Preface

Assam is well known as the home of the beverage, tea, since the time of British occupation of the frontier in the early part of the nineteenth century. Large scale establishment of tea plantations in the state caused shifting of a large number of population from far corners of the country and they now constitute a huge labour class permanently settled in and around the plantations.

The tea labour population, unfortunately, are much backward both socially and economically than their ordinary counterparts. Most of them are uneducated living a subhuman life barely supporting themselves for food and shelter. It was only after the country became independent, the national government took interest in their economic and social upliftment. They still remain in the murkey abandon of want and misery, considering which the present study has been taken up with education and employment as the focus of an analytical study.

The author's interest to study the tea labour class arose during his early college days. Being born and brought up in a tea plantation, he had the opportunity to do his schooling in the tea garden schools with the children of
those neglected multitudes. Studying in tea garden schools in those days, though appeared to be a disappointing venture for him, has ultimately turned out to be a blessing in disguise. The experiences he gathered have greatly influenced him to make bold the idea of studying the labour population of the plantations. In fact, when he approached Dr K.P. Bora, Professor and Head of the Department of Education, Gauhati University to guide him in an M.A. dissertation work, he gladly consented to do so and immediately offered many valuable suggestions for which I remain ever grateful to him.

The present study is a continuation of the earlier dissertation entitled 'The Problems of Educating the children of the Tea Garden Labourers of the Welfare State of Assam.' This study was taken up in the year 1979. It involved intensive field work. While carrying out the field work he was confronted with numerous problems. Since the majority of the tea gardens were located in the remote areas the transport and communication facilities to the nearest urban centres were not convenient in most cases. Secondly, some of the managers of the gardens did not seem quite happy when they were asked questions about education and employment of the
labourers. They appeared to be more interested in the commercial side of the industry. Thirdly, the labourers were initially found to be very suspicious as the author was a stranger coming from outside the garden. After he contacted the Secretary or the President of the garden Labour Union he had to make them understand the purpose of the visit and show them the letter of appeal from their circle office of the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha to their unit in the garden to extend him all co-operation. Thenceforward, they were found to be very co-operative and generous. This was how problems had to be dealt with.

For the collection of secondary data also he had to face some difficulties. Relevant data on education and employment of the tea plantation labourers were not readily available at any office under the Government or any other organisation. The absence of a separate authority or organisation exclusively dealing with the tea labour population was very strongly felt. The author, therefore, suggests elsewhere in this report for the establishment of a separate directorate for the tea plantation labourers to deal with their education
and employment. The Government's recent declaration to set up a separate directorate is a very timely one and should serve well all future needs.

In spite of great effort involved in this work, it is sincerely felt that the work is not thoroughly intensive as it should have been. It remains, however, an humble attempt to throw some ray of light on those problems of tea labourers which need close scrutiny and enquiry.