



# Social Consequence of the Crisis in the Tea Industry of North Bengal

Bidhya Rai

Department of Peace and Conflict Studies and Management, Sikkim University, 6th Mile Samdur-737102  
Email: [bidhyarai.2014@gmail.com](mailto:bidhyarai.2014@gmail.com)

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**Abstract**— *India is the largest consumer and second largest producer of tea in the world. It is a highly labour-intensive industry with 50 % concentration of women workers. However, over the years, tea gardens of India have undergone severe crisis due to low productivity of labour, increasing social cost of production, and fall in tea prices, competition in the world markets and high domestic consumption, removal of tariffs with trade liberalisation. With all the crisis laborers are struggling with the closure and non-payment or curtailment of wages, bonus, gratuity, provident fund and others statutory benefits. The working and living condition of the workers in most of the tea garden is very deplorable and poor and have resulted in forced migration, malnourishment and even death in many cases. The Government failed to provide any meaningful support or alternative to resume work in closed tea gardens. The condition of the workers working in the gardens is worse and insecure and remains unheard and ignored by the plantation owners and the Government.*



**Keywords**— *Tea industry, labour crisis, women workers, government negligence, plantation closures.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

India is one among the top five tea producing countries in the world (Indian Trade Portal n.d.). In the year 2021-22 the annual production of tea in India stood at 1344.40 million kg and it exported 200.79 million kg of tea worth 5415.78 crores (68<sup>th</sup> Annual Report, Tea Board of India, TBI). Tea industry generates employment for a significant section of the labour force domestically (63<sup>rd</sup> Annual Report, Tea Board of India). Amongst the three plantation crops viz. tea, coffee and rubber nearly 53% of the total labour force is engaged in the tea industry in India absorbing 1.26 million work-forces (Joseph and Viswanathan, 2016). Tea is primarily grown in fifteen states of India and among these Assam is the largest producer followed by West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala (63<sup>rd</sup> Annual Report, TBI). These four states account for 97% of the country's total production (63<sup>rd</sup> Annual Report, TBI).

Despite being the largest consumer and the second largest tea producer in the world, the Indian tea economy is in

crisis (Deka and Goswami 2021). Low productivity of labour, increasing social cost of production, and fall in tea prices are some of the reasons given by the companies for the overall crisis (Das and Islam, 2021; Mishra et al., 2011; Majumdar, 2016, Roy and Biswas 2021). Many other factors hamper the viability of the tea industry, like competition in the world markets and high domestic consumption, removal of tariffs with trade liberalisation resulting in cheaper import shrinking export share of Indian tea with stiff competition from China, Kenya and Sri Lanka (Selvaraj and Gopalakrishnan 2016; Maity and Sinha 2021). In such a scenario the conditions of the tea garden labourers have become miserable and negligible. Despite various labour laws provided by various acts such as the Plantation Labour Act 1951, Minimum Wage Act 1948, Maternity Benefit Act 1961, and Minimum Wage Act for the welfare of the labourers, the condition of the labourers has not improved. They remain neglected and ignored by the government and the plantation owner by violating most of the privileges guaranteed by these acts. In many cases, the labourers are struggling with the

closure and non-payment or curtailment of wages, bonuses, gratuity, provident funds and other statutory benefits.

The working and living conditions of the workers in most of the tea gardens are deplorable and have resulted in forced migration, malnourishment and even death in many cases. The State Government failed to provide any meaningful support or alternative to resume work in closed tea gardens. The condition of the workers working in the gardens is worse and insecure and remains unheard of and ignored by the plantation owners and the Government (Bhowmik, 2011). It affected the profitability and viability of plantations, the larger planter adopted various cost-cutting measures to overcome the crisis (Viswanathan and Shah, 2009), which mainly included retrenchment of labourers, abandonment or lockouts of plantations, lowering and non-revision of wages and non-compliance with the provisions of the labour welfare (Viswanathan and Shah, 2009).

#### **Evolution of the Tea Industry in India:**

The beginning of the tea industry in India can be traced back to the eighteenth century foundation of the Assam Company in 1839 in Upper Assam (Bhowmik, 2011). The introduction of tea plantations was initially to satisfy the requirement of British consumers who had for a long time been importing tea from China. The potential for growing tea had been discovered earlier in 1824 by Major Robert Bruce when he came across indigenous tea bushes in Assam (Bhowmik, 2011, O'Malley 1907). In 1923 the local Shingpo chief had informed Robert Bruce, while he was in Assam about some wild plants which resemble tea plants. The sample of these wild plants was confirmed as tea by the botanist but different than those spices as found in China. During these times the British East India Company had exclusive control over trade with China and they imported tea from there (Bose, 1954). In 1833, the then British Parliament cancelled the British East India Company's exclusive trading rights with China (ibid). This greatly hampered the tea business of the Company and the then Company's director decided to explore the possibilities of growing tea on a commercial basis in Assam, an area which had been annexed by the company in 1825 (Bose, 1954). In 1835 a British man named Mr. G.J. Gorden was sent to China where he brought some tea seeds, tea plants and manufacturing experts from there.

The tea-plants were first planted in the Upper Assam at the confluence of the Kundil/Koondil and the Brahmaputra Rivers but it was not successful due to unfavourable soil conditions and flood water. The tea cultivation was then shifted to the Chubwa region (Bose, 1954). The plants grew well and the Chubwa became the pioneering tea farm

in India. India became an attractive destination for British capital to develop tea plantations with its large amount of raw materials, ready markets and an abundant supply of cheap labour (Bose, 1954). In 1838 Bengal Tea Association was formed and in 1839, a joint stock company was formed in London. These two combined to form the first tea company called Assam Tea Company (Behal and Mohapatra, 1992). By 1840, Assam Tea Company started its first tea production on a commercial basis. As a result, the tea plantation was abruptly extended to the rest of the country due to land use change where a large area was converted into a tea plantation (ibid)

In 1838 the first batch of tea was sent to London as a trial (Tinker, 1974; Aritra De, 2015). Within a short period, Indian tea scored over its Chinese rival because of its thicker and stronger brew which increased its popularity among the working class (Bhowmik, 2002). As a result, by 1839, there was a mad rush to clear the hillside of Assam for new tea gardens (Thinker, 1974). The British Indian Government provided the British planter with vast tracts of land on extremely favourable terms and within a year production increased with a doubling of tea prices and soaring profits (Griffith 1967; Behal and Mohapatra, 1992; Behal 1983). Earlier plantations were setup on restricted lands of the Company officials, however later in 1854 the wasteland rule was passed, which opened the tea gardens to several European entrepreneurs (Mishra, 1987). These new European entrepreneurs bought large tracts of land and set up tea plantations resulting in the influx of sterling and rupees in the markets (Mishra, 1987). Subsequently, more than three decades later, the tea gardens were set up in Darjeeling, Dooars and Jalpaiguri districts in West Bengal, Nilgiri and Coimbatore Districts of Tamil Nadu as well as the Idukki and Wayanad Districts of Kerala (Bhowmik, 2011).

Today Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka and major tea producer states of South India. Tea production in Southern India was unsuccessful in the initial years but later on, the tea plantation was experimented in the higher altitude of Malabar Coast and Nilgiri region with the seed obtained from China, and the result was promising. By 1878, commercial tea production was started by increased investment in tea and progressively more land was brought under the tea plantation area (Griffiths 1967). The consequent decline of the coffee industry was the major factor responsible for the extensive planting of tea in South India. In most areas, the tea plantation began to be cultivated only when the coffee industry declined. The first phase of development of the tea industry in South India was confined to the Nilgiri. Soon tea cultivation caught up in Wayanad District of Kerala, followed by another region. Now in India, tea plantations are located in the backward

and rural regions of Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Nagaland, Uttarakhand, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Bihar and Orissa (Banerjee and Banerjee, 2007; Joseph and George, 2010).

### **Crisis in the Tea Industry:**

India has a large domestic low-price market and is the source of livelihood and employment for millions of people (Nagooor, 2010). Over the past decades, India's rank has come down in the list of exporters in the face of stiff competition from Kenya, Sri Lanka and China. This has been hampering the viability of the tea industry. In 2021 India's export share in the global market is only 10% as compared to Kenya which has 29% of the share. It is now in fourth position in terms of the export of tea to the world market (Tea Board of India, 2021)

However, over the past decade, domestic consumption of tea has increased at a faster rate than production (Tea Board of India no date). The steady increases in domestic demand and the inability of the tea sector to enhance production have resulted in a decline in tea exports. The production and yield of Indian tea have remained stagnant although the area under tea has expanded due to the emergence of small growers (Tea Board of India, 2021). Thus, India's share in global exports has declined drastically in recent times. The decision of the Government to allow cheaper tea to be imported from Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka has only deepened the crisis (Bhowmik, 2002 and Mishra, 2014). As a result, many of the tea gardens were declared sick, and abandoned and many were declared closed. Earlier, India used to export 80 per cent of its tea produce and satisfy the domestic demand with around its remaining 20 per cent. The picture is completely changed. Now, 80 per cent of the total production is required to satisfy domestic consumption and the remaining 20 per cent or so is left out for export. The result is India is slowly coming out of the world tea business (Choudhury, 2000).

It is reported that a total of 118 tea gardens were closed in the traditional tea-growing states spread over Assam (17), West Bengal (53), Kerala (38), Tripura (7) and Tamil Nadu (3) and the livelihood of 68, 442 labourers were affected working in these gardens (51<sup>st</sup> Annual Report, 2005). The state that has the greatest number of number closed tea gardens was West Bengal (53 per cent), followed by Kerala (32.20 per cent) and Assam (14.40 per cent). By the end of 2004, 94 gardens were reopened and 24 remained closed affecting the livelihood of 15655 workers. In West Bengal alone 47 gardens were reopened out of 53 closed gardens and six remained closed. In Assam 14 gardens were reopened and 3 remained closed

and in Kerala, out of 38 closed tea gardens 24 gardens were reopened and 14 remained closed. In Tamil Nadu, the entire garden reopened. The no. of labourers in the remaining closed gardens was 15665 people collectively in 24 gardens. This situation resulted in litigation by civil society organizations for protecting the livelihood of the labourers in closed tea gardens (51<sup>st</sup> Annual Report, Tea Board of India). The Report of the Centre for Education and Communication, 2007 states that the crisis in the Indian tea industry has affected the estates in three states namely Assam, West Bengal and Kerala. However, neither Assam nor Kerala has suffered as much as the tea plantation of West Bengal.

## **II. CAUSES OF THE CRISIS IN THE TEA INDUSTRY OF NORTH BENGAL**

### **Climate change and low productivity:**

Global warming induced climate change has negatively impacted the tea industry (IPPC, 2007). Climate change in the North Bengal region is manifested in the increasing mean temperature of the region and irregular rainfall patterns (Dutta and Das 2019). Being a rain fed crop, tea is a sensitive plant to climatic variations (Han et.al. 2020). Changes in climatic conditions impact its productivity. The distribution of total annual rainfall, variation in temperature during growing seasons, the direct normal irradiance and the presence of carbon in the atmosphere influences tea production and its quality (Han et.al. 2020). Furthermore changing climatic patterns also influences the incidence of pest and diseases in the tea plantations (Roy et.al. 2020: 436). Thus global warming induced climate change has negatively affected the quality and quantity of annual tea yield in the North Bengal region (Patra et. al 2013, Roy et.al. 2020). A study conducted by the Darjeeling Tea Research and Development Centre, Kurseong highlights the diminished production of green leaves in the year 2012 by 41.97 % as compared to the 1993 figure and 30.90 percent as compared with the production in 2002 (Patra et. Al 2013: 174). This study points out that green leaf production has dropped constantly since 1994 (Patra et. Al 2013: 174). Climate change thus has hit the tea industry heavily. On the one hand while the production cost of tea owing to inflation and other factors has increased on the other hand decrease in yield makes it difficult for the tea company to meet its balance of payment.

**Increased Cost of Production:** The Indian tea industry suffers from the imbalance in the cost of production and the low price it fetches in international tea market. In comparison to other tea-producing countries, the expenses of producing tea are higher in India (CAG 2023: 80).

According to the Tea Board of India, the cost of production of tea increased by 8%-10% in 2016 (Tea Board of India 2017: 2). Besides the cost of the factory, the companies also have to provide the labourer the additional entitlement above the wages inscribed in the PLA like ration, educational facilities for the children of the workers, health facilities, housing facilities for the workers and others (Tea Board of India 2017). This additional social cost is the major cost diver in the total cost of production. This social cost comprises associated expenses relating to labourers which include housing facilities, medical facilities, ration, recreational facilities, canteens, and crèches in and around the workplace in the plantation estates (John and Mansingh, 2013). The companies claim that the total cost of production is higher than the auction price and the employer compensates the social cost with the low wages of the workers in the tea plantation (John and Mansingh, 2013).

**Increased International Competition:** With the emergence of new producers like Vietnam, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Kenya, Indian tea is facing tough competition in the global tea market. Improved tea production in Kenya and Sri Lanka has improved their exports. The competition in the quality and price of tea from Kenya, Sri Lanka and Vietnam has made it difficult for Indian teas to find markets internationally (Promod et. al., 2008; Hayami and Damodaran 2004). This has adversely affects the sustainability of the tea industry in India (Promod et.al., 2008). Former USSR, UK, Iran, Egypt and Germany were the prime markets for Indian tea. During 1991, these markets together imported 78% of India's tea but it has come down to 39% during 2009 (Nagoor, 2010: 21). This has made India search for a new market for their tea. With the emergence of Kenya and Vietnam as two of the important global tea suppliers and the increase in value-added tea exports from the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Belgium, India has lost its established markets. The disintegration of the Soviet Union further damaged Indian tea market since USSR was the largest importer of Indian Tea (Nagoor, 2010). The CAG Report of 2023 shows that throughout the year 2016-2019 Indian tea production stood at 23 percent of the global share and in the following year 2020 this dropped to 20 percent. Similarly across the years 2016-2019 export of tea remained stable dropping down to 11percent in the year 2020 (CAG 2023: 103).

**Adulteration with low-quality tea, reduction in tea quality and overall brand value:** The rules of the free markets determined by the World Trade Organisation has made India remove it's restrictions on imports of various goods including tea (Selvaraj and Gopalakrishnan, 2016). As a result, tea supply from Sri Lanka, Kenya and

Vietnam has increased significantly. On one hand, this imported tea was sold in the Indian markets at very low prices compared to Indian tea and on the other exports of Indian tea had fallen alarmingly (Maity and Sinha, 2021). Import of cheaper tea for re-export either directly or by mixing up the Indian tea with the Indian brand name reduces the demand and prices of Indian tea in the foreign market (Selvaraj and Gopalakrishnan, 2016; Maity and Sinha 2021)

**Inadequate re-plantation:** Tea estate faces problems of poor yield for the ageing of tea bushes, age-old machinery, problems of re-plantation, the decline in tea quality and lack of developmental activities (Mishra et.al., 2008; Biggs et.al., 2018; Manisha et. al., 2019; Khawas 2006). All these put hindrances to the growth and yield of the tea estates. One of the important aspects of the declining yield in the tea estates has been inadequate replanting (Khawas 2006). The planters' commitment towards the improvement of tea plantation has been found wanting. They are less motivated to make any further investment in the plantation while tries to squeeze profit as much as possible (Biggs et.al. 2018). Most of the tea bush are over 180 years old with poor yield and have passed their prime productivity period (Khawas 2006). When replanted, it takes at least five years to reach a stage when leaves can be plucked. It is in this gap of five years that the companies fear most because they have to pay the workers and invest huge amounts in re-plantation ventures, without getting any profits in return (Khawas 2006). This situation has seriously hampered the viability of the Darjeeling tea gardens and the condition of the workers working in them (ibid).

The overall impact of these causes has led the tea industry of North Bengal into dire straits. Many of the tea-gardens have been closed and abandoned by the owners. This has hugely impacted the lives of plantation labours leading to their out-migration from the plantations in search of employment in cities and nearby towns (Raihan and Deb, 2020; Rai 2020; Roy and Biswas, 2018; Das, 2019).

These causes have seriously led to crisis in the tea industry of North Bengal. Today many of the tea Gardens are fatally sick and there is an increase in the number of closed tea plantations North Bengal.

### **Social Consequence of Crisis in the Tea Industry of North Bengal:**

This entire crisis has affected the workers' lives with low wages, poor infrastructure, poor housing, poor health and a lack of avenues for social mobility (Samantha Goddard, 2008). Following such developments post-1990s, there has been layoff and gradual casualisation of labourers in Indian tea plantations (Sunny and Chattopodhya, 2008;



Lama, 2019), curtailment of tea labour welfare facility (Sarkar, 2015; Roy and Biswas, 2019; Vijaya Baskar and Viswanathan, 2019) leading to irregularity in income source witnessing unrest and worries about future among labourers (Misra, 2003; Sankrityayana, 2018; Langford, 2021). The reflection of such a crisis can also be seen among the labourers in North Bengal tea plantation with reduction of statutory benefits, non-payment and curtailment of wages (Mishra et.al., 2012; Das 2014), posing precarious living and working conditions (Martinez, 2018; Spires et.al., 2022) worsening employer-employee relationship in tea plantation (Gothoskar, 2012; Thapa, 2013; Refeeque and Sumanthy, 2021). Deficient skills and education of tea labourers besides various binding regulations of the company constn them from moving outside the plantation economy in search of better employment opportunities (Gurung and Mukjerjee, 2018; Sarkar and Ghosh, 2021). Low baseline wage rates and limited scope for supplementary earning kept tea plantation labourers in backward sections (Saharia, 2005; Mishra et.al., 2011; Jayaraman et.al., 2016; Xaxa 2019; Guha 2019).

The closure of the garden throws these workers into a state of poverty and helplessness. It is very clear that with the closure of the plantations, workers lose all the benefits or rather the minimum benefits that they were receiving before its abandonment and closure. Also, since the Plantation Acts make it mandatory for the employers to provide these facilities; the workers cannot get any support from the Panchayat (Bhowmik 2009). The workers have to depend upon the relief services provided by the NGOs and other sources. Therefore, because of the sudden closure and abandonment, the workers and their families concerned are thrown into the worst possible situations. Also, the lack of basic infrastructure like medical, educational and other facilities has resulted in deaths due to starvation and malnutrition.

Added to this, there has been a tremendous increase in the pattern of out-migration. One interesting nature of such abandonment is that the owners do not declare the tea garden to be closed but conveniently abandon it without any prior notice to the workers. They simply run away from their responsibilities of paying Provident Funds and Gratuity, wages, bonuses, rations and other facilities to the workers (Rai, 2020). These companies owe huge dues not just to the workers in terms of Provident Fund and Gratuity dues but also to the respective state governments and concerned banks. The workers have been fighting for their right to Minimum wage which is yet to be achieved.

Following pages describes five major, though not limited, social consequences of crisis in the tea industry of North Bengal.

**Withdrawal of public services:** The Plantation Labour Act (1951) provides that tea estate will provide public amenities such as drinking water, electricity, a fair price shop food rations and health care services for the tea garden labourers. With the closing of the tea gardens these services stop. In the closed tea garden basic facilities like drinking water, electricity, a public distribution system and health care have been withdrawn. A survey conducted by Abhijit Dutta and Ranjan Basu (2017) in the closed gardens of Jalpaiguri district of North Bengal revealed that public amenities such as public distribution system, safe drinking water, dispensary, primary school and electricity were non-existent. According to Sayantan Bera (2014), out of 273 tea gardens in North Bengal only 166 estates had dispensaries and as of 2014 out of 273 Tea gardens only 22 were under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) Scheme (Bera 2014).

**Impoverished tea garden labourers and malnourished children:** Due to the crisis in the tea industry, owners of the innumerable tea estates of West Bengal packed up abruptly leaving the workers unpaid. All these resulted in joblessness, desperation, hunger, poverty, and malnutrition among the workers and their families. The workers and their families are thrown into worse-off situations of extreme vulnerability, especially women and children. Lack of basic infrastructure like medical, education and other facilities and overall earnings have impoverished the condition of the labourers resulting in malnourishment, death due to starvation and even suicides (Bhowmik 2009, Rai, 2020). Poverty induced by the closing of tea gardens has compelled children to drop out of school (Centre for Worker's Management, 2015). The study (reference?) also shows that 70% of the people in closed tea gardens are in the advanced stage of chronic energy deficiency (Panwar 2017). The condition of workers even in the so-called "good" tea gardens is no different as poverty is ubiquitous under the low-wage system. According to the National Survey of Tea Workers on closed, reopened and open tea plantations of the Doors region, malnutrition exists in the entire garden surveyed (Bhattacharya 2015).

**Increased Child Labour:** One of the harmful social consequences of shutting down of the tea gardens has been the increase in child labour across those closed tea gardens of North Bengal. Centre for Worker's Management (CWM) (Bhattacharya 2015) identifies various categories of child labour: a) inside the tea garden as plantation labour or in other works and b) outside the tea-plantation for wages. Child labour inside plantations involves

assisting parents in fulfilling productivity quota during lean season to avoid wage deductions and in assisting parents with household chores and childcare mostly performed by the girl child. Child labour outside the plantation involves the girl child as domestic workers either employed locally else trafficked to big cities. Male children from closed tea gardens are employed as helpers in shops, and restaurants, construction labourers and factory labourers (Bhattacharya 2015: 32-33). Under the Plantation Labour Act (1951) and the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act (1986), a child who has completed 14 years of age can legally be employed as a worker in a plantation. The Plantation Labour Act was amended in 2010. New amendment added Section 24 which prohibits child labour in tea gardens yet, child labour is still prevalent in the tea gardens of North Bengal (Bhattacharya 2015). In most of the tea gardens of Dooars hunger, poverty and unemployment, problems like illiteracy, school drop-out, malnutrition and diseases are rampant and the combined effect of such vulnerabilities has further contributed to the trafficking of Children and women in large proportion.

**Large-scale migration of adolescents:** The prevailing economic hardship, social backwardness, absence of life-supporting facilities, dearth of viable employment alternatives and geographical isolation all have collectively created an environment of catastrophe and disgust in the plantation sector. One direct consequence of these is the large-scale migration of adolescents to faraway destinations often without the knowledge and support of their parents, friends and relatives (Ghosh 2013). When the Garden is abandoned or declared sick there is a mass exodus of migration sometimes even leading to prostitution (Ghosh 2013). What is despicable is that there is hardly any monitoring of such illegal activities in the tea gardens. Reports (Action aid 2016) also show that because of the uncertainty of the tea garden and abysmal wages, irregular jobs like daily labour, transport labour, stone collection and grinding at the nearby bed, collecting and selling firewood, daily work under road contractor, job under MGNREGA etc. are not sufficient to provide livelihoods to thousands of destitute workers. Therefore, migration to distant places like Delhi, Bangalore, Kerala, Bombay, and even to cities like Dubai in the Middle-East countries in search of any kind of jobs is regularly reported (Action aid 2016).

**Trafficking of girl children:** Closed tea gardens, economic underdevelopment and backwardness of the Dooars region of North Bengal has led it to become a hunting ground for human trafficking (Ghosh 2012; Chakroborty 2013; Action Aid 2016). There have been increased cases of trafficking of girl children to slave-type

domestic help or prostitution and destination of the trafficked person has been Sikkim, Delhi, Chandigarh, , Kashmir, Kerala and Nepal (Chakroborty 2013). The destitution of the tea garden labourers once the garden shuts down has led to the increasing number of human trafficking with traffickers growing their networks across different gardens and localities makes North Bengal a crucial supplier and transit zone for human trafficking (Ghosh 2012). According to a study conducted by Action Aid (June 2016) on 20 tea gardens in West Bengal's Alipurduar District, the poor living conditions of tea plantation workers in sick and closed tea gardens have pushed children to take on different dangers without the lack of proper support systems. Numerous cases of missing family members have been reported. The study points out that poverty, unemployment, ignorance, the desire of better livelihood and employment elsewhere, fractured family system, illiteracy, deception and sophistry, social influence, domestic violence as the primary causes of human trafficking in the region (Action aid 2016: 61-62). Along with these there is also lack of action by police and local administration, under reporting of cases and alcoholism that allows the traffickers to take advantage of the situation (Action aid 2016: 61-62).

### III. CONCLUSION

Tea Board of India looks forward to improve the crisis brewing in tea industry with a total outlay of Rs. 967.78 crores for the five financial years from 2021 to 2025 across various heads such as plantation development, sector specific action plan, market promotion, welfare of workers, research and development and others (TBI Report 2022-2023: 22-23). However it fails to address the social dimension of the tea crisis. The report does not provide any data about sick and closed tea gardens or the status of labour in the tea gardens. Neither does it report on the violation of workers' rights by managements. Although the Central Government possesses sufficient authority under the Tea Act of 1953 to provide relief to the workers, the Tea Board has focused primarily on the marketing aspect of the plantation crisis and has neglected its regulatory responsibilities as outlined in the Tea Act (Bagchi 2021). The Government of India, through the Tea Board, has invested in the upgradation and product diversification schemes over the years, these initiatives were not extended to sick gardens, nor were much done to address the payment of workers' dues. The issues of unfair wages and the lack of statutory benefits remain significant concerns in the plantations. The frequent shutdown of the tea garden not only affected the younger generation of the workers but also the older section of the tea garden

workers as they were devoid of pension and old age welfare schemes.

The social consequences of the tea industry crisis have a severely detrimental impact on the North Bengal's overall development. There is a need of intervention from both the central and state government to address the social consequences of the tea industry crisis. Along with this there is also a need of more intervention from civil societies and non state actors such as NGOs and INGOs working for social upliftment in the region primarily because they can scrutinise government's policies, raise awareness among the masses and thus bring transparency in the overall operation of policies.

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