2.1-A brief note of the study area

Muttrapore is a small tea garden in the Sibsagar district of Assam and is located at 26.98°N 94.63°E. As of per 2001 India census Sibsagar has a population of 54,482 out of this 56% consist of male population and 44% females. The study area consist a total population of the 5598 out of this 3291 are the tea garden workers and amongst it 1344 are the permanent workers and 1947 are the temporary workers. It is under Sonari subdivision and Hilakuti Mauza. The land area of Muttrapore is 372.67 hectares. It falls under Nazira constituency.

The legend behind the name of Muttrapore dates back to the reign of the Mughals. It is named after an Ahom prince named Muttra Borua who died fighting valiantly with the Mughals. It is a small tea garden of Sivasagar District of Assam. Muttrapore tea estate is under the Apeejay Tea Ltd., which was founded by A. R Gordon Shaw in the year 1889 in London. It is one of the oldest tea companies in the world. Over the years, it has
perfected the art of producing the best of blends, which hold their competitive position in the world tea market, commendably. In the early eighties the management of Apeejay Surrendra Group took over the company in a bid to create one of the world's largest tea groups. Today, Apeejay Surrendra Group manages two companies, namely, Apeejay Tea Ltd, Empire & Singlo Tea Ltd., comprising of a garland of seventeen gardens sprawled across 55,186.25 acres and produces a crop of 25 million kgs. Apeejay Company is among the largest producers of tea in the country with a workforce of 40000 (including all categories). 50000 acres of Company’s land in Assam, produce close to 25 million kilograms of tea. Apeejay Tea Co. was established in 1889. Empire & Singlo is the merged entity following the amalgamation of Empire Plantations (India) Ltd. established in 1863 and Singlo (India) Tea Co. Ltd established in 1864.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{31}Apeejay Directory, 2000.
POPULATION OF THE STUDY AREA

In Assam, the Adivasis today can broadly be divided into two communities—tea garden labours and ex-tea garden labours. The tea garden labours are those sections of the people who resides and work in the tea garden. The tea garden workers and those who came out of the tea gardens at the end of their contracts and settled in and around the area after obtaining a little land mostly through government schemes known as ex-tea garden labours. They are mainly present in Kokrajhar in Western/Lower Assam; Marigaon, Nagaon, Sonitpur and Darrang in Middle Assam; Golaghat, Jorhat, Sibsagar,
Dibrugarh and Tinsukia in Eastern/Upper Assam; North Cachar and Karbi Anglong in Southern Assam; as well as the Barak Valley. The conditions of the Adivasis who came out of the tea plantations and settled as cultivators around the gardens, is certainly better but not by much. Those who have land tend to be better off and more self-sufficient, while those possessing no or uncultivable land often end up as informal labour in nearby towns and cities. They are not directly depended upon the tea industry for their livelihood. The concept of the ex tea garden labour emerged when a section of the tea labour community became physically unable to continue to work and moreover after their contracts time expired they didn’t have any other option to go back and they settled down at the free spaces usually adjacent to the tea garden. As mentioned in our former chapter they were brought under contracts for a limited period of years at the outset after which it was extended and there was no time limit. They worked as long as their physical strength covered. So most of them opted for further terms and the rest settled as independent cultivators, tenants, and agricultural labourers in the nearby villages. So those who settled outside the plantation came to be known as the ex-tea labour.32 Their process of interaction and adjustment with the Assamese society had started as soon as the tea garden labour came out from the garden and settled down in occupations other than plantation as ex-tea garden labours.

32 The ex-tea garden tea garden population in Assam-Umananda Phulkan, 1976, pg-1, B.R publication.
However their forefathers once belong to actual working force of the tea industry of Assam. Thus a distinct section of immigrant people in the rural areas of Assam made its look along with the growth resident tea garden labourers. The availability of cultivable land was much less and the density of population was higher in the district of upper Assam where plantation started quite early. The garden managers in order to draw the extra force of man power during the peak season helped the workers by providing physical assistance like building materials to settle in the government wastelands and thus the garden authorities even helped such settlers in reclaiming the government lands in their on name. The government was also facing problems in the matter of supply of food crops for the increasing population during the same period and such it did not object to settlement of these agricultural people in the government lands provided it helped in increasing the food production of the state.

In the study area of Muttrapore Tea estate it was found that these ex-tea garden labourers have settled in the adjacent village of the tea garden known as ‘Majgaon’. They are not floating population but they are domiciled as citizens and they have adopted local culture, manners, customs and languages as their own. Agriculture, wage earning in the tea garden as

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33 Guha Amalendu, Planters Raj to Swaraj, New Delhi ,pg-209-339,1977
34 Phukan. Umananda-Socio-economic and Political problems of ex-tea garden labour population of Assam, 1976, p-90 B.R publication.
35 "The extent of government land taken up by such coolies for cultivation increased from 112 thousand acres in 1906 to 262 thousand acres by 1921. This was in addition to their tenant cultivation on the tea garden lands. Even coolies of the tea garden muster rolls carried on some cultivation of ordinary crops”. A.Guha (1977)-Planters Raj to Swaraj ,pg-101
either permanent or casual tea plantation labour in the study area are some of the sources of livelihood. The temporary workers are employed by the management to meet the periodic needs of the plantation. Besides these they also work as share croppers both in and outside the study area, domestic wage earners etc.

The tea garden of Assam comprises of a big chunk of immigrant labour who were brought from various parts of India like M.P, Jharkand, Orissa, Bihar etc so different groups of people got mingled up. People of different caste settled down in the region the region. As they have migrated long time back so in all these years they have lost most aspects of their old ethnic identities and now have emerged as a creolic group whom the large Assamese community refers to by various names Bagania, Bongali, or more mockingly as ‘cooie’ and the language they now speak is a pidgin Assamese which they call as Bagania Asomiya.

In the study area of Muttrapore the researcher has found the presence of different caste of tea garden labourers from different place of origin. Majority of the plantation labour belong to the caste like the-Goala, Koiri, Kurmi, Kanu, Kahar, Teli, Rabidas. The group of labours which came from Orissa are caste wise named as Tanti, Nayak, Teli Goala, Panda. The labourers which came from Chotanagpur now Jharkand, Santhal districts are ethnically known as Munda, Oraons, Santhal, Bhumij, Mirdha, Karmakar, Ghatwar. Another group of labour which came from Vishakapatnam, Godavari districts are known as Mal, Naidu,
Telenga. Maximum amount of the tea labours of Muttrapore belongs to Teli, Mal, Kahar, Karmakar, Tantabai. People who basically hailed from Chotanagpur area like the Munda, Santhal, Orang, Kheria, Bhumij, Sawra, Kol, Vil are regarded as Adivasi. These groups of people are present in the study area also, so the researcher has used both the terms ‘Adivasi’ and ‘Tea garden labours’ in its write up. Anyhow, it was observed that there is an inter ethnic unity in the study area. The members of different ethnic group interact with each other in kinship term and their social relationship can be said of harmony and good feelings. Such relation found manifestation in marital relation also and the intercaste marriage was common.

2.2- SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE TEA LABOURS OF MUTTRAPORE

Political participation is influenced by the socio-culture and economic aspect. So in order to access the political participation of the tea garden labours of Muttrapore tea estate the researcher tried to penetrate into their socio-cultural and economic life. The socio-cultural life of the tea garden labours of the study area is simple. The tea garden labours are the dawn to dusk workers who have very less amount of leisure time in their life. They are basically illiterate, however their situation is much better then before. With the introduction of the new welfare schemes much of the changes have been brought in their lives.
While certainly not comparable to earlier times, the working conditions today are still far from being the well-regulated environment that functions according to the Plantation Labour Act brought out in 1951 (though not fully implemented) to protect the interests of workers in plantations and the evidence of it seems in the study area also. Their working conditions have improved after independence by dint of Plantation Labour Act of 1951. In the health sector the facilities which are provided are - Provision for the doctor in the plantation area for the examination and medical supervision of the tea labours as mentioned in the Plantation labour Act of 1951, effective arrangement for the supply of clean drinking water, provision for clean sanitary system. However the Government of Assam gave a tangible shape to the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 in the *Assam Plantation Labour Rules, 1956*. PLA stipulates that, the State government constitute a Medical Advisory Board for matters concerning medical facilities and that the management make easily available facilities for workers and their families. If they are not provided the Chief Inspector may cause them to be provided and maintained and recover the cost from the employer. Every garden that employs more than 500 workers is to have a hospital according to the standards set by the *Assam Plantation Labour Rules 1956*. Where there are fewer than 500 workers the employer may have a lien in a neighbouring hospital within a distance of 5 kilometres with 15 beds for every 1,000
workers.\textsuperscript{36} In the study area there is a well maintained garden hospital where there is one doctor, a Compounder, five nurses’ and the mid-wife. The tea garden labours are getting good medical response from this hospital and with the introduction of the National Rural Health Mission better amenities are provided.

According to the rule of Plantation Labour Act 1951, every garden is to have a latrine for 50 acres of land under cultivation, one for each sex with exclusive access to either sex. It should be conveniently situated and of the prescribed type, in convenient places, maintained by the employer in a sanitary condition and conforming to public health requirements and this facility is provided by the management of the study area.

In the welfare sector other facilities provided are-the state government has made rules that in every plantation where more than one hundred and fifty workers are employed there one or more canteen shall be provided and maintained by the employer for the use of the workers. Provision of the creche has also been assigned in the tea garden where fifty or more women workers are employed suitable rooms adequately ventilated, lighted and accommodated under a trained women for the care of children’s and infants. Recreational facilities are also provided for the plantation labour. As per the welfare scheme the creche and the canteen facility is provided. In

The Assam Tea Plantations Provident Fund Scheme, is the only institutionalized social security cover to the tea garden workers of Assam which came into force with effect from 12th September, 1955.

The Act and the Scheme were amended from time with a view to bring more employees under the social security net.

Again according to the Plantation labour Act 1951 in every plantation where three hundred and more workers are employed the employer has to appoint such number of Welfare officers. In case of hours of work the consideration on the basis of time has been also levied. No adult worker shall be required or allowed to work on any plantation in excess of forty-eight hours of work a week and no adolescent or child for more than twenty-seven hours of work a week. Provisions have also been made for annual leave with wages, maternity leave etc. Allowances are given for those individuals whose sickness has been certified by the doctor. The researcher has found that study area of Muttrapore Tea estate has adherence to all this facilities. The Plantation Labour Act has added lots of welfare measures for this tea garden community.

Education, which is an important ladder for transformation of a community or society for betterment is at the root of the social exclusion of the tea workers. From the understanding of topical issues to activism, education has been said to play a major role in promoting political participation. The
educated would display stronger tendencies to vote, join political parties and engage in civic activities. So an attempt has been made by the researcher to look at the education system of the study area.

One of the main characteristics of education systems as described in the EU policy instruments advocating the potential of education to promote democracy is that it should be provided on an **equal basis to all**. The Council Directive (2000/43/EC) on equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin cited above emphasis that the participation “of all” in society can only be achieved after receiving equal treatment in all fields, including education. Education should thus be provided in a non-discriminatory manner and all children should be treated on an equal footing in the education system. The consensus in the empirical literature on political participation is that education positively correlates with political participation. Theoretical explanations posit that education confers participation-enhancing benefits that in and of themselves cause political activity.

In the education field The Assam Plantation Act, stipulates that any tea garden of Assam which has more than 25 children of the labour population in the age group of 6-12 years, the management is required to provide one primary school and all the required amenities for the free education of these children. The management has to appoint teachers per 40 student or

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part thereof. However with the introduction of the Sarva Siksa Mission
importance is laid on the education of the tea garden labour students. A
survey commissioned by Assam Sarva Sikhsha Abhiyan Mission (ASSAM)
during 2002 shows that 25% of children in the age group of 6-14 are out of
school in entire Assam, while 43% are among the tea garden. Out of
2,46,843 children in the tea garden areas in the age group, 1,05,821
(42.87%) are out of school. The Assam Sarva Sikhsha Abhiyan mission
constituted the Tea Garden Education Committee (TGEC) and Assam
human development report estimates that 1,000 Tea Garden Education
Committees were set up by 2003.38

The study area of Muttrapore has a tea labour child population of 500 in the
age group of 6-16 years and the Muttrapore Bagisa School has a population
of 350 students out of which 15 children’s are from the Assamese
population. The school has children in 4 classes i.e., from 1-4 and there are
15 teachers including the Headmistress. The drop out rate in the school is
low it is 10% and the cause of it is the successful conduction of the *Sarva
Shikhsa Abhiyan*.

The Muttrapore Bagisa School was established in 1938. This school is the
oldest in the area and has the largest number of students enrolment in
primary section of Muttrapore area. It has 350 students out of which 180 are

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boys and 170 are girls. The students who hail from tea labour community use to study in this school. The provision of mid day meal fascinates the children because most of the children’s are so poor that they could not afford a meal per day. It is not the sole reason for the increase of the students enrolment but the labours of the tea garden community are nowadays becoming conscious regarding the matter of education as told by the Head Mistress of the bagisa L.P School, Mrs.Nasira Hussain, who had received best teacher award from the government for her accomplished dedication in works. She said – “since last five years there has been increase in the enrolment of the students. In this matter the scheme of Sarva Shiksa is also playing a great role. The new method of teaching and learning process in which they are provided with the equipments of learning and playing, the students enjoy a lot.”

The guardians of these tea labour students have also become conscious; they seek the Headmistress regarding the progress of the children’s which were earlier absent. The curiosity of the students to learn English is more prevalent.

39 Personal interview with the Headmistress of the Bagisa School
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Enrolment</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
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<td>2006</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>168</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Table of student results](image)

From the table it is seen that the results of the Muttrapore Bagisa Government School has been making the progress yearly since last five years. Moreover the enrolments of the students are also increasing with simultaneous increase in the enrolment of the girl students. The researcher in the study area found the mission of Sarva Siksha fruitful. The teacher in the school speaks Assamese and their books are also in formal Assamese language and English as a subject has been introduced from class-I onwards.

But inspite of the stepping education the most pathetic part in case of tea garden labour is that most of the tea labors are illiterates so even if there is any mistake on the part of the children there is no one to correct the wrong one. When the researcher interviewed a guardian of the school named Tulsi Tanti who is a tea plucker in the study area he said that—"I don't know what my son is studying as I have never been to school but one thing I Know that he is going to school like our Babus son and I am happy for that.” In many
instances it so happens that the parents are not at all bothered about their children's education. Usually the elder members of the labours household go to work early morning and there is no way they can ensure even if they want that their children attend school and in most cases the children remain absent from school and spend their time in play. The opportunity of earning small amount of money by wage is another hindrance to schooling.

Interview was taken from a tea labour who is father of six children Haresh Karmakar, as to what view he have on education he replied-

“We are too poor to think of education and I cant afford to educate six of my childrens The elder one is primary pass and the rest two have left school and are earning for their home now, and moreover I think our destiny is to become plantation labour only not Babus anyway.”

But this spirit is not same among all the tea labours. Some are very keen to educate their children’s by any means and have quite a contrasting view as to what Haresh Karmakar have said. In this case the researcher met another tea labor Joymoti Tantabai who is a widow and mother of two daughters. She said that-

“I am going to educate my daughters by any means and I want they should be teachers and should work for the upliftment of our tea community and educate the tea garden labor students who are deprived of this facilities.”
The educational institution teaches men to be actively involved in organization, participation in meetings, and discussion on social, political and economic issues. So an attempt was made to have an insight into the other educational institution of the Muttrapore tea estate- Anganvadi School and newly opened English medium school- Blossom Play.

**ANGANVADI SCHOOL**

There is an Anganvadi School in Muttrapore Tea Estate which was established in 2002. The attendances of the student are irregular and enrolment is poor. Few of the teachers hail from the tea community. In Anganvadi School the students stay up to 5 years of age. This school trains the students of the minimum elementary teachings like the learning of the alphabets, story telling etc. The children’s of this age simply spends time hovering in the labour lines instead of coming to the schools. But the teachers are trying their level best to bring students in the school. According to the Headmisress of the school Ms. Phulomoni Tanti-“*We try our level best to bring the students to school. We even visit the labour lines for that. As I am from the tea garden labour family so, I want that the next generation should read and write and realize the value of education much better than me.*”

Moreover, S.S.A in Muttrapore is working for teacher sensitization programme to provide equitable learning opportunities. Efforts are being made to generate a community demand for girls education and enabling
conditions for the participation of the women and thus creating a push factor for the women's education. The Integrated child development programme (ICDS) which promote pre school education by providing for training of the Anganvadi workers, primary teachers has also been applied in the schools of Mutrapore tea estate. If these plans and programmes are properly implemented then it can go in a long run to mould political participation.

There is another English medium private pre-pratory school—'Blossom Play' run by the wife of the tea garden Welfare officer Mrs. Meenakshi Mech. Tea Labour Student enrolment is also present here. Though the guardians of the tea community student are illiterate but they are very conscious regarding the studies of their children and tries to send them regularly. The students are also keen to learn and participate in the extra curricular activities of the school like dance, drama competition in the functions of the school. The owner Mrs Mech has been educating two students free of cost who are from tea community with good academic background. Her mode of teaching process is appreciable. The researcher made a personal interview with Meenakshi Mech and asked about her view on opening an English medium School in the tea garden. She said— "My basic purpose of opening the school is to spread education among the masses. The fee of the students has been made keeping in view the wages of the tea garden labourers and I have tried my level best to introduce proper
teaching method basically the play way method. My husband who is the Welfare Officer of this tea garden is also helping me to fulfill my mission. I am getting a very good response from the tea garden labours and they are keen to send their children and the students are also dedicated. “

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Enrolment</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Result(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>80</td>
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<td>85%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig-2.2(b)-Results of Blossom Play School from 2006-2009

The total enrolment of the students is 150 out of which 100 students are from the tea garden community and rest is from the Assamese population. The enrolments of the girls are more than the boys. Though it has only been four years that this school has been opened but it has showing very good performance.

After have a close-up look it was observed that the tea community is recognizing the value of education in their life. They do not want their second generation to face the hardship which they are facing in the present scenario for survival. Tea garden labours want their siblings to get educated and hold good position in the society. This type of psychology in the field of education has roused political participation among the masses. Moreover the student organization like All Assam Tea Tribe Students Association

40 Personal interview with the owner of the Blossom Play School.
(AATTSA) has been contributing in this aspect by organizing awareness
camps for having education. However we will have a broader look at the
AATTSA in our forthcoming chapter.

2.3 RELIGION OF THE STUDY AREA

The effect of religion on Indian politics is overwhelming. Religion is not
idol worshipping, rituals or ceremonies. It is, in fact, a reason for
righteousness, for doing good and leading an honest life. In India, religion
plays an ideal role in the day to day life and is a major influence over the
Indian population and culture. Religion covers every aspect of the life of the
Indian people. Religion also plays an important role in the politics of India.
A political party's acknowledgment of a particular religion decides the
support it gets. It is extremely heart wrenching to see that even though we,
as Indians, call ourselves a rapidly developing country, we are still unable
to isolate religion from politics. Our decisions regarding elections and
political parties still revolve around religious differences and vested
interests. There have been divisions on the basis of religions which lead us
to even judge people solely by the religion they practice.

The way in which the government of India is set up allows for a large
amount of control by the political parties. Religion greatly affects these
political parties. Often so much so, that what looks like a religious hate
crime can be, in actual fact, a complete political occurrence. As religion
plays an important role so the researcher has tried to study the religious life of the tea garden labours of Muttrapore tea estate.

It was found that tea labours of Muttrapore tea estate is under the large umbrella of Hinduism and an insignificant section of the population were the followers of Christianity i.e. 12%. Though the Christian population is low but people of this religion were found to be little educated. There are three temples of Lord Shiva, Durga and Kali and there is regular conduct of Kirtan, Bhajan, and Puja. A Brahmin priest is permanently pressed into the service of temple who is assisted by a labour. They are paid by the management authority of Muttrapore.

The tea labours of the study area observe every festival passionately. Though the tea garden labour communities have a mixed socio-cultural background but they maintain cultural philosophy and celebrate the festivals. Their harmonious reflection were observed in the common festivals of Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Manasa Puja (snake festival) etc. The magico religious belief and superstitions play a decisive role in the socio-religious life of the tea garden labours. They have an intense belief in the effect of the evil spirit, ghost and witchcraft. They even believe that some people have extra power to tame such evil spirit and particularly on Sundays they observe the ‘Deu puja’ (spirit worship). The researcher has found that almost every house of the labour line has the deities. The worshiping of the natural forces like the moon, river, sun, are still prevalent.
there. Tree worshipping like Banyan, Peepal, Neem, Tulsi are also common and sacred among them. The community has firm belief in the immortality of the soul and rebirth. As such they generally attribute the sufferings of present life to the misdeeds of the previous birth. They observe rituals for propitiating the spirits of their ancestors.

Besides these the other festivals observed by the labourers of the study area and mostly by the ex-tea garden labourers are as follows- in the month of December-January when new crops come to the home they observed ‘Maghe parab’. It is a festival when the harvesting and threshing are over. It is the conclusion of the Munda communities financial year and this month is considered as favorable for marriage. The festival of ‘Phagun Sendera’ is observed on the first day of February to March. It is a joyous month for the Monda born hunters. With various hunting weapons of bow and arrows, axe and spears they hunt wild animals and the success of these hunts is mystically connected with the outcome of a good harvest through out the year. In the month of April-May the ‘Sarhul-Ba-Porob’ is celebrated in the spring season. With the blossoming of new leaves and flowers they know that a year is over and they remember their forefathers and it is considered as a must recall of their memory once a year. They celebrate the ‘Haku’ (fishing) festival during the month of April- May, here the representatives from each family set out to a river for fishing and in the evening they enjoy it. ‘Kadleta’ festival which is mostly prevalent among the Mundas and the
Santhals is celebrated on the eve of rice plantation during the months of June –July. In August when the new plantations begin their germinations a prayer is made to God to counter the evil eye on the crops, and this festival is known as the ‘Hariari’ (Greenary). In the same month of August another most popular festivals among the Adivasis known as the Karam Puja is observed. Karam Puja observed for propitiating ‘Mother Earth’. It is celebrated by all the groups of the tea garden labours but it is most important festival for the Oraons group of the community. This festival is mostly observed by the young marriageable maidens of the village with lots of ceremonies and rituals. In September with the harvesting of the rice crops the Jom-Nawa (New Eating) festival is observed. No one touches the new harvest unless the ceremonies have been performed. On the new moon of October-November Sohorai (Cattle festival) is observed for the well being of the cattle on which they are depended for the agricultural purpose. With the threshing of the crops in November-December the Kolom-Singh (threshing) festival is celebrated. Paus Jatras (year end thanks giving) is celebrated in the month of December to offer thanks to the God for ushering them with the granaries.

Every festival in the tea garden is accompanied by dance and music. ‘Jhumur’ dance is the most outstanding tune of their culture. There is no exact derived meaning of the term ‘Jhumur’. However, Jhumur can be explained as – ‘jhu’ means the atmosphere and ‘mur’ means the act of doing something in circle which is performed in circle or moving in circle or
surrounding. Hence the dance is performed in revolving or circling manner where young girls and boys dance in full bloom with the beats of drum, madal (long drum), flute and so on. The themes of the songs of jhumur are vast and varied; most of the songs are of four lines which expresses human feelings pleasure and pain. The dancers wear uniform kind of dress. The female dancers wear sarees and put red flowers on their hairs. Tushu is another important festival which is celebrated during 14\textsuperscript{th} and 15\textsuperscript{th} of January along which resembles the same time of Bihu festival of the Assamese community. The labourers are God fearing and are still under orthodoxy like the belief in evil worshipping and black magic.

The practice of Totemism was also found in the study area. Totemism is a kind of belief in which humans are believed to have kinship with a totem or a mystical relationship is said to exist between a group or an individual and a totem. A totem is an object such as an animal or plant that serves as the emblem of symbol of kinship group or a person. The term Totemism has been used to characterize a cluster of traits in the religion and in the social organization of many primitive peoples. It is manifested in various forms and types in various contexts, especially among populations with a mixed economy (farming and hunting) and among the hunting communities. The table cited shows the different kind of totems believed by different group of tea labours of Muttrapore-

\footnote{Kurmi Sushil, Chah Bagisar Jivan Aru Sanskriti, Assam Sahitya Sabha,1991.}
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SURNAME</th>
<th>CASTE/TRIBE</th>
<th>TOTEM</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bara</td>
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<td>Tree</td>
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<td>Oraon</td>
<td>Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beck</td>
<td>Oraon/Munda</td>
<td>Salt</td>
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<td>Creeper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kullu</td>
<td>Kharia</td>
<td>Tortoise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakra</td>
<td>Oraon</td>
<td>Tiger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minz</td>
<td>Oraon</td>
<td>Fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soreng</td>
<td>Kharia</td>
<td>Stone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tirkey</td>
<td>Oraon</td>
<td>Tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toppo</td>
<td>Oraon</td>
<td>Bird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xalxo</td>
<td>Oraon</td>
<td>Sea-fish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3 Fig-totems of the various tribes of the tea garden community

From the above table it seems that the totem varies with the surnames also. Even the same tribe has different totems.

ECONOMIC ASPECT OF THE TEA GARDEN LABOURS

It is believed that the soundness in the economic face brings about favourable changes in the other fronts as well. The Marxian literature on development goes to the extent of saying through the notion of economic interpretation of history that economic activities of a group of people is the sole determinant for all the other activities of a group of people. In order to view the political participation it
was necessary to glance at the economy of the teagarden of Muttrapore. In the plantation economy poverty and exploitation were vivid in the earlier period but one positive perspective is that the tea plantation work helped them to stand starve to an extent which made one of the European tourist to remark that—“they can afford to eat fish and other luxuries which they never could have dreamt at their homes”. However the economy of the tea labours is basically on wage economy since it is the main source of livelihood. The workers can be divided into three categories – monthly paid workers, weekly paid workers (permanent), weekly paid workers (temporary). Among the tea garden labours the line chowkidar and the Sardar occupy an important position.

In certain cases where survey was conducted the workers were found to be in possession of small plot of land which they bought with their own income. The income derived from land and livestock were their secondary source of income and it was grossly uncertain as it was primarily dependent on nature. It is mainly visible among the ex-tea garden labours. Of late a trend of change has been clearly visible especially among the younger generation which might have attributed to two factors firstly growing unemployment among the workers and secondly the psycho-social problem of being sidelined by the mainstream population. These have led the younger generation to grow distaste for the plantation work which they consider to be derogatory for their social standing.

42. Bose. S.K “Capital and Labour in India tea industry”, Bombay 1954, pg-78, AITUC.
43. A line chowkidar is like a Headman in a particular residential area of the workers known as labour lines. His task is to maintain peace in the labour lines. Sardar is the gang leader of the manual workers in a tea garden. His report of the day is considered important by the authority. See Kar. R.K.-’The Savarras of Mancotta’, New Delhi, 1981, pg-113
demands increases during election times. Sometimes it becomes impossible to manage the crowds but I always maintain patience in dealing with them. We have orders from the top that their interest should be taken care of, and this pressure increase during the time of election'.

The most notable fact is that the awareness of the tea garden labourers are increasing at a very fast speed. In this connection the researcher took a personal interview from the member of the civil society who is an ex-tea garden employee Mubidul Islam—"I have spent my whole life working in this Muttrapore tea estate and the change I see in the attitudes of the tea garden labours seems to be a dream for me. They are now conscious of the happenings around them and are able to counter any problems. Infact their voice have found a platform which they were earlier ignorant.

The concern of the tea garden labours about their rights is not a new phenomenon but it dates back to pre-independence period where the tea garden labours played an active role. However in the forthcoming chapter we will have a detail study of the political participation of the tea garden labours in the pre-independence and the post independence era.

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44 personal interview with the Welfare Officer of Muttrapore Tea estate
45 personal interview with retired tea garden employee of Muttrapore Tea estates
At the apex of maintaining the economy stands the management of the tea
garden and for the proper economic output of the tea garden the worker
management relation is very important. In the years that followed independence
saw changes in the worker management relation. The level of exploitation
during the colonial period gradually came down. In fact, the newly formed
democracy worked as a pressure on the management which had to relax its
ruthless rules. For instance the Plantation Act 1951 introduced the welfare
measures after independence which was earlier not applicable.

In the changed time due to education and political exposure a section of tea
garden labour community have come up and the leaders from this section are
making every possible use of the larger community to reap the personal benefits
which are mostly political in nature. The management is very careful not to hurt
the sentiments of the labourers because they have become a strong emerging
political power.

In the study area the researcher have found that the management takes all the
possible steps to ensure that if not all a substantive number of welfare
programmes reach the labourers. This change in the attitude of the management
was found to be mainly due to the fact that tea garden labourers have become
emerging political pressure groups if not power. A personal interview with the
welfare Officer of the Muttrapore tea garden Mr. Mech have made this fact
vivid-

*The tea garden labours are very much concern about their rights and they
hardly let go any opportunity of striking for demand. Interestingly such kind of
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