

**IMPACT OF FOLK CULTURE ON THE
SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE OF THE PEOPLE OF
TEA GARDENS IN BARAK-VALLEY OF SOUTH ASSAM
(With special reference to tea gardens of Cachar)**

**MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT
Sponsored by U.G.C. (NERO)
2006-2008**

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PREFACE



Structurally the tea gardens are both agricultural and industrial segments of dominance, control, power, confrontation and conflicts from years on end.

The socio-political and economic significance of the tea-gardens have been discussed by various scholars. The key concept in the present research work is to rediscover and highlight the fact that traditional folk culture of the tea gardens, add colour to the composite culture of India. The heterogeneous culture of the tea gardens project the sense of unity in diversity in a miniature form.

Folklore has been accepted as major area of research by the scholar to have an in-depth understanding of the life and style of the people who have been existing in the periphery of social strata since years.

The research work has a definite national and international significance as the study embraces the dynamics of culture, language, traditions, customs and practices of the people of tea gardens through the prism of folklores. In recent years researches under academic exchange programme have undertaken this kind of research even in alien culture and societies. The tea-garden mosaic culture helps in sustaining our heterogeneous cultural identities under an unique caption of Indian hood.

The researcher believes, the penning down of the experience in the midst of the tea populace of Cachar would provide for better and effective tools to negotiate with vexing problems like casteism, terrorism and fundamentalism. The present project is divided into seven chapters including introduction and a conclusion. The chapters, deal with history, immigration, growth and development, culture, status of women and children, folk literature and the works of a few literary writers.

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Accession No. 14058
Date 30/4/2010
Call No.



CONTENTS



Preface

Accession No. 14068

i

Acknowledgement

Date 30/4/2020

ii

Call No.

Chapter - 1 :	Introduction : A Short History of Cachar, Impact of British Rule upto Independence in Cachar, Introduction of Tea Cultivation in Cachar	1-20
Chapter - 2 :	Growth and Development of Tea Gardens in Cachar	21-25
Chapter - 3 :	Labour Migration into the Tea Gardens of Cachar: Causes of Migration Different Ethnic and Linguistic Groups Religion, Caste, Culture and Gender	26-36
Chapter - 4 :	Culture: Life style and Culture of the Tea Labourers with reference to different Tea Gardens of Cachar District	37-47
Chapter - 5 :	Status of Women and Children in Tea Plantations of Cachar	48-54
Chapter - 6 :	Emergence and Growth of Folk-Lore (with reference to Tea Gardens of Cachar)	55-78
Chapter - 7 :	Average Literacy amongst the Tea Garden Populace, some of the Literary Works of the Tea Garden and Ex-Tea Garden People of Cachar	79-83
Conclusion		84-85
Bibliography		86-89
Photographs		

CHAPTER- 1

INTRODUCTION:

A SHORT HISTORY OF CACHAR : In the 13th century, the undivided district of Cachar with Hailakandi, Silchar and Karimganj subdivision was ruled by Tipperah, a section of Bodos and their capital was at Khalangshi on the bank of the river Rukni in Cachar. The Tipperahs moved eastwards and Tulsidwaj, the reigning Prince established an independent Kingdom in the 15th century A.D.

In the beginning of 16th century Cachar was annexed to Tripura but later on the Raja of Tripura was defeated by Koch rulers and Chilarai. The Koch general left a contingent of Koch soldiers at Brahmapur presently known as Khaspur near Udharbond in Cachar. Later on Cachar was ruled by Hidimba, the demons and came to, be known as Hidimba Desha and the rulers used to be known as Hirimbeshwar. The kingdom of HIRRUMBA extended to a vast area covering parts of Nowgong district and Sibsagar and included the entire belt of Cachar, North Cachar and Karbi Anglong district.

In fact Khaspur, a village in the Silchar subdivision of Cachar district was the capital of the Kachari Rajas of Cachar from the beginning of the 18th Century to the death of the last Raja, Gobinda Chandra in 1830. Cachar was officially annexed by the British on the 4th of August 1832 which ended the Dimasa rule permanently.

Captain T. Fisher administered the district of Cachar from Cherapunji and subsequently shifted to Doodhpatil area on the bank of river Barak. Regarding the case of North Cachar which remained under the local chieftain upto 1853 was officially annexed by the British government and brought it under their own control in 1853 and tagged it with Cachar in 1854.

The official nomenclature of Cachar appeared on the administrative map of Assam on September 1835 and the old name of Hirimba was wiped out from the old map of Cachari Kingdom.

The British annexed North Cachar with Cachar in 1854 and subsequently on the 1st June, 1869 Hailakandi was made another subdivision.

With the partition of India in the year 1947 Pakistan was created and new boundaries were demarcated along with the transfer of power. Some of the thanas of Karimganj subdivision was attached to Cachar and the rest to East Pakistan later formed into Bangladesh. On the 1st July, 1983 Cachar district was bifurcated and Karimganj was declared as a separate district and similarly Hailakandi subdivision was upgraded into a district on the 1st October 1989.

Barak Valley which comprises of three districts in South Assam namely Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj is blessed with the river Barak and its tributaries, the Jiri, Chiri, Madhura, Ghagra, Jatinga, Kathakhal, Sonai, Dhaleswari and the Haranga. The river, Barak has been separated into two courses, the Surma and Kushiara near Katigorah and extended to Bangladesh via Karimganj. The major hills of the valley are the Barail range, Bhuban range, Saraspur and the Chatacurra, Barak Valley in the south-east forms an extensive lowland area that is important for agriculture and supports a relatively dense population of 29,94,977 people.

Historically, the significance of the valley lies in the fact that Khaspur, a village in the Silchar subdivision of Cachar district was the capital of the Kachari Rajas of Cachar from the beginning of the 18th Century to the death of the last Raja, Gobinda Chandra in 1830. Cachar was officially annexed by the British in 1832 which ended the Dimasa rule permanently. Some historians opined that the Bhuban Hill gives an evidence of Pala influence. It has also been learnt that the Nidanpur Copper inscriptions issued by King Bhaskara Varma of Kamrup is an evidence to the fact that Karimganj region was a part of Chandrapur Vishaya.

The entire valley is full of tourist attractions both of historical and religious significance like Khaspur, Bhuban Hills, Salganga, Kachakanti temple, Ramnagar Anowa, Gandhi Bag, Dolu, Sonai, Dalur Ulam, Labac in and around Silchar.

Hailakandi, the smallest district of Assam covering an area of 1,327 sq.km. also has the Pirbadi, the dargah of Sufi saint, the Siddeswar Temple, Adi Kali Mandir, which was constructed by Indurova Devi, the wife of Kachari King Krishna Chandra in 1770. The Hazarat Shah Adam Khaki's Dargah attract people from all over world as it is one of the 360 Aolias.

The Badarpur Fort of Karimganj district is of great historical significance as it was constructed by Ali-Kuli-Beg, a Mogal Foujdar of Sylhet in 1740. The treaty of Badarpur was also signed there. There is also the Nootyd Khal, a canal which is known as the Suez of Barak. The Shonbeel lake is famous for its migratory birds. Latu is another place of historical significance as during the Sepoy Mutiny a fierce battle was fought between the Sepoy rebels and the Britishers around this hillock.

Geologically, the valley lies on alluvial sediments and the soil is not at all suitable for agriculture, moreover, the climate of the valley is humid with heavy rainfall. Tea, paddy, betelnuts, coconuts, mustard, linseed, bamboo etc. are few agricultural products. There are few valuable trees in the region like Jarulov Ajhar, Nahar, Cham, Rata, Sundi, Gomari and Gundroi but the bulk of trade is in Tula and other soft woods which are used for tea boxes.

Wild animals are no longer common in the valley, but elephants, bison, buffalo, tigers, leopards, bears and various kinds of deer are still found in the wilder parts and in the hills.

Almost 80 percent of the population is Bengali and yet the valley is the natural home of a number of ethnic groups like Kuki, Naga, Mikirs, Hmars, Khasis, Manipuris, Dimasas etc. The people of the valley are mainly Indo-

Aryan. The Mikirs and Kacharis are mainly Hindus. There is a considerable concentration of Christian population too. Most of the population in Hailakandi are Muslims. Migration from adjacent territories like West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Rajasthan, Manipur, Tamil Nadu, U.P., Chotanagpur acted as a catalyst for social, political and ecological transformation of the valley. Barak Valley has a legacy of composite race, culture and religion and that contributes to its exquisite cultural richness and human wealth.

Educationally the valley has been progressive with a total literacy of 64.82%. There is a Central University at Dargakona near Silchar, the National Institute of Technology at Silchar, the Silchar Medical College at Ghungoor. There are two Law Colleges, one at Silchar and the other in Karimganj district. There are thirty colleges all over the valley, 6B.Ed. Colleges, 61 Higher Secondary Schools, 159 High Schools, 817 ME/MV/Senior Basic school and 3892 Primary Schools. There are 5 veterinary hospitals, 10 government hospitals, 102 Tea Gardens and 2 Gas based power plant within the valley.

Barak Valley is not extensive like any other metropolitan city of our country and yet we can call it Mini-India because of its cosmopolitan culture. Rabindranath Tagore referred to it as 'Sribhumi' because of its distinct geographical, culture and historical significance, (1991). The culture of the valley is a rich tapestry woven with multicoloured yarns of heritage of all races that inhabit her. Its heavenliness can be judged by the serene and composed environment. The people of the valley are religious and God-believing and this can be established by the existing temples, churches, gurdwaras and mosques.

The valley is connected with the outer world by rail, air lines and road. Silchar, which is situated on the basin of the river Barak, is the main town of Cachar district and came into existence in 1832-33. Haran Chandra Raha in his novel 'Rana Chandi' published in the year 1283 Bangabda wrote, 'At present this place is known as Silchar and this is the main station of Cachar'. He also mentioned that the place was earlier known as Silachal and it was the British

government which named it as Silchar. Silchar town offers passage to Mizoram, Manipur, N.C. Hills and is also connected to Tripura, and Bangladesh border by road. Silchar is beautifully located and commands a charming view down the Barak, which is lined with groves of areca-palms and dotted with the sails of native craft.

So all the peace lovers of our country should visit this blissful abode in the remotest part of India and extend their helping hand to bring their brethren closer to themselves.

IMPACT OF BRITISH RULE IN CACHAR UPTO INDEPENDENCE :

The British annexation of Cachar (1832) was immediately followed by an era of Administration as well as socio-economic changes in the erstwhile tiny state which was situated on the border of Bengal and peopled mostly by the Bengali peasants. The 19th Century, was a century of transition when the older order was replaced by a stereotyped as in the rest of the country. The area of most significant changes included the land-tenure system and the avenue management. The Colonial administration super imposed a land holding pattern and a method of revenue collection, though not altogether dissimilar to the changes already inducted in rest of British India were absolutely unfamiliar to the people of Cachar. The new institution replaced the traditional communal land holding guilds by peasants and artisans and other professionals. In these guilds, locally called 'Khel', individual or private ownership of land was unknown. The members paid a small portion of the produces to the ruler through an elected head man called **Mukhtar**, and a strong community bond persisted in every sphere of life.

In course of time the number of Khels increased, groups of adjacent khels joined together and formed larger units. The Mukhtars in return enjoyed rent free lands and honorary titles. The larger units formed was called the Raj or Paraganas. The Mukhtars of the constituent Khels elected a Raj mukhtar with titles such as Choudhury, Mazumdar, Laskar, Barabhuiya, Majorbhuiya.

Chotabhuiya etc. All according to the status and importance to the unit. The most important aspect of these khels were their democratic ideas and secular attitude. There were some **Debattara Khels**, the income of which were appropriated to meet the expenditure of important temples. There were also Lakhiraj estates for the maintainance of the member of the royal family and the ministers.

In this connection mention may be made of **Brahmatara**, **Phirmuttar** and **Baksha** estates as well. As Debattara estates were granted to defray the expenses of the worship of a deity, Brahmatara was granted for the support of the Brahmans. Phirmuttar was given for the maintainance of the religious places of the Mussalman Saints. Lastly, Baksha estates were 666 containing 1153 acres of land.

As is evident from different sources between 1800-1830 one of the important events in Cachar was 'Large scale de-population'. After the advent of the British the Mukhtar System in Cachar was abolished due to certain inherent defects and was replaced by **Tahsildari system** in 1836. With the introduction of the Tahsildari System Cachar was divided into three Tahsils viz, Silchar, Katigorah and Hailakandi. As an immediate effect of the Tahasildari System, the revenue fell down considerably and the areas were heavily affected due to the absence of mutual understanding between Tahasildars with the Mirasdars. To check the growing problem for the introduction of Tahasildari System, the British government proposed for the restoration of the Mukhtar System once again. In 1822 under regulation X, Cachar district was declared a non-regulated province.

Upto 1900 rapid changes were introduced in the field of revenue administration. Numbers of settlement like Burn's settlement for 15 years, Berner's settlement for 15 years, Steward's 20 years settlement, Golakchandra's 15 years settlement, Boyd's 15 years settlement, Saratchandra Banerjee's 15 year settlement etc. which abruptly changed the existing revenue

system. But implementation of this revenue settlement reduced the power of the traditional official apparatus and enhanced the demand of land. To increase revenue, easier terms and conditions of land possessors and agricultural community were introduced.

To encourage the land grant system British government issued circular letters to the neighbouring parts of various districts which resulted large number of immigrants or settlers from Sylhet, Dhaka, Tripura, Mymensingh to settled into Cachar permanently. Beside this in 1864, the 'Junglebari Land' or 'Waste Land' delamation rules were introduced. Although in 1862 the fee simple rules were introduced, under special circumstances, grants were limited to an area of 3000 acres. However in 1875, declamation lease rules of 1864 were modified by the Government.

The most significant changes were brought by the British Government in Cachar by the introduction of Tea Plantation in 1855. Large number of labourers were imported to work in the tea gardens from distant corners of the country viz; Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chottanagpur etc.

In course of time the progress of tea industry was rapid and enormously helped for the growth of revenue enhancement and this valley by this rapid development became an urban area.

The area under cultivation in Cachar was said to be 21,151 acres which yielded 42,35,000 Ivs of manufactured tea, a quantity which exceeded the amount produced in the neighbouring district of Sylhet even as late as 1881. By 1882 the area under plantation had risen in 18,878 and the yield to 12,721,000 Ivs, which was considerably in excess of that return from any other district in the province. Thus the Tea industry in Cachar prospered and it may be regarded as the, 'Gift of the British'. It had its far reaching impact on the socio-economic life of the people of Cachar to a very great extent. Besides this the British Govt. earned huge amount of revenues from miscellaneous sources viz. salt forest, fisheries, rubber, ferryghat.

The British also extended their field of administration in **judicial**. The extension of civil procedure in 1880 and Stamp Act to Cachar, removed the existing defective judicial structure and opened the gateway for the entrance of licenced pleader (Vakeal) from Sylhet and other parts of India to Silchar bar. Thus new judicial system produced a group of intellientiais in the socio-intelligentsia economic urban professional life from precolonial root to Colonial modernity.

In the beginning of English education, group of educated intellectuals were invited by the government to mend this system of education. This intellectual community also opened several schools in this region during the colonial period. In another way a group of wealthy persons of the valley sent their sons and daughters outside the valley to '**Hindu College**' at Calcutta presidency and Morari Chand College Sylhet. In addition some of the progressive intelligentsia established schools in Cachar during the period of nationalist movement viz, Swadeshi School, Cachar School, Narsing School and many others in different parts of Cachar. Some of the progressive minded Christian missionaries started school in different parts of the region.

One of them was the '**Government Girls School**'. (by Miss Evan). The first school was started by the British Government in 1866 which is at present popularly known as '**Government Boys School**'. In that way those teachers started the pioneering works of upgrading the standard of value based education and also emerged as the natural leaders of the society under colonial rule.

As a result of which the valley gradually enriched in the field of newspaper and **printing press**. A group of printing press and newspaper originated and published in the different region of Cachar and Eastern Bengal. These are Surma from Sylhet, Deshabrata, Janeshakti, Hitabadi, Sadhana, Brahmana Parishad Pratrika, Sanjeevani, Paridarsak etc which also created a deep sensation in the minds of both intellectual and non-intellectual indeginous

and non-indigenous class of Barak Valley which was closely influenced by the sylheti culture of Sylhet. Notwithstanding, the Valley also progressed in the field of **Cultural activities** and **Sports**, the establishment of Silchar Town Club by Nalini Mohan Gupta ushered a new era in the history of sports in this valley.

The greatest significance of the valley lies in the fact that a large number of people in general and educated class in particular were inspired by the touring galaxy of Indian heroes which also enhanced the spirit of nationalism and region cultural dimension. These nationalist were Mahatma Gandhi and Ali Brothers, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Bipin Chandra Paul and many others. However in the late Colonial period a group of middleclass people emerged in the lower caste who sought to improve their social status with the help of education.

Patni, Koibarta Community upgraded their status and the 'Surma Sahitya Samedan recognized them as Das. Other boatmen community adopted certain special sir name like Roy, Sarkar, Sikdars, Das, Mazumder, Biswas, Laskar and Purkayastha.

MOVEMENTS THROUGH THE PASSAGE OF TIME AND ITS POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE : The British period in Cachar historically and politically witnessed many political activities side by side organized movements from time to time in collaboration with the All India Leadership counter part. The real political activities started in Cachar when Swadeshi and Boycott movement was launched in Bengal in 1905. Moreover they also organized other nationalist movement like non-cooperation, Khilafat, Civil Disobedience and Quit India Movement.

In Cachar, Babu Kamini Kumar Chanda, M.A.B.L. from Calcutta University, a vakil of Silchar bar who took the pioneering step to organize the Swadeshi Movement in Cachar, followed the similar path of Swadeshi Movement in Bengal. In 1905 the Cachar Swadeshi Sabha was established.

with Kamini Kumar Chanda as the president and Avanti Nath Dutta as the secretary.

The sabha successfully spearheaded the agitation in Cachar and preached the Swadeshi ideals. Both Surma valley and other parts of eastern Bengal also had a similar response to this movement. The people of these two districts because of their historical, linguistic and cultural oneness never felt the existence of the different political systems. Bipin Chandra Paul also came to Silchar, his mammoth speech inspired the people of the district to organise the Swadeshi's culture and philosophy. Many people for quiet a long time had really boycotted foreign salt, cloth, medicine and other goods and used only indigenous goods. Kamini Kumar Chanda was a strong advocate of women education and a girl's school was established in 1895, the women in Cachar couldnot think of attending a public meeting in 1906. Meanwhile, the Swadeshi movement had already achieved an all India character.

Many eminent persons became vocal and the revolutionaries let loose a terrorist campaign against the officials. In 1909 the famous Morley-Minto Reforms Act was passed which ultimately reduced the growing tide of spirit of the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal. However the impact of this movement had a deep sensation in the minds of the people of Bengal and Cachar.

In 1912, the capital of India was shifted from Calcutta to Delhi and the new arrangements were immediately carried into effect. Evidently, the annulment of the partition was only partial for Cachar, Sylhet and Goalpara were again transferred to Assam with the demise of Swadeshi and Boycott movement the revolutionary terrorism also had suspended due to the disintegration and the imprisonment of the trio-hero, Lal-Bal-Pal with the outbreak of the first world war in 1914, Indian Soldiers were sent abroad to fight for the allied powers. The British Government in this particular juncture was extremely busy in the war.

Despite the popular demands the three districts were retained in Assam and have contributed to the development of the province. In the first ever Council of Assam since 1913, Kamini Kumar Chanda of Silchar was a member. He continued as such till 1917 when he became a member in the Indian Legislature Council and continued till 1926.

The whole political environment of India during this period was not worked in an organized way. In 1916 the Lucknow pact was signed held jointly by the Congress and the Muslim League. Same year on 28th April the Indian Home Rule League was formed by Annie Besant. Kamini Kumar Chanda also in this process became the Vice President of the League. In the similar process Maharashtra also took an active part joining hands with Annie Besant and a new dimension was achieved with a hope of new political awakening to drive out the British Government from their homeland. In this political environment British Government passed government of India Act 1919. (Mantego Chelms Ford). After passing of the Act, Mahatma Gandhi organised a passive resistance movement and a wave of demonstration, strikes and riots spread over India. The government tried to put down the agitation with a strong hand and in the process became guilty of the Jullainwallah Bagh massacre when the troupes under General Dyer fired 1600 rounds into the unarmed crowd, killing and wounding several hundred people.

The immediate reaction of this incident in September, 1920 at Calcutta, the Indian National Congress adopted the famous resolution on Non-cooperation with British. In the meantime Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, Mohamed Ali and Shaukat Ali had started the Khilafat Movement.

The Congress now strongly exposed the Khilafat cause. This was the beginning of a new era under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in the discourses of political movements which spread throughout the country.

In Surma Valley, the movement was acclaimed with enthusiasm. The impact of this movement was also a deep sensation to the people of this district.

Many eminent personalities of different fields gave up their profession. The students from various educational institutions in Cachar boycotted the government institutions and a National School was established in Silchar and Arun Kumar Chanda who later made his mark as an Indian Leader, was a teacher. The prominent leaders of the non-co-operation movement in Cachar were Kamini Kumar Chanda, Shyama Charan Deb, Sanat Kumar Das, Sibendra Kumar Biswas and many others.

Females also actively participated particularly Shiv Sundari Devi and Saudamoni Devi both were the wives of Kamini Kumar Chanda and Shyama Bharan Deb respectively, However during the course of non-co-operation movement in Cachar a new political dimension also had produced a gigantic feeling of nationalism in the minds of the tea garden labourers. In Cachar Labour Strike in the different tea gardens was also simultaneous organised, to activate the grievances of the people of tea garden against the colonial rule.

Gangadayaal Dixit, a cloth merchant of Lakhipur along with Deosharan Tripatti and Ram Prashad Chubey, Trade Union Leaders, worked among the labourers and persuaded them to refuse to work in the gardens owned by the European Planters. As a protest against the incredibly low wages at which the labourers were forced to work, there was a general exodus of thousands of workers from Sylhet and Cachar in May 1921. About 12,000 men and women left the gardens and proceeded to their distant homes in North India. The planters took a vindictive attitude and laid the whole blame on the congress volunteers who worked in the gardens propagating the culture of Swaraj. Similarly some young volunteers carried on demonstrations and picketings all over Cachar and Gangadayaal Dixit urged upon Labourers not to work. When the movement was in full swing, Mahatma Gandhi came to Silchar in August 1921, accompanied by the Ali Brothers, Mohamed Ali and Saukat Ali and stayed in the Chanda Bhaban as the guest of Kamini Kumar Chanda.

The real spirit of the tea garden movement was started when Arun Kumar Chanda took the initiative to organize the tea garden labourers under the banner of Trade Union Movement. He was elected the first President of the Assam Provincial Trade Union Congress and was intimately connected in the movements of the labourers in various tea gardens. The main goal of the struggle was to popularise the Indian National Congress in Cachar and drew the rural mass to the struggle for freedom.

As the President of the Assam Branch of the Indian National Trade Union Congress, Arun Kumar Chanda took interest for the improvement of the condition of the workers and tea labourers and won the sympathy of the working classes in favour of the Congress politics.

The impact of the Civil disobedience movement also spread to Cachar and Eastern Bengal and was propelled by some intellectuals and incourse of time gave the leadership to organize this movement. Shyam Charan Deb and Brajendra Narayan Choudhury, the president of the District Congress Committee, Sylhet, was the two Vanguard of the Civil Disobedience movement.

Dhirendra Kumar Gupta, Satindra Mohan Deb, Gangadayaal Dixit and Prithish Naug, Sabidraja Mazumdar had taken active part. The Silchar Mahila Samiti played a significant role in popularizing the campaign.

INTRODUCTION OF TEA CULTIVATION IN CACHAR : Tea as a beverage is consumed by all irrespective of caste, creed, class, status, income and age.

The uniqueness of tea lies in the fact that it contributes to the financial coffers of both the centre and the state. It also accounts for the employment of millions directly and indirectly. Hence it is a culture by itself and not a simple commodity for it is a product which created a history in both social and economic sector.

The word tea is derived from t'e of the Chinese Fukien dialect. The Dutch introduced it to Europe. In Cantonese, tea is known as Ch'a and it is in this form the name Ch'a reached Japan, India, Russia, Iran, and the Middle East. Tea drinking originated in China, but the origin is obscured by a mass of legend.

In one folk tale, Lao Tzu, traveling through Sichuan around 600B.C was offered a cup of tea which he relished and this Chinese hospitality and entertainment to guest is followed to this day and is imitated all over the world.

Another such tale tells us of the Buddhist Monk Darma who left India for Nanjing around A.D520, vowing to meditate for seven years without sleep. In the fifth year, the monk was finding it difficult to keep awake and was struggling hard and in his attempt he tore off his eyelids which when fell to the earth became tea plants , whose herbal offering helped him to fulfill his hearts desire to attain enlightenment. All such legends go to signify the fact that tea was used as a potent beverage in China and subsequently in Japan.

Another legend goes to tell us that a disciple of goddess Kuan Yin (Iron Goddess of Mercy) cared for a ramshackled and ruined temple. The Goddess, pleased at his devotion appeared to him in a dream, informing him of a treasure he would find in a near by cave that he should share with every one. Discovering a small tea sapling, the disappointed devotee nevertheless tended it to its fullness and there upon discovered its golden aroma. Soon, he had a thriving business in tea. As this tea is connected to a divine feminine figure the tea Tieh-Kuan-Yin takes on a divine value, (A Time for Tea-Travels of Tea, Travels of Empire). Tracing the introduction of tea industry in Upper Assam and Cachar, we can well say that it was the imperialist, the Britishers who introduced tea as a commercial product.

After the signing of the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 which ended the long battle between the British and the Burmese, Assam was initially annexed by the British and the British Governor General of British India in Lower

Assam. In case of Upper Assam Commissioner restored Ahom Monarchy and the Raja of Upper Assam paid an annual tribute of Rs.50, 000 upto 1838. Later on when the Raja failed to pay the annual tribute to the British Government in Assam there was a prolonged discussion with the Governor General, and the Commissioner finally dethroned the Raja of Upper Assam and annexed the entire territory of Upper Assam permanently.

After the introduction of the British Raj, the Commissioner, David Scott introduced certain changes in the field of Revenue Administration, Police Administration, Judicial Administration and established his relation with the frontier states. After his death Crack craft was appointed the Commissioner for a short span and as such he couldnot prove his administrative potentiality. J.C. Robertson who was appointed as commissioner in Lower Assam brought about some major changes in the field of administration.

And it is only when Captain Jenkins was appointed as the Commissioner he annexed upper Assam permanently to the colonial rule for administrative convenience and thus the British Raj was permanently consolidated both in lower and upper Assam.

Introduction of tea industry an Assam was a new innovation by the Britishers to improve the economic condition and to earn more revenue for the growth and development of the Colonial Administration in Assam. There was a lot of controversy regarding the evolution of tea culture. Under the Commissionership of Captain Jenkins and report submitted by him, Lieutenant Charlton was able to convince the botanist of the tea committee and the Government that the identity of the Assam plant was similar to that of China.

It has therefore been established that Lieutenant Jenkins and not Mr. Bruce, is entitled to the discovery of tea in Assam and in his memorandum. tea cultivation written in 1873, the Late Sir John Edgar referred to their rival claims as an open question. Following the discovery of tea in Assam in 1836, Mr. C.A. Bruce was appointed "Superintendent of the Government tea Forests"

in Lakhimpur where Tea plants were all in plenty. He was also given the responsibility to purchase leaves and during the next five year he performed, some outstanding work.

It was only in 1837 that Mr. Bruce packed forty six boxes of tea, but owing to defective packing much of it had been damaged due to dampness even before it could reach Calcutta and only a small portion of it could be send to England.

The first Government tea plantation was located on a sand bank near the confluence of the Brahmaputra and the Kundil rivers. Chinese seeds were used for plantation and initially the endeavour did not turn out to be prosperous but, gradually at about 1852 its prospects began to improve and by 1859, it had around 4000 acres under cultivation with a turn over of seven lacs, sixty thousand pounds of tea. Its local expenditure exceeded a lac of rupees annually in 1853 and by this time nine other gardens had been started in all in upper Assam.

The existence of indigenous tea in Cachar was soon afterwards ascertained and in 1856 Barsangan became the pioneer tea garden in Cachar. By the year 1886 the tea industry was making a remarkable progress which was evident from the fact that Indian tea, was driving out China tea out of the United Kingdom and by the end of the 19th century Assam emerged as the leading producer of tea in the world.

The tea industry brought with it a number of new development which had ushered in a new era in every sphere of life of the inhabitants although, the indigenous tea plant in Cachar was first discovered in 1855, the speculations regarding the possibility of tea cultivation had begun since its annexation in 1832. In 1834, Captain Fisher, the superintendent of Cachar was requested by Gordon, Secretary of tea culture committee to examine whether the climate of Cachar was conducive for tea plantation. It was found that the land of Cachar was suitable for tea cultivation. Accordingly a large group of Europeans sent

their application for tea plantation for receiving land according to terms and conditions settled by the government. To encourage the tea planters, introduction of Waste Land Rules was also processed. However the tea plantation had gradually developed all throughout Cachar in course of time. In 1872, 23, 000 acres of land were utilized for the cultivation of tea in Cachar and ultimately in the year 1923 the area of cultivation was 412,000 acres.

The Assam Company Limited was the first Company in the World of Tea with 12,000 hectras of land and Rabindranath Tagore's grand father Shri Dwarka Nath Tagore was one of the directors in the company. (web-http/business.vsnl.comm/ac/tea/).

AREA WISE DISRIBUTION OF TEA PLANTATION IN CACHAR:

India is the largest producer to tea in the world with 846 million kg. in 2000. It produces about 28 percent of the total tea of the world. Consequently India is only the fourth largest exporter of tea in the world. Export performance has been declining gradually since 1998. Until 1987-88 tea was the most significant traditional export item accounting about 21 percent and ranked first among agricultural exports but it started declining at present occupies 3rd position by Contributing to 9% of the total agricultural exports (Boriah 2002).

According to 2005 statistics the total production is 927,984 tones the valuation of which is 1,697,67,97 in rupees. According to Tea Statistics, 2005, the number of tea estates in Cachar was 206 and the total area of cultivation was 32,149 hectares producing 38,757 tones of tea (Source Tea Board). The Average yield per hectares was 1,696 in 1998 and has declined to1, 206 in 2004 (Source Tea Board).

The river Barak divides Cachar into North Cachar and South Cachar which have rich Tea Gardens which fetch handsome profit. The Tea gardens of south Cachar are :

BLOCK:KATIGORAH

SL NO.	IN TEA GARDEN AREAS NAME OF GARDENS
1	AILATHAL TEA
2	KURKURI TE
3	BAIKUNTHAPUR TG
4	BIKRAMPUR TE
5	BALAESWAR GRANT (JALALPUR TE)
6	BATULMARA GRANT

7	CRAIG PARK TG
8	DIGABAR TGEG
9	DIGOR MAHADEVPUR TE
10	GOBINDA KUPA TGEC
11	GUMRA TALKAR GRANT (GUMRA TE)
12	KALAINCHARA TGEC
13	KALIBARI PECHACHERA TG
14	KALIBARI TE
15	KATLACHORA TGEC
16	KONAPARA TG
17	MAGENTA T.E.
18	NATAN PUR T.G.
19	NEW JATINGA VALLEY (DAMCHARA TE)
20	SABAJPUR TGEC
21	SINDURA T.E.
22	SONACHERA GRANT

BLOCK: LAKHIPUR

SL NO.	IN TEA GARDEN AREAS NAME OF GARDEN
1	ALYNEE TEA GARDEN
2	BAHADURPUR TE
3	BINNAKANDI T.E.
4	BOALI T.E.
5	BHUBANDAR TE
6	CHOOTA MAMDA
7	CHINGOOR T.E.
8	DILKHOOSH T.E.
9	HATIKURI T.E.
10	JIRIGHAT TE
11	KASHIPUR TG
12	LAKHIPUR
13	NANDAN KANAN TE
14	NARAINDHAR T.E.
15	TILKA TE

BLOCK: NARSINGPUR

SL NO.	IN TEA GARDEN AREAS NAME OF GARDEN
1	ALLENPUR
2	BANSKHAL DIV.
3	BANODE NAGAR TE
4	BHUBANDAR TE
5	BLURNEY
6	CHOTO JALENGA GRANT - 2
7	CHOTO JALENGA GRANT - 1
8	CLEVER HOUSE CHAH BAGICHA

9	DERBY
10	DWARBAND GRANT
11	DWARBAND TE
12	IRONGMARA TG
13	MECHIPUR DIVISION
14	MONIARKHAL TE
15	PALOI TE
16	PUNICHERRA
17	ROSEKANDI TE
18	RUKNI TEA GARDEN
19	TARANATHPUR DIVISION

BLOCK: RAJABAZAR

SL NO.	IN TEA GARDEN AREAS NAME OF GARDEN
1	ALIPUR TE
2	BALADHAN T.E.
3	BANDOO TE
4	BEEL TE
5	DEWAN TE
6	DOLOOGRAM TE
7	MAMFARI DIV
8	LABOC TE
9	LADIACHERRA T.E.
10	LALLONG TE
11	NARAINPUR TE
12	PALLORBOND TE
13	SCOTTPUR TE
14	TARAPUR TE
15	THAILOO T.E.

BLOCK: SALCHAPRA

SL.NO.	IN TEA GARDEN AREA NAME OF GARDEN
1.	MONIAGARH TGEC
2.	LALBAG TGEC
3.	SUBONG TGEC
4.	ABONG TGEC
5.	CHOTO RAMPUR TE
6.	DALU TGEC
7.	SAHAPUR TGEC
8.	RAMPUR TGEC
9.	KALINAGAR TGEC
10.	FARI RATANPUR
11.	BIJOYPUR TGEC
12.	NARAINCHERRA TGEC
13.	KHAREEL TGEC
14.	ROTTANPUR

BLOCK: SONAI

SL.NO.	IN TEA GARDEN AREA NAME OF GARDEN
1.	DIDARKUSHI GRANT (Bhuvan Valley Division)
2.	RAHAMAN NAGAR TG

BLOCK: UDHARBOND

SL NO.	IN TEA GARDEN AREAS NAME OF GARDEN
1	AINACHERRA T.E.
2	AMRA NAGAR T.E.
3	ARKHATIPUR TE
4	ARUNABOND T.E.
5	BARSINGA
6	CHANDI GHAT TE
7	CHAPPANHAL TE
8	CHOTOSINGA
9	DAYAPUR T.E.
10	DURGANAGAR TE
11	BURTHOL
12	DWIGUN CHERRA T.E.
13	ENDO GRAM T.E.
14	HATICHERRA T.E.
15	KUMBHIR GRAM T.E.
16	KUMBHIR T.E.
17	LALGLA CHERRA
18	LARSINGHA T.E.
19	MAJAGRAM T.E.
20	MARTYCHARA
21	NAGADOOM T.E.
22	NAGAR T.E.
23	PATHICHARA T.E.
24	PATHIMARA T.E.
25	SIBERBOND T.E.
26	ICHACHERA TE
27	TAMACHERRA T.E.
28	TIKALPAR T.E.
29	BURTOL TE
30	KANAIKURI TG
31	ISTAMPUR TGEC
32	KASHPUR GRANT TGEC

CHAPTER - 2

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF TEA GARDENS IN CACHAR:

After the annexation of Cachar to the British dominion in the year 1832, the socio-economic condition of Cachar was in a deplorable State. But with the strong administrative potentiality and economic far sightedness of the colonist, tea industry became one of the leading concern for generating money and furthering the economy. Infact the establishment of Tea Industry was one of the land marks in the economy of Assam during the British period.

Cultivation of tea in Cachar started early in 1855, around Silchar town on a trial by M/S S.G Williamson & Co. They attempted to open a Tea Estate at Barsangan now an out garden of Bajrangpur Tea estate near Silchar Town. They further attempted to open a tea Estate at Istalpur (Madona) and Chincoore. But as the conditions were not suitable for them so they sold all the property to M/S Mcleod & Co. by the end of the century and withdrew from Cachar.

Mcleod & Co. attempted to run the property successfully when Lord Inchape M/S Mc.Neil and Company came to try for tea cultivation in Cachar. They started their work in the northern side of Silchar town on the other bank of river Barak in Dudhpatil area, the then Administrative Headquarter of Cachar under British Rule. Their effort was successful and extended their plantation to Durbintilla Moolidan and Kanai Kuri. Lord Inchape then renamed its organization as Doodpatlee Tea Company and appointed afresh Mc.Neil as agents. Subsequently under the leadership and finance of Lord Inchape, Mc.Neil and Co. opened few more Tea Estate and the organization was renamed as Lord Inchape Group. After that many industrialist like Gillanders-Arbhutnuts, Jardini, Skimmers, Barry & Co, Begg-Dunlop, James Finlay, Duncan Brothers, Octavious Steel, Balme Lawne and others came here for tea cultivation and at the start of 20th century they started Tea Plantation in Cachar. Karimganj and Hailakandi, then known as Cachar was flourished with tea

cultivation and some local people also called "native" came forward for tea cultivation. Vernarpur and Rajnugar Tea Estates sprang up, the pioneers were late Dinanath Dutta and Late Abdul Rohman Barbhuiya. This was accepted as a challenge by the European planters, backed by the district administrations who were also Europeans. The Europeans used to snatch workers, block drains and channels which the Indians bravely resisted.

Before 1914 there was no road ways except camel tracks through deep forests. It was in 1914 when a kutchra road was constructed from Dudhpatee ghat to Fatak Bazar, through Cachar Club of Silchar. The manager of Dudhpatee purchased the first motor car and kept it on the bank of the river Barak on the northern side and its route was from that site to Cachar Club only, the distance of which was about two kms. A four cylinder 10HP motor car could be purchased at Rs 1500/- to 2000/- along with spares and accessories in 1925 to 1930.

In those days it was compulsory to keep a driver being offered by the manufacturing Company or their agent. The driver's salary used to be fixed by the seller of the car which was almost equal to Tea Estate's Manager's salary and used to stay in Manager's Bungalow with all status and dignity. He used to wear a hat similar to that of the owner.

The only black-topped road in 1940 was Silchar-Hailakandi road via Dwarbond. It was a narrow road. In 1939-40 only few tea estates had cars, others used to ride on bullock-carts which were common means of transport.

Tea gardens were managed by the European Tea Companies or by European Mercantile agencies. The Managers and the Assistants had to be European clerks and others were recruited locally and mostly Bengalis were employed. Their qualification was on the basis of few class in the High School, entrance (Matriculation) passed or under entrance and required to have a good handwriting, well-behaved manners and to speak correct English. They were trained by the European Managers.

As the local populace around the tea garden was abused to work in the tea gardens they were termed as 'Coolies' and only in mid 19th Century when it was difficult to get labourers, it was then that the Arkatis came in the picture.

Uma Kanta Sharma, in his award winning novel in Assamese, 'Ejak Manush Ekhans Aranya', the English translation being 'In the forest, the songs and shackles' throws light into the bitter realities of procuring labourers into the tea gardens of Assam (unpublished articles of Late Pravas Sen Mazumder, J.B. Bhattacharjee, Cachar, Under British Rule in N.E. India, Delhi 1977).

The Assam Rules of 1854 was introduced to grant land for tea plantation and it was later on extended to 1856. A total area of 25728 acres of land was allocated under rule 1854. (State and Society in N.E. India by Purnendu Kumar. Pg-28).

At this time about 1870's there use to be raids, killings and fights by the Lushais, Kukis and other hill tribes who expressed resentment over encroachment of the forest which were good hunting grounds for them. But eventually the then D.C. Cachar, J.W. Edger came to a settlement with the Lushai Chief and the situation was brought under control finally by annexing the Lushais domain with Cachar. At present the total number of Tea Estates in Cachar district is 119 in all (See Table -1)

The production level of tea in the gardens of Cachar according to Tea Digest 2005-06 is.

TABLE- 02
TOTAL AREA OF TEA CULTIVATION IN HECTRES
(ASSAM, CACHAR).

YEAR	ASSAM	CACHAR
1951	155674	30445
1971	182325	31018
1991	233284	25314
1993	231942	34385
1994	227120	32326
1995	226280	29969

2000	266512	32008
2003	271589	32137
2004	271768	32149
2005	272000	32149

Source : Tea Statistics, various issues of Tea Digest from Tea Board of India.
Latest 2005-06.

TABLE-03.
PRODUCTION OF TEA IN CACHAR YEAR WISE.
(FIGURES IN THOUSAND KGS).

1980	31451.
1993	42080.
1994	41881.
1995	40180
2000	49206.
2003	41411.
2004	38757.
2005	45110.

Source : *Tea Digest : 2005-06.*

I A. CHRONOLOGY OF INDIAN TEA

Year	Area (Hect)	Production (Th. Kgs.)	Yield (Kg./hec)	Export (Including Instant Tea)			Sold in Indian auctions		Avg. No. of Labour employed in Tea Plantation
				Qty. (Th. Kgs)	Value (Th. Rs.)	U.P. (Rs./ Kg)	Qty. (Th. Kgs)	Avg. Price (Rs./Kg)	
1950	315656	278212	881	200780	804214	4.01	113645	4.23	948598
1951	316840	285399	901	205983	960134	4.66	141154	3.74	933497
1952	317916	278671	877	188170	809104	4.30	137238	3.10	969803
1953	318642	278777	875	227097	1042173	4.59	131244	4.26	969610
1954	319478	295519	925	203195	1307523	6.43	139907	6.12	993594
1956	320588	308719	963	237484	1428249	6.01	163295	4.94	1004683
1957	323285	310802	961	200786	1233859	6.15	168641	4.39	1004257
1958	325357	325225	1000	229503	1365859	5.95	175021	4.55	980238
1960	330738	321077	971	193063	1199883	6.21	173791	5.28	845166
1961	331229	354397	1070	206292	1242513	6.02	195709	4.86	822834
1962	332524	346735	1043	211826	1235339	5.83	190834	5.26	816262
1963	334036	346413	1037	223542	1323710	5.92	191857	5.27	847372
1964	337874	372485	1102	210523	1249012	5.93	199824	5.25	818783
1965	341762	366374	1072	199365	1149747	5.77	221084	5.35	806152
1966	345256	375983	1089	179219	1566457	8.74	214962	5.53	804135
1967	347653	384759	1107	213728	1892147	8.85	218750	6.17	775184
1968	351065	402489	1146	208500	1666763	7.99	241052	5.77	755729
1969	353359	393588	1114	168907	1211889	7.17	250367	5.71	747835
1970	354133	418517	1182	202335	1498033	7.40	241311	6.47	759646
1971	356516	435468	1221	202284	1544269	7.63	240308	6.73	766593
1972	358675	455996	1271	198426	1518563	7.65	266553	6.64	761919
1973	360108	471952	1311	188435	1434677	7.61	283064	6.59	766036
1974	36166	489475	1353	210888	1937134	9.19	255928	9.51	771717
1975	363303	487137	1341	218480	2460213	11.26	286593	10.59	774897
1976	364275	511817	1405	234204	2756792	11.77	310790	11.61	776164
1977	366276	556267	1519	230204	5444279	23.65	318564	15.70	788673
1978	369184	563846	1527	176686	3662169	20.73	332962	12.95	804741
1979	373747	543776	1455	200267	3646910	18.21	323261	13.01	841204
1980	381086	569172	1494	224780	4325461	19.24	306959	13.60	846659
1981	383629	560429	1461	242073	4383467	18.11	376192	13.94	849206
1982	394170	560562	1422	190693	3596380	18.86	358846	15.59	861686
1983	396066	581484	1468	209480	5226765	24.95	338929	23.90	864272
1984	398453	639864	1606	218144	7493013	34.35	420844	23.58	881366
1985	399966	656162	1641	214937	7035904	32.73	505291	23.34	892398
1986	407647	620803	1523	204292	5900131	28.88	468405	23.44	891954
1987	411335	665251	1617	202753	6465573	31.89	472474	24.66	906033
1988	414347	700014	1689	201747	6190034	30.68	497476	24.36	982830
1989	414953	688105	1658	212662	8489780	39.92	477386	36.62	979204
1990	416269	720338	1730	210024	11133510	53.01	482251	43.23	986781
1991	420470	754192	1794	202918	11345533	55.91	501585	40.31	996735
1992	420289	732322	1742	174962	9953307	56.89	448061	38.88	991704
1993	418363	760826	1819	175318	11612636	66.24	441718	48.93	991019
1994	425966	752895	1768	150691	9891469	65.64	428303	40.61	1028694
1995	427065	756016	1770	167996	12080156	71.91	428368	47.99	1028787
1996	431204	780140	1809	161696	12468719	77.11	443116	48.77	1029651
1997	434294	810031	1865	202995	17747781	87.43	459026	66.89	1032267
1998	474027	874108	1844	210338	23094360	109.80	442359	76.43	1045401
1999	490200	825935	1685	191719	19658684	102.54	480768	72.79	1188815
2000	504366	846922	1679	206816	18986119	91.80	507527	61.71	1210055
2001	509806	853923	1675	182588	16821115	92.13	463688	61.66	1232150
2002	515832	838474	1625	201002	17533898	87.23	456549	55.96	1255100
2003	519598	878129	1690	173684	15902128	91.56	477771	56.03	1256210
2004	521403	892965	1713	197668	18111416	93.14	474354	64.54	1257610
2005(E)	523000	927984	1774	199050	18309786	91.99	510234	58.05	1258800
2006(E)	N.A.	955907	N.A.	203857	18309761	89.82	499072	66.01	N.A.

Source : Tea Statistics 2003-04 Issued by Tea Board of India.

CHAPTER-3

LABOUR MIGRATION INTO THE TEA GARDENS OF CACHAR: CAUSES OF MIGRATION DIFFERENT ETHNIC AND LINGUISTIC GROUPS RELIGION, CASTE, CULTURE AND GENDER.

Migration and the movement it entails have always accompanied civilization in every stage of its development. Historically, people have mobilized from one area to another either because of the practice of slavery or because of colonization.

In 'Women and Migration in Asia vol-2' it is said that shift in base and settlement is often prompted by varied reasons and is sponsored by different agents and obviously the process of movement forces one to leave behind a familiar world to explore one's chances in an alien land.

In the Colonial period migration was directly linked with forced transportation of labour as slaves or as indentured workers. Bengal District Gazetteers 'Santhal Parganas' of L.S.S.O Malley Chapter-3 reports that back in 1872 people were to be taken from each village of Santhal Paragans and deported to clear the land and establish tea-plantation for the British settlers. Labour migration was not a new phenomenon in India, but under British rule it assumed a variety of new shapes and forms as well as increasing enormously in scale. Earlier migrants often proceeded from village to village individually or in gangs to assist in harvesting or agricultural operations. The 1890 Famine was the nail in the coffin and now larger bodies of people were moving in search of work. The repression and famine which followed the Santhal insurrection of 1855 generated one such large scale movement of population as also did the British suppression of the Indian uprising of 1857 trends, clearly evinced in the statistics of emigration from British India in the period 1855-65.

By the end of the 19th century, there were 4,00,000 migrant labourers producing 145 million pounds of tea. Between 1911-21, the tea industry imported 7, 69,000 labourers. Another 4, 22,000 came during the following

decade, the 1931 Census indicated the presence of 14 lacs tea garden labourers in Assam. (Source: Census of India, Reported on Assam respective years).

The whole populace of labourers were brought into the Assam tea gardens by giving allurements of good pay, houses and land for cultivation. The Arkatis managed through their cunning to collect labourers. In the colonial period, the pace of migration greatly picked up consisting mainly of labourers who came from the tribal belt of Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Madras, Santhal Parganas, Midnapore, and Bengal to work in the tea-gardens of Assam. By 1921 the tea-garden labourers accounted for one-sixth of the population. Hence the tea-garden people make a multi-floral garland. The Arkatis employed for bringing down labourers used to hand over the respective number of labourers to the respective Tea Estate according to the need. Some of the labourers were brought by trains, jam packed and had to live in the platforms for days on end before being deported to the tea-estates by boats and steamers. Their journey was torturous and unbelievable. We can get a vivid picture in Uma Kanta Sharma's 'In the Forest, the songs and shackles'.

When the indentured labourers reached their respective tea estate and started living there, they found to their dismay that the 'Arkatis' cheated them with false glowing pictures. Several people who had migrated to the tea-gardens of Assam in the late 19th Century, ostensibly for a short-period found they had lost their land to the head man or his kin in their own village, or to the money-lender. They had no option but to migrate permanently. According to records their land was leased out for a period of five years, but they were given the impression that they had lost their land and so persuaded to stay on in Assam. (Source: Power, Culture and Resources in Gendered Seasonal Migration from Santhal Parganas by Nitya Rao).

These labourers were subjected to very hard tasks and their first task was to toil hard from dawn to dusk clearing the huge tracts of forests for cultivation of tea. Due to unhygienic conditions coupled with hard tasks most of the labourers fell sick, epidemics broke out and took many lives. There was no

medically qualified person and the tea companies used to send medicines with dosage and instruction to use specific brands for specific diseases. Later LMP'S was employed in the tea estates as compounders or Doctor Babus for treatment of the sick labourers.

They had to face other hazards also particularly tigers which were a menace for them. Many of the tea garden labourers were killed by the tigers and some were also mauled. Tigers attacked the labourers even in broad daylight, this still persists instance, Dargakona incident, in 2008.

The labourers of Chargola Tea Estate revolted against the atrocities perpetuated by the management. The non-cooperation succeeded in fusing the sentiments of the labourers even in the remote tea-garden areas of Assam.

The emergence of Gandhiji gave the workers all mental strength to face any eventualities and the message of non-cooperation emboldened them. During the freedom movement, there were all total three hundred sixty five tea estates and the labour strength was 5 lacs. The owner of ninety percent tea-gardens were the Britishers. The indentured labourers were called as 'Grimit' labourers, the term was derived from the British term 'agreement' (Source: Sadinatha Sangram Srihatta Cachar by Nishit Ranjan Das). The labourers were reduced to mere slaves and in the year 1902, Bipin Chandra Pal raised his voice against the Britishers and asked them to leave the tea gardens and go back from Assam.

Then in 1921, there was a labour protest and all the labourers along with their family left the gardens to go back to their homestead. But the Colonist raised their guns and let loose a reign of terror and killings near Chandpur. Some of the labourers jumped into the river along with their family just to be swept away by the running torrents.

Expressing solidarity the steamers and railway also went on strike and thousands of the employees lost their jobs. Gradually the labourers of other tea estates joined the movement and the Guwahati High Court remained closed for three days as a mark of protest against the inhuman killings and torture. This

labour movement lasted for two and half months and finally the British government along with the plantation owners came to a settlement with the tea garden labourers and the movement came to an end. This movement is well known in the history of freedom movement as the 'Chargola Exodus'.

In labour Contracts and work Agreement in Tea Plantations Assam, Shri Kalyan Das, V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, Noida noted that 'in the early phase of liberalization growth rate of permanent as well as casual labour has declined in the organized tea plantation sector (large estates) in Assam. In the later phase though there is some growth it is more towards casualization of workforce'.

In the unorganized sector (small tea gardens) of Assam a significant employment growth has been observed during this period. Some employers especially the planters preferred to employ family units and were particularly keen to recruit women because women were more nimble with their fingers and they had to pay them less. The planters were always on the look out for cheap labour. Migration in Assam was structured by demand through returnee migrants or *Arkattis*, who were the channels of information.

The immigrant tea garden labourers, with the passage of time, tried to assimilate themselves with the Assamese people and a new dimension was added to the Assamese tea culture by the migrated tea- garden labourers.

The tea garden migration was linked to a combination of circumstance in the home state such as lack of social and economic opportunities in the receiving country. The widening gap between the have and have-nots is one of the main factors causing migration flow. People try to escape a deteriorating socio-economic condition and leave their parents state in search of better living opportunities.

Labour agents bore them away about a hundred and fifty years ago- the healthiest and fittest first crossing states and rivers, through mountains and valleys, to a land that needed their service but never acknowledged them as part

and parcel of the society. They were and are still referred to as ‘*Bagani*’ or ‘*Coolies*’.

After a century they became the backbone of the tea industry. These labourers do not hold any white collar position in the industry. Little do the tea loving people care to know the stagnant plight of the people whose labour is behind the production of the most preferred beverage all over the world. With the globalized economy the traditional industrial avenues of employment like tea industry are breaking down. The condition of the immigrant labourers are deteriorating day by day and despite the huge population number they are not listed as scheduled tribes in Assam.

Theirs have been a long standing demand for the recognition as scheduled tribes and the horrific incident in the capital of Assam, Guwahati on the 24th November, 2007 is a glaring evidence to the fact that India is still not a free land and is ruled by the power loving few. When the government itself becomes a silent witness to all such atrocities it is a shame to the whole of humanity who considers itself as civilized and globalized.

But gone are those days when the labour community remained silent bearers of the torture and humiliation for the repurcation after the 24th November, 2007 incident is felt throughout the state, nation and international level. In its wake one glaring truth has come to light that the government, the ‘*Mai-Bap*’ of the people for their own political selfish interest created the furore which took a different turn and backlashed the anger and fury of all the people exposing the draw backs and total failure of the government machinery. And only now it became clear why Shri Hemchandra Mirza the garden headman of Borthal in Dewan, who is 107 years old, said ‘*Engrech ae ra marleyo pethay lath marene yo ra petbhora khayeacha*’. ‘The English man assaulted us but never let us go hungry, they gave us our food’. There is no two opinion that this population of tea labourers are a part and parcel of the socio-economic and political life of Assam. The migration of labourers into the

various tea gardens acted as a catalyst for social, political and ecological transformation of the valley.

All the migrated labourers of Cachar belonged to different communities and castes and had their own culture before coming down to Assam but, with the passage of time these different folk-cultures have been amalgamated and developed into a distinctive culture known as the culture of the tea-garden labourers. The tea-garden labourers belong to different ethnic and linguistic groups and each group still preserve their own identity and cultural moorings despite embracing a common culture known as '*Bagani*' or tea-garden culture and all of them have a similar life style.

The year 2007, goes to bugle the clarion call of a marginalized, dispossessed and oppressed class of people. It highlights the intensity of ethnic consciousness, the voice of humanity echoing on all the four corners of the world to counter the adversarial relationship and bring about a Universalization and Standardization doing away with the differential notes of human life.

The government machinery consists very much of human beings and as such these humans need mental lubricants to smoothen and streamline the society, state and nation. In the pre-independent period, the migrants were used by the Muslim political leaders for their political agenda to retain power and subsequently merge the state with Muslim majority provinces.

Thereafter in the post-independence period these migrants were exploited as en masse vote banks by Indian political leadership, giving rise to further influx of illegal migrants to the state. This political game play still continues.

The migrant labour population belong to different Communities such as Bawri, Chakma, Rikhiasan, Kol, Santhal., Mal, Keori, Keot, Ghatwar, Brahman, Pasi, Tanti, Rabidas, Bhar, Rajbhar, Lahar, Borai, Goala, Kurmi, Bagati, Nunia, Naik, Dushad, Tantribai, Moysa, Bhumij, Bagdi, Karmakar, Nair, Orang, Munda, Panika, Chasha, Hari, Lodhi, Kalindi, Ri, Kumar, Hazame, Shill, Mia, Sha, Khan, Ali, Sheek, Shahoo, Verma, Dom, Kharia,

Ghasi, Mukhiar, Gond, Dhobi, Bilaspuri. About 10% to 15% people migrated on their own either to join their kith and kin or to earn their bread. The brahmin, cobblers (chamar, muchhi, now known as Rabi Das), barber, tailors, Maulavi and few high caste people like Ahir/Yadav/Goala migrated on their own.

There are many ex-tea garden labourers living in the sick-gardens or in the neighbouring villages of tea garden areas, these villages were created by the tea garden labours who left the garden due to some reason or other, they mainly clashed or differed in their opinion with the other labourers and in order to be liberated from the clutches of the garden management they were compelled to leave the garden and settle down in the nearby villages. And now-a-days they are treated as ex-tea garden labourers. The theory of 'Cultural Assimilation' or 'the Melting Pot' theory reflects the consensus approach. This theory assumes that the immigrant minority communities will get totally assimilated into the host society to the extent that they imbibe all the values, norms and attitudes of the host society. In other words, the ethnic identity of the minority group will be merged into that of the host Community (IGNOU Booklet).

How far is this theory applicable to the Tea garden immigrants?

The recent violence in Guwahati helps us to retrace our steps back to the year 1921, Chandpore firing where many tea garden labours were mercilessly killed.

Another such incident was the 1926's atrocities by the British imperialists upon the labour organization. The tea garden labourers of Dharam Lal T.E inspired by Mahatma Gandhi held a Ramayan and Kirtan Sabha with the intention to organize a movement against the British atrocities. But it came to the notice of the manager who immediately reported the matter to the British authorities and the entire labour organization faced dire consequences.

Vishay Kanu, Ram Lagan Sigh, Nanku Gowala, Nanda Kumar Sonar, Pitambar Kurmi, Gora Chand Kurmi, Umesh Das, Nikin Das, Vikhu Das, Milia Sonar, Pilua Ram Das attacked the manager and the British authorities had to

leave the place and flee. The very next day the British administration sent army and military forces to the garden and captivated and tortured the labourers and many of them had to face trials in the court.

Sri Umesh Das, Nikin Das and Cholai Sonar was imprisoned for six months and they were sent to Sylhet jail. Umesh Das died immediately after being released from the jail because of the inhuman torture. His widow returned to the garden and was employed in the garden. And here we see how the British administration tried to resolve the conflict to a certain extent because the entire tea industry depended on the labourers. Later on these labourers were declared as freedom fighters and they even received pension and extra facilities as freedom fighters.

Sri Ram Charan Bhar and Swarup Bhar, Hela Das, Sri Krishun Bhar of Durgakona garden and Laxman Bhar and Bishun Kalwar of Dwarbond have been receiving pension as freedom fighters. In 1926, the British Government very shrewdly tried to solve the conflict by making a trade union for the tea garden labourers. By doing so the white administrators minimized their problem diplomatically. The labourers did not gain much except for free housing, water supply and hospital facilities.

In the year 1942 during the Quit India Movement, led by Gandhiji the postal department, railways and other industrial heads joined in the movement. The tea garden labourers were not allowed to join, the leaders of the movement were not allowed to enter the tea gardens. Yet, some brave hearts of Shulgoi Tea Garden, Sonakhera Tea Garden, Dulabchera T.E, Lakherra, Kalacherra, Ghomai Tea Estate did join the movement and also faced trials and some were sacked out. But none of the Newspapers or Journals mentioned their names. They were the unsung heroes of our country who fought along with the others to liberate our country from the clutches of the British Raj.

Similarly the labourers of Silcoorie, Dharamtila and Durgakona tea estates organized strikes demanding ration for the family and accommodation, which was ultimately granted.

But Ram Swarup Bhar, Rupchand Naik and Sri Kushun Bhar were sent to jail, receiving the message, Sri Purnendu Kishore Sengupta came down from Kulhara and met Satish Mohan Dev, Upendra Sankar Dutta and Paresh Chandra Choudhury and got them released. They were also given Mazdoor Sangha recognition letter and were reinstated in the gardens. Under the leadership and efforts of Shri Purbendu Kishore Sengupta, Durgesh Dev, Jiban Santhal, Bhupati Babu, Trivediji, Yamuna Saha, Sita Ram Verma, Arun Kumar Chandra, Paresh Chandra Choudhury, Raja Babu, and Sri Prasad Roy of Sonakhira the tea garden labourers of Cachar got government recognition. In Assam the Cha Sramik Union got a strong foothold with the INTUC, recognition.

After a deep retrospection when we come to the 21st century we find that it unleashed a more terrible and pathetic plight of the tea garden labourers. It is pathetic and uncompromising because here the Imperialist is non-other but the Indian State government and the Indian Central Government.

It is because of political compulsion as well as economic need that the tea garden adivasis have been clamouring to be included into the community of Schedule Tribe. Their contention is that the Munda, Gor, Kul, Bhil, Santhal, Oraon, Ho and Kharia communities be included on the Schedule Tribe List. Incidentally, all these groups are recognized as schedule tribes in West Bengal, Jharkhand and Orissa but strangely, the same have been denied in Assam.

The AASAA called for a Mahasabha on the 24th November 2007 to pressurize the Assam Government to heed to their long standing demand but what followed was sheer vandalism right under the nose of the government administration. The horrific incident has definitely left an indelible mark in the history of Assam.

The problem of the tea-garden labourers who have migrated to the state of Assam a hundred and fifty years back and form a part and parcel of the state were never viewed as identical with non-tea garden people either in the past or today. The discrimination is striking and transparent enough. Social reality

rarely supports the overarching theories, whether feminist, economic or political, because social reality is hugely diverse, constantly influx and full of disjunctions and discrepancies.

In Cachar, the adivasi population exist in almost all the gardens. In some of the tea gardens, like Motinagar T.E, Boali T.E, Burtal, Maticherra, Thaligram, Arunabond, Pathichara, Dayapur, Bheel, Digurkhal, the percentage of adivasi population is significant. Arkatipure, Mainaghar, Nisthal, Mazargram, Lidiacherra, Dilkhush. The tea-garden labourers constitute 45 percent of total voters.

They are used as vote-banks by the politicians and after each election they are ignored and forgotten, moreover the government schemes are far out of their reach and even after 60years of independence there is no change in their living condition, infact, it has worsened. The Imperialists now are the brown sahibs and before independence the Britishers exploited them. There is just a change of hands in administration and the rest remains unchanged.

Table -4
ESTIMATED TOTAL NUMBER OF LABOURERS ON ROLL AS ON 31ST DECEMBER
OF EACH YEAR ASSAM

States	Districts	Estimated total Number of Labhorers as on 31 st December												Estimated No. of bonafide dependents of resident workers as on 31 st December			
		Resident				Permanent				Temporary				Total			
		2002	2003	2004		2002	2003	2004		2002	2003	2004		2002	2003	2004	
Assam	Darrang	82803	87654	88849	12893	12790	12810	22145	18286	16126	117841	118730	117785	133873	133924	133919	
	Goalpara	4976	5284	5388	281	283	276	4450	4413	4312	9707	9980	9976	9276	9281	9288	
	Kamrup	7131	7552	7691	387	276	377	1565	1478	1383	9083	9406	9451	1649	1660	1699	
	Dibrugarh	146171	1544863	157468	20159	20215	20243	37043	27134	25013	203373	202212	202725	2022502	203194	205800	
	Lakhimpur	8170	8583	8675	1281	1279	1295	4884	4298	3880	14335	14160	13850	19889	19921	19494	
	Nowgong	11757	12509	12729	2404	2413	2410	5067	4338	3986	19228	19260	19125	27072	27124	272144	
	Sibsagar	112050	118492	119853	14259	14311	14313	35987	27270	24970	162296	160073	159136	165807	166149	166860	
	Karbi Anglong	3306	3471	3535	309	303	298	955	1124	1072	4570	4898	4905	4289	4294	4311	
	North Cachar	8370	8753	8900	407	405	402	1670	1543	1470	10447	10701	10772	10648	10674	10705	
	Cachar	48105	50781	51666	2451	2473	2456	18227	16648	15671	68783	69902	69793	78912	79098	79383	
Total	432839	457942	464755	54831	54848	54880	131993	106532	97883	619663	619322	617518	653917	655319	658703		

Source : Tea Statistics 2003-04 Issued by Tea Board of India

CHAPTER - 4

CULTURE: LIFE STYLE AND CULTURE OF THE TEA LABOURERS WITH REFERENCE TO DIFFERENT TEA GARDENS OF CACHAR DISTRICT

Assam one of the major states of north-eastern region of India comprises of Assam Valley or the Brahmaputra Valley which stretches across the state from east to west and the Barak Valley forms its southern adjunct with the hill districts lying in between.

Assamese is the premier language of the state, while most of the tribal groups like the Karbis, the Dimasas, the Bodo- Kacharis, the Rabhas, the Misings, the Tiwas and the Deuris have their own languages. In Barak Valley however . Bengali (Sylehti) has a dominant place. Apart from these there is a large section of heterogeneous population settled down all over the tea estates of Assam. Tea plantations in Assam began as early as 1837 (Kar, R.K. 1989,pg37) by the Colonist Raj. Till 1853 tea plantations was confined to Sibsagar and Dibrugarh district only. Tea cultivation in Cachar and Karimganj Distirct (Barak Valley) was started in 1855.

The indigenous people were reluctant to work in the tea plantations and there was an acute shortage of human hands which was the prime necessity. The British government therefore pooled labourers from other parts of the country mostly tribals from Uttar Pradesh , Bihar , Madhya Pradesh, Budwan, Purulia, Midnapore, Birbhuna, Bankura, Orissa, Madras and Chotanagpur. The present paper thus attempts to explore and study the culture of tea garden labourers of Cachar district of South Assam.

Culture, according to Emily. A Schultz and Robert H. Lavenda are 'sets of learned behavior and ideas that human beings acquire as members of society'. Culture is in fact the consistent whole of the human society and this makes us unique amongst living creatures.

Culture is essentially a socio-psychological phenomenon. Raymond William defines culture as a particular way of life, shaped by values, traditions, beliefs, material objects and territory.

The culture of the indentured labourers from various parts of India in the tea gardens is a class apart. It is an ethnic fabric of varied cultural, linguistic and ethnic heritage. Different groups were recruited from different places, e.g., the Munda and the Gonda from Bihar, Santhal, Tanti and the Bhumij from Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, the Khond from Andhra Pradesh, and the Boya from Tamil Nadu (Raha, 1989 pg. 38).

These independent cultural tribes of the tea garden combined together to form a common work culture and gradually developed a common language to bridge the gap in language. They evolved a melting pot, the 'Bangani Language' which contained the mosaic language of the different ethnic groups with different cultural moorings which enable them in transmitting the singleness in communication.

THE TEA PLANTATION LABOUR IN BARAK VALLEY

There are different tribes in the tea gardens of Cachar but in some gardens certain tribes predominate. The Bengali speaking people who are better known as Burdwanis predominate in Borthal, Labac, Lalong, Thailu, Binnakandi, Pallorbond, Nutan Kashipur, Kumbirgram, Khumba, Nisthal, Rosekandi, Arunabond or Urrnabond, Dolugram, Chandighat, Nagar Tea Estates. The people are called Chasa, Ghasi, Das, Bauri, Ree, Kalindi, Proja, Bhagati, Karmakar, Bhakti, Turi, Malpahari, Baraik, Tantubai, Lodhi. The Bengali speaking people of Cachar do not treat these immigrant Bengalee speaking tea garden community as part of their culture and language.

The Adivasis predominate in Booli T.E. Matinagar, Brital Dayapur, Mazargram, Bagarkuna, Digurkhal, Maticherra, Arunabond, Dolugram, Arkatipur, Lalbagh, Rampur, Nisthal, Bheel, Lediacherra, Pangram. They are

ethnically branded as Munda, Santhali, Oaron, Ho, Kol, Bhils, Panika, Gond, Akowra, Savaras, Ghatwar, Bhumij, Kheria. Within their tribe they speak in Munda, Ho and Santhali language.

There are some Muslims belonging to the Hindi speaking community. They mostly predominate in Binakandi, Dewan, Pallorbond, Borthol, Rosekandi, Elanpur, Barjalenga, Westjalenga, Silkuri, Bariknagar, Derby, Palloi, Bhaskhal, Rukni, Bhubandor, Thailu and Jalalpur Tea Estate. The Hindustani Muslims are also called as Jhulas whose profession was weaving but now-a-days they donot weave. They used to do sewing and tailoring and the tailors were called as 'Khalifa' or 'Darji'.

There are a few Christians in Dewan, Dollu, Rampur and Kumber Tea Estate. Their population is very less. There are a few people from Nepal in Changduar which is out garden at Ratanpur Tea Estate.

There are also Oriya groups of labourers. They are titled as Tanti, Nayak, Jena, Mishra, Telipathar, Panda, Kalindi, Patro, Moyra, Keaf. There are a large number of Oriyas in almost all the gardens especially Bajrangpur tea estate Ratanpur, Dwarbond and Dewan tea estate.

In the Chandipur garden, Dwarbond there are Madrasi people titled as Telangana, Naidu, Mal, Malo, Madrasi.

There are a large number of diaspora populace from U.P., M.P., Jharkhand and Bihar. They are Goala, Dhobi, Singh, Pasi, Kurmi, Koiri, Rabidas, Baroi, Bhar, Rajbhar, Bind, Nunia, Gareri, Musher, Dusadh. These people are Hindi speaking and more popularly speak the Bhojpuri language.

The entire workers community comprised of different caste. The work of the people were divided according to their caste. Each caste had their traditional jobs and once they came down to the gardens they were employed according.

The Gaola (Ahir/Yadav) belonged to the high caste, the Brahmins, the Kumars who later on wrote Prajapati and Kohar consider themselves as descendent of Brahma. Their occupation is making of vessels out of clay.

Then there were Blacksmith titled as Lohar, Karmakar, the Goldsmith titled Sonar, Paddor and now-a-days they even write Verma. The Sweeper or Mathar from Bihar especially titled as Bosphor they are primarily employed as Scavengers, they are skilled in making bamboo and cane baskets, mats, fans etc, the Dusad are Scheduled Caste they are believed to be ancestors of Rahu, they eat and drink during Lunar and Solar Eclipse which is otherwise not allowed. These people are not allowed to worship or perform any rites. They are given the right to worship only the 'Dih' God under a tree outside the village. There is no particular image of the Dih God, they offer wine and meat especially chicken to the God. The Dhobis are caste Hindus and are believed to have descended from Neta the heavenly washer woman. The Kahars are people who carry water for all the people, they are the common paniwallahs.

The people of Barai Community amongst the immigrants are better known as wood cutters. They are deputed the task of sawing wood, most of them are Carpenters.

There are Muslims mostly Hindusthani or Bihari Muslims who write Miah, Sha, Khan, Ali, Sheak. The Sha belongs to the beggar community, they can accept gifts from the others. These Hindusthani Muslims already mentioned are known as Jullahs.

On the whole it has been found that the tea garden immigrant labourers constitute of people different caste, creed and language but under the banner of the tea garden culture they may be assimilated under one single head 'The Tea Garden Community' with their oneness in diversity. In respect of the three states in eastern India-Orissa, Bihar and West Bengal there are nearly one hundred tribal groups. In Orissa alone there are sixty-two groups (Mahapatra

.1992) but the tea tribes of Cachar constitute of few tribes compared to their home states from where they were indentured, or migrated.

FOLK CULTURE OF THE TEA GARDENS

The teagarden folks like any other folks have their own traditional and distinctive culture. Some of these are discussed below:

Religion : Religion in a more specific way has been playing a vital role in the social life of the tea garden immigrants. Religion is an important aspect of culture and is indispensably associated with the socio-cultural life of the people. Every human society have belief in some supernatural entities or supernatural power which is given different terms like God, Allah, Khuda, Thakur, Bhagwan etc and the expression of established faith on such belief is given through various rituals, practices, ceremonies including magic or occultism or tantrikism which may provide a sense of security in crisis situations when thrust against forces beyond human beings.

The tea garden labourers though alienated from their ancestral homes still practice and follow some of their religious and cultural mooring of their forefather. Here it can be said the younger generations donot have taste, preference or knowledge of all their religious and cultural practices and as such it is fast vanishing. There are about 98% of Hindus, barely 1% Christians, and less than 1% Muslims (Singh, 2006). This is an evidence that the Britisher planters were not interested in buying the souls of the labourers they were more commercial in their out look. They left the immigrants on their own, to their faiths and practices.

The Hindus worship various Gods like Kali, Shiva, Jagannath, Lakhmi, Saraswati (Tushu), Krishna, various deities of the forests also the Sun, Moon and Earth, snakes, tigers etc.

The Muslims celebrate Mohurum, Id, Tajja, Bakhri Id. It may be mentioned here that during Bakhri Id, the Muslims are not allowed to slaughter

cows, so they celebrate Bakhri Id with chicken and mutton. There are a few mosques in and around the tea gardens but there are no such Churches for the Christians and they have to go outside during Christmas and other religious festivals.

Important Festivals: India is a land of variegated festival. The tea-garden culture provides a panorama of colourful festivals varying from tribes to tribes and area to area. In spite of their dire poverty the diaspora try to preserve their culture through the performance of varied festivals.

Tushu Puja is one of the most popular festival of the Burdwanis. Tushu is performed in the month of January, known as 'Posh' in Bengali. A small variety of dull violet coloured flowers bloom in a bunch in small plants. The unmarried ladies make a small hut with bamboo or sticks of Tushu flower and place some flowers inside carry it on their head and place it in a sacred corner of the compound, light candles, camphors and burn incense and sing Tushu songs invoking the Goddess Lakshmi to bless the Tushu maiden with a good and loving husband like Shiva. The prayer and songs are sung only at night. Nowadays the hut is made and decorated in a sophisticated manner. This particular variety of Tushu flower blooms till Sankranti or harvest festival. After the month long invocation with songs and ceremonies the Tushu hut is immersed in the river on the day of Sankranti.

Karma Puja was originally celebrated by the Mirzas. Nowadays it is celebrated even by Gonds, Binjhar, Monjhar and Oraons. This is celebrated in the month of August-September with great pomp and full of amusement. The themes of the songs are mostly sexual. They worship the Kalmi branch which is wrapped with up with new clothes and at the end of the puja the men and women drink and dance together in the same tune, to ward off all evil spirits and receive the blessing of Karma.

Shrikam, Diwal, Raghubir and Gramdevta puja, all these pujas are performed in the month of Ashar, (June-July) by the people of Mirza

community. These pujas involve animal sacrifices. The Mirzas cannot get their children married off without performing these rites.

Gramdevta puja is celebrated in all the tea gardens in the month of May. The people collect money both from the labour line as well as the managerials and offer fruits and whatever Prasad is possible and every evening they perform namkirtans in the Radha Krishna mandir for fourteen days. On the fifteenth day they erect red flags or Jhandas outside the garden area cordoning off the garden from evil spirits, diseases and to protect the garden from all kinds of natural calamities. People from all communities take part in it.

Dural Puja is usually celebrated by the Khols. They dig a tunnel and lit fire on it and walk over the burning fire to prove their purity and chastity and also to appease the Gods and make penance for their unknown sins.

Maha Shakti Puja is performed by the Santhals, whereby they heat up an iron rod and hit themselves with it, trying to cleanse the people of all their sins. This is an act of penance and sacrifice for the common welfare.

Satbhain Than Puja, this is performed in the month of April. Seven Siva lingas are made in the name of the seven manifestations of Ma Durga and worshipped to appease and please Lord Shiva.

Parad Parav: This festival is celebrated annually on Bengali New Year's Day when a ceremonial hunting expedition is undertaken with dogs. This is prevalent in Ratanpur Tea Estate. They hunt down rabbits, wild hens, pigs, etc. previously they used to hunt wild boars and deer.

Phal upabhas is the practice of abstaining from cooked food the day before Charak Puja. The devotees can take only fruits once a day. On the day of Charak Puja they fast for the whole day and do not drink even a drop of water. In the evening they offer Puja to the Lord Shiva in the temple. Now a days many Kaibarta families have settled in the vicinity of the Tea Gardens and

they perform the Charak Puja, some of the tea garden labourers also join in and even participate in the **Charak Dance** in order to earn money.

Ratha Jatra: In the tea gardens where Oriyas are in majority like the Bajrangpur Tea Estate, there are devotees of Lord Jagannath and thus they make the holy chariot and pull it up to the temple garden. Bhajanmalas and kirtans are sung.

Shitala Puja: this is celebrated in the month of January-February. It is performed within the village under a peepal tree, and in the some of the gardens there are special temples for Shitala Mai. The main purpose of this puja is to save the garden from the scourge of epidemic diseases like cholera, small-pox and chicken-pox. Goats fowl, pigeons are offered.

Fagua or Holi is an important festival of the tea garden people. Fagua is celebrated by all the communities and sometimes it lasts for a week. It is celebrated in a most colourful manner. Both males and females join in the merry making and dancing. The Santhals perform Jhumur and the Bhojpuris perform Dandia dance or Katinach while celebrating Holi. They drink local home made wine which they refer to as 'laupani'.

Manasa Puja is performed mostly by the village medical men. They try to appease the Goddess of snake and pray to her to spare her wrath on them. Animal Sacrifices are made and songs and ojah nitya is also performed.

The Panika who have migrated from Madhya Pradesh donot take the help of the Brahmins, they perform all their rites on their own. They make small images of animals like cows, pigeons and offer pindas. These idols of animals are made with atta (wheat).

Marriage: The Oraons perform the marriage ceremony early in the morning even before sunrise. They have a unique practice, both the parties to the marriage hit each other with broom sticks.

The Chasas from Orissa who are mainly agriculturist make the chowra more commonly known as Kunja by placing an ish or a plough, facing which both the bride and bridegroom sit and the marriage is solemnized.

The Turias who are titled as Rabidas now play the Turia danga a drum like instrument and sing to its tune throughout the night. The Community have a special marriage structure whereby the bride's party shoots an arrow and the bridegroom or his men have to find out the arrow, if he is successful in procuring it the girl's party surrenders before the man and the marriage is solemnized.

The Rikhiasans receive the bridegroom or Barati with the mridanga. Before the marriage a special sacrificial ritual is performed where they sacrifice a boar. The gaon bhura or choudhury is all in all, he has to give his consent. Cross-community marriage entails threats, punishment and negotiations. To put right the threat of cultural disorder occur through the gaon bhura.

The Tanti of Oriya community take the help of a barber instead of a Brahmin to perform the puja just before marriage.

The 'Napith' or Barber and the 'Dhobi' or Washerman has a very significant social value for without them any social function cannot be conducted. So if any family is under social threat they have to face Napith and Dhobi bandh.

There are two communities in the Bowri jat. They are Thetulia and Goboria. The Thetulia are considered to be of higher caste than the Goboria. Tilak is the first step to their marriage where clothes like dhotis and sarees are exchanged between the bride and bridegroom at the gate. These people believe that the barking of dogs at the time of marriage is an ill omen. If any dog barks at the time of marriage, the ceremony has to be stopped.

The labour populace of Mirza, Karmakar and Mal community live together procreate children and then get married. They marry under an umbrella and they use the jash as musical instrument.

Polygamy is permitted among some of the tea garden labourers and widow remarriage is also recognized. Funerals are commemorated with great emotion and sometimes in a weird manner.

The caste Hindus cremates the dead whereas the Muslims and Christians bury the dead bodies. In almost all the tea gardens there is separate land allocated for performing the last rites of the deceased. Some of the labourers even cremate their dead near the river banks or deep in the forest areas.

There are some of the adivasis who perform special rites at the demise of a person from their own community. The women of the Oraon community hold a special funeral ceremony and lead a mourning procession to the river ghat wailing in cadence and gliding mysteriously. The whole atmosphere fills with an eerie feeling. On reaching the ghat they bathe and then regain their normalcy for, the weird lamentation stops all of a sudden and then they come back silently and go back to their homes .

The tea garden populace of Cachar have very little culture as they live far from the cities and are quite removed from all those seats of learning and intellect. yet they are quite happy with their life inspite of all their inconveniences and hardships. They are quite content and relaxed and often cheerful and hilarious. Carnivalism is a part of their life and the various cultural and customary rituals and practices are cemented in lives. Money or no-money they are happy-go-lucky with no tension and are free from ambition.

Dress is simple, for men wear dhotis and women most often wear sarees. The woman sometimes wear ghagri and full sleeved choli and a chhadar. The women are fond of tying up their hair with multi-coloured ribbons and colour their lips and make-up their eyes with surma or kajal.

Food of the tea garden labourers of Cachar usually consists of rice or roti. These people prefer rice and beaten rice. They drink rice beer and are fond of meat and fish. Fish is often caught from bheels, ponds and rivers and animals are hunted down for meat.

The women workers of the tea estate before going for kamjari they take rice or chira i.e. beaten rice in tea liquor. They prefer to drink boiled water and they usually put some green tea leaves while boiling the water.

The women of some of the gardens send their children out for catching small variety of fishes from running streams or rivers. They even collect eatable stems, roots and leaves which they cook for meals.

The Bhojpuris prefer Chatu because it is healthy and easy to take moreover they get more energy from it and it saves them from the trouble of burning fuel.

So the cultural moorings of the tea garden people of Cachar is varied and interesting and needs further study so as to highlight the fact that the tea garden villages are much like any other tribal village in the state with gamut of folk culture rich in tradition and heritage worth preserving.

CHAPTER - 5

STATUS OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN TEA PLANTATIONS OF CACHAR

Participation of women in economic activities is not a new phenomenon in tea garden. The women workers occupy the status of women, as a plantation worker, like their male counterpart. The planters preferred women as pluckers because of dexterity and nimbleness with their fingers. Plucking of 'two leaves and a bud', 'Duti pata ekti kuri' should be quick and neat, not injuring the bush. Again the women have to be careful to see that twigs are not present with the leaves because that is again detrimental to the quality of tea.

The women of the tea garden of Cachar integrate their family and work in an accommodative manner like the women workers in other tea gardens of Assam. Plucking of tea leaves may seem to be an easy task but it is not so because the pluckers are constantly under pressure from the overseers, the deffadar and sardars. They pressurize them for increasing the quantity and at the same time select the good leaves.

The women workers of the tea gardens of Cachar are adaptive to their work because living in the gardens for years on end and performing the same task relentless they have become just like cogs in the machine. They have no career opportunity like their counter part working in other sectors and as such they are self-complacent.

The planters and colonial administration formulated schemes for systematized labour recruitment. They believed in family recruitment for it encouraged them to live together and thus prevent absconding of the males. Family recruitment policies were thus a powerful instrument under which labours were indentured into the various gardens of Cachar.

The first labour immigration legislation, Transport of Native Labour Act III of 1863, enacted rules to transport of one female to every four male labours. Then came the problem of many women labours willing to immigrate alone to

the gardens and this again gave rise to many questions. Now, the Tea District Labour Association (TDLA) was instructed to enquire whenever young or unmarried woman came for registration. By 1920, the policy of family migration was formulated by which the paternalistic control of women was a must. She had to be accompanied by her husband or other male relatives to the gardens. On the other hand male unmarried men were considered to be potentially unstable. So here again we can mark the pivotal role of women workers in the tea industry.

The plantation women have a set routine and they contain themselves into that space and time. They rise as early as 5am, perform house hold chores, prepare meals even if frugal for the family and pack some of it in containers which are again tied in pieces of cloth. But in some of the gardens the researcher has marked these workers carry tiffin carriers and boiled drinking water also. In some of the gardens, the garden management provides drinking water through tankers. At 7am, they have to rush for their plantation work and on their way, the women with children like Phulmoni Mazhi of Labak garden drop their child in a creche. The girl child from 10 to 14 years accompanies the mother and joins the Children Dafa.

After working from 7am to 12 noon they have lunch break. During lunch break those who are engaged near the labour line go home for lunch others remain in the plantation area and take whatever food they carry with them. At 2pm they start working again up to 5pm.

The workers have to pluck 18 kgs to 21 kgs of leaves. But the wages of the workers of Cachar Tea Estates vary from Rs 30 to Rs 46.25. Development of permanent workers is less as compared to faltu or ticca labour. The extra hands do not get bonus or pension so the planters are benefited by employing casual or Ticca Workers.

The women workers complete their two rounds of work in the gardens equally as the male counterpart who are mostly employed in the factory or as pruners, gatekeeper, water bearer, drivers, bearers, watchmen, malis etc.

After these two rounds of usual work the women have a third round when they busy themselves cooking food, collecting fuel, making rice beer, taking care of live stock, taking care of children. The women workers have to walk miles on end to collect water for their household purpose. The women of Borthal expressed their dissatisfaction to the researcher that sometimes they have to carry their utensils and clothes also to the river for cleaning.

Bhanumoni expressed her dissatisfaction, '*Hairani kam, bhalonai lage amder manush tao pani anay rathe jayoi kare*'. The stink of otherness is there in her statement. That she is tired was not sufficient she is more concerned about her husband's carrying water.

It is not only the women and men who are reduced to cogs in the machine who sweat their way out with a sort of stereotyped and set way of life, the children have to bear the brunt of poverty. The Government has introduced various schemes for the welfare of the tea garden communities of Cachar and for the upliftment of women and children. Despite the sincere effort on the part of the Government these schemes are not being implemented in totality. The condition of some of the gardens of Cachar is in a precarious state. Small girls like Gauri, Pinki and Piria who are hardly 6 to 7 years old carry heavy loads of wood to meet the demand for fuel. It has been reported to the researcher that the government has formulated policies for subsidised ration – rice, atta, kerosene for the workers of the tea plantations. But the managers of some of the tea gardens reported (names have not been revealed by the researcher on request by the management) that there is a nexus between the different government bureaucrats and as such the ration do not reach the garden workers.

Schools have been constructed in all the gardens for educational upliftment of children but the entire educational machinery has failed. Schools are in terrible condition, desk and benches are broken and goats are found to be kept inside the buildings which were supposed to be full of students.

The researcher expresses satisfaction over a few gardens, for the conscious effort on the part of the management to do its best for the implementation of the schemes.

The Sarvashika Abhijan is one such policy which has failed to bring the children under the umbrella of education due to lack of awareness on the part of the labourers.

So the State Government is trying its luck with the introduction of Mina Campaign a UNICEF programme. The District Mission Co-ordinator (SSA) has reported to have started its work in the various gardens, its main aim is to motivate the children and dropouts below 12 years to enrol in the various tea garden schools. Mina Club is being formed with women members consisting of Member Secretary, President, Vice-President, G.P. member, parent members and mother president. The club is entirely a Women's Club and the role of the mother president is mainly to motivate the woman section.

The Health department has also introduced various schemes for the health and welfare of the women class of the plantations. The Janani Yojana, the Asha Training Programme, The Anganawadi etc.

The Plantations have definitely undergone a change with the changing times, a reorientation of dreams and visions of the women for themselves, their family especially children. The women of the tea populace occupy an important space in the family. They have the same status as the male counterpart mainly so because of their economic contribution as wage earners.

The women are playing an important role as the mother, wife and has emerged as a emancipated figure, the researcher has come across many women labourers in the urban areas and also had the opportunity to interview some of these women coming down to the main market areas with flowers, peepal leaves, basil leaves, chillies, lentils. Some of these women come down from Silcoorie garden and a few from Bajrangpur. On enquiry one woman Sabra said that she has grown flower plants in a plot near her hut, she collects the flowers and brings them to the market area for selling, she earns thirty to forty

rupees and this helps her to send her son to high school. She smiles and tells the researcher that she dreams of her son becoming a barrister. Another woman who comes with her daughter with lentils and chillies says that she is teaching her daughter this business so that her daughter can do the same business for herself. There are women who come out of the gardens to work at construction sites, doing household work and even as massage women or dhais. There are many emancipated women who have been employed as Anganawadi workers. There are a few women from the gardens who have set up small tea-stalls outside the garden area. All these reports are evidence that the women of the tea garden also have dreams for their children. It is not only that they weave dreams they try their best to fulfil them.

Women are given the political rights by the government and as such there are many Anchalik President and Gaon Panchayat President and members in the different garden areas.

**The table below shows the names of some of the women,
G.P and A.P members till date 2007.**

G.P.

A.P.

Vibha Gowala (President)	Anima Goala (President)
Joshomati Rabidas (President)	Ramrati Dushad (A.P. Member)
Basanti Goala (President)	Rina Phulmati (A.P. Member)
Indira Goala (Ex- President)	Ratna Bania (A.P. Member)
Seema Goala (President)	
Bina Santhal (President)	
Rina Rabidas (President)	
Alok Mirda (President)	

The various plantation Acts passed by the government, from time to time, to improve the condition of the labours have been half-heartedly implemented by the Managers of various gardens.

The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 ensures maternity leave with full wages to the women workers. The management in order to avoid this employs casual workers.

The Plantation Labour Act 1951 and Assam Plantation Labour Rules, 1956 plays a significant role in regulating working hours, granting annual leave for 15 days.

The Government has made legislation for the literacy of all children below 12 years and to make school more attractive it has introduced free mid-day meals to all the children. But, here also we find there is lack of awareness amongst the labourers.

The Sarbasikha Abhijan has formulated schemes for implementing the government legislation for literacy. But the researcher has found out that these schemes are not properly implemented in all the gardens except for a few gardens.

There are school buildings which are in terrible condition and in some of the gardens it has come to the notice of the researcher that these schools are used as cattle sheds with the desk and benches razed to the ground.

There is the Janani Suraksha Jagyna which ensures the safety of the mother at the time of delivery and post natal safety.

It is high time now that the women are made aware of the various schemes for most often they are kept in the dark, so, special task force must be engaged to see that the workers especially women are enlightened.

The women of the various tea gardens are also given training in the Gaon Panchayat levels on sewing, tailoring, handicrafts etc, free of cost.

Women awareness and enlightenment is the necessity of the day for they are the backbone of the family. It is through them that the children can be geared up as better citizens of tomorrow.

Culturally and socially also we see that the women have a significant role to play. It is the women mainly who practice the different religious and traditional festivals and rites.

The various dances Tusi, Jhumur, Dandiya are organized by the women and not by men. The various puja's and fasts are observed again by the women. So we see that the women enjoy equal and in some cases more rights and privileges than their male counterpart. They also have a major role in upholding and preserving their own cultural moorings in the multi cultural ambit.

2007

THE PLANTATIONS LABOUR ACT, 1951

&

THE PLANTATIONS LABOUR ASSAM RULES, 1956

ALONGWITH

THE PLANTATIONS LABOUR (AMENDMENT) (ASSAM) RULES, 2006 (DRAFT)

THE PLANTATIONS LABOUR (AMENDMENT) (ASSAM) RULES, 2001 (DRAFT)

THE PLANTATIONS LABOUR (AMENDMENT) (ASSAM) RULES, 1987 (DRAFT)

THE PLANTATIONS (WELFARE OFFICERS) ASSAM RULES, 1977

THE PLANTATIONS (WELFARE OFFICERS) ASSAM (AMENDMENT) RULES, 2003

THE PLANTATIONS DEVELOPMENT FUND SCHEME, 1994.

NOTIFICATIONS:

GUIDELINES ON OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH OF PLANTATION WORKERS (20TH JUNE, 2005)

DIET TABLE FOR TEA- GARDEN HOSPITALS

LIST OF EQUIPMENTS TO BE MAINTAINED IN TEA- GARDEN HOSPITALS AND DISPENSARIES

LIST OF DRUGS TO BE MAINTAINED IN TEA-GARDEN HOSPITALS AND DISPENSARIES

STANDARDS AND SPECIFICATIONS OF PLANTATION PRIMARY SCHOOL BUILDING IN ASSAM

STANDARDS AND SPECIFICATIONS FOR LABOUR HOUSE IN THE PLANTATION WORKERS IN ASSAM

EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES PROVIDES FOR THE CHILDREN BETWEEN THE AGES OF SIX AND TWELEVE

APPOINT THE OFFICERS AS COMMISSIONER'S TO EXERCISE THE POWERS AND THEIR JURISDICTIONS.

ASSAM LAW HOUSE

CHAPTER-6

EMERGENCE AND GROWTH OF FOLK-LORE (WITH REFERENCE TO TEA GARDENS OF CACHAR)

Folklore is closely related to tradition. It is a comprehensive term and has gained currency in the academic world. It is an acknowledgement of the roots of wisdom found among the ancient people. Folklore includes the rites, rituals, beliefs, memories, tales of a folk, music, revelry, dance, superstitions, premonitions, witchcraft, folk-customs sports etc.

Folklore can be summarized in a few definitions. The New English Dictionary explains 'Folklore' as "The traditional beliefs, legends and customs, current among the common people, the study of these Popular Antiquities or Popular literature".

William John Thomas in his letter 'Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics' defines folklore as "Folklore consists of customs, rites and beliefs, belonging to individuals among the people, to groups of people, to inhabitants of districts or places, and belonging to them apart from and often times in definite antagonism to the accepted customs, rites and beliefs of the state or the nation to which the people and the groups of people belong".

The Encyclopedia Britannica gives three approaches to folklore, the humanistic perspective, the anthropological perspectives and the psychological-psycho analytic perspective.

The humanistic folklorist sees the materials of folklore in large part as 'oral literature' and the folk as artistic performers of tale or song. The emphasis is on the narrator.

The anthropological folklorist looks for cultural norms and values and predictable laws of behaviour that form a consistent pattern in non-literate society.

Folklore is an aesthetic product of the society mirroring its values. The anthropological folklorist is more concerned with the value system of a given

culture. The humanist points out or rather tries to identify the folklore in the globalised perspective i.e. the same tales or songs are found in many parts of the globe of a particular people, even when they have been strongly localized.

The Psychological, PsychoAnalytic Perspective views the materials of the folklore behaviouristically. Myths, dreams, jokes and fairy tales express hidden layers of unconscious wishes and fears.

Folklore although a separate discipline is interrelated with history, psychology, philosophy, sociology and linguistics. Folklore depicts people's civilizations, culture, habits, history and day-to-day life. Folklore is based on oral tradition and David Buchan defines folk literature as opposite to High-Literature' and shows how it originates, what character it assumes and how should one appreciate it critically. In Folk tales or songs the local credibility far out weighs the historical account. There is an airy and fairy element in folklores.

Now while taking into account the Folk literature of the Tea Garden Populace the researcher refers to it as a 'Combo Pack' or a 'Combo Meal'. The Tea Garden and Ex-Tea Garden people have migrated from various parts of India and as such they have carried with them varied and numerous oral songs and tales.

These people have been living in the Tea Gardens for almost 150 years and yet the researcher found that the labourers especially the elders are still upholding their cultural moorings and sing folksongs on different festivities.

They have very little culture as they live far from the cities and from all the seats of learning and intellect; yet they are quite contented with their life, despite all the inconveniences and hardships. They are quite content and relaxed and often cheerful and this laid the most comprehensive impression in the mind of researcher.

The folk tales and songs definitely can be studied from the aesthetic, psychoanalytic, humanistic, perspective.

The myth and the narration of 'Karma Puja has a definite aesthetic value. A labourer of Borthal garden narrated that King Srivarsha first celebrated this puja as he did not have any children, then he was blessed with a son by Karma Dharma.

Karma Dharma means that work is worship. The story is that there was a cowherd who tended five cows of a milkman (goala). One day one of the cows went missing and as such he was humiliated and tortured by the owner. The cowboy being very religious, had great faith in God so he offered two batasha (sugar candy) and lighted a candle and prayed to Sri Krishna earnestly. The Lord of the cows was so pleased with him that he appeared before the boy. The boy ran to the owner and questioned him if he had seen the lord, the owner refused, at this, the goala went to the same spot and offered prayers, the owner then saw Sri Krishna and besides him was sitting the lost cow. The goala was so happy that he gifted the cow to the boy. On the other side Dharma and Karma had a quarrel over the issue as to who was greater Dharma (religion) or Karma (work). Dharma left Karma and went off to heaven. Karma asked the cowboy from where did he get the cow, the boy said that he got the cow for his hard work.

Karma now realized that work is greater than worship and so he went out to meet his brother Dharma. On the way Karma met a widow sitting under a mango tree. The widow asked Karma where he was going and when Karma said that he was going to heaven the widow requested him to ask God why insects infested her mango tree.

Next, Karma saw a muddy pond and a fisherman requested him to ask God why his pond was always muddy. Then again he saw a woman with her head inside the fire pot (chula) and she asked Karma to ask God, as to why her head never came out of the fire pot.

His next encounter was with an oldman with swollen legs sitting under the sun, he asked Karma to ask God why his legs were swollen.

A dumbman next wanted to know why he couldnot speak, a cow asked him to find out why she couldnot feed her calves and the milk spilt on the ground while feeding her calves. Lastly, he met a herd of horses which kicked him.

After crossing seven seas and thirteen rivers he heard Dharma crying, for he was worried as to how his brother Karma would cross the river which was full of dangerous water animals. So Dharma took the guise of a tortoise to help his brother without his knowledge. On reaching heaven, Karma said to Dharma that he had realized that Karma was greater of the two and requested Dharma to return to the earth but, Dharma said that he would return to the earth in the month of Bhadra(August) when devotees celebrate Bhadrapurnima and meet Karma on that day.

On his way back home Karma answered all the questions, to the first he said, that no one must throw the seeds of mango near the tree after eating. To the second he said that a fisherman had three daughters and that he should get the eldest one married off so that the water do not get muddy for that will put an end to all the gossips. The third answer was not to kick the wood into the fire. Never kick that which gives you the light. The fourth answer was not to harm anybody with knowledge and knowledge of herbs should be properly used. The fifth one who was a goldsmith was asked not to cheat any customer. The solution for the cow was to live in the house of a human being so that its milk does not go wasted. The horse was asked to go to Telis house. So all the riddles were solved by Karma who again asked everyone on earth to celebrate Bhadra Purnima in honour of Dharma. The puja is celebrated by seven Natyake Karmate (unmarried girls) and one brother. The worshippers fast for five days and on the fifth day Dharma comes to the earth to meet his brother Karma.

There is also a folksong which is sung at the time of celebration of Karma Puja-

Telighare Teli
Diya gharer bati,
Hamar Shasur jaoli
Charan shel o Shakti Dhoni Dhoni.

This puja was originally performed by the Mirza community. The tale communicates the message that one must perform ones duties and must be honest and helpful to others in order to enjoy divine blessings.

The garden labourers are very shy and are often reluctant to speak and it is a difficult task to take them into confidence to get a song or a tale or any kind of information and so the pace of research was slow. After much patience it was possible to cross the hurdle and come closer to them. Some of the songs were recorded at the time of participation and some were written down. A few songs which are sung at the time of Karma Puja are:

(1)

Pahare Porbate Maina

Kore Ana gona re

Pahariar Maina

Boila deo go maina

Najabo Hami re,

Karma Ka dine

Haire O Haire hai,

Nadhakle prasna jai

Eheijya Dinwa

Me Khehune dikhaya re

Mor asha tote golo

Karma ke diney.

Here a married woman sees the birds flying about singing and immediately a thought comes to her mind that the birds have brought her news of Karma Puja back in her parents house. She tells the bird to go and tell her parents that she would not be able to go there although at heart she is nostalgic and depressed.

(2)

*Badhoke akadashi,
Karma ke rathe re;
Sabay gopin khalto
Jhunuri hai!re!hai!*

*Hathe lilo ghamcha
Khande lilo maduli
Sabay gopin nachey
Ghuri pheri hai!re!hai!..*

*Akrai bajey bashi
Koeler muchiki hashi
Gopin sabey holo hula huli
Bhadoke akadoshi
Karama ke rathe re,
Hathete kankon churego
Payete nupur go*

Thumuki thumuki chale Radharani

Chokhey kajal mukhey hashi

Ke boli bo hai!re!hai.

Khopai achey gandha phul

Nache Radharani go.

Here both the men and women join in the song. The women sing and dance jhumur to celebrate Karama puja. She is all decked with bangles, anklets, khol and wear flowers in her hair. The men beat the drums rhythmically to keep up pace with the women dancing in unison.

(3)

Gache ke goa didi

Loteke pan re

Kaison mitha lage didi

Pakan pan.

Chutomuto marich gach

Koto jatn korebo bolo

Deygo Thakur

Didi kakay Sanga Korebey

He!he!he!

This song is full of carnivalism where the younger sister is teasing the elder one and is asking her to offer betel- leaf and betel-nuts growing in their garden to God and ask a boon for a good husband.

(4)

Gojomati harpare

Chorolo akhora khori

Jhumoro, Jhumuro bajay

Gajomoti hargo

Jhumoro, Jhumoro bajay

Ghateya debo hargo

Shakhi dhonike hmargo

Bhujai debo gojomati hargo

Jhumoro Jhumoro bajay

Gojomati hargo.

The women of the tea gardens live in the midst of nature and thus love to deck themselves up with natural flowers at the time of festivities and especially Karma puja and this is being upheld by the above song.

Tushu also has a myth behind it. It is believed that once Parvati saw Shiva riding on a horse and before she could do anything Shiva rode away. Parvati, fell in love with Shiva and wanted to marry him so she sat down in the forest and offered prayers to Goddess Lakshmi offering her Tushu flowers. From that time Tushu is worshipped by unmarried girls during the month of January, at night fall they sing songs and on the day of Sankranti or Magh Bihu the Tushu flower is immersed in the river. This is an occasion when the daughters married off come to their parents house for celebration.

Some of the Tushu songs collected by the researcher personally at the time of celebration. A few songs were also recorded.

(1)

*Ekti amar shadar Tushu
Man bazarey shoshur ghar
Pakayar upar ghare raikhe
Polai ailoy bapar ghar,
Polai ailey bhaloi karley
Thakgo beti gharkore;
Jamai aiyle lakbo jhagara
Mainbo na toke leiya jatey.*

Here the daughter was not permitted to go her parents at the time of Tushu puja so she runs away from her in-laws without permission. The mother through her song justifies her daughter's action and says that she would quarrel with her son-in-law if he comes to take her beloved daughter back before the end of Tushu puja. The narrative reveals the tension that is often created between the parents and in-laws.

(2)

*Tusu aima desay
Ranga charan dhuwabo
Mathar keshayo chal Sarada chal Boroda,
Barite baddo.
Balir jalay shinan kore
Tusur charan dhuwabo,
Kadam gachey utay Tushu kashi kadam pailona*

Pakle kadam shabay khabey

Kowre mane kar bona

Nadir dhare juna railam,

Juna khailo harinye

Dhar Tushu hathe dhanuk

Harin marbo duiloney.

Tushu aima deshey

Ranga charan dhuwabo

Dhuwabo mathar kesho.

This is an invocation to Tushu Mata to come down to the earth. The devotees sing in unison and say that they would wash her divine feet and long hair with utmost care and devotion. Next they seek for Tushus blessings so that the wheat crops flourish and the fruit trees bear fruits. Tushu is celebrated in the month of January in honour of Goddess Lakshmi so that she showers the spring season with productivity and greenery.

It is not unusual for the ethnic tea garden populace to weave a tale around any incident and one such instance is the recent mauling of Sri Jyoti Prakash Bhumij by a tiger on the 24th January, 2008 at Durgakona tea estate. The people of the area narrated to the researcher that the tiger had come out of its den to remind the people to worship the Goddess (Devi). The narrator said that there was a Devi Sthan (a place of worship) where the forefather of Jyoti Prakash use to perform Puja and since it was not practiced by his family the Devi's tiger came out and attacked him. So the concerned family offered puja and after that the Devi was appeased and the tiger left the village.

Through Folk songs free vent is given to the emotion and sentiments and are often expressions of happy moments. Every festivity and occasion is

accompanied with dance and songs amongst the tea garden people. Each festival has its own songs and dance which is relevant to that occasion.

The Muslim Community people have their own celebrations and festivities, one such occasion is the marriage ceremony when the Bhojपुरी Muslims Sing:-

Ye Haldi bhajey mera Allah!ho Nibine,

Telua bhajey Aline

Kiya khusise shadi rache mera Allah Nabine.

Toho jama bhajey mera Allah Nabine,

Achkana bhajey mera Allah ne.

Kiya khusi se shadi rache mera Allah Nabine,

Makne bhajey Ali ne

Toho jama bhajey mera Allah Nabine,

Achkana bhajey mera Allah ne.

Kiya khusi se shadi rache mera Allah Nabine,

Makne Bhajey Ali ne

Kiya Khusi se shadi rache mera Allah Nabine

Toho chasma bhejey mere Allah Nabine

Rumaliya bhajey Ali ne,

Kiya Khusi se shadi rache mera Allah Nabine

Toho jutuya bhajey mera Allah Nabine,

Atar bhajey mera Ali ne

Kiya khusi se shadi rache mera Allah Nabine

Toho chatre bhajey mera Allah Nabine,

Gaho Allah Ballah Ballah bhajey mera Aline,

Kiya khushi se shadi rache mera Allah Nabine

Gharua bhejya Allah Nabine

Jarua bhejya Ali ne

Kiya khushi se shadi rache mera Allah Nabine

Tilua bhejya Ali ne.

Exchanging of gifts between the bride and bridegrooms family is a common rite amongst all communities. So the above song gives us a list of gifts bestowed upon the bride at the time of marriage.

Another song goes to give us details of how the bride is smeared with haldi and chandan (turmeric and sandal wood paste), by all the female members of the family. Widows are not allowed to participate in this ceremony. It is clear from the song that widows are always kept away from any kind of ceremonies and rites. The song goes thus :

Suneke khotura se agar chandan

Rupeke khotura se Hari Hari debo

Uptan lag rahe hai,

Haldi laganeka liya amma suhagan

Mor beta hari hari debo

Uptan lagrahe hai.

Suneke khatura se agar chandan

Rupeke khotura se hari hari debo,

Haldi lage liya chache suhagan,

Mur bhateja hari hari debo

Uptan lagrahe hai

Suneke khatura se agar chandan

Rupeke khotura se hari hari debo

Haldi lagene wali phuphi suhagan.

So, the song goes on inviting all the women members one by one.

Songs are sung at childbirth or at the time of nativity. The Bhojpuri's society is patriarchial and hence celebrations and gaiety is usually seen at the birth of a son. But nowadays there is a gradual transformation in outlook. One such song is :

Chandan kere chowkiaya

Matia lagal jhaloreyia ho

Labna sehe charhi

Nahan to Sita sundar bihosita ho.

Hasey, hasey, sakhilo puchele

Shakhi kaun bidiyia?

Kaile to rama bor piayelu

Bhukhi rahila akadeshiya

Duwadeshiya paran ho!

Lalona bidhise

Bukhila atawar

To Ram O bor O pailo, ho!

Kartika masho nahaila

Suriya payia porele ho!

Lalona tulasike

Deepoka charaile

To Ram O bor paile ho!

Maghehey masaya nahailaya

Pachaoi he pandita

Bhogo lagoi le,

Lalona bidhise

Bukila atawar

Here the friends were asking the mother of the child what did she do to beget a son and the mother relates the various practices, fasting and sacrifices she had to undergo for her son. The various rituals for cleansing of the mind and body and making space for the new one is correlative. Tulsi or Basil leaf and plant is very sacred to the Hindus. It is worshipped in every Hindu household. The Hindu community of the tea gardens worship and even sing songs in honour to the sacred plant. One such song is :

Tulsi Geet

(1)

Jaun hama janatai duare

Hamre aiheiy Ram,

Rachi, rachi jawana banayia rakto ;

Anganaiye beech Tulasi lagai rakto.

Jaun hama janatai duare

Hamre aikey Ram.

Rachi, rachi phulowake shajai lagai rakto

Angaraiye beech tulasi lagai rakto.

The sacred plant is offered various fruits and sweets in the name of Rama or Vishnu.

(2)

Gachmadhai tulsi,

Pathamadhahi pan,

Triamadhahi Radhika.

Pati bhagawan.

The elders of the society of Burdwani community bless their daughters while marrying her off and this is also an advice to the daughter to treat her husband as her protector and lord. The song itself reveals the patriarchal form of society.

Chaat puja is prominent amongst the Bhojpuri community but the others of the tea gardens also join in the festivity and celebration. It is again performed by the women folk. The labourers of Silcoorie, Bajrangpur, Arkatipore, observe this festival in large numbers. This is worship of the setting Sun, vegetables, fruits, turmeric, milk, ghee is offered. It is a wonderful and colourful sight indeed specially so because the women walk up to the bank of the river in large procession wearing colourful clothes and bangles and singing in unison. One such song is as follows :

Kelawaje phorela ghawadase,

Upar/suga mera rai (2)

Sugawake merabo dhanukse,

Suga girihey muruchey (2)

Sugani je roweli biuyogase

Aditya huie na sahai

This song is full of angst and at the same time romantic. The human nature while trying to appease the Sun God forgets that the bird is also a part of nature and has an equal right to survive in God's plenty. The man takes his bow and arrow which is believed to be the cultural symbol of the tea garden labourers and shot dead, the male bird, which was feeding on the ripe bananas. The female bird then cries her heart and prays out to the Sun God to make her male alive and help it. The song is a message to mankind to make space for all and give up meanness and selfishness.

There is another song which is sung when women carry vegetables, fruits down to the river bank for the worship of the Sun God. The song goes thus :

Ye kachahi basake bahange jia

Bahange lacha katijay (2)

Batahi puchela batoheyia

Ye bahange kegha rake jai

Tuta anhar huwia re batoheyia

Ye banhenge chatte mayia ke jai (2)

Bahange ke bhariyia ware bahange ghatyia pouchayie.

In the above song a vendor carries vegetables and fruits for the Chaat puja and on his way to the river bank the women make inquires as to where he goes. The vendor then takes the name of each devotee separately and tells them that he is going to the house of the referred devotee to deliver goods for the Chaat puja (Chaat mayia).

Manasha Puja is celebrated in the month of August. Manasha is the snake goddess. It is believed among the tea populace that worship of this diety helps in fulfillment of wishes. Animals especially goats are sacrificed during the ceremony. Snake – charmers perform dances, which is also known as Ojhanitya. The researcher participated in the ceremony and recorded a few songs. Some of the songs which were sung in Gonit Phulmali's house are :

(1)

Borosad railo mar mone, lal jaba

Phul diba mar charane

Borosad railo mar mone.

(2)

Ke achey ke deboy mago

Ke achey amar

Gangar jal tulsi diya haoui,

Puja tumar.

Here again we can see the significance of the Tulsi (basil) leaves.

(3)

Jalar upara bhehula

Bholar upara bhehula,

Bhehular kulate mara pati

Jalar upara bhehula

(4)

Dhekhete sundaro nari

Parono patar saree.

Ghate pathey khuja barai

Koto ojhar bare.

(5)

Bisher jalate prano jai

Kalidio bisher chate prano brijhe jai,

Pranoy preyia arje bhujji koi na.

It is believed that any person bitten by a snake can be cured by the snake charmer (Ojha) with his clairvoyant powers. The labour community as a whole are very superstitious and one particular incident is an evident to it. In West Jalenga tea estate a particular man was bitten by a snake and he died instantly. The body of the labourer was brought to the garden hospital for postmortem. but a mob of about 2000 labourers gharoed the manager and the hospital

demanding for the dead body, as a particular snake-charmer. (Ojha) claimed that he would be able to revive the dead through his powers. The manager of the garden became so much helpless that ultimately he had to surrender before the mob in order to appease them and the dead body was accordingly handed out to the Ojha. It so happened that the Ojha failed to perform, the miracle of making the dead alive and the body was bloated and stinking. Ultimately the manager had to call in the police after two days for disposing the dead body.

Shri Hemchandra Mirza of Borthal tea garden who is 107 years old is the gaon burra of 22 villages. He expressed his unhappiness at the lack of interest of the present generation in their own cultural heritage and thus sings a folk song :

Angache anbokhala

Ar taken nachey bura lakray.

He expresses his dissatisfaction here when he says, 'Unknown bark of unknown tree, and they dance about in a stylish manner'. He pointed out to a young boy and said that those young ones did not have knowledge about their origin and simply danced about.

Carnavalism and revelry is a part of the lives of the tea garden populace. They often revel and spend most of their time in merry making. These people also use vulgar language and jokes. A few such jokes related by Shri Hemachandra Baruah :

(1)

'Bhaitache Bukholo Hemachandra Bharua

Kuchu kuchu kaiyo barua

Kuchu kuchu tor muche lagai

Aur kuchu kuchu ley jai tore bhaina lagaiya'.

When translated his means, 'Hemachandra Bharua as a shameless hungry man, eat little and stick little on to your moustache to carry back home to your sister'.

(2)

Bapdada chap dari,

Beta thora thore

Bara hath ke pagori

Aur dush hath ke dhoti bantehai.

These lines again points out to the younger generation who have forgotten their culture and habits for they no longer wear dhotis and keep beards as their forefathers. He further said,

'Suna thakur bateya

Bura bayasa kesha

Jatab khetia

Sas puta hai dey galiya'.

Here he said that he had already put in years and yet his mother-in-law rebuked him for not doing any work. He further sings :

Keshoto paki gale,

Datoto giri gale,

Umor to chalegale,

Choke chalesa lagi galey goya,

Ami holey katari ke khoya.

Marriage is a time when there is much merry making for, through marriage new relationship is created between the two families. This is also an occasion when both the bride and bridegroom's party enjoy joking with each other. One such joke cracked at the expense of the in-laws is :

*Bhukhat dhukal aile sampdhi,
Chaple dumur ghache ho !
Dumur ghache le girle sampdhi
Akhi O-putlo !
Kan O-putlo !
Putlo tar dono har ho !
Ano bhain sui suta
Siyo samdhi ke duno har ho !
Mai kore aro jharo
Bahein pisha biro,
Jhaha jhaha sampdhir dharad lage
Taha taha lagai o biro.*

Here the bride's family refers to the bridegroom's family as hungry ones, who have come to fill their bellies. The mother-in-law climbs a kadamba tree and falls down to the ground breaking her bones. So the bride is asked by her brother to stitch up the broken bones of her in-law with needle and thread and soothe her wounds with herbs.

Pangs of separation of the labourers from their original homeland often finds expression through folklores. Some of the indentured labourers of the different tea gardens of Cachar did go back but had to return back dissatisfied when they saw that their land was grabbed away either by their relatives or the agents who brought them down to the gardens. The created a mental conflict and often found expression through their songs :

*Amar mon bandhu kacha sunago,
Barir pathe kore anagona go,
Chor bole maria na tora go
Ami bideshe bhomara.*

The above song is full of turmoil and conflicting dreams of home and near and dear ones. The singer pleads for love and compassion when he says that his mind is as soft as molten gold and often his mind becomes nostalgic about his home. He further entreats those around him not to torture him for he is no thief and that he is just a foreign bee.

(2)

*Am gacha am nai,
Jhapat kane maro hai,
Tumar deshay ami nai,
Akhe kane thare re (2)*

Here the singer is once again filled with angst and pain at the thought of mango trees, full with mangoes back home. He then reminds himself that it is useless to strain his eyes to see his homeland, which he will never visit again.

*Boy : Ah ! sundaro ke sundaro,
Madhu koro hey
ke sundaro.*

*Girl : Asho brohmaro,
Madhu koro go
Ke Sundaro go
Jahapai doru tu,
Pani te kimero nai
Asho brahmaro madu koro go.*

*Boy : Keta pani, keta poko,
Jona nagala ghabiro.*

*Girl : Jaha pai doru tu
Pani re kumbir o nai,
Asho bramharo madhu koro go.*

Here the boy spies a beauty on the other side of the river but is unable to cross the deep waters. The lady invites the lover to cross the river which is free from crocodiles and other water animals. The monotony and helplessness of the young people of the tea gardens is expressed through the folk song by Motilal Jena of Bajrangpur tea estate who is 87 years old.

The concept of 'mai-bap' is unraveled through this folk song by Bharat Tanti :

Moni ma suni ma
Haire garebo deko,
Nirok jona rokho pankajo mukho,
Bhasigole bhobojole
Rakho karo mate,
Atanga na sano bana,
Na sono bhakta bedana,
Ada hei jibo mona
Key de bo dako?
Moni ma suni ma
Haire garebo deko.

The researcher was told that this is a plea to the sahibs, previously referred to the white sahibs and presently the brown sahibs seeking for sympathy and blessings. The 'moni ma suni ma' is entreated to realize their plight and thus help them out.

Frustration and unhappiness is explicit in :

Amar sadne mitelo
Asha na purilo,
Sakole phuria jai ma,
Aie pritibhi koiu baloto bashena

Aie pritibhir kiou bashite janena

Jathai accha bhalo basha basi

Satni pran jate chay ma

Pather jamin parerai che ma

Rai patar dhonia,

Ami morley korba kan na kati

Ghar kakay bahir korle

Dibey mago gobor chita,

Kaokatba jharar bash,

Kao ba pakai dori,

Char jonate loyia bolbe,

Hari ! Hari !

Roibe re tor sadar dokandari !

The tea garden labourers were inspired by the great nationalist during the freedom movement and many of them raised their voice against the British Raj. Many folk songs were created at that time and the researcher collected two such songs. The first one is :

Jagaran brata dhorosabe bhai,

Shatru ashechey deshay,

Koroshan kare chute asho,

Sab jagebe au rathe trashe.

Here the folks were giving a clarion call to all the men to keep fasts and glisten their swords to chase off the enemies.

The other collected folk song on freedom movement is :

Jai Jago bandhu,

Jadu kula Hindu

Jaite bhujia Arjuna,

Sartore martore,

Narshinga rupao,

Sastebodito hirono kashipu

Jai jago bandhu,

Jadu kula Hindu,

Tratoyiajugore

Ravana shanghare,

Bibhishane dilo rajya bharo

Jai jago bandhu.

This song has a mythological essence. When asked the singer reported that during the freedom movement they sang this song to inspire all men to free their country from the enemies just like Arjuna in the Mahabharat.

CHAPTER-7

AVERAGE LITERACY AMONGST THE TEA GARDEN POPULACE, SOME OF THE LITERARY WORKS OF THE TEA GARDEN AND EX-TEA GARDEN PEOPLE OF CACHAR

Educational backwardness is a major hurdle for the tea garden labourers. Since the colonial days the labourers of tea gardens were considered as a work force and ever since exploited. These people are self-complacent lot and are rather afraid of changes. They are scared to rip away the cord of hierarchical past. Their manner of work and their life style kept them away from the main stream of the society and the managers were shrewd enough to see to it that they remained within the confines of the garden itself. The researcher had tried to find out the opinion of various managerial heads and the answer was often the same that, those people were indifferent, junglies and often refused to change their mindset.

With commercialization and various economic and educational development and reforms, the monopoly and privatization of every sector is questioned. The proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has laid stress on the inalienable rights of man and the concept of live and let live with dignity has gained momentum.

But, despite all the din and bustle and claims by the government it has been found that the diaspora of the tea gardens are still living a life of want, destitution, misery and suffering. A sense of uneasiness seizes the mind when one enters any of the tea garden vicinity especially the labour lines of Cachar district.

The tea garden labourers of other parts of Assam are more developed educationally and are more aware as compared to the tea tribes of Barak Valley especially Cachar. Both the Central and State government have taken up various measures to impart education to the different sections of the society.

These measures and steps are also applicable to the tea garden people but sad to note the various development schemes have been taken up half-heartedly in the garden sector and practically not much have been changed. Compulsory education for children up to 12 years also have not worked out because of large number of dropouts. The Sarba Siksha Abhijan and other government authorities are introducing new schemes to attract the children towards the school. The Meena Campaign recently introduced by the District Mission Coordinator (SSA) is surveying all the tea gardens and is forming Tea Garden Education Committees in all the gardens. The Meena Club is entirely a Women's Club and its main intention is motivation of mothers and children for primary education and specially to counsel the drop-outs. Already it has been found out that two generations of the labour population are illiterate and third generation is advancing in a very slow pace.

More of awareness camps and filtration of N.G.O.'s to motivate the present generation to embrace education is a must.

Some literary works of the tea garden and ex-tea garden people.

The researcher also came across amazing facts that a group of labour community people and ex-tea garden people who are educated have produced quite a sizeable number of literary works. It is not possible to discuss all the literary works in this project and as such few of the works have been taken up for study and discussion.

Most of the works are written in Hindi language, of course, there are a few writings in English, Assamese and Bengali language.

Ashok Verma was born and brought at Lalamukh tea estate in the district of Hailakandi. He served as a maths teacher in Kashipur High School for two years and then joined Narsing Higher Secondary School and ultimately retired the Principal of the school. He is a well known poet, short story writer, novelists and editor of various papers, souvenirs and journals both in Bengali and Hindi in Cachar district.

As he hails from the tea garden his works are mainly concerned with the socio-economic status of the tea-garden people. He highlights the varied emotions and feelings of the people.

He has as many as eleven collected works of poems, poetic dramas, short stories and has a good number of translation works also which include Bengali, Manipuri, Dimasa, Bishnupriya, Manipuri, Assamese translations.

Short stories like 'Pagal', unravels the horrors of Bangladesh War of 1971 and its impact on the mind of people. 'Ar Ek Kunti' discusses the Bangalee language movement in Cachar. In 'Chura Bali' he writes of floods and the failure on the part of government machinery to provide sufficient relief to the victims. In 'Shiri' and 'Glani', Shri Verma talks of modern youths, their frustrations and ambition. The story 'Shiri' has a message for the youths of the tea gardens that they must have an ambitious mind if they want to come out of the vicious circle of poverty and misery and that they should try to climb the stairs of success.

His drama 'Moru Trisha' and 'Ekti O Bastab Natika' are wonderful works. In 'Ekti O Bastab Natika' he brings all the great men who were handicapped physically on one platform to show us that physical disability is not at all a factor for if a man wants to achieve or perform his best, his mental strength and the will to do is sufficient.

In 'Moru Trisha' the theme is on Hasan's poisoning his wife. Ashok Verma composed poems, which are of religious and social significance. The volume titled 'Chanchal Mon Dagmagathe Kadam' has fourteen poems in all. Another volume 'Uljhano ke resho par' has thirtythree poems in all.

Apart from these works he also wrote a few English poems, which are unpublished. Poems on freedom movement like 'On the eve of 15th August' and, 'Copper-leaf for freedom fighters are expressions of sorrow and depression which prevailed in the tormented minds and souls of the poor masses. 'Statement of a leader' and 'Message' also speaks of the conflicting mind on one hand and strong conviction on the other.

Joydrath Goala, of the Rosekandi Tea Estate, is a teacher and a notable writer amongst the tea garden populace. He wrote many poems and a few articles mostly on the problems of tea-garden.

His poem 'Chayya' gives us an insight into the lives of the tea garden labourers. A sense of unhappiness and dissatisfaction is expressed at the people's indifference to the importance of tea and the hands involved in producing tea.

In the poem 'Sharbasiksha Abhijan' Goala appreciates the government scheme of education for all especially the children upto the age of 14 years. The poet laid emphasis on awareness and willingness on the part of the illiterate people to help the government to realize its goal to eradicate illiteracy. Joydrath Goala, a lover of nature wrote many poems on nature like 'Prakriti', 'Pani', the evils of pollution is clear and vivid in 'Pradushan'. All these are written in Hindi. His poem 'Maa' glorifies mother and motherhood, her sacrifice and commitment. 'Manab' deals with human beings and human nature.

Bishnu Sankar Verma, a young poet hailing from the tea garden is presently serving in Kendriya Vidyalaya. A few of his poems have been published in 'The Brown Critique', a literary quarterly published by Gayatri Mazumdar, Calcutta. 'The Everyday Battle', reflects the inner conflict of man. He draws a parallel of this unavoidable conflict to the epic battle, the battle of Mahabharata.

'Devotee' & 'Hunger and the plate of Rice' published in the Telegraph, selected by Jayanta Mahapatra are of great social significance.

'A love story' has a romantic appeal. The poet is very much sensuous while appreciating the female beauty of his imagination. Another poem 'The Weaver' is another philosophical poem. The 'Hibernation' by Bishnu Prasad Sharma has been published in the 'Poiesis', a journal of poetry circle, Mumbai, 1996.

Mira Singh, of Borjalenga Tea Estate, is a practitioner in Auryvedic medicine. She has produced quite a large size of poetical writings. The

researcher had the opportunity to meet her personally and interview her. She is a strong feminist. Most of her writings revolve around woman and her plight in a patriarchal society. She wrote a few poems on freedom movement also and one such poem 'O Mat Rukho Ma' brings out the patriotic fervour and zeal in her, above all her poems have great social significance. Some other writers belonging to the tea garden community of Cachar worth mentioning are Annapurna Devi Verma, Dhruva Narayan Koiri, Amar Nath Sharma, Yamuna Prasad Sonakar, Kapil Dev Upadhaya, Babul Narain Kanu, Bijoy Sharma Verma, Kumari Santoshi Lahor.

Yamuna Prasad Sonakar's poems like 'Basana Mukti', 'Tuje kia mila', 'Prasana', 'Pathik', 'Kagaj ke kila' are meaningful and a sense of concrete despair and hope is found in the poems. He has also written short stories like 'Lotna' and 'Badai'.

Kapil Dev Upadhaya is another notable writer. His poem 'Dhahej' which means dowry, is very significant for, it brings out the evils of the system. Dowry is still practiced amongst the tea garden labourers. Some of his writings have been published by the Balark publishing house. 'Puranaprakash', 'Dunia', 'Bibi', 'Dharam Yudh', 'Ma', 'Geet' are included in the volume titled 'Ghar Mera Sajade'.

There are many more writers whose works have remained unpublished. No systematic attempt have been taken to highlight the writers of the tea gardens. Most of writings express their emotion and sentiment but there are writings which are an evidence to the fact that the educated few do want to mobilize and change the fate of their fellow beings and educate them. Their language and style may not be elegant and grand and yet the works have emotional intensity of feeling, pathos and greatly reflects the life and mind of the tea community. Gender discrimination, caste inequalities in religious rituals, glorification of nature, their mental agony seeking for transformation for a better life find expression in the writings by the tea garden and ex-tea garden literatis.

CONCLUSION

To draw a concluding line to the study of the tea garden community, their culture, socio-economic problems, development and literary works is not possible within such a limited space for the researcher has come to learn that there is lots more to it than what has already been analysed and studied.

The tea garden as a whole contains a whole gamut of traditional culture both interesting and informative and at the same time colourful, varied and diversified, a multi floral garland consisting of a populace belonging to different communities. It is high time now that we encourage and help these diaspora to merge with the main stream people. The constitution of India in its preamble guarantees social, economic and political justice, freedom of worship, quality of status and opportunity and fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and national unity to all the citizens of India without any discrimination of caste, creed and sex. Conflicts and tensions existing within the state and national frame work can be minimized by creating a conducive environment and making, space for all Indians. We just cannot suspend and segregate these segment of Indian nationals like 'Trisanku'. The tea tribes clamour for identity is justified and it is most necessary on the part of the managerial heads and the government to take right steps towards development and progress of the much deprived and exploited lot of tea garden people. Promoting tolerance towards diverse sections of the nation is the need of the hour.

The management must try to sort out all difference for, neither the planters, nor the labourers would be gainers for any kind of backlog and dissatisfaction amongst the tea garden populace will definitely pose a threat to the economy of the garden, the state and nation as a whole, moreover the management will always be at the receiving end.

Strategies for supplementary employment opportunities must be chalked out so as to provide employment to the labourers in the lean period. Provisions should be made for all round mental and physical well-being. Initiative to

create community assets and infrastructure development would assure the inmates of the plantation with a sense of security and belonging. The Labour Unions can be taken into confidence for a basic social transformation that is structural change in the base of economy, power and social relations within the tea gardens.

New productivity assets, for the youths, through the various Government schemes must be introduced and for this awareness must be created amongst the youths of the tea garden. Their youthful energy can be tapped and utilized for community development and cultural promotion.

The task of imparting education must be carried out on war footing. Mothers must be counselled sufficiently to sent their young ones to school for it is they who must see to it that their children are not robbed off their childhood, to be exploited, victimized, abused and ill-treated.

The management must play the pivotal role in creating conducive climate and recognize the workers as the most precious input, thus help in building a work culture that would motivate their spirit to excel and to widen their horizon. The gap between the tea community and the main stream population can be minimized by giving sufficient recognition and acknowledgement to their culture, feelings and emotion.

The younger generation must be made aware of the richness of their culture especially their folk songs, music, festivities and must also be reminded that they should not let their tradition die rather they must strive towards development and enrichment of themselves and their community and over and above assert their self identity and prove themselves as a part and parcel of the nation.

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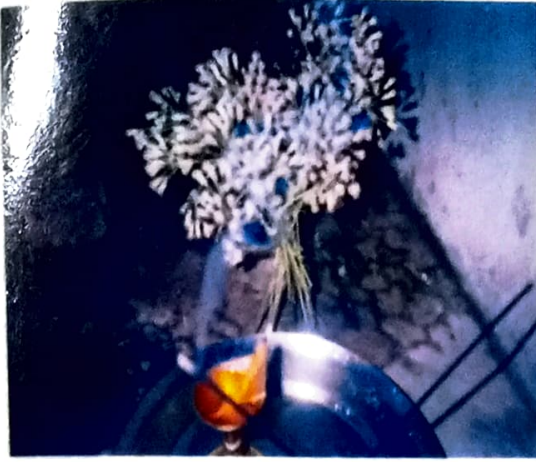
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**A FEW PHOTOGRAPHS OF DIFFERENT
RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS, CELEBRATIONS,
DANCE, MUSIC AND LIVING CONDITIONS
OF TEA GARDEN PEOPLE**



Monosha Puja, sacrificial rites and kirtan



Tushu flowers and tushu celebration at Rosekandi Tea Garden



Chaat Puja (offerings)



Charak dance



Dandi or Kathinach



Jhumur dance by tea garden women



Jhumur dance organised by students of Radhamadhab College in Social Week Cultural Programme, 2008



Deplorable living condition and dearth of water supply



Progressive minded tea garden women selling vegetables, lentils and flowers at N.S. Avenue, main market