Chapter-VI
SUMMARY OF THE MAIN CONCLUSIONS

1.1. The ownership and production structures in the tea plantations have changed in recent decades and the emergence of Small Tea Plantations are the offshoot of such new trends in countries like India, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Indonesia, Nepal etc. Now, plantations cannot be considered as a 'lopsided development' of regional economy, which grows in isolation from its surrounding regions, popularly termed as 'the enclave economy'.

1.2. Unlike the traditional plantations, the Small Tea Plantations have set some new ideas and directions of research in the field of plantation economy. To mention a few:

   a. Owner-worker relations in the Small gardens have replaced the traditional labour relations that were based on social hierarchy in the estate gardens;

   b. Division of final production of tea between farm and BLFs or CPFs;

   c. Employment of local labour instead of migrated labour and preference of direct recruitment of workers over other methods particularly recruitment through the middlemen.

   d. Large-scale units of production (estate farms) have been replaced by Small-scale production replaced by; individual ownership (small family farms etc.) of land in lieu of corporate or company ownership etc.

   e. This may better be termed as 'subaltern economy', which finds favour particularly with the marginal and small farm owners.

1.3. The definition of Small Tea Plantations varies with one institution to other and from one country to another country. In India, the Tea Board of India gives the most precise definition: it is "as a landholding of 25 acres (10.12 hectares) under tea cultivation". As per North Bengal Small Tea Planters' Association, below 100 acres of plantation are considered as Small Tea Plantations. Land Reforms Department, Government of West Bengal considers a holding of 24.20 acres (7 hectares) as Small Tea Garden.
1.4. The emergence of Small Tea Plantations is of very recent origins. This is because most of the land that was considered suitable for tea cultivation was already occupied by the Large Tea Plantations in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. These can be called the traditional areas of tea cultivation whereas Small Tea Plantations have emerged beyond the traditional tracts of tea cultivation. Though, the Small Tea Plantations emerged in early 1960s in India, their concentration was mainly found in South Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. It is only in late 1980s or early 1990s these were introduced in the two leading tea-producing states of Northern India of Assam and West Bengal (except Himachal Pradesh). Subsequently, these emerged beyond the traditional tea growing areas in India and states like Bihar, Uttarakhal, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland, etc. are the new entrants in the tea map of India.

1.5. Today, as per the Tea Board (2005) sources, there are 126,256 Small Tea Growers with a collective holding of 106,748 hectares and the production of 180 million kg against the total production of 857 million kg tea in India, which is around twenty-two per cent of the total tea production in India. There are 514 BLFs and 24 CPFs in India located in different small holding tea growing areas in the country. The average farm size in Small Tea Plantations is about 1.83 acre in India. The highest numbers of Small Tea Growers are found in the state Tamil Nadu with 61985 followed by Assam and West Bengal with 42492 and 8398 respectively.

1.6. In North Bengal, These Small Tea Plantations are mainly located in three localities of North Bengal i.e. Islampur subdivision, district Uttar Dinajpur; Khoribari-Phansidewa blocks of district Darjeeling and Rajganj, Jalpaiguri Sadar, Mainaguri and Dhupguri blocks, district Jalpaiguri. The Mekhliganj block of district Cooch Behar is an added flavour of Small Tea Plantations today. In the Islampur sub division, district Uttar Dinajpur alone, there are three hundred and nine Small Tea Plantations, as per the Land Reforms Department of West Bengal, 2001. The average farm size in Small Tea Plantations is 11 acres in Islampur subdivision.

1.7. Before the introduction of tea plantation on small farms, most of the farmers used to grow pineapple in North Bengal. The main reasons for switching over to
tea cultivation are the paucity of available market for pineapple. Moreover, in the absence of proper market and processing technology, the pineapple growers had to face a lot of difficulties for selling their products to far off places like Delhi, Kanpur, Agra, Nagpur, and Kolkata etc. Consequently, it was inadvertently involving an army of middlemen each taking a share of the produce. Thus, the resultant outcome was the emergence and spread of Small Tea Plantations in the last two decades of the twentieth century.

1.8. For the present study, the land holding size up to 25 acres (10.12 hectares) have been considered as Small Tea Plantation. However, for analytical purposes, the Small Tea Plantations have been further categorized under three sub groups as Family Farms (less than 5 acres), Owner-Supervisory Farms (5-15 acres), and Staff-Supervisory Farms (15-25 acres).

1.9. Micro level ecological variations in terms of the soil quality, texture, fertility, ground water level, slope etc. play an important role in the localisation of particular economic activity. On the bases of these ecological variation the study area can be divided into two distinct ecological zones: the Dangis (high lands) and the Nichanparas (low-lying areas). Corresponding to these ecological variations these regions have two distinct economic characteristics. Plantations are most popular in the Dangis, hence these have predominance of the plantation households and the Nichanparas have traditional agriculture hence these have predominance of non-plantation households. Plantation Labour Household Economy, consisting the study of labour households associated with the Small Tea Plantations, and Non-Plantation Labour Household Economy comprises the non-associated labour households (engaged other agricultural work).

2.1. The Islampur subdivision (study area) is basically transferred from the State of Bihar. The territory consisting of 906 villages in 3 police stations with a population of 270,666 spreading over 732.88 sq. km were transferred to the district West Dinajpur. The Islampur subdivision comprises of five community development blocks namely: Chopra, Islampur, Goalpokhar-I, Goalpokhar-II, and Karandighi with a total area of 1732.82 sq. km. Islampur town is the headquarters of the subdivision, under the district of Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal. The
distribution of Small Tea Plantations is found only in three blocks i.e. Chopra, Islampur, and Goalpokhar-I.

2.2. Geographically, the state of West Bengal can be divided into five broad regions, viz., Northern Hilly, North Bengal Plain, Central Plain, Coastal Plain and Western Undulating Terrain. The Islampur subdivision too is a part of district Uttar Dinajpur, North Bengal Plains.

2.3. The smaller streams, namely Berrong, Douk, Raba, Dalucha, Sariano, Pitano, Sudano and Bolhakaur, form the main drainage channels in the Islampur subdivision. Among the major rivers, the Mahananda forms the northern boundary of the region whereas the Nagar River forms its south-eastern boundary. Most of the streams forming the local drainage network in the area are seasonal or ephemeral in nature. The climate of the area is tropical per-humid with mean annual temperature of 24.4° C and mean annual rainfall of 3628 mm. The soils of Islampur subdivision fall under the group of Teesta Alluvium.

2.4. The total forest area in the subdivision is 720.3 hectares. The forest cover in Islampur subdivision is distributed over three blocks only i.e. Chopra, Islampur, and Karandighi with an area of 576.8 hectares, 13.5 hectares, and 130.0 hectares respectively. It is a reflection of local topographic variation between the Dangis and the Nichanparas. The proportion of area not available for cultivation is relatively high in the subdivision with a total area of 38822.7 hectares and the block-wise distribution of this category land is highest in Chopra block with 13890.2 hectares. The number of tea growers and area under Small Tea Plantations is also highest in Chopra block.

2.5. The total area of Islampur subdivision is 1751.80 sq. km. and out of this 16.11 sq. km. is urban. Thus, the subdivision is predominantly rural. There are two towns i.e. Islampur and Dalkhola in Islampur subdivision with population of 52738 and 13895 respectively. Both the towns are agro-based commercial centres engaged in transaction of jute and related products. The share of urban population in Islampur subdivision is 5.09 per cent. The level of literacy in the study area is again depressing and it has only 29.59 per cent literacy. The variations within the subdivision are also equally discouraging. In fact, with the exception of the two urban centres, literacy rate in the subdivision is below 29 per cent. The low literacy clearly indicates abundance of unskilled workforce in the
study area, which is also responsible for weak bargaining power of the workers in relation to the working conditions in the tea gardens.

2.6. Approximately 27 per cent population is scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in Islampur subdivision. *Rajbanshis* are majority among scheduled caste population in the study area as well as entire North Bengal. The second largest component in the population is composed of Muslims, and the overwhelming majority of the Muslims belonged to a differentiated cultivating or peasant society, *adhiars* forming large proportion of that society. Among the scheduled tribes, *Mushahars* are basically local tribes and scattered over different places in the subdivision; *Santhals*, *Oraons*, are basically migrants and live on land distributed by the government.

2.7. Paddy and jute are the two main crops grown in the *Nichanparas*. Previously pineapple was an important plantation and commercial crop grown in the area but in recent years it has been replaced by tea in the *Dangis*. The infrastructure for the development of a large-scale industry is conspicuous by its absence in the subdivision. However, few *Rice Mills* are available and the other industries are *Cotton Weaving*, *Pottery*, *Bamboo and Cane products*, and *Silver and Gold ornaments*. Recently few petrol filling stations have been set up along the National Highway No. 31. One *Food Processing Unit* at Kalibari near Islampur town and one *Chemical Fertilizer Unit* at Ramganj are under progress. 12 Bought-Leaf Factories have come up in Islampur subdivision and these factories are fully dependent on the supply of green leaf from the Small Tea Plantations in the study area.

2.8. The percentage distribution of main workers has declined in the study area as well as in all the blocks over the decade from 1991 to 2001, but the interesting fact to notice here is that in the year 2001, the percentage of main workers is relatively high in Chopra and Islampur block (highest concentration of Small Tea Plantations) as compared to Goalpokhar-I, Goalpokhar-II and Karandighi block. As a consequence, the proportion of marginal workers is high in Goalpokhar-I, Goalpokhar-II and Karandighi block. There is gradual increase in the share of non-agricultural workforce in the study area from 1991 to 2001. The share of non-agricultural workforce is declining as one move from north to south, i.e. Chopra block in the extreme north and Karandighi block in the south. This kind of spatial
variation can be linked to the expansion of Small Tea Plantations in Islampur subdivision.

3.1. Kenya, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Nepal and India are the major countries in the world that have an emphatic presence of small tea plantations. In Kenya, the small-scale sector produces 61 per cent of country's total tea production. This is the first country to recognise and institutionalise this particular sector after it established the Kenya Tea Development Authority (now Kenya Tea Development Agency Limited) in 1964 with tight control over tea development. It was followed by Sri Lanka and it too recognised the importance of this sector and established the Tea Small Holdings Development Authority (TSHDA) in 1978 to facilitate its smooth functioning of Small Tea Plantations. Today, it is the nodal agency to implement and monitor most of the programmes related to the small tea growers. It contributes nearly 62 per cent of country’s total tea output. In Indonesia, there were 62,123 hectares of land under small tea plantations with a production of 36.5 million kg in the year 1996. In Nepal, the Small Tea Plantations are distributed over five districts of Ilam, Jhapa, Dhankuta, Panchthar and Terathum in east Nepal. Nepal had approximately 4186 hectares of land under Small Tea Plantation, with an estimated production of 1.7 million kg during the year 2001-2002. It was estimated to be around 22 per cent of country’s total tea production.

3.2. As per the available sources, only 56.77 per cent Small Tea Growers in India are registered with Tea Board of India. At the regional level, the picture is depressing e.g. in the North-East India only 12.39 per cent of the Small Tea Growers are registered with Board. It is much lower than the all North India figures of 16.99 per cent. In South India, 90.84 per cent of the Small Tea Growers are registered with the Board and the reason behind is the longer existence of the small farms in the states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. As opposed to this in the North and North-East India these farms are of recent origin and very few growers are registered with the Tea Board while most of the growers prefer to join local level Small Grower Associations.

3.3. Traditional tea growing areas in West Bengal are confined to Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts. These traditional tea-growing areas can be divided into three sub-regions namely, Darjeeling Hills, Dooars and Terai. According to the Labour
Gazette (1994), there were 275 tea estates in West Bengal with an area of 94386.62 hectares. According to some other estimates (2002), there are 277 estate gardens registered under Plantation Labour Act, covering an area of 103,950 hectares, producing about 169.90 million kg tea.

3.4. In North Bengal, initially, Small Tea Plantations started in Chopra block of district Uttar Dinajpur and from there these spread to other localities i.e. Sadar, Rajganj, Mainaguri and Malbazar in district Jalpaiguri; Islampur and Goalpokhar in district Uttar Dinajpur; and Mekliganj in district Coochbehar. Chopra is considered as the birthplace of Small Tea Plantations in North Bengal. At present (2005), there are 77 BLFs in operation in North Bengal with an annual production of 52 million kg, which contributes approximately 25 per cent of total tea produced in West Bengal.

3.5. Introduction of 'No-objection Certificate' (NOC) too proved to be a bigger hindrance in the smooth functioning of Small Tea Plantations in the entire North Bengal. According to a notification issued on 30.06.2001 (cut off date for tea plantation announced by the Government of West Bengal), there were 5941 Small Tea Growers who submitted applications for NOC to the government of West Bengal and out of these only 1699 received the NOC. As per this source, out of total number of Small Tea growers in North Bengal only 28.59 per cent have received NOC from the state government so far. In 2005, only 538 Small Tea Growers were registered with Tea Board in North Bengal. It is also proved by the field survey results that despite their best efforts there were approximately 53 per cent growers that failed to obtain the NOC till 2005.

3.6. The Tea Board of India implemented the Price-Sharing-Formula (PSF) on 1st April 2004 at all India level for the protection of Small Tea Growers, but so far it has mostly remained an exercise on paper as far as North Bengal is concerned. There are 74 total BLFs in North Bengal, out of these only 24 factories submitted returns in the month of April 2004 and then onwards it kept on reducing. The percentage of the number of BLFs submitted returns to the Tea Board shows that 32.43 per cent of the total number of factory submitted their return in the month of April 2004 and 2.70 per cent factories in the month of September 2004. No return was filled in the months from October to December in the same year. This shows the market monopoly of the BLFs in the region. The agro-extension services
provided by the Tea Board of India to the Small Tea Growers are just inadequate in nature.

3.7. The *North Bengal Small Tea Planters’ Association* was formed in the year 1994 with a leading role-played by Late Khagen Chandra Pal. Since then this organization is taking up problems faced by the small growers. It is mostly covering the tea growers up to a land holding size of 100 acres. Therefore, the small growers’ definition given by the Tea Board is not applicable in this regard. As a consequence of this confusion the tea growers below 25 acres formed another platform known as the *United Forum of Small Tea Growers’ Associations (UFSTGA)* in the year 2002 for protecting their own interests.

3.8. The first Self-Help Group of Small Growers in North Bengal was registered with the Tea Board on 21st August 2004 under the name *Panbari Small Tea Growers’ Society* at Panbari, Block-Mainaguri, District-Jalpaiguri. The first Self-Help Group in the study area was formed in the month of December and it was formally inaugurated on 24th December 2005 named as *Premchandgach Sabuj Small Tea Growers Society*, located at Premchandgach, Block-Chopra, District Uttar Dinajpur. The number of Small Tea Growers is 53 and the total tea plantation area is 132 acres spreading over four Mouzas (Census village) of Bhata-5, Ziakhuri-3, Bhagalpur-17, and Poakhali-4.

3.9. It is difficult to pin point a single factor responsible for the change of fortune, that followed after the introduction of Small Tea Plantation in the region. However, it is widely believed that the Bengali immigrants from Assam initiated the process in the late 70s of the last century. Initially the immigrants experimented with the cultivation of pineapple in the *Dangis* and subsequently in late 1980s and early 1990s they switch over to tea. It is believed that these people came to Siliguri subdivision from Assam due to some ethnic troubles there, particularly because of *Bengal-Kheda* (anti-Bengali) movement in Assam. Arjun Paul was the first person to start pineapple cultivation in Chopra block district Uttar Dinajpur in 1970’s.

3.10. There are five community development blocks in Islampur subdivision, i.e. Chopra, Islampur, Goalpokhar-I, Goalpokhar-II, and Karandighi and the Small Tea Plantations are distributed only in first three blocks. The total number of Small Tea Growers is 1930 and out of which more than 92 per cent are located in Chopra block. The total area of Small Tea Gardens in Islampur subdivision is
7333.87 acres. The block-wise distribution of area of Small Tea Gardens shows that these are 88 per cent, 11 per cent, and 1 per cent in Chopra, Islampur, and Goalpokhar-I block respectively.

4.1. Unlike the industrial sector, cash wages do not constitute the entire remuneration to labour in the tea gardens and in many cases it is supplemented by grants of cultivated land (free or for nominal payments). At times payment can be in kind or both, for example, in North-East India, rice is supplied to labour at considerably lower price than market rates towards partial payment of the wages. There were some labour recruiting agents locally known as Sardars in North-East India and Kanganie in South India. A distinct feature of recruitment in tea garden is that the unit of recruitment is the family and not the individual. As a consequence, the minimum wages are fixed on the basis of one and one half units of consumption. This criterion of fixing the wages is unheard of in other sectors where for the purpose of fixing the wages a worker the consumption of the two other members of his family are considered and included in the wage basket.

4.2. About 70 per cent of the total labour force engaged in the tea plantations consists of migrants from other states. The total number of estimated workers employed in tea plantations in India is 1,188,471 and the number of resident workers is 834,619. Though, these workers are permanently settled in the respective regions with little or no contact with their places of origin, yet they continue to be treated as outsiders or immigrants, both by the local population and as well as by the attitudes of the government officials. Their conditions have become precarious for want of well-organized trade union movement as well as foresighted political leaders. The number of bonafide dependents of resident workers in plantations is high in West Bengal with a ratio of 1:1.67. As a result, this dependent workforce migrates to Small Tea Plantations in search of regular employment throughout the year in different parts of North Bengal.

4.3. It is again interesting to note that within the tea plantation workers, there are regional variations in terms of the wages paid to the workers in different states in India. Tea workers are paid less in the states of Assam and West Bengal. The reason behind this is often cited as workers in Assam and West Bengal are given cereals at subsidized rates as part of their wages. Besides wages, workers are
given 2.2 kg of rice/wheat per day. as opposed to this, workers in south India (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka) do not get subsidized rations.

4.4. The Small Tea Plantations in North Bengal were brought under the collective bargaining process in the year 1994, when the small tea planters formed *North Bengal Small Tea Planters’ Association*. Since the inception of Small Tea Plantations, the workers started looking for an alternative system for the settlement of wages, yearly bonus, paid holidays, and working conditions etc. through the process of bipartite settlement. Unlike the tripartite agreement in the organised Tea industry, collective bargaining in the Small Tea Plantations exists through bipartite agreement between the representing Associations and Management in one hand and Trade Unions on the other. Government as the third party is conspicuous by its absence in all kinds of negotiations.

4.5. From the beginning of the Small Tea Plantations, there have been four wage agreements between workers and planters i.e. Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) dated on 08.10.1994, MoS dated on 01.11.1998, MoS dated on 07.03.2002, and MoS dated on 06.09.2005. The wages have increased from Rs. 16.70 in 1994 to Rs. 45.90 in 2005. Generally, wage rates are settled for a period of three years in every agreement.

4.6. The Bonus/Ex-gratia Agreements are settled every year just before *Durga Puja* during the months of September-October, for the preceding accounting year starting from April to March. The bonus percentage of an individual Worker is computed as: No of days worked during the preceding accounting year \times \text{Wages Rate of the year} = \text{Total Wage Money of a worker of the Preceding accounting year} \times \text{Bonus Percentage} \quad [\text{e.g.} \quad 200 \text{ Man days} \times \text{Rs.}50 = \text{Rs.}10000 \times 10 \% = \text{Rs.}1000].

The workers engaged in the different categories of gardens received all time high of 15 per cent bonus during the accounting year 1999-2000.

4.7. The Small Tea Planters pay their workers nine festival paid holidays in a year, i.e. (i) Republic Day (26th January), (ii) Holi, (iii) Id, (iv) May-Day, (v) Independence Day (15th August), (vi) Durga Puja-2 days, (vii) Kali Puja, (viii) 25th December. However, keeping the total number of holidays as nine, the list of holidays varies from one garden to another. Besides these, protective clothing is also provided to the workers, the most common forms are umbrella, apron or pullover and Hawai Chappal etc. in addition to these compensation is also paid to the workers
engaged in hazardous works like spraying etc. The work schedule is fixed through bipartite agreements and these are duty hours, thika tasks, pruning, draining, irrigation, etc.

4.8. During the field study it was noticed that the farm owners are of two types: residential and non-residential owners. The difference between the two is; while the former resides in the nearby villages adjacent to the farm and the later comes from the urban areas and manages the farms. It is interesting to note that the non-residential owners are relatively well-off and for them tea cultivation is another means of expanding and diversifying their existing business. On the other hand, residential owners are more vulnerable to market fluctuations as this is the only establishment they could stand with.

4.9. The intra-farm differences are also well marked by the differences in the cultural background of the farm owners. The local dialect Suryapuri is dominant among the owners of Family Farms and Owner-Supervisory Farms and their dominance is up to 80 and 60 per cent respectively. The number of the speakers of Suryapuri decreases with the increase in the farm-size, but the opposite is true in case of Bengali speakers. The percentage of Bengali speakers is highest in Staff-Supervisory Farms with 60 per cent. Thus, the speakers of Suryapuri are most dominant with 60 per cent, followed by Bengali and ‘others’ (tribal languages) with 33.3 and 6.7 per cent respectively.

4.10. Practicing mixed farming as a sustainable mechanism is one of the typical characteristics among the Small Tea Growers in the study area. Almost all the three categories of farms have paddy land besides tea plantation. In the Family Farms, three owners have paddy land, while in Owner-Supervisory Farms and Staff-Supervisory Farms two farm owners each have paddy land. This is indicative of some micro-level topographic variation in the study area.

4.11. The Small Tea Growers are associated with different Small Grower Association operating at the local level. Small Tea Growers in the study area too are highly unorganised as informed by the key informants in different localities. Though, out of the 15 farms surveyed, nine farm owners are affiliated to different Small Tea Grower Associations but their affiliating associations are different in their nature and approach.
4.12. The age of the farm varies significantly in the study area. The average age of Family Farms is 6.20 years; it varies between 7.80 years for Owner-Supervisory Farms and 10.20 years for Staff-Supervisory Farms. The age range between minimum and maximum to all the categories of farms is 5 to 7 years, 6 to 12 years, and 6 to 13 years respectively. This again proves the period of switch over of pineapple growers to tea cultivation in the study area.

4.13. The production of green leaf per acre is high in Owner-Supervisory Farms followed by Family Farms and Staff-Supervisory Farms with 7340 kg, 6231 kg, and 5499 kg respectively. The reason behind this is personal management and care in the Owner-Supervisory Farms. As opposed to this, the Staff-Supervisory Farms are mostly managed by monthly salaried employees and they take all decisions regarding management and technical support needed to the farm. So, their relationship with the farm is purely contractual, which means personal care which is key to plantation economy is missing in these farms. This has been sited as one of the main reason for relatively poor performance in the Staff-Supervisory farms.

4.14. The average price of green leaf per kg received by the Small Tea Growers during the year 2004 is high in Staff-Supervisory Farms, followed by Owner-Supervisory Farms and Family Farms with Rs. 8.26, Rs. 7.71, and Rs. 7.51 respectively. This kind of picture is mostly related to the existence of Farias in the study area. Family Farm and Owner-Supervisory Farm Owners are more dependent on Farias as compared to Staff-Supervisory Farm Owners.

4.15. Two types of labourers form the labour force in the Small Tea Plantations i.e. local and migrant labourers. Local labourers come from nearby villages and consists mainly Muslims and Rajbanshis (Scheduled Caste from Hindu community). Migrant labourers stay at farm quarters within the premises of the farms. There are two routes of migration; one from district Kokrajhar, Assam and another one is district Jalpaiguri West Bengal. Almost all the migrant labourers are tribal and they have migrated with their families. Method of recruitment is individual in case of local labourers and migrants are absorbed as family because they come along with their families.
4.16. *Labour absorption* rate is high in Family Farms followed by Owner-Supervisory Farms and Staff-Supervisory Farms and per acre labour absorption rate is 1.35, 1.08 and 0.91 respectively. The reason behind such results particularly in the Family Farms is related to the availability of cheap family labour for carrying many operations like manual watering or irrigation instead of sprinkle irrigation, spraying, weeding, fencing etc. in the Owner-Supervisory and Staff-Supervisory Farms.

4.17. The *average wage rate* in the Small Tea Plantations varies with the size of the farm. It is Rs. 41.60 in Family Farms, Rs. 42.18 in Owner-Supervisory Farms, and Rs. 42.96 in Staff-Supervisory Farms. This is caused by the gender differences in wage rate in the Family and Owner-Supervisory Farms. The absolute wage rate differences between male and female in Family Farms is Rs. 6.40 and Rs. 2 in Owner-Supervisory Farms. On the other hand, in Staff-Supervisory Farms both male and female are paid equal wages. Moreover, the labour relation is more formal in Staff-Supervisory Farms. There is greater involvement of trade unions to monitor the activities of these farms, which makes it mandatory for every farm owner to follow the minimum and equal wage rate principles. As opposed to this the involvement of trade union in minimum in the other two farms hence, it is noticed that the in these farms minimum and equal wage rate principles are often not adhered to.

4.18. The *effective working hours* varies in all three categories. In Family Farms the effective working hour per day per wage is 6.30 hours; it is 7.30 hours in Owner-Supervisory Farms and 7.18 hours in Staff-Supervisory Farms. Lowest effective working hour in Family Farm is mainly related to the presence of *thika* tasks on one side and piece-rated wage system on the other. The hourly payment of wage is Rs. 6.60, Rs. 5.77, and Rs. 5.98 in Family Farms, Owner-Supervisory Farms, and Staff-Supervisory Farms respectively. The average hourly wage rate in all the farms together is Rs. 5.98.

4.19. Besides the daily-rated workers in the Small Tea Plantations, there are some workers who are employed on monthly salary basis. They are commonly called as *Munsi, Supervisor, Manager, Day-Guard* etc. and it is the term which basically varies from one farm to another, though the nature of works remains almost similar. They are personally recruited in the farms on the basis of one-to-one
negotiations with the farm owner. It was noticed that Family Farms do not employ salaried employees but it is quite common in case of Owner-Supervisory Farms and Staff-Supervisory Farms.

4.20. The common fringe benefits to the workers in the Small Tea Plantations are *provident fund, paid holidays, bonus, injury benefit* etc. besides the wages. In the Family Farms, no paid holidays are given to the workers. Normally, a worker gets nine *paid holidays* in a year. It can be stated that the fringe benefits are at the discretion of the farm owners and personal relation of the labourers and workers. play major role in deciding such benefits in the Small Tea Plantations in the study area.

4.21. It was found that absenteeism in the Small Tea Plantations is a common practice. Absence from work is mainly found during the peak agricultural season in the Small Tea Plantations as labourers are paid higher wages in agricultural fields as compared to tea cultivation. Absenteeism is highest among the Local labourers because they borrow advance money from paddy cultivators during lean season for their sustenance and thereby bound to work in the paddy fields during the peak season. Addiction to liquor and drinking habit are also reported as other causes of absence from work among the migrant labourers. In the Small Tea Farms, there are high incidences of inter-farm mobility of labourers. This happens due to the lucrative offer they receive in terms of better security, higher wages and other fringe and incidental benefits from the other farm owners.

4.22. The weekly income of a worker varies from one season to other. During the lean season, intensity of work is reduced, as there is no green leaf plucked during this period. Consequently, income of a worker is also affected and the average income of a worker in a lean season is Rs 251.95 per week. On the other hand, during peak season a worker is always given *thika task* (extra work) for which he/she is paid extra money for his/her overtime work. This is mainly related to labour scarcity in this period, as demand of labour is high in pineapple and tea plantations. The average income of a worker in a peak season is Rs 266.25 per week.

4.23. Besides these some other interesting facts about the study area are:

   a. Commuting distance of the labourers varies 0.25 km to 2 km from the villages to the farms.
b. Oral engagements and agreements usually sanctified by custom are in practice in most of the gardens and determine labour relations. In the study area, 
*West Dinajpur Cha Bagicha Sramik Union* represents CITU and the INTUC is represented by *National Union of Plantation Workers* at the local level in the Islampur subdivision.

c. The major occupational hazards and health problems are *finger injury, finger cut, shoulder pain and skin diseases.*

d. The daily wages increased from Rs.29.30 to Rs.48.50 (as per bipartite agreement) from 1998 to 2005, and corresponding to the same period green leaf price declined from Rs.12.58 to Rs.4.53.

5.1. Before the emergence of Small Tea Plantations, agricultural workers were ignorant about wages and their bargaining power particularly in the Islampur Subdivision. With the introduction of pineapple in the late 1970s and tea in late 1980s and early 1990s (particularly in the Small Tea Plantations) the situation changed dramatically. Labourers received the wage both as cash and kind. During 1971-72, the daily wage was Rs.1 in cash and 1.25 kilogram of rice in kind, per worker per day in the paddy and jute fields (during the same period the price of sugar was Rs.1.25 per kg.). The daily rate of a *Haal* (plough) was Rs.5 including one man who was also provided a meal called *Ponta-Bhat.* This *Ponta-Bhat* is an important indicator and symptom of poverty and household economy in this micro-region. The schedule of work for the *Jons* (worker) was from sunrise to sunset in these areas, which was approximately twelve working hours per day.

5.2. The beginning of Small Tea Plantations led to further improvement in the condition of workers in the labour market. Now nobody works more than eight hours a day in the Small Tea Plantations. The wages are more rationalized as compared to what they are in the pineapple and other traditional agricultural. In the paddy and pineapple fields the contract wage or piece-rated wage system is still prevalent. Here the field-owner and labour both bargain and settle their wage on a daily basis. Thus, labourers working in the paddy and jute fields work mainly during the peak season when they get a somewhat better deal. Otherwise, they remain unemployed for most of the times in a year or they migrate in search of seasonal jobs.
5.3. Before the introduction of the plantation, the study area was suffering from chronic unemployment and under-employment. Labourers used to borrow paddy from the village landowners for their livelihood and survival during the lean season in exchange for labour in the forthcoming season to either paddy or jute fields. The calculation of the debt was exploitative and a kind of cyclic exploitation prevailed in these areas. This pushed many labourers to undertake debts from the landowning classes. The relationship between the two became similar to the one that existed between master-slaves in the past.

5.4. Employment in traditional agricultural sector is available for a brief period restricted to two to three months in a year but the tea farms employ workers throughout the year. Besides this, tea workers receive yearly bonus, protective clothing, provident fund (farm employing more than 20 workers) etc. Though as per wage agreement Gender differences in wages are not existent in Small Tea Plantations but the results of the field survey show the existence of such discriminations. In the year 2004-05, agricultural wage was Rs.50 for men and Rs.45 for women, but as far as the small tea plantations are concern the wages for male and females were same i.e. Rs.45.90.

5.5. The average size of the household is 5.22 persons in the plantation labour households and room density is 3.40 persons. As compared to this the average size of household is 5.37 persons in non-plantation labour households and room density is 4.29 persons. The difference of room density between plantation and non-plantation labour households is 0.89 persons show that the living space as well as quality of living is better in the Dangis (plantation labour households) as compared to the Nichanparas (non-plantation labour households).

5.6. Differences are also visible in terms of some of the social indicators like literacy etc. it is noticed that the literacy rate of the head of the household is 21.67 per cent in the Dangis and 18.33 per cent in the Nichanparas.

5.7. There are three types of houses found in the labour households in the present study area namely: the Kutch a houses also known as Thatched Houses', Kutch a walls with GI corrugated sheet roof named as 'GI Corrugated', and pucca walls with GI corrugated sheet roof named as 'Semi-pucca'. The total number of GI Corrugated houses is higher in the Dangis than the Nichanparas. It is 21 and nine in plantation and non-plantation labour households respectively and the
difference between absolute terms is 12. As opposed to this, the numbers of Thatch Houses are more in non-plantation labour households in comparison to plantation labour households and the distribution is 45 and 34 respectively.

5.8. There are four sources of drinking water available in the labour households. These include hand pump, ring well, kutcha well, and not in premises. Out of 60 households, 31 have hand pump as a source of drinking water in the Dangis, as compared to eight households in Nichanparas. Though the cost of setting up a hand pump is higher in the Dangis, even people could afford to have it due to their regular employment and income from plantations.

5.9. The availability of sanitary toilet is a gross absence in the labour households under study. Most of them use the open space. It is only in Indira Awas Yojana household beneficiaries have sanitary toilet. Electricity for lighting is available in rented manner, or two-three houses share a meter. These households are not in a position to have separate meter connection and cannot afford minimum bill for the connection. It is noticed that one bulb connection costs of Rs.10 per month which most of the houses take from their neighbour. In 60 plantation labour households, 12 households have such connection and rests of the households are dependent on kerosene as a source of lighting. On the other hand, all the non-plantation labour households are using kerosene as energy for lighting.

5.10. In the plantation labour households basically firewood and chips are used for cooking, but the non-plantation labour households use cattle dung cake and chips for cooking. In the Dangis, forests, shrubs, pineapple waste, pruned tea branches etc. are available as domestic fuel, but in the Nichanparas cow dung cake and paddy straw are used for cooking.

5.11. The incidence out migration is most common feature in the Nichanparas It is seasonal in nature. The period normally stretches from November to March in a year. This can be termed as migration due to push factor in the Nichanparas. Most of the migrants are individuals. The most preferential destinations are Delhi, Punjab, Darjeeling, Siliguri etc. to mention a few. Therefore, destination routes are divided into two categories i.e. inter-state out migration and intra-state out migration. In Delhi, they engage mostly in construction, embroidery, knitting, painting, white washing, working in Dhabas and Tea Stalls. As opposed to this, in the Dangis, there is pull factor in tea plantations. People form other areas are
attracted to these areas in search of jobs in the small tea plantations and also in the activities like trade and commerce that have come up to cater the needs of the growing population.

5.12. The common consumer durables maintained by labour households are bicycle, bullock cart, table, chair, bedstead, Almirah, radio, wristwatch, wall clock etc. The per capita value of consumer durables is Rs. 459.57 in plantation labour households and Rs. 335.23 in non-plantation labour households. The difference between the two livelihood zones is Rs. 124.34 and it is indicative that under these discretionary expenditures the plantation labour households are in a comfortable position to decide and take decision.

5.13. The most common livestock are bullock, cow, goat, etc. Except bullock he rest of the animals are reared with an expectation of return in the form of milk, meat and offspring. This ultimately improves economy of the household. Country hen is the only poultry bird is found in the labour households. The per capita value of livestock and poultry is Rs. 641.79 in plantation labour households and Rs. 526.85 in non-plantation labour households and the absolute differences between the two livelihood zones is Rs. 114.94 in favour of the plantation households.

5.14. Most of the cereals consumed by labour households in Islampur subdivision are rice, wheat, muri, chira, suji, and sewai. The total consumption of cereals per person per month (30 days) is 15.27 kg in plantation labour households and 13.59 kg in non-plantation labour households and a difference of 1.68 kg between indicates that consumption level is higher in the Dangis as compared to the Nichanparas. The quality of rice consumed is better in plantation labour households with the average market price about Rs.9.86 per kg. On the other hand, it is Rs.9.70 per kg in non-plantation labour households.

5.15. The overall monthly per capita consumption expenditure is Rs. 393.04 and Rs. 368.77 in plantation and non-plantation labour households respectively. The difference between the two agro-ecological livelihood zones is Rs. 24.27. This difference is largely due to variations in the food consumption by the households.

5.16. An interesting fact about the household survey is that though the non-plantation labour households are poor yet their per capita medical expenditure is high. This is mostly related to the contaminated drinking water from ring wells.
and kutcha wells, and poor state housing and living space and housing. Similarly, the per capita expenditure on purchase and construction is again high in non-plantation labour households. It is largely due to the high maintenance cost of a poor quality house they live in.

5.17. Household savings are grouped under four categories, i.e. cash at home, cash at bank account, jewellery, and no saving. The per capita savings in plantation labour households is Rs. 238.98 and Rs. 158.62 in non-plantation labour households. The labour households save more by engaging themselves in tea plantations as compared to other agricultural activities. Saving is Rs. 80.36 more in plantation labour households.

5.18. As opposed to this, borrowing is also common in labour households. There are two types borrowing, i.e. cash borrowed and kind borrowed. The reasons for borrowing mostly include, illness and health related problem, maintaining household expenditure during lean season, house repairing, ceremonies etc. The main sources are villagers, friends and relatives, village clubs. The interest rate varies from no interest to 5-12 percent per month and sometimes a flat interest of 50 percent of the total amount is fixed. The per capita indebtedness is Rs.106.87 in plantation labour households, and it is almost double i.e. Rs. 223.28 in the non-plantation labour households. The absolute difference is Rs. 116.41 against the non-plantation labour households.

5.19. The impacts of underemployment in the Nichanparas during lean agriculture season particularly November to March include food insufficiency etc which is quite common in the non-plantation labour households. Out of 60 households, 15 of them have expressed the food insufficiency in the Nichanparas. On the other hand, in the Dangis only three households out of 60 that have reported the incidence of food insufficiency and the possible reason cited by them is the pruned season in tea plantations and rotation of work in the farms. Therefore, it can be justified to say that food insufficiency is severe in the Nichanparas as compare to the Dangis.

5.20. Finally, the composite Household Economy Index (HEI) considering 12 indicators shows a very contrasting picture between the plantation and non-plantation labour households and have significant differences in their living conditions. Out of total 60 plantation labour households, 18 are Low, 20 are
Medium, and 22 are High HEI and their percentage share is 30 per cent, 33.3 per cent and 36.7 per cent respectively. As opposed to this, in the non-plantation labour households the distribution is 29 are Low, 23 are Medium, and 8 are High HEI and their percentage share is 48.3 per cent, 38.3 per cent, and 13.3 per cent respectively. The proportion of High HEI in plantation labour households is significantly higher than the non-plantation labour households and the absolute difference between the two is 14 households, and the difference in percentage is 23.4. Similarly, the most contrasting picture arises in case of Low HEI. Here the proportion of non-plantation labour households is higher in comparison to plantation labour households and the absolute difference between the two is 11 households and the difference in percentage is 18.3 per cent.

Finally it can be said that plantation have contributed in improving the quality of life and economy of the plantation labour households. These households have registered impressive performance over the non-plantation labour households in every sphere of economy, activities and employment conditions. Hence, the null hypothesis “employment and improved labour conditions have positive impact on the household economy” in the Islampur sub division, North Bengal is accepted.