

## Migration and Its Challenges: A Study on Women Workers of Dooars Tea Gardens in West Bengal Since 2011

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### Abstract

One of the oldest industries in India is the tea industry. Tea workers, particularly women from the Dooars region, have encountered several challenges in recent. To prosper in the competitive market in globalised world, the Dooars tea planters reduced the labour cost during this period. When there are insufficient job possibilities in the local area, women are starting to migrate in large numbers, it almost consistently culminates in exploitation afterwards. In order to meet people's fundamental necessities, West Bengal's Government implemented a number of social programs which is directly benefiting women. The study introduces the concept of "bio-populism" but asserts its failure to address the issue of unemployment and poverty in tea gardens, highlighting the limitations of the populist politics. The study was carried out in the Dooars tea garden area of West Bengal, underscore the vulnerability and migration of women even in the wake of the government's populist policies.

**Keywords:** Women Labour, Migration, Populist Politics, Bio-Populism.

### 1. Introduction

Women are an important resource in our society; without them, things would not progress as they ought to. Consequently, without women, no civilization can grow fully on all fronts. Historically, women have made up a sizable portion of the worker in India's tea sector. Women continue to play a large role in this tea industry today, constituting over 50 percent of the workforce (Labour Bureau, 2010). India has used agricultural products to produce agricultural goods for export historically. Since plantations are located in rural and underdeveloped areas throughout the entire nation, they support and create jobs for the rural population in their respective regional economies (Joseph and George, 2010). The socioeconomic structure of the plantation industry, which is typified by a strong reliance on manual labour and a low degree of technology, sets it apart from other businesses. The Indian tea industry is among the oldest organized sectors, having been in existence for almost 160 years. Family-based employment on tea estates accomplishes two goals: first, it facilitates labour reproduction by offering subsidized rations, housing, health care, and education; second, it boosts the profitability of the entrepreneurs by supplying low-cost labour. The gardens serve as housing for the labourers and their families. The nation's average sex ratio in organized employment has probably increased because of the plantation sector, which employs a huge number of women in organized labour (Joshi, 1976). Because plucking is considered a feminine talent, planters have a particular need for female labourers for both productive and reproductive tasks. In 2010, women accounted for 55.86% of all plantation occupations, making up the vast majority of

labourers. The percentage of female employees in tea gardens has risen above that of male employees. However, the Labor Bureau (2014) reports that from 103894 in 1995 to 73043 in 2010, fewer women were working on West Bengal's tea estates.

West Bengal's plantation industry has seen widespread illness and closure since economic globalisation. Indian tea was developed with the world market in mind. In order to survive in the new, cutthroat market, the Dooars tea planters at this period adopted a cost-minimising attempt. This led to inconsistent or non-existent wage payments, no bonuses, erratic ration supply, difficulties funding provident funds, unpaid gratuity obligations, and other issues. However, additional welfare programs that, according to laws and customs, garden owners were responsible for providing things like fuel, healthcare, education, fringe benefits, etc., were also jeopardized. On account of continuous immigration and infiltration from neighbouring countries Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan the density of population in Dooars is gradually increasing day by day. As a result, unemployment prevails in these areas. Starvation, malnutrition, ill health and immature death are very common. Infrastructural facilities like transport-network, degree of urbanization, industry, and medical facilities are very poor in the area. In the absence of adequate employment opportunities in the local area, to supplement it there has emerged a tendency of outward migration. Every member of the family takes part in the producing process. They generate food and drink for themselves. Every member of the household works very hard to live. As a result, many households lack a clear distribution of labour based on gender. One essential component of industrialization and social formation is the phenomena of migration. This allows organized crime to entice many women to far-off locations under the guise of offering them work, which nearly always results in their exploitation later on. This paper attempts to investigate significant concerns surrounding the intimate relationship between migration, vulnerabilities, and challenges surrounding the migration of female workers of tea garden in a sickening tea garden in the Dooars area of Jalpaiguri district, West Bengal. These women and girls are mostly uneducated and unskilled. They have extremely poor living standards and work inhumane conditions in cities. The populist schemes of the new government of West Bengal also failed to address the migration problem of women tea garden workers. The present researcher must inquire into these zones that left unaddressed. Here lies the justification of the study.

## **2. Research Location and Methodology**

Studies were conducted in the Dooars tea gardens to assess the degree of worker marginalization, women's vulnerabilities, and the impact of migration. The names, locations, and present state of these gardens are listed in Table 1. They were selected and chosen based on field visits' initial status reports and accessibility. Research instruments like in-depth local people's interviews, group discussions and case studies were used to gather data because the goal of this study was to gather qualitative information about the nature, extent, and dimensions of the various types of vulnerabilities of women labour in particular. Victim case studies were also gathered from victims, their relatives, neighbours, and other associates.

**Table 1: Names, Location and Status of Tea Gardens Studied**

S.L.	Name of Tea Gardens	Location	Area in Hectares	Status as on November 2023
1	Katalguri Tea Estates	Dhupguri Division 26.8351°N, 89.0896° E	777.06	Sick
2	Chamurchi Tea Estates	Dhupguri Division 26.8822° N, 89.0800° E	889.20	Sick
3	Debpara Tea Garden	Dhupguri Division 26.8331° N, 89.0120° E	851.81	Sick
4	Diana Tea Estates	Dhupguri Division 26.8494° N, 89.0251° E	536.62	Sick
5	Redbank Tea Estates	Dhupguri Division 26.8731° N, 89.0394° E	769.47	Sick
6	New Dooars Tea Estates	Dhupguri Division 26.8283° N, 89.0535° E	962.35	Sick

Source: Combined efforts utilizing the data from the personal surveys and Tea Board.

### 3. Background of Women Migration

Indian tea was forced to compete in the international market after 1990 with the onset of globalization and the government of India's adoption of the New Economic Policy (NEP). The unrestricted movement of products across international borders was made possible by the introduction of the free trade agreement. During this time, Dooars and other tea-growing regions turned to blending Indian tea with inferior tea imported from countries like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to sell their product on the international market (Pul, 2018). To tackle this problem and prosper in the newly competitive market, the tea planters of Dooars adopted a cost-cutting strategy by sharply reducing labor expenses. This led to a number of issues, including irregular or non-existent wage payments, no bonuses for the employees, inconsistent ration supplies, no maintenance of worker's quarters, unpaid gratuity obligations that grew over time, failure to deposit a specific amount that was withdrawn from income for a provident fund, and so forth. Additionally, the expenses for fuel, healthcare, schooling, extra perks, and other welfare programs for the workers all of which, by practice and custom, had been the garden owners' responsibility were now compromised. Roy and Biswas (2018) attribute the poor condition of the tea gardens on low quality tea bushes, trade barriers, low production costs, and antiquated tools and methods. The workers' primary issues following the closure or abandonment of the gardens in Dooars are more significant to their survival, such as the lack of safe water to drink supplies, the discontinuation of the ration supply or power, the absence of daily wages or wage cuts, and the inadequate medical facilities in the garden hospitals.

Historians have observed that throughout the history of private capitalist firms in colonial India, the tea industry employed a sizable labour force at the lowest pay levels (Behal, 2006, p. 4). Tea plantation labourers received the lowest pay in the organized sector even after independence (Bhowmik, 2002, p. 150). According to the North Bengal Report on Hunger in Tea Plantations, published in 2004, 22 plantations had either closed, been abandoned, or had been declared sick since 2002. There were 20,487 permanent employees working in these 22 gardens, and 94,347 individuals were impacted overall. In addition to it, the jobs of the temporary "bigha" workers in the gardens were also destroyed. Many tea gardens were closed in 2003–04, leaving its employees starving. Although there may be some truth to the employers' assertions, there were a number of other reasons that lead to the gardens' declining state,

wherein the administration and employers shared equal responsibility. Among these are the practices of restocking and tending to the old bushes to boost yield and extend the tea-growing region. Whereas in Tamil Nadu, the majority of bushes were younger than 20 years old, the production rate was pointedly greater in Dooars, where over 50% of bushes were older than 50 years. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to assign the worker's responsibilities in isolation. Very little action has been taken in Dooars to rejuvenate the tea bushes (Sarkar, 2021)

Even though constitution of India protects people from exploitation, wage exploitation in Indian tea sector still exists. When it comes to pay, women who work in the tea gardens in West Bengal are denied genuine salaries. Workers receive the lowest earnings (Bhowmik, 2011). It has been observed that the female employee is not receiving her full pay. Even when laws ended the pay gap between male and female labourers, many West Bengali tea planters refused to pay their female employees a fair rate even though their labour was equally valuable to both genders. It wasn't carried out in certain tea gardens until July 1979. After a few years, these salary disparities were eliminated as a result of pressure from several plantation labour trade unions. Even if there is no legal wage gap, in practice there is still a wage difference that persists to this day. Women of all ages who are elderly, infirm, old, or indolent, or who have a persistent illness, are employed. They receive two thirds of an adult worker's pay. The fact that many adult women workers receive a lesser amount than their male coworkers, wage disparities persist in various forms. (Bhadra, 2004). There are many women working as casual labourers in some tea gardens. This is important since temporary employees do not receive same benefits as permanent employees. (Fact Finding Mission Report, 2016).

As to the principles of "Right to Life," each individual must have adequate living conditions. However, this is untrue for the families of the female tea workers. The unsanitary dwelling colonies of tea garden workers and their offspring are located in this area. Due to lack of literacy and their low socioeconomic status, the majority of these workers are still unaware of their rights and entitlements. The numerous diseases and health issues that the workers experience is mostly brought on by unsanitary living conditions and lack of education. The two main problems for the locals are the lack of electricity and clean drinking water. The corporation provides workers with inadequate and unclean drinking water, and the water supply tank is not regularly sanitized. In certain tea estates, management has installed hand pumps or tube wells to solve the water problem. However, these initiatives are not sufficient to satisfy the needs of the employees and their families. Furthermore, not every garden has access to electricity (Ghosh, 2015). Women and girls bear a disproportionate share of the labour-intensive task of fetching waterfalls on some plantations. The management frequently disregards labour laws by not providing restrooms or latrines. (Fact Finding Mission Report, 2016). Women labourers are virtually entirely employed as tea pickers and are not eligible for promotions. Women's potential for better pay are hampered by their incapacity to complete other activities (Fact Finding mission report, 2016). A variety of strategies, guidelines, directives, and protocols were formulated, and actions were conducted to mitigate the difficulties encountered by female tea plantation labourers. Although it is true that these initiatives were intended to fulfil the basic necessities of labourers, their implementation proved inadequate. Every citizen is guaranteed fundamental rights by the constitution, as stated in Article 21 on the right to life and liberty. Article 21 is the most important one since it protects the right to life. Ensuring a means of livelihood for all is the ultimate goal of social security. Stated differently, the right to life inherently includes the right to social security.

As per Article 38, the state will safeguard and foster a societal structure wherein justice, encompassing social, political, and economic aspects, would impact all national establishments and augment the well-being of the general public The state will specifically work to reduce

financial disparities and remove status, opportunity, and facility inequalities between groups of individuals, not just persons who live in different regions or pursue various occupations.

According to Article 39, the state must adhere to a number of principles in order to carry out its objectives. Specifically, it must focus on ensuring that every citizen, male and female alike, has an appropriate means of livelihood.

The tea industry, being an organized sector, is also subject to the rules of social security that are managed by both the federal and state governments. The social security rules, which cover things like provident funds, gratuity payments, maternity benefits, etc., also apply to tea workers. Additionally, tea workers are given access to drinking water, housing, firewood, medical facilities, canteens, childcare facilities, etc. by the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 (PLA).

The Operation Management Committee (OMC) was established as a coalition of local politicians, trade union leaders, and administrative authorities to address the unemployment problem. The labourers resumed their leaf-picking duties once the OMCs were formed at various gardens and at various times. However, as the welfare benefits—such as food, fuel, medical care, and other ancillary benefits—that the garden owners had previously been required to deliver as per the Plantation Labour Act of 1951 were not reinstated, their suffering remained unrelieved (Talwar, Chakraborty, and Biswas, September 2005).

The closed tea gardens were ordered to be included in the machinery of the right to food by the Supreme Court of India in 2004 (Talwar, Chakraborty, and Biswas September, 2005). Before, it was only the garden owners' duty to supply their employees with necessities like as water, weekly rations, access to healthcare, and decent accommodation. Following the shutdown, these necessities were no longer available. In the event that these weren't there, the Indian Supreme Court moved to protect these rights of its people and gave the West Bengal government some orders like directed the state government instructions to declare the plantation workers in the area's closed gardens to be Below Poverty Line (BPL) individuals; The state government would send doctors, nurses, and a pharmacist carrying medications to each garden at least twice a week in order to provide medical treatment for the garden workers etc.

Initiatives by the State Government to Expand Social Security Programs to the Gardens: In response to this crisis, the West Bengal government declared that the Labour Relations Department would take action to guarantee the prompt regularization of the newly established plantations, which primarily belong to small growers. This included vested lands and putting the abandoned gardens up for open bids from promoters (Dasgupta, 2009). Allegedly, nevertheless, the aforementioned plans' performances fell short of expectations.

#### **4. Women Migration in Tea Gardens in Dooars**

Keeping the historical context mentioned above in mind, let's now investigate the issue of women migrating to work in the many Dooars tea gardens. The West Bengal government is now taking notice of the ongoing issues with tea gardens. The National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA, 2013) would include all tea gardens as one of its constituents, and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes (MGNREGS) will be extended to the gardens as among the measures taken in this regard. After 2011, the new government launched a number of initiatives, including Khadyasathi, Swasthyasathi, Sabooj Sathi, Lakshmi Vandar, Rupashree, Kanyashree, and different financial grants. The government adopted a form of welfareism while simultaneously taking on the roles of order reproduction and damage repair. Periodically, the government introduced welfare programs to assist victims of exploitation and provided bail-out packages for struggling capital, following Keynesian principles. During this

period, the state blended capitalistic growth with the implementation of welfare packages for vulnerable populations as a strategy to postpone legitimating crises. In India, the liberal-democratic order has established an intricate system to integrate the traditionally "excluded" and marginalised sections into the societal structure through various schemes. These populist schemes, which may be associated with Foucauldian 'biopolitics' (Foucault, 2008) since these try to gather political support and maintain control of a large population by fulfilling some of their basic needs for survival.

The daily pay at the tea gardens surveyed for this study is INR 250 in 2023. By concentrating on a few tea gardens in Dooars, West Bengal, the research aims to determine whether or not these populist policies have been successful in stopping external labour migration in light of recent developments. Even a casual glance at any tea garden reveals that issues like hunger, illiteracy, and diseases are pervasive in addition to poverty and unemployment. There has been a critical need for alternate work options to address this. However, these illiterate and unskilled people have relatively little possibilities due to the "enclave economy" of Dooars. The law of minimum wage has not been adhered to by the Dooars tea sector. Two methods are used to pay wages. The first is monetary in nature, and the second one relates to housing, drinking water, and a medical facility for those under the age of eighteen. The latter, though, is irregular. As a result, their only source of income is cash. The rationing facility was previously a part of the second category. However, the gardens were added to the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) with establishment of the NFSA. Even though the current study revealed that a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are handling the issue of medical facilities and some individuals also helping to the worker, it is insufficient to meet the need.

A trend of outmigration has emerged in the absence of sufficient employment possibilities in the resident area. It is estimated by Victor Basu of Dooars Jagran that over thirty percent of labour migrants currently work in the many gardens in Dooars, together with their families. Currently, tea labourers are paid INR 250 per day. Families are only allowed to employ one member as tea labourer in the garden. A worker can work no more than 24 or 25 days in a month, and they are not compensated on holidays. They so make about Rs 5,000 a month. Many workers said that they are migrating outside of their area since no employment available to them. Rupa Lohar of Debpara Hospital Line a migrant worker said that she had a job in garden but she left the job and going to Delhi for domestic help because the salary she received in garden didn't meet her family needs. She said that how she will feed her family with that little salary and how she will educate her children, repair her house or maintain health issues. Munija Khatun of Chamurchi Tea Estate said that "There are a lot of issues here. We have a meagre income from the tea garden, which makes it very difficult to manage. Girls, even if they don't want to, leaving their homes to support their parents. Since they have no other income opportunity, they are forced to leave." Following various group discussion and interview with various member of political parties and civil societies, it was observed that the primary drivers promoting women to migrate include low wages, unemployment, poverty, high aspirations and domestic violence with low wages and unemployment emerging as the most dominant factors (see Table 2 and Table 3).

**Table 2: Causes of Women Labour Migration: Perception of Group Discussion Participants**

Rank	Causes of Migration	Total Responses
1	Low Wages	41
2	Unemployment	26
3	Poverty	21
4	Poor Life	14
5	Hunger	9
6	High Aspirations	4
7	Domestic Violence	3

Source: Information gathered from group discussions at tea estates in November 2023.

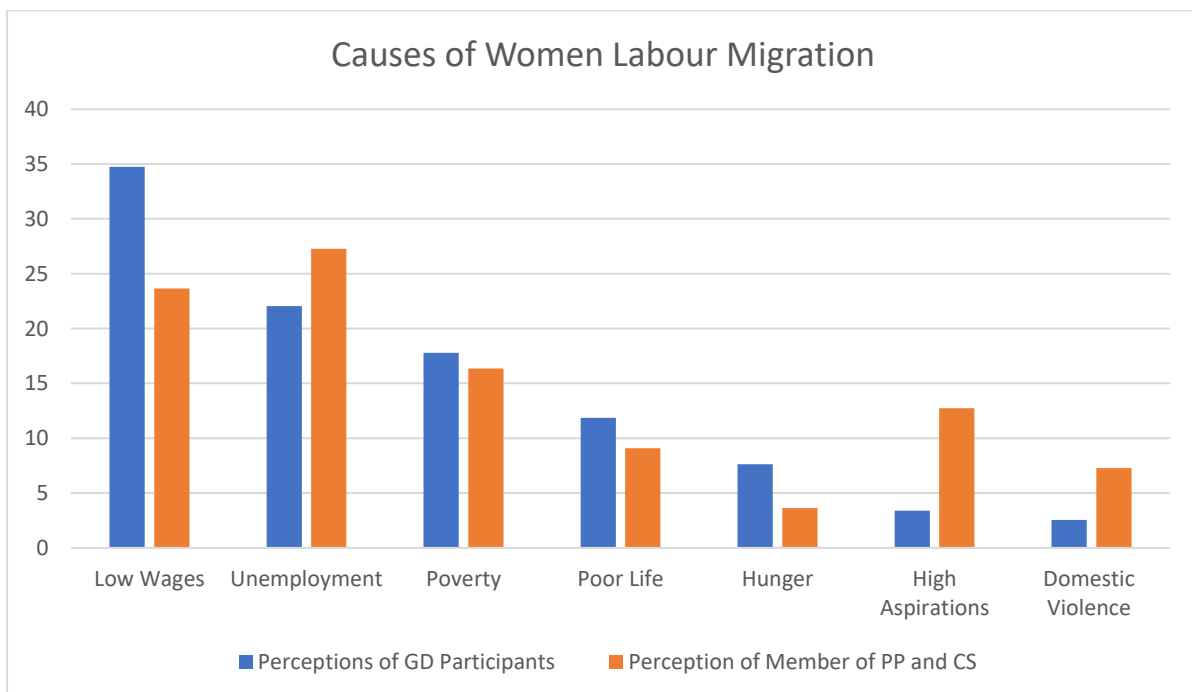
**Table 3: Causes of Women Labour Migration: Perception of Member of Political Parties and Civil Societies**

Rank	Causes of Migration	Total Responses
1	Unemployment	15
2	Low Wages	13
3	Poverty	9
4	High Aspirations	7
5	Poor Life	5
6	Domestic Violence	4
7	Hunger	2

Source: Data collected based on interviews in November 2023.

The data in Figure 1 also demonstrate that there are some push factors like unemployment, low incomes in tea garden, domestic violence, hunger and also some pull factors like high aspirations behind the migration of women tea garden workers.

**Figure 1: Causes of Women Labour Migration**



Source: Estimated from Table 2 & Table 3

The majority of women's jobs are as domestic help. Households are generally seen to be heavily reliant on remittances from urban migration. Nearly all of the households the researcher looked at discovered that it is extremely difficult to get two square meals a day without remittance money, and that the remittance also depended on unofficial sources of income in the urban economy, which prevented these families from receiving socioeconomic and medical security.

At least one member of the studied households in the chosen tea gardens is involved in activities outside the garden. They moved to cities in various regions of the nation, where they now send money back to their families. The majority of the time, the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979's requirements are not being adhered to. As a result, migrant workers do not have enough job or life security. They travel on these trips at their own risk, and their only source of revenue is the amount they can negotiate with the local placement agency. The labourers will have work stability and not be required to pay for their travel costs if the regulations are fulfilled. Women are almost always the victims of these false promises. According to one survey, over 180 women disappeared from the tea estates permanently between 2011 and 2013 (Ghosh, June 28, 2008)

Maximum number of women are migrated to Delhi and then to Bangalore. And most of them are work as domestic worker (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Data of Women Labour Migration in Dooars**

Name of Migrant	Address	Family Unit	Destinations	Type of Job	Monthly Income	
					Migrant	Family
Pallabi Nag (21)	New Dooars Factory Line	F-4	Dubai	Domestic Work	15000	13000
Jasinita Marandi (40)	New Dooars Santhal Line	F-2, M-1	Delhi	Domestic Work	-----	5000
Sonali Oria (42)	New Dooars Upper Line	F-2, M-5	Kashmir	Domestic Work	11000	14000
Mungli Hansda (50)	New Dooars Santhal Line	F-1, M-1	Delhi	Domestic work	-----	10000
Mini Sunar (25)	Debpara Hospital Line	F-3, M-2	Delhi	Domestic Work	13000	32000
Anjali Sunar (30)	Debpara Hospital Line	F-3, M-2	Delhi	Domestic Work	14000	32000
Jamuna Sunar (30)	Debpara Hospital Line	F-3, M-1	Mumbai	Domestic Work	15000	30000
Gita Oraon (31)	Debpara Prem Nagar	F-4, M-1	Bangalore	Meat Packing	10000	-----
Mungri Oraon (43)	Katalguri Hatkhola Line	F-2, M-3	Delhi	Domestic Work	15000	15000
Minakshi Lohar (38)	Katalguri Division Line	F-2, M-1	Delhi	Domestic Work	15000	5000
Rajanti Oraon (54)	Katalguri Division Line	F-2, M-2	Patna	Domestic Work	6000	-----
Fulmoti Lohar (45)	Katalguri Division Line	F-3, M-2	Delhi	Domestic Work	15000	26000
Reshma Khatun (28)	Chamurchi Upper Division	F-4, M-3	Bangalore	Domestic Work	15000	32000
Guriya Lohar (19)	Chamurchi Upper Division	F-5, M-3	Bangalore	Domestic Work	13000	-----
Jahena Khatun (26)	Chamurchi Division Line	F-5, M-2	Bangalore	Food Delivery Staff	11000	15000
Uma Tamang (33)	Redbank 3 No. Line	F-5, M-1	Delhi	Domestic Work	10000	24000
Rajna Khatun (24)	Redbank Bikha Line	F-9, M-2	Chennai	Domestic Work	12000	8800
Anna Tirkey (45)	Redbank Upper Line	F-3, M-2	Delhi	Domestic Work	8000	20000
Mallika Mahali (23)	Diana Lower Line	F-2, M-2	Gujrat	Domestic Work	7000	17000
Anika Oraon (37)	Diana Factory Line	F-1, M-2	Delhi	Domestic Work	10000	4800

Source: Field Survey, November 2023.

If someone seeks a job, they should usually get in touch with a local "placement agent" or middleman. These people frequently approach the less fortunate people from the gardens. The agents pay the travel expenses if they are unable to. However, that must be reimbursed after receiving payment. These agents actually function as "sub-placement" agents and are compensated fairly for labour supply. It makes perfect sense in this situation that a network of middlemen is in place to keep the labour supply. It is also evident that, after arrival at their

destination, the newly hired individuals are brought to various "placement offices" and detained there for a few days or weeks prior to being assigned to jobs or released for distribution. It is also fact that a major portion of local agents are from their relatives and their neighbours.

Employers frequently forcibly seize cell phones and required documents in "placement offices" in order to prevent the recruits from going home. The same sum of money that they spent as incentives to the local "placement agents" must be reimbursed to the employer if they wish to go back. These new hires are frequently forced to work in different locations without pay until their employers receive compensation, and they are not given the kind of job or location they were promised previously. Fortunately, some women might get a nice job, but this is not always the case. In some situations, the employer provides food and housing, so the employees are able to send a sizable sum of money home. However, the remittance automatically decreases when the workers are forced to arrange their own housing and food. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that they will get payment each month. Even the promised salary is often not received and sometimes not at all.

Nonetheless, there are no indications of significant unrest or protest from the individuals' relatives or community members. Consequently, the agents have had plenty of chances to establish robust networks throughout the gardens. This further demonstrates the general ignorance of the local populace. Furthermore, their lack of knowledge of the outside world causes them to be duped by the agents' false promises. The local agents create stories to mislead the family whenever a woman stops communicating with them. Therefore, in addition to push forces like poverty and unemployment in the community, the allure of better living conditions abroad opens doors for agents, particularly for women. Occasionally, high aspirations like the allure of expensive clothing and cosmetics serves as the catalyst for the girls' fall into the trap. The moment a garden is become "sick," a widespread desire for departure arises. In these kinds of circumstances, agents present the less fortunate with prospects for well-paying jobs. It is frequently quite difficult for the sufferers and family members to resist such temptation. It is important to stress in this context that drinking alcohol and domestic violence is a significant driving force behind this. Victor Basu from Dooars Jagran said that in many cases the heavy drinking is acting as the trigger for migration of women.

It was discovered through talks with members of civil society and local politicians that parents frequently force their young girls to work to support their families, which puts a great deal of pressure on them to look for jobs of any kind. The agents approach the stage during this moment. The majority of parents in tea gardens lack sufficient foresight, so they send their daughters into the uncertain world without first consulting someone with local knowledge. Parents are frequently offered financial incentives in these deals. They become aware of their errors after their daughter disappears. Subhashish Munda of Dooars Jagran said that one of the main reasons women go out is because of domestic violence<sup>iv</sup>. According to Victor Basu, there were between 200 and 250 trafficking agents working in the Dooars region in 2018. Each agent had a designated area of operation (Bhaduri, October 1, 2018). Additionally, he mentioned that although migration is a common occurrence in the area, most of it ends in slavery and that there is few successes rate for rescues due to uncooperative management. There are situations in which police are unwilling to investigate missing person cases.

People also claims that police frequently take a "bureaucratic approach" to dealing with the relatives of the victims and are "partial" in their handling of the cases since it has been discovered that the agents have resources and connections to those in power (Ghosh, 2014). However, the family member can even be afraid to reveal the identity of the agents. The traffickers are safe from legal entanglement due to absence of robust official complaints against them and inadequate authentic information about the movements and activities of the agents

around the region. Because the majority of victim family are uneducated, they frequently file missing diary reports rather than filing cases under the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956, which makes their complaints extremely weak. The paucity of demonstrations against trafficking is due to social prestige and a lack of unity caused by caste and ethnic divides. Senior journalist Koushik Shil stated that parents typically do not protest because of two other factors: a lack of police backing and a fear of the police.<sup>v</sup> Political parties, trade unions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can play a crucial role in bridging the gap that exists between the residents of the tea gardens and their administrators and police. But there are also rare examples, such as the Dooars Jagran success story, which revealed during the field study. Based on field survey, it was discerned that factors contributing to families refraining from protesting against agent's deceptive promises encompass a lack of awareness, illiteracy, absence of social support, domestic violence, poverty etc. (see Table 5 and Table 6).

**Table 5: Reasons for Family Not Protesting against agent's False Promises, Perception of Group Discussion Participants**

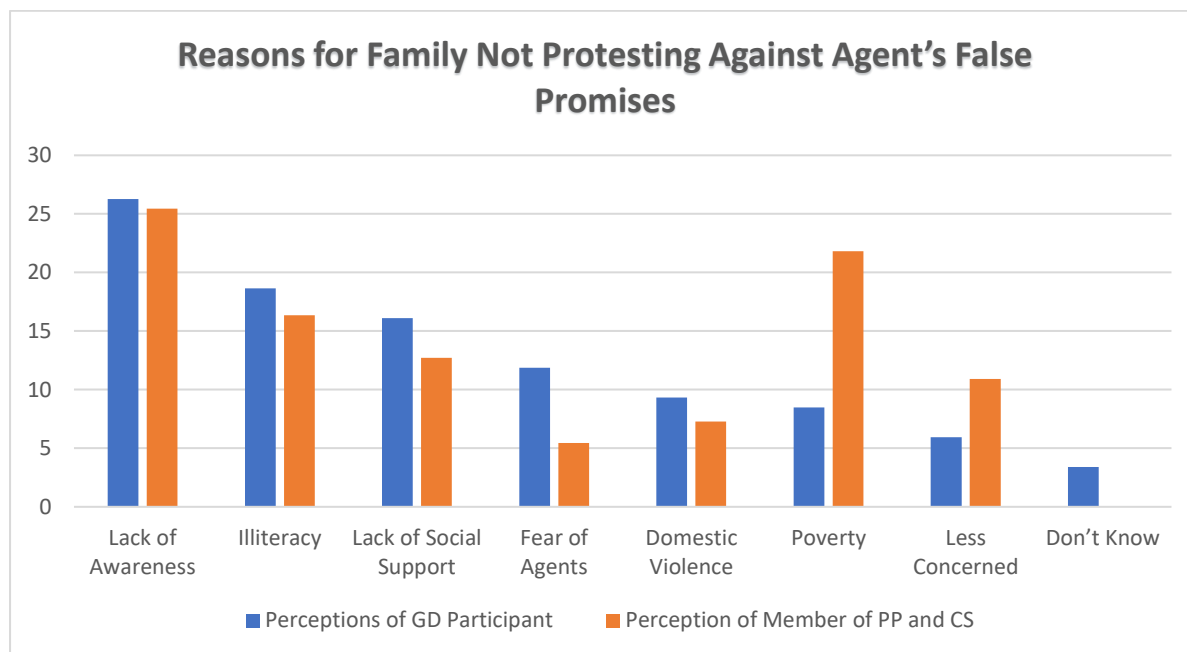
Rank	Reasons	Total Responses
1	Lack of Awareness	31
2	Illiteracy	22
3	Lack of Social Support	19
4	Fear of Agents	14
5	Domestic Violence	11
6	Poverty	10
7	Less Concerned	7
8	Don't Know	4

Source: Data collected from various Group Discussion in tea gardens in November 2023.

**Table 6: Reasons for Family Not Protesting against agent's False Promises, Perception of Member of Political Parties and Civil Societies**

Rank	Reasons	Total Responses
1	Lack of Awareness	14
2	Poverty	12
3	Illiteracy	9
4	Lack of Social Support	7
5	Less Concerned	6
6	Domestic Violence	4
7	Fear of Agents	3
8	Don't Know	0

Source: Data collected based on interviews in November 2023.

**Figure 2: Reasons for Family Not Protesting Against Agent's False Promises**

Source: Estimated from Table 5 & 6

The data in Figure 2 demonstrate that fraudsters are attracted to areas of low literacy, high rates of domestic violence, and a generalized fear of agents.

For the workers, migration represents an opportunity to break free from oppression and hardship, as well as an escape from poverty and helplessness. Everyone participating in the process has something to gain from it. The problem of outmigration is a real illustration of the dialectics between labour and capital because of the manner in which labour and capital collide and because of the continuous conversion of the working class (Marx, 1986). Only the very beginnings of the problems exist, such as the outmigration problem and the odd but inevitable shift caused by the labour that is referred to as "organized sector labour" progressively becoming "informalized." It's significant that this shift is taking place at a time when, although being close to mechanization, the tea plantation industry cannot assert that it has given up its labour-intensive nature. Indeed, all the evils made possible by neo-liberal labour reform discourses to supply are being appropriated by plantation labour regimes. Plantation management regimes across India are defending the benefits of consistently low labour costs in addition to launching direct attacks on labour rights and entitlements. Throughout the Dooars tea belt, it is now evident how labour and the mechanisms and politics of capital accumulation are at odds.

## 5. Vulnerabilities of women Migrants: Some Case Studies

This study has succeeded to record a few victim women's cases from different tea gardens. They were gathered from a variety of sources, including the victims, their neighbours, and family. They also discuss the consequences of migration.

### Case -I

Jhuma Sunar (37) of Debapara Premnagar went to Delhi for work with Asha Chetri and Pratap Chetri of Debpara tea Garden (agent). And since the day she left home she has been missing (about 18 years). She was 18 when she went to Delhi. Sumitra Sunar her mother said that her

husband was an alcoholic who caused chaos and tortured her and due to financial problems, she left her young child and went to Delhi for work.

#### **Case -II**

Rupa Lohar (26) wife of Rabi Lohar from Debpura Tea garden went to Kerala for cooking in hospital. Her father Harikumar Lohar said that she doesn't receive proper payment for her work and sometime they forced her for overtime duty but they don't pay any extra payment for overtime duty.

#### **Case -III**

Suraj Muni Lohar (35) wife of Mangal Lohar of Kathalguri Division Line Left home for jobs because of domestic violence. His husband Mangal Lohar told that his wife left home for a job and contacted by phone call and said that she is in a work but he and his family don't know where she working and now, she is not in contact. Mangal fearing for his wife for missing.

#### **Case -IV**

Mallika Mahali (23) of Diana Lower Line went to Gujrat for domestic help through an agent. She got into trouble when she went there. Her own relative Debika Mahali (She is an agent) of Nagrakata took her Delhi in June, 2020 first for a job and promised her that there she will give her 15000 per month. But after taking her to Delhi, she was employed in a house at Gujrat where she came to know that her salary is 7000 instead of 15000. And she was subjected to a lot of torture. She did not allow to talking to her family on the phone. With great difficulty she used to talk to her family members and after telling all the events at home her family members contacted to a NGO, Dooars Jagran and Dooars Jagran rescued her from Gujrat in February, 2021. But in the end, she didn't get any payment for her work.

#### **Case -V**

Anna Tirkey (45) of Redbank Upper Line goes to Delhi with an agent, Anil Munda of Jalpaiguri for work as domestic help and the agent handed over to another agent of Grassmore and the agent employs her in a house at Vasant Kunj and takes Rs 50000 and salary of first month from that houseowner. As the agent took Rs 50000 earlier she didn't get actual salary and since the agent took the first month salary, she didn't get the first month salary. When she wants to return home she is not allowed to come back to home and comes home with much trouble and at the end, she did not receive full payment. They cut Rs 9000 from her salary.

#### **Case -VI**

Mungli Hansda (50) wife of Arjun Hansda of New Dooars Santhal Line went to Delhi for domestic works with an unknown agent of Banarhat in 2018. She has been missing since she leaves home. No further contact with her. Her niece Kiya Muni said that after 1 year they tried to find her but they couldn't find her. Later when they asked the agent who took her to Delhi, she said that she gave her a job in one house and then Mungli went somewhere else and she didn't know anything about it.

#### **Case -VII**

Jasinita Marandi (40) wife of Dayal Tudu of New Dooars Santhali Line went to Delhi for domestic work in 2016 with an agent of Ambari. For the first two months after she arrived Delhi, she was in contact by phone. After that, there was no communication. When talking to her she used to say to her husband to take her back to home, she will not stay there. And then her husband Dayal went to Delhi and looking for her but he could not find her.

## 6. Conclusions

The study has brought to light the vulnerabilities and marginalisation experienced by women workers in the wake of the Dooars tea garden shutdown due to sickness. Due in part to market globalism, structural disparities have become more noticeable in all spheres of Indian society. The combination of social and economic vulnerabilities has resulted in a large number of female labourer migrations out from the Dooars tea estates. The study discovered that a variety of pull factors, including high goals, as well as some push issues, such as unemployment, low pay in the industry, starvation, and domestic abuse, influence the migration of women employed in tea gardens. The case studies highlight the scope and type of women's vulnerabilities in various contexts. Reading about these stories will help one understand the challenges faced by female workers. For some of them, the first impression is not too bad. However, for many of these migrants, the result is exploitation on all fronts—physical, economic, and psychological. The suspected agents use their extensive network to apprehend women and bring them, frequently in groups, to predetermined locations. The instances show that the suspected agents first deceive and mislead the victims by making exaggerated claims about favourable employment, nice housing, and high pay. The other forms of deception include giving an advance, sending money for a few months, and other similar actions to sway the family members' beliefs. A large number of drunken and greedy parents and spouses find it difficult to resist the allure of cash advances during a time of need. The accused spies' primary tactic is to emotionally sway the family members.

The members of political parties and civil society, many of whom belonged to trade unions, non-governmental organizations, self-help groups, or panchayats, were surprisingly unable to say any prominent organization or agents who are now perpetrating this scam in the region. Neither could they name any agent that may assist in preventing false promises scam in near future. The government must take charge of this issue and enact appropriate laws and regulations to safeguard the skilled labourers involved. Tea plantations not only supply food for the Indian populace, but they also represent the largest market for Indian exports. To prevent this worker from exploitation, the government should establish a distinct entity to handle this and enact strict legislation. Plantation owners should strictly be instructed to have proper working hours and to give proper wages; additionally, wages for men and women should be equal. The government should directly connect plantation workers to labour law departments so that they can go there and fight for their rights.

The study demonstrates that the demands of the local population are diverse. After 2011 the new government led by Mamata Bannerjee (Chief Minister) has effectively identified and addressed the common and fundamental aspects of these demands, resulting in the implementation of a variety of social measures in West Bengal that aim to address nearly all basic human needs. These populist approaches don't seem to be enough for the local population's healthy development. In addition, policies face challenges in accurately identifying recipients and administrative red-tapism. Many women claimed that they had visited the Block Development Office multiple times in order to address concerns with government programs, but they were unsuccessful. One of the most intractable problems relates to information dissemination. People are, in many cases, unaware of their entitlements related to the schemes. The issue of biological existence has been successfully introduced into the political sphere by the government; this is known as "bio-populism" (Antal, November 9–11, 2017). But these populist policies are failed to meet the major problem that is unemployment and poverty in the gardens. Because of this, the West Bengal government's populist initiatives cannot be incorporated into a long-term plan for social change. The populist paradigm of development has limitations in this regard. Within the framework of this study, it is evident

that the populist government in West Bengal faces a formidable challenge in tackling the issue of labour migration. In response to stakeholder recommendations, we may propose both short and long-term steps to stop migration issues and agent fraud. To enable the women of the tea garden to work and make money in their communities, the state must provide employment opportunities in the surrounding area and need the expansion of high-quality education and women's empowerment and awareness.

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