The labourers in tea gardens of Assam, constitute a large portion of the total population and have played a significant part in the economy of the state. Though they play a significant role in the economic development of the state in particular and the country in general, they are in a very backward condition both economically and socially. Even after living in Assam for generations, they are far away from the socio-cultural mainstream of the state — some factors make it so for such a state of affairs.

(1) Socio-cultural isolation: As mentioned in Chapter I the labourers in the tea gardens were brought from various parts of India having different socio-cultural background. They were at first brought on contract basis for a period of three to ten years. After the expiry of the contract period they were repatriated. But as time passed on the labourers gradually started to live permanently in the tea gardens or some adjoining areas. But the socio-cultural isolation still continued. The most important reasons of such a state of affairs are noted
(a) Due to the remoteness of the locations of the tea gardens the labourers find it difficult to establish any social contact with the people of the neighbouring villages. Moreover, there was no felt need for such contact.

(b) The practice of recruitment of the entire family as unit had encouraged the employment of women and children in the gardens. This made them significantly immobile.

(c) The labourers recruited from various parts of the country were not employed on the basis of racial and cultural homogeneity. Behind this there was a definite policy of the colonial British planters. They were afraid that if the labourers were employed in one garden on the basis of their cultural and racial homogeneity they might get united easily and this would have its immediate adverse impact on the tea industry. Whatever might be the motive behind such arrangements it is a fact that such policy had constrained their social development.

Due to the mass illiteracy and mixing of various cultural and racial groups together, a new culture and language (in
course of time) has emerged in the tea gardens of Assam which is known as the 'tea garden dialect'. The labourers had gradually lost their linage with their ancestors and at the same time they could not develop any social relation with the local Assamese people. Therefore, the whole process of cultural assimilation with the mainstream of the society became very slow. Three important contributing factors which can be mentioned here in this regard are as follows.

First, the local Assamese people were unwilling to work as wage earners. Had there been some local people in the gardens as labourers it would have reduced their social isolation.

Secondly, the establishment of the tea industry did not have any direct economic impact in the life of the local people. Therefore, the local people also did not take any interest in maintaining a relation with the labourers.

Thirdly, the garden authorities recruited local 'babus' to work in the clerical cadres, which also installed a class feeling between labourers and the local people.

Therefore, socially and culturally they remain far behind the mainstream.
(2) Economic Backwardness: Economically the tea plantation labourers in Assam are very backward. During the pre-independence and even in the early post-independence period the wages of the labourers were very less. The present rate of wages varies from zone to zone which has already been discussed in chapter VI. Besides their money wages though they are provided with other facilities like quarters, water, ration, medical etc. which has been discussed in chapter VI, yet economically they are very backward. Due to low family income and lack of savings their standard of living is too low. The incidence of consumption of alcohol is too high and dominates the expenditure pattern of the family. Their population is continuously at an increase and due to their isolation from local people they are highly concentrated in the garden areas only. Gradually there is a fall in the employment opportunities which also adversely affect their economic condition.

(3) Exploitation by Garden owners: The tea plantation labourers from the earliest time of the starting of the industry are being exploited by many in various ways. As discussed in Chapter I the labourers in the early time had to tolerate, inhuman torture.
from the professional suppliers and planters. The labourers were treated like lower animals by the planters.

As already discussed they were kept socially isolated from the mainstream which helped the planters in exploiting them easily. The labourers due to their illiteracy and lack of awareness and bargaining capacity becomes the easiest victim of their exploitation. Adequate welfare measures for the labourers were not taken by the planters until the plantation Labour Act 1951 was passed. It was only after the independence of the country the conditions of the labourers have improved though not to a satisfactory level. The labourers are still treated like the personal property of the planters.

Education in tea plantations

Education which is a powerful instrument for socio-economic changes is in a very neglectful state in the tea plantations of Assam.

In the early days, as mentioned already labourers were brought from outside the state of Assam on contract basis for a period of three to ten years. Hence the question of their
education was not considered to be a responsibility of the planters. But gradually when the labourers started settling down permanently in the tea gardens of Assam the need of education of the labourers was felt by many. Some benevolent planters in co-operation with some employees opened schools in their respective gardens.

Schools were established in the tea gardens of Assam in 1938, that is, after 100 years of the starting of the tea industry in 1839 on a commercial basis. After independence also no specific scheme has yet been taken up by the Government for the expansion of education of these neglected multitudes. Educational provision beyond primary stage is not found to be existent in the tea gardens. In the sample of students beyond primary stage a large majority of students (72.73 per cent) attend their schools/colleges located at a distance between 2-12 kms. The remaining 27.27 per cent attend schools/colleges located at a distance below 2 kms. This makes evident of the inadequacy of the educational facility beyond primary stage within the garden. This impedes the spread of education beyond primary among the labourers.
(1) **Physical facilities in the schools**: Majority of the schools in the gardens have a school building. But the school buildings are not spacious and properly partitioned. As discussed in chapter IV the schools lack all the essential facilities such as furniture, teaching aids, library facilities, playing ground and recreational facilities, urinals and toilets etc. Teaching aids other than the black board is absent in all schools and interestingly in one school even the black board was also found to be absent. The teachers were seen using the shutters of the windows for instructional purposes. Furniture for the teachers and students are not sufficiently available. Some teachers of the sample gardens had reported that they used to borrow tables or chairs every morning from some nearby houses for their use in the school. As a result the school becomes very unattractive and a place of nobody's interest.

There are several reasons for such a state of affairs.

(a) **Parental indifference**: The tea garden labourers are generally indifferent towards the education of their children. Due to their illiteracy, poverty and a psychology of hard earned subsistance they can not appreciate the value of
education. Therefore, the parents practically do not take any interest in the educational matters of their children. They hardly maintain any contact with the teacher and the garden authorities in matters relating to education. The trade unions too have not so far done anything tangible for the improvement of the school system in tea gardens. The demands of the unions to the authorities are generally centred round increasing of monetary benefits and other working and living conditions. Improvement and expansion of educational facilities so far has not received due attention of the trade unions.

(b) Indifference by garden authorities: Education of the labourers is an undeniable responsibility of the garden authorities. As already stated the garden authorities have always been indifferent towards the educational development of the labourers. The Plantation Labour Act 1951 has made education a responsibility of the planters. Accordingly schools were opened and buildings, teachers and the minimum required furniture for the teachers and students were provided. But a qualified teacher and teaching aids required for instructional purposes were never provided with. These were done to fulfil
the provision of the legislation. Hence a congenial atmosphere of education was not created by the planters.

(c) Indifference by state authority: The state authority too, has been observed to be indifferent towards the educational development of the labourers. The responsibility of education of the labourers was always left to the planters by the state authority.

The taking over of the schools of Sibsagar and Cachar districts by the Government in 1968 has not made much change in the situation. Many teachers even complain that after the Government take-over, the situation has further deteriorated. It is observed that though the planters were indifferent towards the educational development of the labourers, they had legal obligations to provide educational facilities like school buildings, furniture etc. inside the garden. But after the taking over by the Government such facilities have become gradually reduced. The buildings lack maintenance, schools have become ill furnished due to the lack of proper attention by the concerned authorities. In some gardens (8.37 per cent) of the sample there are no school buildings and classes are held
in the labourers' club. Under the Government there is no provision of sanctioning building grants to the primary schools. The responsibility of construction or renovation of the school building is left to the community. But in a community where the masses in general are illiterate and poor and lacks the appreciation of the value of education it is difficult to expect the community participation in such activities.

(2) **Academic aspects**: The academic side too in the tea garden schools is very much neglected. The educational objective of primary education in India as stated by the Education Commission 1964-66, is to achieve social justice and democracy, raising the competence of the average worker and for increasing national productivity.¹ But the existing system has failed to achieve this goal.

(a) **Courses and curriculum**: On school curriculum in India the Education Commission 1964-66 was of the opinion that it is very "narrowly conceived and largely out-of-date. Education is a three-fold process of imparting knowledge, developing

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skills and inculcating proper interests, attitudes and values.
Our schools (and also our colleges) are mostly concerned with
the first part of the process — the imparting of knowledge —
and carry out even this in an unsatisfactory way. The curri­
culum places a premium on bookish knowledge and rote learning,
makes inadequate provision for practical activities and experi­
ences, and is dominated by examinations, external and internal.
Moreover, as the development of useful skills and the inculc­
ation of the right kind of interests, attitudes and values are
not given sufficient emphasis, the curriculum becomes not only
out of step with modern knowledge, but also out of tune with
the life of the people."2 But the condition in the tea garden
schools is too different. The existing school courses and
curriculum seem to be difficult for the children of the tea
garden labourers. An important defect of the present curricu­
lum of the lower primary stage is the abolition of class A and
B of the previous pattern. Abolished, but the pre-requisite
of pre-primary schools has not been fulfilled. Pre-primary
education is imperative under the present curriculum especi-
ally among the socially backward sections. In the present
courses a child is admitted after the attainment of the

2. Ibid., pp. 319-320.
minimum age 6+. But in the tea plantations in the absence of pre-primary schools the children are found to acquire the habit of loitering here and there with other children throughout the day. In the absence of adult members of the family at home in the day time there happens to be none to look after them. And when they attain the age of 6+ it becomes difficult to hold them in the school.

The curriculum is dominated by verbal learning. The subjects taught in the schools of the sample are Assamese, Arithmetic, General Science, Geography, Drawing and Handwriting in all the schools but only in 30.43 per cent there is provision of instructing work-experience. But the examination on work-experience is held in all schools. Tea garden children can not aspire to get themselves trained in vocational subjects in the neighbouring Secondary schools since such schools do not offer vocational subjects. Education purely on academic subjects is less attractive and less beneficial for the socially backward communities like tea labourers.

Students' proficiency in different subjects, according to the teachers' rating is average in majority cases. Lack

3. The average in tea garden schools is not the same as average elsewhere in the state. Rather the tea garden children's proficiency in academic works is lower than the proficiency observed in other areas.
of congenial atmosphere at home and lack of guidance are the sole factors responsible for such lesser proficiency.

Assamese is the medium of instruction in all the schools of tea garden. Though Assamese is not their mother tongue yet it is considered to be most suitable medium of instruction for them. Educating through their mother tongue is an impossible proposition on the ground that in the tea gardens of Assam there are people of multi-language groups. The language of one is not spoken by the other. The lingua franca which developed in course of time can not also be accepted for obvious reasons. Assamese, which is the regional and official language is considered to be the most suitable. Moreover, in the higher education too the regional language is the medium of instruction. Since the labourers have settled permanently in the gardens, the acceptance of Assamese as the medium of instruction will definitely prove helpful in the long run.

(b) Teacher and teaching: The teachers in the schools of tea gardens are not properly qualified. Majority of the teachers (48.15 per cent) of the sample possess educational qualification upto the matriculation standard. The number of trained teachers constitute only 54.24 per cent of the total. Teachers from labourers community form only 8.48 per cent in the sample.
These have been discussed in chapter IV. Due to this condition the standard of teaching becomes very low.

The function of teaching is to guide the experiences and the educative growth of children in the direction of the accepted purposes of elementary education. The teaching in the tea garden schools is merely imparting some factual information. Teaching aids like maps, charts, scientific models, audio-visual aids are not used. Therefore, teaching becomes dull and unattractive and not in conformity with the principles of teaching at the elementary level. Such teaching does not leave any lasting impression in the minds of children. Tea garden children being socially backward, verbal learning alone is not sufficient.

(c) Students: The enrolment and attendance of students in the tea garden schools is very poor. Of the total number of children below 14 years of age of the sample, only 27.74 per cent attend school. Girls constitute 31.46 per cent of the total number of school going children. Education of girls in the tea gardens has yet to receive the same importance as that of the boys. A large majority (92.17 per cent) family heads reported that they did not favour education of their girls equally with the boys. In case of a girl, learning household work is considered to be more important than formal education.
In the schools of tea gardens as discussed in chapter IV the attendance varies at different periods of the year. This is due to the fact that during the plucking season a large number of labourers are engaged in the gardens and therefore the children are withdrawn from the school by the parents and engaged either as child labour or in household works so as to enable all the adult members of the family to work in the garden. As a consequence a large number of students are dropped out of the school.

Examinations in tea garden schools are generally conducted twice a year. As mentioned in chapter IV promotion of students is made on the basis of annual and terminal examinations and class attendance and performance.

There is high incidence of wastage and stagnation among the children of the tea garden labourers at the primary level. This is mainly due to the withdrawal of children during the plucking season. Therefore, the attendance of the students is not uniform throughout the year. There is a sudden fall of attendance in the schools from the month when tea plucking starts (And it generally increases when the season is over). Only a few of the total number of children withdrawn resume their studies. And the remaining students become the case of
Another important cause of wastage is due to the continuation of admission throughout the year. Due to this practice students turn out to be unsuccessful in the examinations resulting in wastage. Due to the lack of proper amenities the school fails to attract a large number of children. Stagnation is not as high as wastage as per the opinion of the teachers. Because in the schools a liberal method is adopted while promoting students in the examination. Otherwise any stringent policy leads to wastages.

There are certain factors responsible for high incidence of wastage and stagnation.

(1) Teachers' Negligence: Wastage and stagnation occur due to the indifference of the teachers. Due to the isolated location of the gardens the teachers lack interest to serve in the garden schools. As a result the educational atmosphere deteriorates. The teachers recruited by the garden authorities are underqualified. There are two categories of teachers, viz., teachers originally from garden services and the teachers appointed by the Government. The first category of teachers enjoy all the amenities admissible to the other employees of the gardens
which are not applicable to the latter category. This creates discontent among them and as a result it affects the efficiency of the teachers.

(2) Parental negligence: As has been printed out earlier, the parents are indifferent and therefore, negligent towards the education of their children. Due to their illiteracy and poverty they always considered their children as economic assets. Sending a child to school upsets the whole economic consideration of the family. Education of the children is considered to be a liability rather than a responsibility. Therefore, there is a high seasonal variation in the attendance of the students in the schools which has been discussed in chapter IV. During the plucking season the children are withdrawn from the school and either engaged as child labour in the garden or in household works so as to enable more adult members to work in the garden. As a result the majority of the children withdrawn from schools results in cases of wastage.

(3) Negligence by state authorities: The state authorities also appear to be negligent in this respect. There is no effort by officials to improve the situation and check large scale
wastage in the gardens. Though the Government has taken over the tea garden schools of Sibsagar and Cachar districts yet the change over has not brought about any improvement. The Government has not taken up any special measure to bring children to class rooms and to follow up those who stay out for longer periods.

(4) Negligence by garden authorities: The garden authorities do not pay any attention to the educational needs of the children. The taking over of the schools by the Government has provided an opportunity to the planters to withdraw themselves from the field in which they were reluctantly involved. Besides, the induction of the children as child labour by the parents adds to the problem of wastage, which is of no concern to the employees and employed in the garden.

The economic condition of the family and father's occupation and special status are not determining factors of children's education in case of tea plantation labourers. The families of higher income group are those who have more earning members in the family. These families instead of sending their children to school send them to work and earn as much
as possible at the cost of their education.

The occupation of the father is not a determining factor in the education of the children. The fathers of majority of the students are labourers who do not have any special status (chapter V).

Suggestions for improvement: The present study brings out abundantly the fact of educational backwardness of the tea garden labourers. Considering the factors responsible for educational backwardness, prompt measures for its improvement are considered necessary at this hour of national reconstruction. The following suggestions are put forward for implementation to that effect.

(1) General Conditions:

(a) Socio-cultural isolation: The socio-cultural isolation of the labourers has to be reduced. For this the following measures are suggested ---

Tea labourers should not be allowed to live a life of social outcastes. Cultural integration with the larger community is necessary and socio-cultural organizations should be encouraged to work in this sphere.
In the adjacent areas of the gardens within easy reach of the children middle, high and secondary schools should be established. And the children of the garden labourers should be sent out to those schools where they will come in contact with children of various communities. This will in due course help to overcome the social and cultural isolation.

The children of the adjoining areas should be invited to study in the tea garden schools. Though it appears to be a difficult proposition, it can be successfully practiced if the tea garden schools are provided with all the required amenities for a school.

(b) Economic backwardness: The economic condition of the labourers has to be improved. To do this the wage structure of the labourers must be raised. The income of the family should be sufficient for a better economic holding.

The school going children of the tea labourers should be awarded some economic benefits like scholarships, book grants etc.
Alcoholism: Children, adolescents and women should be educated on the evils of alcoholism. House to house propaganda and through documentary shows massive anti-alcoholism drive should be taken up.

Introduction of total prohibition may not practically be possible immediately. Therefore, propaganda should be made for weekend drinks rather than daily.

Exploitation by tea garden owners: The indifferent attitude of the garden authorities has to be removed. The garden authorities should be involved in the process of education. They should be made directly responsible for the spread of education among the labourers. The management of schools should be at the hands of the garden authorities.

For the educational expansion among the labourers the planters should earmark a certain amount of money per head of labourers. The fund should be exclusively utilized for the spread of education among them.
(e) Illiteracy: The education of the parents is as important as the education of the children in plantations. Massive adult education programmes should be taken up so as to enable the parents to appreciate the value of children's education. For that purpose night schools should be established in the gardens by the planters in co-operation with the concerned department. These schools should be provided with all the requirements and the labourers should be compelled to attend such schools.

(2) Educational programmes:

(a) Physical facilities: The physical facilities of the school must be improved. The garden authorities should be made responsible for providing all such facilities. A minimum of physical facilities like school building, school compound, school furniture, teaching aids, books, pictorials and other study materials for the children, drinking water, mid-day meal, urinal etc., should be provided to every garden school. The schools buildings should be properly maintained and should be spacious so that it can accommodate students of all classes without any inconvenience.
(b) **Courses and curriculum:** The courses and curriculum of primary education should be remodeled to suit the needs of the labourers. Subjects suitable for girls should be introduced in the schools.

Pre-primary classes should be introduced in every garden schools.

(c) **Teachers and teaching:** Sufficient number of teachers should be appointed to man all the classes of the schools. The teachers' qualifications should be as per the norms framed by the Government for other primary schools of the state. Refresher courses should be arranged for the teachers on some particular subjects and teaching methods.

In the tea garden schools, persons belonging to tea labour community be preferably appointed at least one in each school. Such teachers have a better contact with the community and they can draw more students and can understand their problems in a better way.

Teaching in the schools should be made more demonstrative. Periodical tests should be held at regular intervals.
The emoluments of the teachers should be at par with similar tea garden jobs.

There should be a close relation between the teachers and the community. Meetings with the guardians should be organised at regular intervals.

(d) **Students**: Primary education should be made compulsory as per the provision of the constitution of the country. Steps should be taken for its immediate and proper implementation.

The enrolment and attendance of students in schools of tea gardens must be improved. The high incidence of wastage and stagnation must be reduced. The following measures are suggested for the improvement of enrolment and attendance in schools.

Employment of children below 14 years of age in the plantations must be stopped through legislation. Fair wages must be given to compensate loss of family income.

Creches must be provided in every garden as per the provision of the Plantation Labour Act 1951. Separate creches
should be provided for each 'Labour lines'.

Provision of free supply of food to the students in the schools should be introduced as admissible in other schools of the region. This will help both as an incentive and to improve nourishment.

Text books and other study materials, dresses should be supplied free of cost to the students by the Government.

Leaving and joining school at any time of the year should be stopped at any cost. A student if remains absent continuously without permission should be traced out. The reasons of his absence should be investigated and appropriate measures be taken.

The system of giving long vacations should be cut short.

More and liberal scholarships should be sanctioned by the Tea Board and the Government for the encouragement of education of the labourers' children.

(3) Education and the state authority: The state authority should be responsible —

(a) To check physical facilities provided by garden authorities,
(b) To recommend teachers for appointment,
(c) To formulate curriculum,
(d) To approve text books and other teaching materials,
(e) To supervise admission and holding of examination,
(f) To inspect school from time to time,
(g) To do such other duties as may be found beneficial for education of children of the tea labour in particular and other in general,

(4) Miscellaneous:

The teachers of the schools and the employees of the gardens should jointly persuade the parents to send their children to school. They should also try to narrow down the social isolation of the labourers.

School hours should be so adjusted that it suits the local needs.

**Employment in tea plantations**

There are different categories of jobs in tea plantations viz., managerial, clerical, artisan and manual works. In the managerial work persons from the labourers' community is
practically nil. In the clerical work, now-a-days in some gardens, persons from the labourers' community are found to have been engaged and in case of artisans they constitute the majority. In manual work all of them belong to that community. This study is confined to the manual workers and the artisans who are categorized as labourers. A list of occupations of the tea garden is given below.

List of occupations

1. Managerial:
   (a) Superintendent Manager
   (b) Manager
   (c) Assistant Manager(s)

2. Supervisory:
   (a) Factory supervisor
   (b) Garden supervisor
   (c) Office Superintendent
   (d) Vegetative propagation supervisor
   (e) Foreman
3. Clerical:

(a) Head clerk
(b) Second clerk
(c) Third clerk
(d) Fourth clerk
(e) Provident fund clerk
(f) Godown clerk
(g) Head factory clerk
(h) Second factory clerk
(i) Third factory clerk
(j) Fourth factory clerk
(k) Excise clerk
(l) Manual
(m) Head mohurer
(n) Men mohurer
(o) Women mohurer
(p) Children mohurer
(q) Vegetative propagation mohurer

4. Artisan:

(a) Head fitter
(b) Second fitter
(c) Third fitter
(a) Fourth fitter
(e) Electrician
(f) Carpenter
(g) Mason
(h) Engine driver (diesel)
(i) Motor operator (electrical)
(j) Helper
(k) Switch Board attendant
(l) Water supply engine operator
(m) Motor mechanic(s)
(n) Driver(s)
(o) Handyman of trucks and tractors
(p) Oilman

5. Manual and Semi-manual workers:
   (a) Labourer in field
   (b) Labourer in factory
   (c) Gardener
   (d) Packer
   (e) Sweeper
(f) Office bearer

(g) Waterman

(h) Sarder

(i) Chowkider

(j) Post-man

6. Medical:

(a) Medical officer

(b) Asstt. Medical officer (in large gardens)

(c) Compounder(s)

(d) Radiographer(s) (in large gardens)

(e) Laboratory technician(s) (in large gardens)

(f) Dresser(s)

(g) Nurse(s)

(h) Mid-wife(s)

(i) Antimalarial officer

(j) Hospital attendant

(k) Helper to doctor

(l) Cook
7. Others:

(a) School teacher

(b) Managers' cook

(c) Bearer (managers' bearer)

The bulk of the work in tea plantations are usually of the simple agricultural type and hence do not call for a large number of skilled workers. The working knowledge and ability in most cases is acquired through experience. For the artisans there is the necessity of technical knowledge which also generally acquired through experience. The school curriculum does not include subjects which can prepare children for such occupations.

For the tea labourers there is avenues of employment both within and outside the garden. By employment in this study means the employment of labourers in the garden itself.

(a) Employment in own garden:

In the present time, as discussed in chapter VI, the labourers are no longer recruited from outside the state.
The procedure of new recruitment is different in different gardens and within the same garden different procedures are adopted at different times. As mentioned in chapter VI the recruitment is made in all the gardens in majority cases from the same families. The other procedures followed are different in case of different gardens.

The basis of fixing the minimum number of labourers is the agreement of 1.1.69. The maximum number depends on the economic condition of the garden.

Working and living condition:

The working and living condition of the tea plantation labourers is very poor. Many plantations are situated in highly malarial regions. Many workers are anaemic and fall victims to diseases. The food ration given to the workers is of inferior quality and also insufficient and as a result workers suffer from malnutrition.

Though there is provision of rest during working hours yet the other facilities like latrine and urinals, drinking water, quarters, medical facilities etc. are not provided with as per the provisions of acts as discussed in chapter VI. The
absence of such facilities affects health and hygiene of the workers. The condition is better in agency gardens than the non-agency gardens.

Scope of further employment:

There has been a gradual reduction in the scope of employment in the tea plantations with the increase of population. The garden acreage is not increasing proportionately with the increase of population. Tea being an agro-based industry the production also does not show any consistency. There is up-and-downward trends in the production front but employment is always at an increase. As a result there is unemployment among the labourers.

These observations fail our earlier notion (hypothesis 10 on page 133) regarding employment scope in tea gardens. The increase in the labour population (both tea and ex-tea garden labourer) is at a much higher rate and so expansion facilities always lag behind the labour supply position.

Training:

Training of labourers for work as stated in chapter 11 depends on the type of operation performed on a particular work.
In tea plantations work is generally divided into field work and factory work. Most of the operations in the field do not require any skilled labourer or any person with special training. But in factory in some operations which are considered semi-skilled and skilled some training is given on the job.

Training affects wages and opportunities for alternative employment. They have ample opportunities for alternative employment, particularly where machinery is concerned.

In tea plantations appointments are largely made on individual efficiency than education which is discussed in chapter VI. Both literate and illiterate persons are engaged in manual work. But in other occupations where some amount of education is required the literates constitute the majority. The labourers are generally apathetic towards undergoing training. Of the total a large majority (73.04 per cent) expressed their unwillingness to undergo training for any new occupation. This is mainly due to the lack of education, limited aspirations and lack of mobility.
(b) Employment outside the garden:

Employment avenues outside own-garden is limited due to three main reasons. First, as stated already the tea labourers are unskilled in majority cases. Secondly, they are illiterate and hence the scope of employment outside the garden is too limited. Thirdly, the labourers in general are very immobile. They are unwilling to go outside the garden for employment. The employment avenues in other gardens is also limited because there is the problem of surplus population in different degrees in all the gardens.

Unemployment:

Unemployment among the tea labourers is at an increase with the gradual reduction in the avenues of employment. There are two kinds of unemployment among the tea labourers of Assam viz., seasonal and perennial. Seasonal unemployment occurs as a result of the seasonal character of the industry. Perennial unemployment is one in which persons remain unemployed for a longer period during which they are not employed anywhere on payment or profit.
There are several factors responsible for the increasing unemployment problem among the tea labourers.

(1) **The population growth**:

As stated in chapter VII the population among the tea garden labourers is at an increase, but the area under cultivation is not increasing proportionately with the increase in population. Hence there are surplus population who are without employment.

(2) **Lack of education**:

The tea labourers are illiterate and due to their illiteracy the avenues of employment outside the garden is very limited.

(3) **Effect of technological change**:

The adoption of modern techniques of production does not have any significant impact on the employment of labourers, because the tea industry being an agricultural based industry in which majority of its labourers are engaged in the field than in the factory. The field operations are not yet much mechanized in India compared to other countries. Some operations in the factory have been semi-automatized in the recent
time in some gardens. Though this has some impact on the total requirement of the labourers yet it does not cause unemployment. The surplus labourers of the factory are transferred to the field where there is ample scope to engage them.

(4) Mobility:

Unemployment among the tea labourers is also caused by the lack of mobility among the labourers. The tea labourers are very much immobile as stated in chapter VII. Due to this immobile character they remain inside the garden and fail to secure employment outside. They are attracted by the amenities provided to them by the garden. They have developed a sentimental attachment to their own garden and also they have seasoned and adapted themselves to plantation occupations and working and living conditions. Ignorance also prevents them from going places and taking new occupations.

(5) Unskilled:

As already stated the tea labourers are unskilled and due to their unskilled character their avenues of employment other than the tea labourer is limited.
(6) **Limited scope of alternative employment**:

The scope of alternative employment is also strictly limited in the gardens. There is no ancillary industry found to exist in tea gardens.

The scope of self-employment is also very limited. Majority of the labourers do not have any knowledge of any trade or craft. Due to the lack of savings they cannot take up any self-employment scheme.

(7) **Retirement and termination**:

Unemployment is also caused by termination and lack of specific retiring age. There is no specific retiring age for the labourers. They can work as long as they are physically capable to work. Retirement is always voluntary. As a result the avenues for the younger ones become less.

(8) **Strike**:

Unemployment in general does not occur due to strike. But in some cases when a strike continues for long in the garden where the financial condition is not good unemployment occurs. Such cases are not very common but are on the increase now-a-days.
(9) Economic weakness of the gardens:

The tea industry in the north eastern region of India is now confronted with serious economic problems. Due to such difficulty the economically inviable gardens can not provide good scope of employment to labour and rather very often cases of termination of labourers from service are reported.

Unemployment has grave social, economic and political dangers. It causes hardship, frustration and discontentment and undermines security. The very fear of unemployment adversely affects the worker's happiness and efficiency. It reduces his income and results in a fall in the standard of living. It thus causes misery to the worker and his family. It leads to his physical deterioration and reduces his earning capacity. It prevents him from developing a spirit of loyalty and co-operation. It leads to destructive and pessimistic outlook and endangers industrial peace and economic production.

Suggestions for improvement

Unemployment is a general problem in almost all states and industries of the country. The problem of unemployment among tea labourers cannot be isolated from the general economic
conditions. An improvement in general conditions is bound to reflect in the economic condition of the labourers. For the improvement of employment situation among the tea garden labourers, however, prompt measures may be taken with respect to the following factors.

(1) **Increase of population**:

The increasing of population has to be stopped. Adoption of birth control measures has to be made compulsory. The people should be educated the value of a limited family.

(2) **Changing attitudes towards training**:

The facilities for training for different types of work should be improved. Apprenticeship courses should be made available with stipend in the gardens. The trades which are in demand in tea gardens should have adequate provision of training facilities. For this purpose the nearby high or higher secondary schools should provide with vocational subjects.

Technical schools with an aim to train persons for vocations like electrician, fitter, motor mechanic etc. should be established among a group of gardens.
(3) Mobility:

The mobility of the labourers must be increased. For this purpose measures should be taken to reduce their social isolation. The labourers should be encouraged to secure employment outside their garden.

The problem of settlement of the labourers has to be dealt with carefully. The tea labourers though living in Assam for generations do not have any permanent settlement of their own. Therefore, measures must be taken to ensure their permanent settlement. The Government should distribute land to these landless people. Their settlement outside the garden will help in gradual reduction of social isolation.

(4) Retirement of labourers:

The labourers should be allowed to work as long as they enjoy good health. There should not be any definite age for retirement as it is practiced now. The policy of early retirement may create jobs for younger people, but it may not be a permanent solution.
(5) **Child labour**:

The employment of children below 14 years of age should be strictly prohibited. Abolition of child labour will open avenues of employment of adults. For this purpose it is suggested to amend the Plantation Labour Act, 1951. Fair wages should be paid to compensate the foregone income due to abolition of child labour.

(6) **Alcoholism**:

Distillation and sale of wine in the garden and nearby areas should be stopped with some drastic measures. Drives should be made for total prohibition within a fixed number of years. Public opinion should be created against alcoholism.

(7) **Land and Labour ratio**:

A definite ratio between land under cultivation and labour must be maintained. In the waste lands of the gardens other plantations viz., Coffee, Rubber etc. should be started so as to increase the employment of labourers.
(8) *Economically weak gardens*;

The 'sick' or economically weak gardens should be supported with technical experts, finances and better managerial skills by the Government and the Tea Board. Concessions in tax and duty should be granted to such gardens.

(9) *Savings and self-employment*;

Rural banks should establish its branches in tea gardens or in nearby areas. In places where opening of branches is not possible, the banks should run its counters for the convenience of the people. Such counters should be opened at least twice a week after the pay day.

People should be educated to develop the habit of saving. The small savings department and trade unions should organise meetings, talks should be broadcast by All India Radio, Seminars should be organised to persuade the people for savings.

The banks should sanction loans liberally to the unemployed to enable them to take up self-employment schemes.

The pay day of the labourers should not be preceded by a off day. Because after receiving their pay they spend out a
sizeable portion of their income on the off day on alcohol and other amusements without saving for the rest of the days. Therefore, if payment is made well before the off-day then it will be possible to save some amount of their income which otherwise would have been spent on alcohol and amusements.

(10) Miscellaneous:

Proper planning of manpower for the tea plantations has become very urgent. For this purpose a separate directorate for tea plantation labourers should be established to deal with their proper educational and manpower planning.

The provision in the factory rules to increase the working hours from 8 to 12 hours during manufacturing season should be abolished. This affects the health and efficiency of the labourers.

The Government should be strict on the implementation of the provisions of the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 by the planters. The inspecting authorities should be activated and the weakness of the Act should be rectified.

Ancillary industries should be established in and around gardens so that it can open avenues of employment for a large number of job seekers.