

Introduction the role  
to develop the  
capacity of



IntroductionThe tea industry is one of the oldest industries in India and is more than two hundred and ten years old. It has its origin in Assam in 1839. It has been a labour intensive industry and the largest employer in the organized sector.

The workers in tea industries accounted 94. 26 % which is highest than other plantations like coffee, rubber, cinchona and cardamom (Labour Bureau, 2015). The laws, practice, policies, bodies and organizations of labour market often influence the operations of the labour market and directly affect the labour.

Plantation Labour Act, 1951 is the central law which regulates tea industries; wage setting is often affected by collective bargaining process in North India; Tea Board of India and the State are the major bodies' which influence the conditions of labour and worker-cooperatives have been entrusted with the role to develop the capacity of small tea growers. Therefore, how these labour market institutions work is a significant question which directly has implications on the labour of the tea industries. Understanding Plantation Labour Act, 1951Plantation Labour Act, 1951 is the central regulatory act for tea plantation industries in India. This central legislation extended the power to State Governments to make rules in their respective states by following all or any provisions of the central act.

The Plantation Labour Act was enacted in 1951 with the aim to provide welfare measures to plantation labour. This act is applicable to those areas which are not less than five hectares and should have employed fifteen or more than fifteen workers. The main provisions of the act are health and

welfare, hours of work, rest intervals, annual wages with leave and employment of children. Therefore, the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 is a very significant act for improving the living conditions of tea workers. But most of these provisions in the act have never been implemented, especially in Assam and West Bengal (Bhowmik, 2015). Again, Tea Board of India under the heading of “ Labour Welfare” is providing some welfare measures to the areas of tea plantation which are not covered by Plantation Labour Act, 1951. Indian Labour Journal which was published by Labour Bureau in 2015 has shown a positive report of the implementation and working of Plantation Labour Act, 1951.

This journal was based on the returns submitted by the plantation industries all over India in 2012. This report can be extensively used for tea plantations in Assam and West Bengal because it stated that out of 790 plantations registered in Assam, all were tea plantations and out of 284 plantations registered in West Bengal, 281 were tea plantations. The report stated that there were no adult worker in Assam and West Bengal working more than 48 hours. Most of the workers were working between 45 to 48 hours in India. It also stated that 96.

98% workers were given leave with wages in all over India. It has shown a positive scenario of the implementation of educational facilities, sickness benefit, hospitals and maternity benefits and so on (Labour Bureau, 2015). It is to be noted that the report did not comprise with section or statistics on the employment of children and adolescents. However, a study conducted by then Chief Ministers’ Advisor PP Varma in 2014 on working conditions of tea

plantation workers in Assam showed a different story. It was found that management was not offering many facilities which were there in the act.

He stated that improvement was needed in health, housing, education and other facilities of plantations. (Business Standard, Nov. 2014) Again, this non-implementation as stated by Government of Assam is not a new case.

Bhowmik (2015) has also stated about the poor living conditions of tea workers in plantation of West Bengal. He stated about poor housing facilities, no bathrooms and stated that primary schools were a “ mess”. Das Gupta (2000) has highlighted the deprived and voiceless condition of women workers in tea plantation due to lack of education and basic facilities which should be provided to them as per the act.