

Dharmasala Tea Estate  
Dharmasala, Himachal Pradesh  
24th August, 1968.

From:-

The President, Kangra Tea Association

To:-

The Chairman and Honourable Members  
Government of India,  
National Commission on Labour,  
Camp Simla

Subject:- Questionnaire

I on behalf of the Kangra Tea Association thank you for affording us an opportunity of placing before you the actual position of the tea industry in Himachal Pradesh and conditions of labour employed here. This being more of a cottage industry and still in a very backward state it is not possible for us to reply to your above questionnaire. We will however try to give you a true picture of the conditions prevailing here and the comparative position of this sub-marginal cottage industry.

The question as to what labour policy is to be adopted and whether any massive State aid is to be given to this industry to save it from ultimate ruination and disintegration or it is to be allowed to go out of production can be considered after going through this representation.

2. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE KANGRA TEA INDUSTRY.

Tea was planted in Himachal Pradesh during the years 1855 to 1865. Mostly the low producing and poor quality yielding China and China-hybrid varieties of tea were planted here as these varieties are more handy than the very much better and higher yielding indigenous and Burma varieties. In fact in North East and South India, China Jats of tea are being uprooted and replaced by better varieties. Lately the entire planting of tea has been revolutionised by the introduction of the Clonal system of planting and colossal yields are obtained from these. Unfortunately raising of clonal plants in this District inspite of the best efforts of the Punjab University and Tea Research Association has proved to be a complete failure. Actually due to economic difficulties and adverse natural factors hardly any more tea could be planted after the original plantings.

3. SOIL AND GEOGRAPHICAL FACTORS.

Unfortunately the tea producing areas of Himachal Pradesh are situated in the last belt in extreme North West where it is

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possible to grow tea, and that too in little portions of Kangra, Palampur and Jogindernagar Tehsils. The soils are poor, made worse by surface erosion. The climate is of an extreme nature with very long spells of drought in summer and autumn and a very heavy precipitation of rain fall during the monsoons. The summer drought lasts from the end of March up to the first week of July i.e. for a period of three months approximately. This drought not only effects the life of the plant but the crop as well. Dr. C.H. Harler, in his book "THE CULTURE & MARKETING OF TEA" remarks that "The rainfall in Palampur averages 100 inches, but the distribution is poor, with a hot, dry spring so harmful to the bush when it is producing the first flush".

Mr. S.K. Datta, Chief Scientific Advisor, Indian Tea Research Association, Member of Advisory Committee on Tea Board Scheme of Improvement of Tea Culture in the Hilly areas of Himachal Pradesh, in his report submitted to the erstwhile Punjab Government in May, 1963 has also remarked "Although the total rainfall is adequate, the distribution is not satisfactory, because there is a long dry season from Oct. to January and then again from April to Mid June and the real monsoon rarely starts before the end of June to early July! Winter is too cold, with frequent falls of snow and frost. Further there is heavy damage to the crop in April and May due to destructive hail storms. In September weather begins to get cold and dry, and the leaf begins to harden and the yields start declining. Since due to drought, there is hardly any crop in May and June, the actual production months are April, July, August and September. Thus we have a shorter production period, as compared to North East India and very much shorter period as compared to South India where plucking is continued throughout the year.

#### 4. POSITION OF THE TEA INDUSTRY IN HIMACHAL PRADESH AS COMPARED TO THE REST OF THE COUNTRY

That the Himachal Pradesh tea industry is a sub-marginal one is evident from the following facts and figures taken from the latest statistics published by the Tea Board which clearly give the comparative position as against the tea industry in India taken as a whole.

According to the above statistics for the year 1966/67 the comparative position is as follows:-

S.No.	Place	No. of Plantations	Area in Hectares	Production (in thousand kg)	Average yield per hectare in Kgs.	Prices per Kg		Gross revenue per hectare	
						Rs.	Ps.	Rs.	Ps.
1.	Himachal Pradesh	1,385	4,183	1011	244	3.27		798	
2.	India	10,823	345,019	374,806	1086	6.04		6559	

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From the above it is clear that gross earning per Hectare in Himachal Pradesh is only Rs.798 as compared to Rs. 6,559 for the whole of India.

Further although the number of tea estates registered with the Tea Board is only 1385 (as given above) the actual number of plantations is about 2500. The very smallest units which in some cases are one fiftieth of an hectare, for administrative reasons combine together and are registered as one unit. An analysis of these Estates will show that only 15 estates cover an area above 40 hectares, 15 estates cover an area between 20 to 40 hectares each. The rest are owned by hundreds of small planters. Out of all these states, not more than 15 units manufacture tea with the help of machinery, which is of a very old and worn out type. Even these so called factories pale into insignificance when compared to the huge industrial units of North East and South India.

Due to poor soils, adverse climatic conditions, small holdings, lack of capital and machinery, Himachal can only produce tea which may be classed as "even inferior to common" on an average with a very large percentage of light fannings and residue grades. Liquors are very thin and poor. This accounts for the very low prices realised. On an average these are less than 50% of prices realised from other areas, even for their common teas.

Mostly green tea of an inferior type is produced here. These factors were also noted by the Plantation Enquiry Commission and were briefly mentioned in their report.

#### 5. TYPE OF WORKERS EMPLOYED.

Unlike North East India or South India or even Uttar Pradesh there are hardly any workers residing in our Tea Plantations. Almost 99% per cent of them are either peasant proprietors or tenants i.e crop sharers or both. Their main stay is agriculture and they take to tea garden work only to supplement their incomes whenever they are free from their agricultural operations. They reside in their different villages and hamlets, in houses owned by them, and come to work in the tea gardens closest to their residence in the morning, returning in the evening. Thus the labour force employed in Kangra District is entirely of a different type than is commonly understood in other parts of India, where there is a large number of migrated resident labourers who have no home of their own and have to depend upon the tea gardens entirely for earning their daily bread.

Thus the Tea garden labourer in Kangra is attached to his lands. For him agricultural operations on his lands are more important than working in the tea garden. Unfortunately the height of the plucking season coincides with the work in the fields. For example the harvesting of Rabi Crop starts from about the 2nd week of April. That is the time when the first "April Flush" comes and that is the best and the largest part of the Kangra tea crop, which has to be plucked at once.

Then again the monsoon flush in Kangra beings to com up in July. But at that time too there is a great shortage of workers as they are busy in their fields sowing their paddy crop. Then again in Sept. the workers begin to absent themselves in large numbers as at first they have to cut, dry and store hay for their cattle for winter, and then the paddy crop is ready for harvesting. During these periods of sowing and harvesting of food crops it often so happens that only one member of the family comes to work in the garden while the others are busy in their fields with agricultural operations.

The workers come into the garden in large numbers during May and June, but as ill-luck would have it, there is very little tea crop to be plucked because of the drought. Similarly during winter when there is not much work in the garden plenty of workers turn up.

It is thus clear that worker in Kangra, works in the Tea Gardens not to earn his daily bread but to add to his income.

#### 6. CAPACITY TO PAY AND COMPARATIVE ECONOMIC POSITION

From the Tea Board Statistics we have shown that the average gross earning per hectare in Himachal Pradesh is Rs.798/- as compared to Rs.6559/- in India taken as a whole. As in other parts of India about 2.5 workers are employed per hectare in Himachal Pradesh also. To avoid any marginal error the figure may be taken as 2 workers per hectare. Thus the gross earning through one worker in Kangra come to only Rs.399 as compared to Rs.3279 in India. It is with these meagre earnings that the Kangra Planter has to carry on. Thus this industry since some years has been running at a loss. The losses so far have been covered by borrowings, sale of family Jewellery and other valuables, sale of garden timber and lands etc. Due to further steep fall in prices of common teas a large number of gardens have already closed down and others will have to follow suit if speedy measures are not taken by State Government, Tea Board and the Government of India. We would like to respectfully point out further that apart from the wages of the actual workers we have to meet many other expenses like repair and renovation of the machinery and the buildings, fertilisers and manures, insecticides and pesticides, garden implements and the pay of the Manager, Munshis, Clerks, Mistries, Boiler man, Sweeper, Chowdhris Mates, Chowkidars, Peons, Malis and other supervisory staff and maintenance of Tea fields etc.

The terrain being absolutely hilly, plots of tea scattered at long distance ranging from 2 to 9 miles, transport of leaf is a major item of expenditure. To all this has to be added the burden of a host of miscellaneous expenses difficult to detail here.

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In 1952, Mr. A.D. Khan, I.C.S. the then Chairman, of the Tea Board, visited Kangra and went round the Tea Estates and saw the actual working conditions prevailing here. In his letter No.90/52/5498 dated 14th August, 1952 addressed to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Punjab appear the following significant lines, which give the true picture of Kangra Plantations.

"The grave situation that is now facing the tea gardens has affected the Kangra Valley no less than the rest of India. In fact, the position of the planter-s in that District is even more precarious than in other parts of the country, where estates are larger and better organised to withstand the periodic cycles of depression to which the Industry is subject. The total area under tea in Kangra does not exceed 10,000 acres, owned by some 2500 planters, most of whom have small holdings. Only 14 estates cover an area of between 50 to 100 acres each, and 15 are above 100 acres, and not more than 12 estates manufacture tea with the help of machinery. Furthermore, the majority of small producers grow tea along with other crops. For them tea is not a full time occupation, as it is understood in Assam or Darjeeling or the Nilgiris. Rather, it is one of the many crops that the cultivator raises on his land, and so there does not exist to the same extent, as in other tea growing areas of India, the problem of reconciling the conflicting interests of capital and labour. It is against this back-ground that the position as a whole must be viewed.

The economic crisis to which reference has already been made has been precipitated by the unhappy coincidence of a steep fall in prices with a persistent rise in the cost of production. Any relief that is given therefore, must have for its immediate objects reduction in the margin of loss now incurred by producers on account of the steadily declining market".

A very important point to which we would like to draw your kind attention is that till today there has never been any strike, lock out or any other labour trouble. In Kangra no occasion has ever arisen to give a case to any Tribunal to adjudicate upon.

#### 7. PROBLEMS OF RE-PLANTING & INFILLING

The Plantation Enquiry Commission in their exhaustive report has observed as follows:-

"The tea bush like any other living plant has only a limited span of life. As in the case of all living things heredity, environment, 'Jat' climate and soil of the place where it grows are factors which affect its span of life. From the replies we have received, the prevailing opinion of a large section of planters appears to be that the economic life of a tea bush, receiving reasonable care, may be about 60 years. In spite of the need of a programme of re-planting for the very existence of the industry in the long run, we have observed the progress is very slow. We are given to understand that the main

reason for this is that replanting has become so expensive that large sections of the industry are unable to launch on a programme on an adequate scale. In the plains the tea bush takes about 5 years after planting before it starts yielding. In the hills this period of waiting is longer and has been variously estimated as 7 to 10 years according to evidence received by us. According to the Plantation Enquiry Commission the cost of replanting in 1956 was calculated at Rs. 3725/- per hectare (page 65). Kangra has about 10,000 acres of land under tea. The total cost of replanting will, therefore, come to about 3.72 crores.

8. FACTORIES

As already mentioned there are hardly any factories worth the name here. In this connection we may draw your kind attention to the observation made by Shri S.K. Datta, Chief Scientific Adviser, Indian Tea Association & Member Advisory Committee on Boards' Scheme of Improvement of Tea Culture in Hilly areas of Punjab. The following remarks appear in his report submitted to the Punjab Government after a thorough investigation.

"At present, majority of the factories are either ill-equipped with outdated machines or these are in bad state of repairs. The factory buildings lack suitable withering and fermenting facilities. No attempts have been made to provide loft or controlled withering which is so necessary in the cold climate of the district. In the fermenting rooms, often the air is too dry and cold. Efforts should, therefore, be made to humidify the air and raise the temperature as and when necessary. Teas are often not adequately rolled and fermented".

9. REPORT ON STUDY OF SMALL TEA PLANTERS

The Agricultural refinance Corporation and the Reserve Bank of India carried out a joint and exhaustive enquiry into the Kangra Tea Industry. This has been published in the "Report on Study of Small Tea Planters". The Kangra study was carried out by Dr. M.V. Hate, Secretary of the Agricultural refinance corporation and Shri Sant Das Assistant Chief Officer, Agricultural Credit department, Reserve Bank of India. They have made the following minimum financial requirements for the rehabilitation of the industry in Kangra District alone :-

1.	Processing machinery	---	20 Lacs.
2.	Renovation and repairs of factory buildings and old worn out machinery	---	40 Lacs
3.	Replanting and infilling of tea bushes in this area @Rs. 8,000 per hectare	--	105 Lacs
4.	Short term loans for crop production @ Rs. 440 per hectare	---	5.28 Lacs

Grand Total --- 170.28 Lacs

Thus from the above it is clear that huge sums are needed to be invested in these Estates if these are to be rehabilitated.

10. MARKETING

The Himachal Tea Industry was very seriously effected by the Indo-Pak hostilities. Himachal Pradesh gardens mostly produce green tea, as their factories are not fit to produce black tea. The small growers who manufacture tea by hand and without any factories at all can only produce green tea. Since the last half century or so the bulk of green tea produce has been exported to Afghanistan. Following outbreak of hostilities Pakistan has closed the overland trade route to Afghanistan. This has resulted in heavy losses to the Planters. Amritsar being the only tea market of Himachal teas has also been very seriously effected by the closure of these routes. Since generations Amritsar has been the main centre of trade between India and Afghanistan. Entire trading between these two countries is done on a barter basis. Mostly dry fruits have been exchanged for green tea. Cost of air freight being very prohibitive after the closure of the overland routes, most of the traders from Amritsar have shifted their business to the Port towns, causing a further serious depression in the Amritsar Market.

Further the Punjab State gave massive financial aid amounting to crores of Rupees to war hit border industries in Districts like Ludhiana, Jullundur and Amritsar etc. But no aid was given to the Kangra Tea Industry inspite of our repeated requests.

Due to world over production there has been a very steep fall in the prices of particularly common teas and prices in the Amritsar market have slumped by nearly 50%. To add to our difficulties traders have refused to lift stocks bought by them in the auctions held at Amritsar during May, June and July as prices have come down. Thousands of such packages are still lying in the God-downs of our Tea Marketing Co-operative Society at Amritsar. Since these have not been lifted no payments have been received and the planters find themselves in a most humiliating and desperate situation. Some gardens have closed down and others are bound to follow sooner or later unless some speedy financial aid is given by our State Government, to start with, an immediate loan to our Cooperative Marketing Society amounting to Rs.5.28 lacs as estimated by Dr. M.V. Hate for short term loans for crop production to be advanced against stocks to its members.

11. WAGE RATES

Inspite of all the above we have been paying wages at rates unanimously recommended by the Central Wage Board for the Tea Plantation Industry for these areas.

## 12. CONSEQUENCES OF CLOSURE OF GARDENS.

In spite of its weak and submarginal nature tea, in these backward areas has been the main stay of about 2500 planters and around 10,000 workers for the last 100 years or so. Closure of these gardens would be a major disaster for these employers and employees. Apart from tea the planters have no other source of livelihood. In this connection Shri A.D. Khan I.C.S. the then Chairman Tea Board mentions as follows in his report:-

"The time has therefore come for Government to decide what policy should be adopted towards tea cultivation in this part of India. Adoption of the principles of "survival of the fittest" will expose the industry to ultimate disintegration, which in its turn will give rise to other problems. Government will have to consider what use the 10,000 odd acres of tea estates are going to be put once tea ceases to grow on them. Agricultural changes cannot be effected overnight, adjustment to altered circumstances will take time, and consequently account must be taken of the economic dislocation that is going to follow in the wake of unemployment of labour, and the distress of the planting community. If, on the other hand, it is the intention of Government that the Industry should be helped to remain on its feet until better times come, the importance of taking immediate and adequate steps to save the producers from bankruptcy is paramount".

Most of the workers on Himachal Tea Plantations are those who can not take up harder work involving more manual labour elsewhere. Thus in these estates it is the women, Children, the old and infirm who find employment. Thus with closure these would be completely thrown out of employment.

The tea bush is very deep rooted and there are atleast 4500 bushes per hectare. These hold the soil even better than forests because, apart from tea, there is a canopy of shade trees on top. Thus erosion is almost completely eliminated with the modern method where tea covers the ground completely. If these estates go out of production, serious soil erosion will take place endangering the dams and Hydro electric schemes so vital for the well being of this country. As it is, soil erosion in these areas has always been a very serious problem.

Tea being a major export commodity this would result in loss of very valuable foreign exchange.

In conclusion we would like to respectfully point out that in the case of a cottage industry of this type it has not been possible for us to reply to your questionnaire, but we have endeavoured to give a brief outline of this industry, its workers its problems and conditions because the fortunes of employers and employees are closely linked together.

Yours faithfully,

Sd/-

President,

The Kangra Tea Association.