CHAPTER-VI

CONCLUSION
This research has attempted to project an analysis of the history of tea planters and labourers in Cachar during the British period. In the process, the study has discussed the origin, growth and development of tea industry, labour recruitment policy, life-style of the tea planters, the living condition of the tea garden workers and lastly the raids carried out by the local tribes during the period from 1855-1947 in the present two districts of Barak Valley namely Cachar and Hailakandi.

The establishment of the tea plantation in India had been the result of conscious efforts on the part of the British. With the establishment of tea plantation in India, a new avenue for finance and business management had opened up. This led to the beginning of British exploitation of Indian resources in a large scale. The establishment of the tea plantation with regard to the Cachar district brought about a dramatic change in the field of economic sector pursued by the British government and it paved the way for an active colonial penetration in the region. .

The history of the tea plantation in Cachar was the outcome of the adventurous nature on the part of the colonial rulers including the Planters. The early planters had to go through tremendous hardship while establishing the tea industry in Cachar. They were the pioneers in the field of tea plantation and belonged to middle and lower middle class. These served as retired personal of armed and naval services, officers of engineers and medical departments. Before involvement in the tea sector, they were engaged in the different industrial fields, such as, rubber, coffee, jute, indigo, opium plantation etc. Their involvement in multiple fields helped them in course of their involvement in the plantation sector, and that helped them to manage and control the surrounding industrial problems.

The Planters showed great insight by establishing the tea industry in Cachar. It was ‘dreadful’ for anyone else to think of coming here and establishing tea plantation in such type of condition. Cachar, in those days was an unknown land vested with heavy jungles with large number of wild animals and deadly diseases. It was the ‘dreadful’ weather and the diseases of the region that most of the planters would not adjust themselves and therefore, many died and many left the garden for good. Records of the Assam Company and Jorhat Tea Company, mention many
such deaths and disablements. Besides this, communication at that time was very negligible, roads were virtually non-existent. Only means of communication at that time was through paddy fields. Thus, all around, the English were to face a lot of problems which was hard to overcome it. However, with the passing years, with their colonial interest and economic reasons they manage themselves and gradually settle down in Cachar.

In the subsequent period, backed by the British administrators, the Planters were able to expand the tea plantation and within a short span of time the wasteland were covered by the tea plantation. This ultimately led to the requirement of huge number of labourers who are always ready to provide physical labour. The nature of work in the beginning of the tea industry involved, road making, building and repairing, earth cutting, drain cutting, nursery making and finally plucking of tea leaves. Therefore, the labourers having agricultural background could only maintain such hard works. It was therefore, felt necessary for the tea planters to arrange such type of labourers for smooth running of the plantation. In the beginning, they had the wrong notion in regard to the availability of the labourer, but in the subsequent period they realizes their wrong notion. Henceforth, at last, the planters, for the sake of the tea plantation decided to recruitment of labour from the outside Cachar, especially they focused on those regions which suffered from famine or anything else.

Accordingly, the decision was brought into effect and large number of labourers were recruited from the flood and famine affected areas. The regions that the labourers were recruited were, Chotanagpur, Bihar (including present Jharkhand and Uttarakhand), Orissa, Madras, Madhya Pradesh, Bengal etc. Generally, two methods of recruitment were adopted to bring the labourers from the flood and famine affected areas to the plantation, they are, Contractor System and Sardari System. In the Contractor system, a contractor was appointed who was licensed person for specific area to supply labourers in tea gardens of Cachar. This system in due course of time was found to be ‘defective’ and as it created ‘havoc’, therefore it was replaced by Sardari system. Under the Sardari system, a labourer who is
working in the tea garden chosen by the garden management was send to his original places to bring his own relatives and friends to Cachar tea gardens as labourers. Between these two systems, the Garden Sardar recruitment system proved to be more satisfactory than the Contractor system. This recruitment system of Garden Sardar was very much prevalent in Cachar. Side by side, to regulate the smooth process of immigration the Government also passed special laws from time to time.

The migration to the Cachar districts was generally in the form of families rather than individuals. The contractors collected labourers from the above said regions by telling hundreds on false promises ‘high pay and light work’. In the subsequent period, it is found that large number of labourers immigrated to the Cachar tea plantation. Behind their migration, it appears that, it was their extreme poverty, debt, social anarchy and inhuman torturing of the Zamindars which compelled them to immigrate to tea plantation to get handsome income and better life.

With the emergence of the labourers in the tea gardens, there evolved two peculiar characteristics, namely, planter that is owner and the worker. The relation between this two class was like master and servant. The latter was always loyal to the former and throughout his life he would maintain the order of his master. So far as the ideology is concerned, both colonial and capitalist mentality was fully operative among the planters, therefore, the relation was in reality a master-slave relation.

The garden itself a territory well decorated between the area of labour i.e. factory and the garden, the coolie lines and the Bungalow. The physical distance between coolie lines and the Bungalow was also racial, cultural and an economic distances between the two sections of the people that is rulers and ruled. Racial considerations always maintained a situation of aloofness between the white planters and the native labourers.

Once the tea plantation was established, the planters started the planter raj in the tea plantation based on racial superiority, coercion, ruthless exploitation over the laboures. Thus, planter’s life-style in the tea plantation gradually reflected emerging
elite Whiteman’s cultural domain. The planter consolidated his power within the
garden, looked for effective mechanism of maintaining that power, which was
sometimes resisted by the labourers in their own ways. A tea garden worker, on the
other hand, virtually a slave like, who could not leave the plantation a his own will
and all ‘absconders’ were treated like ‘animals’. If a worker caught for, while he
tried to flee from plantation, in this case, he could not seek redressal in any cost.

In the plantation, the planters exercised supreme authority over their over
their workers and the latter totally dependent on them for all their needs. As the tea
plantation growing gradually, the responsibility of the planters increased. With a
view to smooth running of the tea plantation the planters adopted dual characteristcs
– ‘ma-baap’ concept and harsh attitude. They mostly followed the latter pattern.
Generally, in the plantation sector, as they were the master, they treat their workers
according to their will. Especially, the women folk were terrorized and often they
were sexually exploited by the planter.

The moment that the labourers put their feet on the soil of the tea garden, the
worst thing started, which they never thought of. Subsequently, they realized that the
recruiters made them bluff while recruiting them in the tea garden. However, with
the passage of time, they adjusted the situation and settled down and started a new
life in tea plantation, which evolves a separate culture in the garden. Their new
settlement in the plantation sector remained cut off from their ancestral moorings.
All hopes of these workers were shattered by the blow of misfortune and they were
forced to live in a common barracks under perpetual fear of wild animal and while
European Sahebs. In case of any resentment, boots and kicks of the planters were the
only reply. The planters did not allow any worker or staff moving on horse back or
on cycle. The ordinary workers were not allowed by them to put on ‘dhoti’ down
their knees. If any Saheb visited the section, sardars used to say ‘chata bhango.’
Everyone had to say ‘Salam Saheb’. This was the life that spent by the labourers in
the plantation sector. Sometimes, their frequent torture towards the labourers
sometimes led the strikes and agitation in the garden. As for example, the Chorgola
Exodus and Aurunabond Strike.
On the other hand, life of the planters in the tea estates though lonely, but comfortable. There were a large number of servants who were always ready to serve. The planters and family were well looked after. During the British days, the planters were the masters and above laws within their garden. They maintained in such a way that nobody not even British Government official could enter his garden without his permission. The planters placed watchman to keep a look on the immigrant labourers, so that they could not tried to escape from the garden. If anyone tried to escape and found, he was beaten mercilessly.

One of the chief attraction of the early tea planters was their Bungalows and their location. Most of the Bungalows were generally well decorated and located on the top of the hillock surroundings with numerous tea gardens which could be reached only through designed making steps. The Bungalows were generally comprised of four of five rooms, made with all timber covering wide ‘vernadas’ on all their sides. So far as the drink is concerned, it was available and it was depending on the mood of planters for having it. In the beginning of tea plantation, the planters besides time had no economical sound to take recreation for themselves, as they were made fully busy to the expansion of tea plantation with a view to achieve their profit motive. However, as the decades passed, life became more organized and gardens were successfully established, a relaxation came into being in the daily life of the Planers and gradually they were interested to establish Clubs, arrange sports and recreation among themselves.

The tea labourers of Cachar were also victimized by the neighbouring frontier tribes like Lushais, Kukis and Nagas in the last part of the 19th century. Though the British in the beginning adopted the policy of non-intervention towards the hill tribes, but in course of time, seeing the oftenly raiding nature of the Lushai tribes, the policy of non-intervention was given up and adopted slow but steady penetration into the hills. Accordingly, by an expedition, made by English, the Lushai Hill was annexed to the British territory on 27th January 1898.

In fine, the establishment of the tea industry in Cachar was the colonial character of the British. They undertook the plantation for economic reasons and for
the benefit of Company Raj. It is to be noted here that though the establishment of tea plantation benefitted for the White people, but it cannot be denied that indirectly it changed the general outlook of the district.