

# Is Tea a Cottage Industry ?

---

## **Possibilities of a Socialistic Pattern**

By M. K. SINHA

★

*Lib. Rev. 1941*

*dh*

Published by  
INDIAN FINANCIAL JOURNALS LTD,  
116A, LOWER CIRCULAR ROAD,  
CALCUTTA-14.



Library

IIAS, Shimla

PH 633.72 Si 64 I



00015923

2017/83



PH

633.72

Si 64 I

THERE are around 6,000 tea estates on record in India. The outstanding feature in their collective character is the absence of anything like a marginal or representative size, that is, the acreage under crop which helps to determine the productive unit in terms of size. As far as one can see, the size is related directly to the capacity for capital investment in some indeterminable way; but this sounds too modern a way of looking at this industry, which started when the purchasing power of money was exaggerated by concessions not to be bought with money at all times, for instance, the acquisition of land for tea growing under the Waste Lands Acts. The fact that the book value of the capital engaged in the tea industry represents those early pioneering days in most instances should appear to mix up investment in relation to size.

### The Size of a Tea Estate

The average size of the tea estate in the several tea growing areas is not the same. In Assam, it is about 389.1 acres; and, in West Bengal, 609 acres. In Madras, 2,122 estates covering 21,900 acres make an average size of only 10.3 acres; while, in the Kangra Valley, 2,015 productive units cover only 1.18 per cent of the total acreage in India, near about 780,000 acres. The range of acreage diversity—when the acreage under tea is only considered—varies from the 0.3 acre unit in Kangra to the 2,000 acre unit in Dooars or Assam. For the whole of India, the average size is roundly 130 acres only.

The average size, however, has no meaning except in statistics of large members, and 6,000 estates are not a legion. What is more, the extension of tea production has not been such as to have definitely given anything of a margin in the economic sense. A great deal is heard about uneconomic gardens, but that is a case

decided in terms of costs and prices, and not by size. If a certain size was limiting in the economic sense either in bigness or in smallness, that should have stopped the confused heterogeneity of the industry in this respect.

Actually, estates of all sorts of sizes are to be found. Adverse conditions may discommode many small and big ones, but they have not killed any of them. It is probable that unfavourable price fluctuations would hit the larger estates worse than the smaller ones. But then, the largeness of size cuts either way. If losses are liable to be big, so also the gains, and recovery is much quicker, as has been seen in the last three years.

The tendency to largeness of size was not an inherent one in tea growing. In China and Japan, where tea growing had been going on for centuries before the British or the Dutch took up the line, tea had been a rural industry, a part of the peasants' farming activity. The idea of farm-producing tea did not appeal to the European, who had other ideas about plantations and raising crops on a scale suitable for world commerce. The Chinese and the Japanese tea were more for home consumption than for exports. The tea grown by the Europeans was mostly meant for exports. The corporate enterprise of those planters was fashioned accordingly after enlarging the area under crop over years with the idea of reaching out to the economic margins, and, of course, maximising profits.

Besides, it may be that the European enterprise is never satisfied unless it has a scope that suits its ambitions. Plantations of less than 500 acres do not appeal to their imagination. It certainly had very little appeal in the days of colonial exploitation, when a tea plantation cost £40 to £60 per acre. It is true that conditions have since altered radically. Also, the tendency to large plantations did not work quite successfully in the changing conditions, and the arrest of the tendency has become more and more pronounced, though

conditions of tea production and trading have generally been favourable, inspite of some crises now and then. During all the years of the Second World War, the output on the tea estates rose, but the acreage remained more or less stationary. From extension, emphasis shifted to intensity of cultivation, and the liberal use of manuring has disguised how far this has proceeded.

### **The Inconveniences of Bigness**

One wonders if the growing tendency in the size of the big estates is exhausted. The point is not easily determined, because the size, once related to the extent of the market more intimately, has been stationary, while the tea market has expanded. A great many problems have emerged in recent times for the big estates, and the most embarrassing one is that of the present-day costs with prospects of further increase. It is not equally certain if, with such high costs, the expansion rate of the markets may not slow down or even fall to zero. Besides, until this date, the returns to investments have been fair and reasonable on average, probably because the investments had been low, giving rise to the legend that the tea industry is under-capitalised. One can hardly imagine what the returns would be on the huge investments, now too obviously required for replanting or new planting, and if there should be enough profits for all the parties interested, including the Governments here and elsewhere. If, therefore, the bigness of the big plantations is already a completed achievement, that must be supposed to be due, not to anything wrong with the European enterprise, but to the absence of many other factors that once helped it to be articulated in suitable size. But the discouraging factors have been growing during the course of years.

For, expert calculations show that replanting or opening a new acre would now cost anything between Rs 2,500 and Rs 6,000 according to the geographical conditions and labour cost.

An acreage of 600 under crop would mean an initial capital investment of Rs 15,00,000 to Rs 36,00,000. Then would come at least four years of waiting till the bushes began to bear, and the returns started coming. And working expenses are also there. As the long-term investments tend to become permanent investments, the nature of the rewards and the capital value of the plantation are dependent on the current incomes, and recovery of the capital cannot be figured out with exactitude.

The popular idea is that the tea producing companies have got back many times the capital they invested in the past, and that whatever profits they now realise are of the nature of rents. But this is a point irrelevant to any production going on permanently and in which investments also tend to be permanent. The returns, in the long run, may be fully satisfactory; that keeps the production going all the time, in spite of uncertainties. But that may, nonetheless, be discouraging for further permanent investments in enlarging the size only. And, if such additional investments are also likely to affect the volume of the total investments and the rates of dividends, the proposition would not be acceptable to business.

Probably, the immediate future is not one for considering extension but maintenance of the achieved results. This is an issue that is now being raised only by the scientists, but it will, sooner or later, have to be faced by the tea industry, and particularly by the old big estates. The life of a tea bush on the plains is 40 to 50 years and that on the highlands, 60 to 70 years. The bearing capacity of a bush may be raised or protracted by artificial fertilisation; but, as the scientists say, there are apparently limits.

Most of the bushes in Northern and Southern India are pretty aged, and their biological span of life should soon be at an end. That implies a crisis to come. A few estates have started

replanting already, at a rate of 3 per cent of their acreage. This would mean that, with all the estates following suit, there would be an overhaul and new beginning in about 33 years. One may say, with certain allowances made, that it would be roughly 50 years. It is doubtful if the industry can afford to take such a long period for rejuvenation, and it is quite possible that a sudden collapse of production will happen some day before the planters find it out or the Government.

## The Alternatives before the Industry

The organisation of the entire industry may, accordingly, change in another fifteen years' time. The big estate holders are thinking in terms of mechanisation. But the extent of mechanisation permitted by the nature of the production is always open to controversy. And, whatever may be the benefits to production of maximum mechanisation, there remains the question of employment in the Indian economy, and employment at fair wages. Besides, mechanisation of the big estates only would not benefit the industry as a whole; for, the larger number of estates are not fit for it. It is also impossible to be sure that the costs would not rise with large-scale mechanisation unless the output also rises.

There is, however, no valid economic reason why the growing should continue to be as it has been, a relic of the oldtime colonial enterprise, when it is well-known that many countries grow tea as a rural pursuit, and manufacture it as a rural industry of some sort. If it is a matter of organisation, the small holdings can be organised as well as the big estates, and without any loss in the economic sense, of either production or quality. In China and Japan, this is being done with success, and the indispensability of tea growing as a job of the peasantry is self-evident in the rural economy of the East. In Japan, it is the business of the National Agriculture

Association, along with the prefectural Associations who have undertaken to build up tea growing and manufacturing as a rural industry.

The idea is to use a co-operative type of organisation eventually, and distribute re-processing factories in such a way as to enable these small producers and first hand manufacturers to sell easily to these factories. As the Shizuoka area produces 65 per cent of the total Japan tea, there are some five big factories in it and a number of small ones. In Formosa or Taiwan, three-fourths of the total tea grown are from small holdings, and the big estates have hardly more than 50 to 100 hectares. Though there is a plan for mechanisation in Japan, it is being held in check in the growing of it in the fields. In Ceylon, the Tea Research Institute has taken upon itself to advise the small producers, and has established a sub-station in the Low Country. The distribution of the small holdings, which are widely scattered, is as follows in that country:

1952		
Central Province	..	38,000 acres
Southern Province	..	14,000 "
Koa Province	..	7,300 "
Sabaraganuve Province	..	15,000 "
Western Province	..	1,900 "
<hr/>		
Total	..	76,200 acres

Rural Development Societies and Co-operative Societies are being built up with Government support. The Tea Research cess was increased in 1952 by 5 cents to provide more funds for an adequate extensive service. Information is not available about Indonesia, but there also the Government's policy is to organise the tea growing peasantry on a co-operative basis.

The extent of small holdings in India has to be found out, for it is not so obvious a part of the tea economy of the country. This is being dealt with separately later in this



article. But one can hardly do anything about these holdings unless one has a definite idea of what a 'small holding' is, for, in 'small holding', there are no determinate criteria.

## The Measure of a Small Holding

What is the measure of a small-holding? As in the case of the big estates, so also here no criterion of size exists anywhere. This indeterminableness is understandable in the case of tea-growing by farmers as a part of the whole farming work. But it is not so easily understood when the tea growing is done on an independent unit plot of land which is not complementary only, and for the income that is expected by a peasant. The range is really astonishing here, from less than one acre to anything under 300 acres. Never has an attempt been made to determine the economic size of a small holding, because the general idea in the main black tea producing countries is that these have come as an unavoidable fringe of native enterprise to the big Western plantations with their factory equipment, and is oftener a nuisance than a help. In Indonesia, the big estates frequently complain of the competition by the small producers, who do some primitive manufacturing and sell to the local consumption market instead of the factory owners.

Informed opinion has it that the economic or representative size in North East India varies from 300 to 400 acres in Darjeeling to 900 to 1,000 acres in Dooars. This goes for the modern large-scale units of European enterprise. But nothing is said anywhere about the size that would be economical for a peasant-family. This, of course, depends on the general level of income expectations of the grower and on no other factor. The exploration work in this field should, accordingly, take into account the income expectations as a definite criterion of size and solvency of the small holding.

## Small Holdings in India

In India, the "uneconomic estates" are supposed to be those under 300 acres because these cannot take advantage of the many opportunities that time and science provide, that is, of the total external economies. The reason for this is obvious. The financial capacity of any of these is not equal to the task. Between bad times and good, the average earnings of such estates do not yield much for reserves. The big estates manage to have reserves because their average profits have, somehow or other, permitted this till now.

Yet, the number of such "estates", which may, in other words, be called "small estates" is astonishingly large. The following account is extracted from the membership rolls of the several Producers' Associations.

### NORTH EAST INDIA

#### (a) West Bengal

	(ITA)	(ITPA)
Darjeeling ..	28	..
Dooars ..	8	15
Terai ..	11	..
Tripura ..	42	..
	—	—
Sub-total ..	89	15
	—	—
Total (ITA & ITPA)	104	..
	—	—

#### (b) Assam

Darrang ..	..	19
Goalpara ..	..	1
Kamrup ..	..	11
Nowgong ..	..	7
Sibsagar ..	..	164
Lakhimpur ..	..	85
Cachar ..	..	22
		—
Total ..	..	309
		—

### Uttar Pradesh

Only 6 out of 46 are above 300 acres.

**Kangra**

Only 5 estates out of about 2,500 are above 300 acres. 28 estates cover 4,857 acres, and about the same acreage belongs to the remaining estates. Of the 28 big estates, 23 are of 248 acres to 51.5 acres.

**SOUTH INDIA****(Upasi List)**

Coimbatore	..	..	2
Coorg (2 acres)	..	..	1
Madurai (2.23 acres)	..	..	1
Malabar	..	..	5
Malabar-Wynaad (mostly small holdings)	..	..	14
Mysore	..	..	10
Nilgiris	..	..	227
Nilgiri-Wynaad	..	..	20
Central Travancore and Mundakayam	..	..	86
Cochin	..	..	5
Kanan Devans	..	..	3
South Travancore	..	..	29

A descriptive account would show that, in Tripura, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, there is quite a good sprinkling of small holdings, the smallest one being of 1.2 acres. In the Darjeeling district, one comes across gardens from 2.87 acres upwards. There are 6 gardens under 10 acres. Small holdings do not pay in Dooars region. In Terai, the smallest garden is 60 acres. In Tripura, there is a plot of 9 acres, and the number of gardens below 300 acres is the greatest. In Darrang (Assam), there is one garden of 14.97 acres and two of 18.75 acres each, but the big estates predominate. In Goalpara, out of 10 estates on the list, 3 measure below 300 acres. In Kamrup, these small estates are 11 out of 18. In Nowgong, bigger estates prevail, though there is one of 41.60 acres. In Sibsagar, the smaller estates seem to be the rule, though some really big estates are found there also, the biggest

being of 1,943.35 acres and the smallest of 1.50 acres. In Lakhimpur, the big estates make a fair proportion, but there is one of 177 acres also. Cachar has bigger estates mostly, the smallest one being of 14.66 acres. In South India, small holdings abound in Nilgiris, Central and Southern Travancore and make the best proportions in the total number of holdings, if not in respect of acreage. Nilgiri tea plantation is small-holding plantation, and holdings below 200 acres predominate. Out of 28,317 acres, at least 60 per cent is occupied by small producers.

So, it is possible that, in terms of acreage, the big estates are certainly imposing; but, in respect of number, the small estates far outdo the big estates. There are, of course, many small holders who are not included in the above lists. As already pointed out, these have been carrying on and, though mostly as "a few paternal acres" under a perennial crop with hardly any other economic status, yet it must be an evidence that the European plantation system need not be the only successful system. An industry composed of small units may be as good as one composed of big units with a tendency to grow bigger. In point of quantity, and in respect of quality also, there may be measures taken to ensure it to the small producing units. Whether the industry should be mainly of bigger size units or of the smaller size ones, depends on the other conditions, social and economic, and, by far and large, on the employable population and social methods of distribution of incomes. The contrasts in organisation, the bigger ones tending to be vertical and the smaller ones to be horizontal, would certainly make a lot of difference in the distribution of the aggregate incomes.

Prima facie, the small-holding has what is called small capital intensity and larger employment of labour. The opposite emerges in a bigger holding, if modern mechanical and scientific methods are followed. Mr S. J.

Wright, investigating the situation for purposes of mechanisation in Ceylon, concluded that, given the more appropriate bush pattern in new replantation, or new tea opened, there is every prospect that, by fairly straightforward mechanisation, the present labour requirement could be reduced by at least 50 per cent. As in all tea growing areas in India and Ceylon replanting or new planting may have to be done sooner or later, the tendency to mechanisation would be natural, seeing that labour costs are rising and would be rising. It may be stated that labour costs of a pound of tea are now about 65 to 73.8 per cent of the total costs; and, if these costs rise, the producers on the bigger estates would be in a fix. The chances are that they would have to mechanise as far as possible.

Yet, in India, the issue of maximising profits in an undertaking is not the economic end. The issue is maintenance of production in a way that would help employment and a fair distribution of the incomes, and all progress of production would imply progress in these also. The need is for minimising the conflict between wages and profits, and enabling these to move together. Until now, they have had to go together; but, unfortunately, because the Government's economic and labour policy enjoined this. The existing organisation is being always put under a strain by the enforced measures by the Government everywhere; for, in the capitalistic enterprise, there is an incapable contrariness against labour, however restrained that contrariness may be.

### Tea in the Draft Second Five-Year Plan

The Planning Commission tantalisingly mentioned in the draft Second Five-Year Plan that, by 1960-61, the production of tea in India would be raised to 750 million pounds. The Commission left it there, and have not suggested how this may be done. So far, tea out-turn has been rising on the strength of increas-

ing manuring. The yield per acre is being pushed up wherever costs and prices enable it. Big estates in Assam are aiming at 1,400 lb per acre and above. But one doubts how far this trend can go. Of course, it is feasible for big units to hit the target. The tea areas have been producing under pressure since 1941. From the 414 million lb average of 1934-38, production has touched 644 million lb by 1954-55, an increase of 230 million lb in 15 years or so. The Planning Commission want an increase of 106 million lb only in 5 years from the present date, and the big estates can certainly do it; for, it means only 21.2 million lb a year additionally. But, even at that, one cannot be very sure about it, and the reasons have already been stated. First, stimulated production may reach a limit; and secondly, the adverse biological factor may assert itself categorically at any time, and it may do so in the next five years even over a large portion of the producing area. The need for a new set-up in terms of productivity and profit may be difficult to find.

It would, therefore, be necessary to consider a process of possible rationalisation that might be called for, probably as soon as replanting on a large scale would necessarily begin. The rationalisation would embrace the whole industry, but more pertinently the small units. For, these certainly have a place in the tea industry and in the national economy. The bigger estates may be left to do the replanting, and that should result in their shedding many of the acres held by them, and even acres under tea. They may think of introducing mechanisation, as they must in order to be able to produce if labour costs become unbearable. And there is no reason why there would not come organised small-holdings in those areas from which the big estates should retreat, or why new areas, if these are to be opened, should not be for such organised holdings by peasant proprietors. One can visualise the coming developments without much difficulty. Of the 1.2 million workers on the tea estates, at least

40 per cent may be thrown out on the completion of replanting though, at first, there may be an increase of employment. There is, besides, the surplus labour on many estates and the fear of a fast increasing labour population on the plantation. These are points that are not usually given much thought, but they are inescapable. And, with all these changes happening, the prospects of the target output of 750 million lb would become very vague. Even if the target is hit, the picture suggested above must be realised soon after that; for, after all, this picture of decreasing employment and waiting for the replanted clones to grow to the bearing condition has a scientific basis.

But, if any sudden crisis in production and employment is to be avoided, the only means is a new set-up of small holdings, which would be done with the least amount of capital investment, and which should provide the largest volume of employment. Of course, these small holdings should not be squatters' colonies. They must be set up on a definite economic plan, and integrated into the Plan-Frame in a way to ensure stability; and those would be first chosen who have experience of tea growing. If possible, tea growing would have to be included in what may be called "integral farming" as in some countries, and in some cases where it is never wise to depend on only a single commercial crop, whose prices fluctuate as those of tea. And not only this. The small-holders' production would have to be co-ordinated with and made complementary to that by the big estates. There will be no sense in generating strife between the big producers and the small while trying to eliminate the possible rising conflicts between wages and profits, or between labour and management already embarrassing the existing organisation or one with more intense capitalisation.

## The Economics of Small Holdings

With large-scale replanting or new planting by the bigger estates as a high degree of pro-

bability, the availability of tea lands for small-scale farming becomes difficult to guess. Besides, the way in which such farming may be given a start can be determined only after an actual on-the-spot survey will have been made. One thing is certain. The small-scale farming must be economic, and its productive efficiency must be the highest possible. It must not be a casual affair, as it has tended to be in Kangra now, nor should the small holding be liable to be broken up by the laws of inheritance as it is now. Lastly, the kind of organisation necessary will have to be very carefully thought out; for, it must not be supposed that this small-scale farming is going to be an easy affair, or what the State has got to do is only to dump some families on some tea lands.

Supposing that there are sufficient tea lands, and that small farming will be the order for the future production of tea; there are the questions of capital and labour, and what is no less important, the right kind of organisation, all of which are material. Labour should undoubtedly be the basic factor, but the capacity of labour is very much limited. At this time, the labour employed on the estates is usually 1.5 men per acre. This may be a standard, seeing that, in the actual plantation work in India, mechanisation has not yet been appreciable enough to change the nature of this aspect of tea-growing. But, with this measure, a labourer's family, usually supposed as consisting of 3.6 units in terms of consumption, would not be able to manage more than two acres. Yet tea growing on two acres, even if the yield is 500 lb per acre, may not yield as much as is being earned by such a family now, and what the family earns now is about the subsistence wages.

For, the small holder will not manufacture. He will simply supply raw leaf, and, at the current market prices, the best price he can get will not exceed 10 annas to 12 annas per lb. Of course, the price will depend on the working



cost of the factories, and the market prices of the manufactured tea at a given time; and, unless the bigger producers rule the market, the receipts by the small holder may be larger. Yet, two acres need not be the ceiling.

If a co-operative system is introduced, the allotment per family may be raised, probably 5 to 10 acres, and that ought to be economic, suitable to a fair standard of living, provided the standard yields are maintained. The possibilities in this direction should be investigated. If it is supposed that the small-scale farming has to produce, in the course of the next ten years, 200 million lb of tea, this would presuppose availability of 4 lakh acres (with yield at 500 lb per acre), and about 6 lakh workers (at 1.5 men per acre). On co-operative basis, the labour employed would be about half to three-fourths of the above number, that is, about 3 lakhs to 4.5 lakhs, including those on the organisation as a whole. Obviously, the labour required may be available; the problem of land will have to be solved, and land, being State-owned, would have to be granted on easy loan terms to begin with.

It is possible that a difficulty will arise in respect of acreages below 500. Estates with acreages below 500 are economic or not, according to the costs of their production and market prices prevailing. Those below 300 acres are definitely liable to trouble when prices fall, because the costs are mostly inelastic. They cannot have sufficient resources also, because the margin for such reserves is almost nil. They cannot also claim any differential treatment by the Government, because they belong clearly to an order that depends on itself and professes to be self-sufficient. It has not been possible for most of these to maintain the standards that the bigger estates find necessary for the time. They are the problems of the industry now, and they will be so in the future order as contemplated. It is certainly necessary to find out where and how they stand, and

what they would do when the large-scale re-planting will be forced on them. They are to be considered because the availability of both labour and land may be affected by what they would do or be required to do. Suggestions have been made that they may, in suitable conditions, combine into bigger estates or concerns; but, if that does not happen, these estates may have to be brought under the same general agricultural policy of the Government as would contain the small holdings.

'Capital' would have to be 'rural credit' in the given conditions. Here, the general agricultural policy that visualises an order of peasant proprietors with transferable rights in holdings will have to be worked out, with such modifications as would be required by the difference in circumstances. The investment required may be found out by more pertinent research; but, roughly, it may be put at Rs 150 per acre at the present rate. It must not be forgotten that the proportion of labour in this kind of production is to be higher than that of capital. At this rate, 4 lakh acres would require Rs 6 crores, and the organisation may cost another Rs 4 crores. So, the volume of capital required for the set-up would be about Rs 10 crores, and an item of Rs 10 crores would be negligible in a Plan that would spend thousands of crores in the next few years.

The farming organisation may be co-operative, as that is also supposed to be the future basis of agriculture in this country. But, for the sake of credit and manufacturing and marketing, the use of voluntary co-operation may have to be modified largely at the beginning and put under State control and management. A sort of zonal arrangement may be required with a central body for co-ordination purposes. Factories will have to be set up at convenient centres; and, though, at the start, these would have to be State-owned and managed, they might be transferred to co-operative bodies whenever such change is found desirable. The State should, through the Tea Board or inde-

pendently, establish research stations in every zone.

## The State and the Small Holders

There may be some doubts about the benefits or the share of the benefits that should accrue to the State or the Government by this policy. The existing organisation has paid the Government well in taxes, duties and cesses; but the rural farming may turn out to be a permanent liability, like general agriculture. But, for one thing, the bigger estates that were born in the last century are not going out of the picture; they are expected to consolidate and thrive. If so, the current receipts by the Government should not suffer much. Secondly, the misgivings that the small units would become a liability always may turn out to be idle, if the whole thing is handled properly and honestly. Thirdly, even if the small holdings turn out to be a liability, it does not matter. The whole of the agriculture of a country is that some time or other, and yet agriculture is not abandoned for that reason.

The only relevant question to be raised here is: would the investments made by the Government pay dividends in the years to come? The answer to that is not likely to be more definite than the expectation that there will be dividends; just as all the expenditures under the Plan are expected to pay dividends, so it will be in the case of tea. Here, the general policy of economic development matters most. Nonetheless, the fact that small farming has been here and in all tea producing countries also under all possible circumstances should be ample evidence of its survival capacity and economic validity in the countries in which they exist.

The whole purpose of taxation and expenditure is the development of the economy of the country, which means increased employment and a rising level of aggregate and personal

incomes. The end of the policy cannot be merely increasing production but also fair distribution of the increasing production. The two must go together, and that is what the Plan-Frame signifies. Taxation and expenditure are meant no less for the purpose of less unequal distribution than for that of many-sided increase of production.

## The State Policy for Tea

The future policy in respect of tea will, therefore, have to be determined by the entire economic policy of the nation. Until the present date, this policy has not been extensible to tea, because of the settled character of the industry. The work of the Tea Board, the Government's instrument of control, cannot do much; for, the industry has so long been going on in its own way successfully, and any drastic change is most likely to upset it. The only thing that the Government can do is to impose some new obligations and share some of the profits. Nothing more can, presumably, be done.

But the expansion of the production, which will be required by the increasing world demand, need not be tied up to this restrictive order. The point to decide here must be: Is Tea-growing a rural industry, and a part of agriculture? The answer to this admits of no doubt. Opinions may differ about this nature of tea-growing in Australia, or in a country in which agriculture plays a subordinate role; but they cannot do so here, in the countries of South East Asia and the Far East, in which over 42 per cent of the world population lives, and where large-scale industrialisation will never be equal to the responsibilities of full employment. There is, again, nothing radically and theoretically wrong in the assumption that tea-growing is essentially a rural pursuit. For, both experience and history prove it. Without going into any invidious comparisons of the big and the small, the Western idea of plantation and the Eastern practice of farming, it is possible to say that place, time and enterprise are

likely to be decisive in favour of the small-scale farm-basis of tea production.

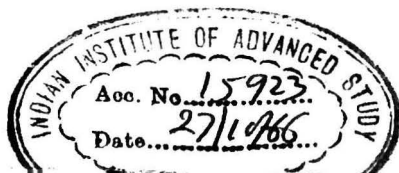
It may not be irrelevant to take another step forward and consider this whole business in the declared socio-economic end of India,—namely, the socialistic pattern of society. By this phrase, 'socialistic pattern,' is meant the rise in the standards of living and life which must be in a large degree common to all the individuals born and recognised as citizens of India. There should be much less social and uneconomic inequalities than now prevail. The methods used in bringing this about need not be copied from any existing model; for, no such model pattern exists. So, the need is for finding and shaping these methods according to cost, conditions and traditions, and improving the whole in every way possible. New ideas would be tried and employed in so far as they strengthen and expand the new order meant to realise the values chosen so deliberately.

And this is a matter in which the bigger units are likely to be more interested than may be supposed. The first, and probably the most embarrassing, problem of these big producers is the increasing unemployed labour population already settled in the estates. In so far as these labourers are tea garden workers, they would find it difficult to be shifted to any other line without losses to them. The Government will have a serious problem to face here, as the Assam State Government have already been doing. Besides, in a region like Darjeeling, the labour want to work in tea gardens mostly, and have very little of opportunities in any other line. One thing about the tea garden labour is that men, women and child workers (above 12 years) may be employed, and this may not be possible in other industrial lines. The family unit that can be accommodated in a tea plantation may not be so easily accommodated in other industries. So to a large section of the growing labour population on the estates, this new way of growing tea would provide an avenue of remunerative employment that would be urgently needed very shortly.

Of course, organisation would be the most crucial problem in the new order, and it will be some time before it is completed. But, unless a start is made right now in this direction, the future of tea production in India itself will be problematic. The warning has been given repeatedly, though it has not been heeded. The following is an extract from one of the articles by a Chief Scientific Officer to the Tea Research Institute in South India:

"Of the 1,72,808 registered acres of planted tea in Southern India, a great many have been in existence for more than 60 years and there are in fact appreciable acreages of tea the records of which date back as far as 80 to 90 years. Instances of tea a hundred years old are also by no means uncommon. This age factor, the need of greater productivity to meet the requirements of expanding world markets, and to offset the increasing costs of production, the need for a higher output of quality teas, to maintain our place in those markets, and the need for some degree of rationalisation of production methods to offset the complexities caused by problems of labour-management relations are all incentives for the South Indian planters to give serious consideration to this problem of replanting tea."

If this is so in South India, it must be much more so in Northern India, where tea planting began so long ago, and may be said to have been heavily concentrated. The only conclusion drawn from this is that the big plantations will soon have their resources over-taxed for replanting. The additional output required to maintain the share of Indian tea in the expanding markets will have to be produced by other ways; and the most promising, durable and adequate way is, without a doubt, the farm-growing of teas within a modern and suitable organisation.



— —