation agriculture and an agro-based industry. The processing of tea comprises of a chain of operations starting with the selection of seeds, preparation of nursery beds, scientific manuring, pruning, weeding, plucking, withering, fermenting and roasting of leaves, sorting, grading etc. These operations have been effectively combined into the plantation form of enterprise, which allows operation of managerial techniques in the handling of a large scale agricultural product and its subsequent manufacturing processing.

By its very nature, a tea plantation requires initial investment of a large amount of capital for the first layout of a plantation to its subsequent operations and maintenance. It has been estimated that to become economic, a plantation should have an annual output of at least 100,000 pounds of green leaf in a year. Such harvesting naturally means a plantation size of 250-300 acres, depending on the per acre outturn. Plantation of such a large area, maintenance of a large labour force within a tea estate and installation of modern sophisticated machineries for the factory, could only be met by large units of production, organised on the basis of joint stock companies. These
limited companies constitute an important section of the stock exchange markets with capacities of handling huge amount of capital circulated in various industries. Since this industry was originally established in India by enterprising British pioneers, backed by English capital, the industry, even at the present day, is largely in the hands of foreign business houses of London and 75% of tea production is controlled directly by a limited number of agency houses of these foreign firms.

Another special feature of this plantation industry in India is its contribution to the cultural geography of the region. When tea was first introduced in this country, the plantation areas were covered with dense and rather inhospitable forest environments. Vast areas were cleared for plantation and a large labour force from other physical environment had to be brought in as the plantation areas were then practically uninhabited. These have given rise to the gradual emergence of a new type of landscape, resulting from the intermixture of cultural ideas of various people, coming from different socio-economic strata of the country and now obliged to live in the semi-urban isolation from their original tribal agricultural communities. The subject therefore covers a vast field of study. It includes a knowledge of
Tea of commerce is obtained by the processing of two leaves and a bud from a tea plant, which requires acquired skill.

A typical tea plantation in the Doosars.
geography, economics, commercial organisations, etc. Besides, it requires a working knowledge of plantation techniques, labour legislation, trade unionism, social psychology and internal and international trade procedures. All these functions are to be satisfactorily performed for the setting up of an ideal tea plantation.

Consumption of tea is rapidly increasing in India. The internal consumption would likely to increase substantially at the end of Fourth Plan. About the feasibility of increased home consumption of tea, the government and the producers hold opposite views. The former, in their eagerness to augment foreign export, disfavour any bulk increase in home consumption while the latter look upon the ever-expanding internal market of tea as an excellent opportunity to stabilise their plantation in the face of the existing uncertain price fluctuations in the international market.

Tea covers many fields of the country's activity. It is grown in various parts of the world under various conditions of soils and climate. Therefore, an exhaustive study of tea production in all its aspects even if possible, is not practicable. In India, the Dooars is a very important tea producing centre noted for its high yield per acre, the amount produced and also for its quality. It has, therefore, been decided to restrict the study to the tea producing
region of the Doors. The Doors, in a true sense, covers the area lying east of the Tista river in Jalpaiguri District, but for the completeness of the study, the area lying in the west of the river has also been taken into consideration. Thus, the Doors, in the present study, means the whole of the Jalpaiguri District.

Object:

The object of the work is to study the different aspects of the tea industry. First, it analyses the graphical environments of the Doors, which are related to the growth and production of tea and to establish a relationship between the geographical features and the quantum of tea production. Secondly, it analyses the various economic aspects of tea production, namely the land, the labour, the capital and the organisation, and examines the special feature, necessitated by the industry. Lastly, the study deals with the different cultural factors associated with the production of tea and their influence on the inhabitants of the Doors.

Scope:

The scope of the study is necessarily very wide, because it covers a very diverse field thus producing effects of varying nature - sometimes very
prominent and readily deducible and sometimes very faint.

In the physical section, the contribution of the various geographical factors, viz., climate, soil etc. upon the production of tea has been estimated and their role on the local distribution of population has been assessed.

In the economic portion, the interaction of the special features of the tea industry on the various agencies of production, has been estimated. A survey has also been made on the problems of the existing labour-employer relationship with special reference to the State's intervention in labour welfare.

In the cultural section, the changing cultural contour of the Dooars with the introduction and development of tea plantation has been assessed, specially with reference to the impact of the tea industry on the changing landscape of the area. The influx of a large number of tribal labour required for running the tea plantations and its contribution to the changing pattern of the landscape have also been discussed.

**Method:**

For a study like this, no single method appears to be satisfactory. As the tea industry is an
old commercial enterprise in India, there are available resource materials, reports, findings etc. on the plantation, manufacturing techniques, etc. of tea production. Apart from some standard books on tea, few geographical and economic materials, there are the annual reports of the Indian Tea Association, Indian Tea Planters' Association, the Statistical Surveys of the Tea Board, etc. of much value. The publications of the Tea Research Institute of Tocklai and the dictionary published by them, contain a lot of very valuable information. These materials have been found to be very useful for formulating a theoretical framework. Besides, statistical data have been collected from the decennial census reports specially of 1951 and 1961, published by the Government of West Bengal.

As a supplement to this theoretical study, repeated field surveys were undertaken in the Doiars in various seasons for several years, with a view to correlate the theoretical framework with actual geographical and cultural conditions prevailing there. A number of selected tea gardens and some village settlements adjacent to them have been studied and data regarding their socio-cultural activities have been collected. Besides, a detailed questionnaire
(pro-forma given in the appendix) has been issued to various tea estates to gather information from the planters. Materials have been compiled from these questionnaires. Lastly, interviews were arranged with the leading tea planters in the Dooars and with some very old persons residing there.

Problems and Difficulties:

Several problems and difficulties were confronted during the theoretical and practical studies on the subject. First, the bulk of the tea plantations are controlled by Public Limited Companies under Indian and non-Indian managements, who keep their working, production data, profit figures etc. as closely guarded secrets. Besides, little care is taken for the collection and recording of the relevant geographical data by them as compared to financial matters. Secondly, since the Chinese Aggression in December 1962, the entire area has been pushed back behind a sort of iron-curtain apparently on military and strategic grounds. Even simple outline maps of the district have been marked "restricted" and access to them has been denied. Hedged between these proprietary and political prohibitions, the field study of the Dooars has become problematic. Lastly, the study has been hampered due to the difficult nature of the terrain. Most of the tea estates are located miles
away from the main road or railway link, inside dense jungles, leading to communication and transport difficulties. The peak season for tea coincides with the rainiest months of June to August, when bad roads and floods made matters worst. The friction of space is said to work adversely against the tea industry in the Doors.

FIELD DIARY

First Visit:

4th July, 1966; Left Calcutta and arrived at Jalpaiguri at 2 P.M. and met some tea planters at Jalpaiguri.

5th July: interviewed some of the tea planters.

6th July: consulted some maps and compiled data from the Indian Tea Planters' Association Library.

7th July: - do -

8th July: - do -

9th July: - do -

10th July: Departure from Jalpaiguri at 9 A.M. for Locksan Tea Estate by car. Arrived at the estate at 2:45 P.M. and investigated the manufacturing procedure of the factory.

11th July: visited the garden works, factory, hospital creche, school and labour quarters.
12th July: - do -
13th July: - do -
14th July: Departure from the tea estate by
car for Ramjhore Tea Estate at 9 A.M.
Arrived there at 1 P.M. and visited the
factory works and discussed with the
manager on various problems.
15th July: visited the garden works, factory
and the office to collect data.
16th July: visited the labour quarters and
interviewed them.
17th July: Departure from the tea estate at
6 A.M. by car and arrived at Jalpaiguri
at 10-30 A.M. and returned to Calcutta
at 3-30 P.M.

Second Visit:
7th December, 1966: Started from Calcutta at
9-45 A.M. and arrived at Jalpaiguri at
2.00 P.M. and met some of the tea
planters residing there.
8th December: started for Anandpur Tea Estate
at 10-30 A.M. by car and arrived there
at 6-30 P.M.
9th December: visited the garden works, factory,
office and the hospital, for the collec-
tion of data and other information.
10th December: visited the labour quarters and interviewed them.

11th December: visited the hospital and labour quarters and interviewed the doctors and the labourers.

12th December: started for Kalchini Tea Estate at 10-30 A.M. and arrived there at 1-00 P.M. Visited the garden and factory works.

13th December: interviewed the labourers and visited their Aghan-Paurab - a festival of the tribals.

14th December: interviewed the labourers.

15th December: departure from the tea estate at 9-00 A.M. and arrived at Malangi (Hasimara) Tea Estate at 11-45 A.M. by car. Visited the labour houses, garden and the factory works.

16th December: - do -

17th December: departure at 6-00 A.M. from the tea estate and back to Jalpaiguri at 10-45 A.M. Started for Calcutta at 11-45 A.M.

Third Visit:

6th May, 1967: Started from Calcutta at 9-45 A.M. and arrived at Jalpaiguri at 2-00 P.M.
and met some of the tea planters residing there.

7th May: Started from Jalpaiguri station at 7-30 A.M. by train and arrived at Falakata station at 11-05 A.M. Started for Gopalpur Tea Estate and arrived there at 2-00 P.M. Visited the garden and factory works.

8th May: interviewed the labourers at their quarters.

9th May: — do —

10th May: Left Gopalpur Tea Estate for Dalgaon railway station at 11-30 A.M. and arrived at Nagrakata railway station at 2-15 P.M. Started for Bimandanga Tea Estate and arrived there at 4-00 P.M.

11th May: visited the garden, witnessed the devastations occurred by the recent flood and transportation of the tea chests by elephants and boats.

12th May: visited the labour quarters and Tondu Tea Estate and Tondu village. Interviewed the local people engaged in the production of tea.

13th May: departure from Tondu Tea Estate at 7-30 A.M. and arrived at Jalpaiguri at
1-30 P.M. Attended the Fiftytwo Annual General Meeting of the Indian Tea Planter’s Association held at 3-00 P.M. in Jogesh Memorial Hall, and interviewed some reputed tea planters, scientists and labour officers of different tea companies. Started for Good Hope Tea Estate at 7-30 P.M. and arrived there at 9-30 P.M.

14th May: visited the garden and the labour quarters and interviewed them.

15th May: visited Rupali Tea Estate and the labourers were interviewed. Visited Malbazar and interviewed some persons there engaged in the occupation other than tea.

16th May: - do -

17th May: departure from Rupali Tea Estate and arrived at Mal at 7-00 A.M. and departed from there by bus and arrived at Jalpaiguri at 11-00 A.M. Returned to Calcutta at 3-45 P.M.

Fourth Visit:

5th January, 1968: Arrived at Jalpaiguri at 1-00 P.M. Collected data from Indian Tea Planters' Association Library.
6th January: Started for Mujnai Tea Estate at 8-00 A.M. and arrived there at 1-15 P.M. Visited the labour houses and interviewed the persons residing there.

7th January: visited the labour houses, adjacent village dwellings and carried investigations on the off-season garden activities. Interviewed the people engaged in various occupation. Witnessed a marriage ceremony of an Oraon family.

8th January: departure from Mujnai Tea Estate at 8-00 A.M. and arrived at Sibarpur tea garden at 2-00 P.M. Visited the labour quarters, interviewed them and the dwellings adjacent to the tea estate.

9th January: - do -

10th January: departure from the tea estate at 8-30 A.M. and arrived at Jalpaiguri at 11-00 A.M. Returned to Calcutta at 2-45 P.M.

Fifth Visit:

18th April, 1968: started from Calcutta and arrived at Jalpaiguri at 1-45 P.M. Started from there to Ranicherra Tea Estate at 2-30 P.M. and arrived there
at 5-30 P.M. Interviewed the manager and discussed the present problems of the tea industry.

19th April: visited the factory and garden works and collected data from the office.

20th April: visited the adjacent village dwellings and interviewed the dwellers.

21st April: visited Syile Tea Estate, the labour houses, factory and interviewed the residents of the tea estate.

22nd April: - do -

23rd April: departure from Ranicherra Tea Estate at 9-00 A.M. and arrived at Falakata at 11-00 A.M. Started from Falakata to Kadambini Tea Estate and arrived there at 11-30 A.M. Visited the garden works and the office materials, irrigation works etc. Visited the market (Hut) at Falakata.

24th April: visited the labour quarters and interviewed the labourers.

25th April: started from Kadambini Tea Estate at 7-00 A.M. and arrived at Falakata and then returned back to Jalpsiguri at 11-30 A.M.

26th April: started from Jalpsiguri at 2-00 P.M. by car and arrived at Alipur-Duar at 7-00 P.M.
27th April: collected data for transport, industries etc. at Alipur-Duar and started for Kohinoor Tea Estate at 2-00 P.M. by car and arrived there at 5-00 P.M. Interviewed with the local union leaders, sardars and coolies of the garden.

28th April: visited the garden works, factory and the labour quarters and interviewed the labourers.

29th April: visited Santalpur village, interviewed the residents of the village. Visited Shamuktola but (market), interviewed the people purchasing and selling different commodities. Spent one night with a Santal family at Santalpur.

30th April: visited Dhwajhora Tea Estate and interviewed the residents of the estate. Spent one night with a Oraon family at Kohinoor garden.

1st May: visited Jainti Tea Estate and interviewed the plantation labourers. Visited one Caro bustee situated a mile away (in the north) from Jainti Tea Estate and interviewed the people. Returned to Kohinoor Tea Estate at 10-30 P.M.
2nd May: visited Rydak Tea Estate and interviewed the residents of the tea estate and adjacent village dwellers.

3rd May: started from Kobinoor Tea Estate at 6-00 A.M. and returned back to Jalpaiguri at 11-15 A.M. Back to Calcutta at 3-00 P.M.

**Sixth Visit:**

12th June, 1968: Left Calcutta and arrived at Jalpaiguri at 2-00 P.M.

13th June: started for Gurjanjhore Tea Estate at 12-30 P.M. and reached there at 3-00 P.M. Visited the factory works and the labour quarters.

14th June: interviewed the plantation labourers, adjacent village dwellers and the residents of the tea estate.

15th June: collected data from the office records. Visited the adjacent village and returned back to Jalpaiguri from Mal at 5-00 P.M.

16th June: visited the Saraswatipur but (market) and returned back to Jalpaiguri at 5-00 P.M.
17th June: visited Sikherpur tea garden and returned to Jalpaiguri at 7:00 P.M.
18th June: Returned to Calcutta at 2:45 P.M.