CHAPTER - I
INTRODUCTION

Tea is one of the World’s most popular beverages. A survey conducted by the Indian Tea Board reveals that 89% of the people take tea as a matter of habit, 8% for refreshing their mind and 3% for appeasing thrust. India has the second largest area under tea in the world at present. In 2002, India had an area of 511,940 hectares with a production of 826.17 million kg. Out of this, 201.00 million kg, valued at Rs.1,753,39 crores, was exported and 625.17 million kg was retained for domestic consumption. In the same year, Assam produced 432.51 million Kg of tea on 270,163 hectares of land, which accounted for 52.35 percent of the total production in India. The other states in North East India, producing Tea in small quantities include Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim.

Tea is one of the most important industries in Assam. Apart from the fact that it is the biggest cash crop in the state, the tea industry is also a major source of revenue and employment. Most of the gardens are privately owned, though some are also owned by the government of Assam and managed by the Assam State Tea Development Corporation. The privately owned gardens fall in to two categories. One, those owned by Companies like Tata, Williams and Megor, Russel etc, who invest huge sums of money in the tea industry and own a number of gardens and the other, called the “propertied tea company”, where ownership is limited to an individual or to a family. Such companies are generally small and have one or two

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gardens only under their management. Currently, around 20% of tea business in Assam is controlled by Assamese planters.

The tea plantations of Assam are mainly concentrated in Upper Assam and Barak Valley. The small tea growers are spread around the big tea gardens to which they supply green leaf. In 2005-06, Assam produced 57.2% of tea produced in India and about 1/6th of tea produced in the World. The tea industry has contributed substantially to the economy of Assam by providing employment to nearly half a million people contributing revenue and support to develop other infrastructure and service sectors over the years.²

At present Assam has more than 848 registered tea gardens accounting for 92.3% of the total tea estates in the North East Region. The annual production of Assam tea of around 454 million kg (private and other sales excluded) in a year implies that the estimated annual turnover of the tea industry and tea trade as a whole in Assam is around Rs.3, 223 crores.³ Assam gets more than 100 crores per year as revenue from the tea industry. Although Assam produces more tea than the rest of the tea producing states like Kerala (10.40%), Tamilnadu (9.65%), Karnataka (0.50%), Bihar (0.10%), UP (0.50%), HP (1.20%), yet the wage structure of the labourers of the tea gardens of Assam is much lower than in the other states.

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³ It was about Rs.2, 800 crores in the year 2002. However the total production of tea in 2008 was 487, 497 million kg (Assam Valley - 432.346 mkg and Cachar - 55.51 mkg) against 479 mkg in 2007 and an average auction price of Rs.93 per kg. In 2009, the country produced 70 mkg of tea against the 980.8 mkg produced in 2008. Again in 2009 the country could export 191.5 mkg compared to 203.1 mkg in the preceding year and earned 1,258.07 crores till July 2009. *The Assam Tribune*, March 16, 2009 and Feb. 17, 2010, Pp-1-3.
The advent of a large number of small tea growers in recent years is a significant development in the tea industry. In 1978 the first commercial small tea garden were started in Assam with the untiring efforts of the Agriculture Minister of Assam, Suneswar Bora. By 2008, there were 3375 small tea gardens covering an area of 9111.13 hectares of land and involving more than three lakhs people directly or indirectly. The small tea growers produce around 29 percent of the total tea produced in Assam.

The Tea industry of Assam has been pivotal in the development of several ancillary industries like the plywood industry in Assam. Moreover, it has contributed in a large measure to opening up the communication network in the state.

In the present work an attempt has been made to focus on the issues and realities facing the industry today, and the need to forge close partnership between the industry and the Government, the consumer, the community, the workers, the trade unions and other stakeholders.

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5 Statistical Hand Book of Assam, Guwahati, 2008, p-195
6 In 2000-01, there were 28,585 small tea growers in the state cultivating an area of 27,878 hectares and producing 257.6 mkgs green leaf or about 60.5 mkgs manufactured tea. Around 135 leaf factories have been established to cater to the needs of this small growers.-Directory of Small Tea Growers of Assam, 2001, Govt. of Assam.
7 For details, see, Goswami, Priyam. Assam in the Nineteenth Century: Industrialisation and Colonial Penetration, Guwahati, 1999, Pp-128-164.
The Tea industry, being labour intensive, directly employs over one million workers. It employs 2.5 persons per hectare compared to 1.38 persons engaged in other agriculture sectors. The most interesting feature of the employment pattern in tea gardens is that it is family based. So apart from its own work force of one million, it also looks after more than 3 million dependents. Further, the Tea Industry generates income and livelihood for more than 10 million people over and above its own work force. The tea labourers in Assam are popularly known as Bagania, Banua or Cha Mazdoor and Ex- Tea garden labourers. They are also referred to as Adivasi and Tea Tribes. In 1983, the Government of Assam established a separate department for the welfare of tea garden labourers viz, the Directorate for Welfare of Tea and Ex- Tea Garden Tribes, to work for their welfare and in order to bring them at par with the rest of the people. In the absence of local labour, the British had been constrained to import labour at high costs from other provinces such as Chotanagpur, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bengal and Bihar. According to Amalendu Guha, the management-worker relationship in those days was the worst form of Serfdom.8

Prior to independence, several Labour Acts had been passed from time to time for the welfare of the labourers. After independence, the Labour Act of 1951, the Assam Plantation Labour Rules 1956, The Tea Act 1953, Assam Tea Plantation Employer Welfare Fund Act 1959 have been enacted for the security

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8 In plantations labourers were treated like serfs, who were attached to it by extra economic means. The labourers were kept in a condition that the planters would not face scarcity of workers. The labourers were allotted small plot for paddy cultivations. In times of need they borrowed money from the Manager and repaid from their wages in a continuous process. Economically and culturally uprooted workers were an easy prey for exploitation where made them akin to the serfs and slaves.
and well being of the plantation labour. But, the facilities that have been provided under these rules and regulations are very nominal in nature and although some improvement is seen, the general condition of the labourers is still very pathetic. The problems are manifold. Very often they take recourse to *strikes, hartals and lockouts* for the redressal of their grievances.

**Historical Development of Tea Industry**

Tea drinking originated in China about 3000 years ago and was initially cultivated in **South East China**. The name of the specie from which tea was obtained was known as *Camellia Sinesis*. The well known plant, *camellia* and *Thea Sinesis* are the members of the same genis. The term *Tea* is believed to have been derived from the Chinese original, *Thea* or *Thee* which was initially used as a medicine in China ⁹. The word *‘chai’* appears to have been derived from, *Amoi* a Fukian dialect ¹⁰ in which, *Tea* is known as *‘Cha’*. Gradually people realized that if the plucked leaf was withered and roasted, it could be dipped in water and taken as a beverage for pleasure.

The origin of Tea is obscured by a maze of legends. One legend associates the origin of tea with Daruma who founded the Ch’an school of Buddhism in China. While mediating for years together, Daruma fell asleep. When he woke up, infuriated at his sleepiness, he cut off his offending eye lids, threw them away and tea plant grew where they fell on the Earth. Thus tea is said to drive away

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sleepiness. Another legend is associated with Shen Nung, a 2737 B.C Chinese emperor who, while on a hunting trip in wild forests, discovered that, some tea leaves carried by the wind into his pot of boiling water, produced a very refreshing drink.11

In the Chinese Encyclopedia "Pent Sao", the compilation of which goes back to 2,700 BC; there are some references to the peculiar qualities of good tea. Vague references to tea also exist in She King a book written by Confucius, the philosopher. Cha Pu , another well known writer, writes more definitely on the subject asserting that the plants were discovered by the Chinese in the hills of several provinces but that general attention was directed to it during the time of Hun dynasty(211-279 A.D) Loyu or Yulu of the Tang dynasty (780 AD),states that the use of tea was so common in the eighth century that it encouraged the authorities to levy a tax on its consumption(793A.D). By the end of the eighth century, the Mohammedans established free commercial intercourse with China and the use of tea at that time is mentioned by the Moorish historians and travellers. Soliman, an Arabian merchant and traveller visiting China in 850 AD., describes "sah" as the usual beverage of the Chinese. From China the habit of tea also extended to Tibet, Mongolia, Turkistan and other places. In the ninth and tenth centuries there developed a brisk domestic trade in tea and export trade to Tibet. During the Sung dynasty, trade in brick tea was so important that brick tea tablets

11 The Telegraph, Kolkata, March 7, 2000
came to be used as currency in the big horse fairs of China. About the time brick tea packed in gold cases was sent to the Emperor as tribute.\textsuperscript{12}

In Europe tea became famous by the 16th century. The opening of sea route to India and the East in 1497 by the Portuguese facilitated large scale trading between Europe and the Orient. The first consignment of tea from China was transported to Benton in 1606 and from there it was shipped to Europe. Once tea came to be recognized as an important article of commerce, the Dutch became active participants in its trade. At that time, tea was mainly sold in one ounce packets by apothecaries. Later it was stored in colonial warehouses and then in grocery shops. Macaulay, an English writer, remarked that tea went through a phase of extreme fashion in France at a time when it was hardly known in Britain. By 1648 a Paris physician referred to tea as an important novelty of the age.

Texeria, a native of Portugal, found the dried leaves of tea at Malacea about the year 1600 AD. Alerious tribes in 1663 found that tea leaves were used by Persians, who obtained it from China through the Uzbek Tartors, Coffee, Tea and Coca are all mentioned in Acts of British Parliament of 1660, but the regular use of tea as a drink became popular much later. Pepys in his \textit{Diary} mentioned in September 1661 that he had sent for a cup of tea (a Chinese drink) which he had never drunk before. The Dutch East India Company first introduced it in Europe and it was brought to England from Amsterdam. Tea was first brought in small quantities of 2lbs and 20zs in 1664 for presentation to the Queen of England by the

English East India Company as one of the novelties. Two years later a similar present of another parcel was made.\textsuperscript{13}

**Development of Tea Industry in India**

The Discovery of indigenous tea in 1823 by Robert Bruce in Assam is generally considered to be the originator of tea enterprise in India. Gradually tea plantations were started in other parts of India on an experimental basis. During 1862-67 the cultivation was started in Chittangang and Chottanagpur. Seeds and saplings brought by Gordon had been planted in Kumaon and Garwhal regions and a small sample of tea made from them had received favorable comments from Mincing Lane in 1842. These seeds were distributed in Assam, the Himalayas and the Nilgiris. In 1893. The United Planters' Association of South India was founded for tea cultivation and research on tea. Later it was extended to Tamilnadu and Kerela. Tea cultivation in Darjeeling, which produces a world famous type of tea with an exquisite aroma and flavors not to be found elsewhere, began in the mid of 1850's. Earlier, in 1841, Dr. A Campbell had brought China tea seeds from Kumaon and had planted them in his residence in Darjeeling town at a height of around 7000 feet. But attempts at opening out full fledged gardens began only around 1852-53, the success of the Assam plantations proved to be the impetus. By 1856, gardens like Tukvar, Canning and Hope town were thriving. The planters found the elevation range of 2500 – 6000 feet to be most suited for the tea planting. By 1874, there were 113 tea gardens in Darjeeling.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} Dutta, Dinesh. Ch, *op cit*, p-135
\textsuperscript{14} Dutta, Arup, *Cha Garam- The Tea Story*, Dispur 1992, Pp-85-86
The second largest tea plantation areas after Assam was the Dooars and Terai areas of North Bengal. The first experimental tea garden was established by James White in 1862 at Champta in the Terai region (Siliguri). The first tea plantation in the Dooars, Gazaldubi, near Oodlabari foothills was established in, 1876 by Brougham, an entrepreneur in Darjeeling, who employed Richard Houghton as Manager. Cultivation by Indian entrepreneurs started in 1878, with the tea garden at Altdanga. The first Indian Tea company with exclusively Indian shareholdings and Board of Directors was Jalpaiguri Tea Co. Ltd. Set up in 1879. Plantations initially set up in Dehra Doon and Kangra at the foot hills of Western Himalayas were planted with China seeds. Cultivation continued till 1857 when the industry languished for a number of reasons.

In 1917, the first tea estate was established at Ranibari in Tripura, during the reign of Maharaj Birendra Kishore Manikya. Most of the tea estates were established from 1917 to 1939 with seeds of Assam hybrid variety. The other tea growing state like Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Manipur, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Nagaland etc. were started gradually in India. By the end of 19th Century tea production had increased with cultivation of 2, 11,443 hectares and production of 89.5 million kg. as compared to 114,900 hectares with production of 32 million kg. In 1825. The following table shows the percentage of production of major tea growing areas of India up to 2002.

\[\text{Table}\]

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15 The tea growing areas in the district of Jalpaiguri with an annexation of some tea areas of Cooch Behar is popularly known as Dooars.


Table 1:1
Tea growing areas of India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerela</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tripura</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Development of Tea Industry in Assam

The tea industry of Assam is an agriculture industry having a very peculiar past history. Warren Hastings sent some tea seeds which arrived in India from China to George Bagley in Bhutan in 1774, in an effort of the British East India Company to promote industrial development in India. In 1815 Colonel Latter is reported to have noticed tea drinking habits among the tribes of Upper Assam, which appeared to be the starting point for East India Company’s venture into the plantation industry in Assam.

In 1819 David Scott, then Agent to the Governor General, took interest in the possibility of growing tea and wrote to Nathaniel Wallich, Botanist of the East India Company and Superintendent of Botanical Garden, Calcutta to send Chinese tea plants and seeds from the company’s Botanical Garden in Calcutta, for being

19 *Ibid* p-35
planted ‘*in the Hills to the Eastward of the Berhampooter*’ The plants were sent but they all died.\(^{20}\)

There have been many divergent views which transpire from the report published by Col-Keating, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, regarding the discovery of plants in Assam. Many opine that Robert Bruce was the first among the Britishers to know about the existence of tea plants in Assam in 1823.\(^{21}\).

Major Bruce supposedly saw tea plants growing wild in some hills near Rangpur (Sivasagar), then the Ahom capital of Assam. As an adventurer and trader, Bruce had gone Upper Assam in search of trade as an agent of the dethroned Ahom king, Purandar Singh, with the permission of the East India Company. He made an agreement with a *Singpho* Chief, Bisa Gaum, who agreed to provide him with tea plants and seeds during his next visit in the following year\(^{22}\). Assam, was under Burmese occupation and subsequently, in 1824 war broke out. Major Robert Bruce died in 1824 before he could collect the tea plants. But he must have confided about his agreement with *Singpho* Chief to his younger brother, Charles Alexander Bruce, before his death.\(^{23}\)

C.A Bruce was a midshipman in service of the East India Company. He offered his services to David Scott against the Burmese invaders and was sent to

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\(^{20}\) *Ibid* p-36

\(^{21}\) Chadhury, M. *Yuge-Yuge*, Guwahati, 1989, p-208-10

\(^{22}\) Beesa is a *Singpho* village near Margherita in Upper Assam

Sadiya, Assam, which was near the home of the Chief with whom Robert Bruce had made the agreement. He collected the promised tea plants and seeds and handed them over to Scott, who planted some of them in his own garden, sent some to the Government of India through F. Jenkins, Commissioner, and forwarded the balance to N. Wallich with a letter dated 2, June, 1825.

There is a controversy regarding the real discoverer of Assam tea. According to Baildon 24 (1877), the tea plant of Assam was discovered by a local Assamese nobleman, Maniram Dewan (1806-1858). Hannangan25 corroborated this view. He viewed it as almost certain that Maniram Dewan introduced Bruce to the indigenous tea plant and he was acquainted with the plant for many years before 1823 and he should be regarded in the true discoverer of ‘Thea Assamica’

In 1831 Lieutenant Charlton who had been serving in Assam collected some tea plants from Sadiya and sent them to the Agricultural Society, Calcutta, stating,

“The tea tree grows in the vicinity of Suddyah, the most vicinity of Suddyah, the most remote of the British possessions towards the east, in Assam, and adjacent to the British territory. Some of the natives of Suddyah are in the habit of drinking an infusion of the dried leaves, but they don’t prepare them any particular manner. Although the leaves are devoid of fragrance in their

25 Ibid, p-25
green state, they acquire the small and taste of Chinese tea when dried".  

The appointment of a Tea- Committee in early 1834, ‘for the purpose of preparing and maturing a plan for the cultivation of the tea plant by the Governor-General in Council came as a God-send. The Chinese had enjoyed in those days a monopoly of the lucrative tea-trade, but the rigid closed door policy adopted against the English movements and the consequent strained relations between the two governments led the East India Company to search for alternative sources within their possession for the supply of this invaluable commodity. 1834, was a momentous year in the history of tea as it gave shape to the eventual development of the tea industry in Assam. The Committee met for the first time on 13 February, 1834. As the plants sent earlier from Assam did not get recognition as the genuine tea plant, the Committee decided to introduce tea plants from China in the Sub Himalayan regions, and the Nilgiries, which they considered to be the most favorable areas. But prior to that they wanted to collect more information on the soil and climatic conditions of these areas and hence, issued a circular to local official calling for information. Captain F. Jenkins, agent to the Governor General for North Eastern Frontier replied that “Camellias’ are found in every part of this hill country, which Singpho and Kamptees generally used for preparing tea”. In last part of December 1834, the Tea Committee announced the viability of tea cultivation in Assam.

26 Griffiths, p. op cit, p-37
In 1835, the first commercial tea cultivation was started in Chabuwa, in present Dibrugarh District (Cha-Tea, Bua-to grow). The Bengal Tea Association was formed in February, 1838 by some rich people of Bengal and some European with a share capital of Rs.10 lakhs. But they faced certain difficulties in procuring labour, technical knowhow, machines and tools as well as transport bottleneck. During that time Jenkins was in charge of Sadiya. A team of scientists headed by N. Wallich, J.M. Cleland and W. Griffith were sent to Assam to report on the Indian indigenous tea and to advise on the most favorable localities for starting experimental tea gardens. The Scientific Commission visited Assam to make a study of the situation and appointed Major Charles Alexander Bruce as Superintendent of tea gardens of Assam in 1838. Two years earlier, C.A. Bruce produced tea with the help of Chinese skilled workers.

Bruce took the members of the Commission to different tracts at the foot of the Naga and Pataki hills and in the river valleys where the indigenous tea plant grew in clumps. It was found that tea was far more widely scattered in Assam than had been realized. Bruce also reported in June, 1839.

.... "The numbers of tracts now known amount to 120, some of them are very extensive, both on the hills and in the plains. A reference to the accompanying map will show that a sufficiency

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29 Griffiths, op.cit. P-53
of seeds and seedlings might be collected from the tracts...but a very small portion of the localities are as yet known.\textsuperscript{30}

There was however, a difference of opinion as to what tea seeds should be planted i.e. the indigenous tea seeds or the imported tea seeds of China. Finally it was decided to use the Chinese seeds for Government experimental plantations. The Committee also could not come to an agreement regarding the most favorable localities for establishing experimental gardens. Wallich favoured the Himalayan region but the other two favoured the Upper Assam region where tea was found growing in the wild.

Thus, the first tea plants grown in Assam to explore the possibility of tea plantation were of Chinese origin. Gordon who went back to China dispatched seeds from there and these seeds were distributed for cultivation in Assam, the Sub-Himalayan areas in North India and South India. Bruce was appointed, under Lieutenant Charlton, in-charge of tea nurseries. The first tea seeds nursery of China seeds was established "at Sadia, on a char near the confluence of Koondil and Brahmaputra" towards the end of 1833.\textsuperscript{31} Of the selected areas, tea grew reasonably well in the sub-Himalaya region, but the best tea was produced in Assam. However the selection of site for nursery in Kundilmukh near Sadiya was a wrong one as it was a shifting sand bank having only few inches of alluvial soil on the top and sandy layer below. Due to this, the plants died soon and the nursery

\textsuperscript{30} C.A. Bruce, \textit{Report on the Manufacture of tea and on the Extent of the Produce of the Tea Plantations in Assam.} Journal of Asiatic Society, 1839, August, 1839

\textsuperscript{31} Griffiths, P. \textit{op.cit} p-49
was abandoned towards the end of 1836. The surviving plants from Sadiya were planted at Jaipur in 1837 and a new plantation was successfully established at Chabua. Initially Chinese seeds were used but in course of time indigenous Assam plants got cross-pollinated naturally and produced a hybrid variety found later in great numbers.32

Bruce extensively explored the forests of Assam, particularly in the Singpho territory to the South of the Brahmaputra, along and down the river Buri-Dihing and found wild tea growing there and at other places like Phakial, Tingri etc. He befriended the different tribal chiefs with sweet words and by offering opium and other means was able to find the places where tea grew in the wild. He cleared Jungles and made contracts with the tribal chiefs, Gums, assuring them that they would be taught the method of cultivation and manufacture and that the manufactured tea would be bought from them. In December, 1837, twelve boxes of tea were shipped to London and this was followed in the next year by another lot of ninety five chests. On examination, the tea was found to be ‘equally good as that of China’. Whatever doubts hitherto existed was thus removed and it strengthened the belief that ‘a fair and mercantile article might be obtained from the indigenous plants’.33 In 1838, Bruce published a pamphlet which contained a map where he showed the extent of his discoveries of wild tea. He located 80 tea tracts in the Matauk country, 12 in the Singpho territory and 28 in the west of Buri Dihing at Namreng, Tipam, and Jaipur and in the neighborhood of Rangpur (Sivasagar) and

32 ibid
33 Barpujari, H.K. Assam in the days of Company, 1826-58, Guwahati, 1980, Pp 40-41
After abandonment of the first plantation at Sadiya, C.A. Bruce set up nurseries at Jaipur, Chabua, Chota Tingri and Hukanpukri and he was convinced of its commercial exploitation by 1840.

As mentioned earlier, the Association of the Tea Company was established with its headquarter at Nazira with share of Rs. 10 lakhs. Under the Waste Land Grants Rules, 1838, Governor General in Council allowed the Company to expand its business. The Assam Company had, in the meantime, occupied a part the Gabharu hills in the district of Sivasagar. Under J.W. Masters they set up an establishment of their own at Nazira, on the bank of the navigable Dikhow river and commenced collection of stores, erection of depots, recruitment of labour and such other works necessary for operation. For better management, the properties of the Assam Company were divided into three sections – Charles A. Bruce was made Superintendent of the Northern Division with Headquarters at Jaipur, J. Masters of the Southern division with headquarters at Nazira and J. Parker of the Eastern division. In March 1840, C.A. Bruce, whose services in the meantime had been transferred to the Company, joined his new assignment and was placed in-charge of the Northern Division comprising of the tracts of Tipam, Nowholea, Jogando and Ningro. The remaining portion of the Government plantation around Chabua in Muttack was started as an experimental station and worked for a few years satisfactorily. It was supervised by Thomas Watkins, and on the latter’s resignation in 1842, by Lum Ping Young.

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the son of Lum Qua, who had died at Jaipur in 1840. The growing competition from The Assam Company and the lack of proper supervision gradually resulted in a deterioration, both quality and quantity, of the production of the government plantations. It was increasingly felt that these operations could not be pursued by the Government as profitably and efficiently as by private entrepreneurs. In 1849 when was it found that the yield was not worth even the cost of production, the garden was sold out at nominal price to a Chinese, from whom it passed two years letter to Messer’s Warren Jenkins and Co-Limited.36. Despite many difficulties of the pioneers, early operations were promising. In 1853, a dividend of three percent was declared for the share holders and extension of new rules of wasteland tenures to Upper Assam enabled the Assam Company to expand its operations.37 The Company established a garden on the north bank at Singri Parbat. In 1855 their first garden in Cachar was started. In 1857, Colonial Hannay opened a garden at Chawalkhowa, near Dibrugarh, and factories were started at Mothola and Bojalani. The following year saw the formation of the Maijan Company under Warren Jenkins and the establishment of estates at Bokapara,Barbarua, Nagaghuli and Deosal in the district of Lakhimpur. In 1858, in collaboration with Williamson Robertson, an officer of the Assam Company formed the Jorheaut Tea Company in 1859 with its Central office at Jorhat, with W. Robert as the Chairman. It bought Cinnemara, Oating and Kaliabar gardens from Williamsons and Numaligarh from H.Burkinyoung38. The Company was started with a capital of

36 Barpujari,H.K, *ibid* p- 250
37 *Ibid* -p-41
38 Baruah ,Pradip, *op cit* p-35
£60,000. The amount was utilised in buying up Cinamora, Oating and Kaliabor gardens of Williamson’s and Numaligarh from Burkinyong, and in the following year saw Williamson (Junior) as the Superintendent of the new company. The Assam Company extended its operations on the north bank at Singri Parvat in 1855 and in the same year in Cachar of Barak Valley. Next year tea was discovered in the district of Sylhet, but no attempt was made to commence operations.

During 1858-59, out of 59,860 acres occupied, 7599 acres were under actual cultivation, of which The Assam Company alone held 3381 acres producing 693,249 lbs of tea at eighteen factories. In 1860 the Jorehaut Tea Company yielded a crop of 118,946 lbs which increased to 327,050 lbs in 1865.39

By 1859, there were 51 tea gardens in Assam—ten in Lakhimpur, fifteen in Sibasagar, three in Darrang and rest in Kamrup and Nagoan Districts. Labour was a big constraint in the early years. Initially the tea gardens individually imported labour from Bihar, Bengal, MP, UP etc. through from Calcutta contractors, but from 1859, and the labour recruitment was done by the industry collectively. In 1855, indigenous tea plants were found in the Chandkhani Hills in Sylhet and along the Khasi and Jaintia Hills bordering the Surma Valley. In 1862, the annual production of tea in Assam was 1,250,000 lbs. There were one hundred and sixty gardens under fifty seven private companies and five public companies. The public companies were The Assam Company, Then East India Tea Company, Jorehaut

39 Ibid p-35
Tea Company, Lower Assam Tea Company and Central Assam Tea Company. In 1872, there were eighty tea gardens in Cachar with a production of 4,883,183 lb in area under tea of 23,000 acres.

The following table shows the production of tea in 1859 with Factories in Assam.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Factories</th>
<th>Total area (acres)</th>
<th>Out turn in 1858-59(lbs)</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seebsagur</td>
<td>4,778 ¾</td>
<td>693,249</td>
<td>Belonging to Assam Co.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seebsagur</td>
<td>90,180</td>
<td>153,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td>11,034</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Belonging to Pvt. Planters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luckimpore</td>
<td>14,038</td>
<td>282,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamroop</td>
<td>12,207</td>
<td>6,160</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durrung</td>
<td>3,783 ¾</td>
<td>23.280</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Labour in Tea Industry:

The tea industry’s unique feature is the employment of a huge labour force. These labourers are normally confined to their bastis, the labour lines, with inadequate housing, sanitation or education facilities. They have little mobility and generations after generation spend their lives in the gardens. The level of alternative employment is generally poor and they are still unable to free themselves from the shackles of the life style into which they were forced long years ago by the Britishers who had established tea estates in remote areas of India.

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40 Griffiths, P op cit. p-75
41 Griffiths, P op cit. p- 92-
Assam. About 20 lacs of people in Assam are estimated to be directly or indirectly involved in the tea industry presently.

Since local labour was not available, the demand had to be met by importing them from other regions. This was fulfilled by the ‘Arkattis’ and ‘Sirdars’, commissioned agents who were posted at Calcutta. During 1884-85, they recruited labourers from Bengal (27.2%), Chotanagpur (44.7%), Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (21.6%), Assam (5.5%), Madras (0.7%), Bombay (0.2%).43 Many of them died on their transit to Assam by steamers. Among the major tribal groups, who migrated were the Munda, Oraon, Santhal, Bhumij, Tanti and Mal while Kurmi, Goala, Koiri, Barai, Kanu, Kahar were the backward communities from plian districts of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh from which labourers were recruited. Some scheduled castes like Chamar (Rabidas), Pasi, Dusadh, Mushar Bhuyan (now called Rikhiason) etc. of the same places also migrated to Assam.44

The gradual expansion of the industry in a labour short economy created a class of agents or middle men who supplied labour to the gardens. The first mention of a paid recruiter is in the Board minutes of the Assam Company of 4 June, 1839, when it was agreed to offer one Campbell of Midnapore the job of going to Chotanagpur or Bhagalpur to collect families of labourers willing to migrate to Assam. He was to be paid Rs. 2/- as commission for every able bodied

44 Sing, N(ed), Socio Economic and Political Problem of Tea Garden Workers,. N.Delhi, 2006, p-43.
man landed at site, Rs. 1/- for every woman and child and for himself Rs. 150/- monthly towards his own maintenance and travelling. These immigrant labourers were very poor. They had been lured in to Assam with false promises and had to face innumerable difficulties. Often they became victims of deadly diseases like Kalajar, Malaria, Cholera in the inhospitable surroundings in which they were compelled to work some what like serfs.

The journey to Assam from other parts of India was also very painful for the Labourers. They were treated as slaves. The Assam labour Enquiry Committee of 1906, reporting on this stated:

"Contractors collected coolies by the hundred on false promises of high pay and light work and dispatched them to the tea districts without taking any sanitary precautions for their welfare on the journey, the result was shocking mortality on the voyage up, while many of the immigrants were of caste or constitution which precluded all hope of their surviving many months in the jungles of Assam."

On the other hand mortality on the passage to Assam was usually 10-15% but sometimes ran as high as 50%. Between December, 1859, and November 1861, the Assam Company brought 2,272 coolies of which 250 perished in transit. Between April, 1861 and Feb, 1862 the Company recruited 2569 coolies of which


46 Dutta, Arup kumar, op cit, 1992, p-82.
135 died on the way and 103 absconded. Of the 84,915 workers landed in Assam between May, 1863 and May, 1866, 30,000 had died by June, 1866. It was a story of death and misery unparalleled in the colonial history in any part of the World.47

There were two methods of recruitment, (a) contractors system or Arkattis (1859-1915), (b) Garden Sardari system (1870-1959). Initially, a few local people were recruited, but because of short indentured labourers had to be recruited from outside Assam. From 1841, workers were recruited through Calcutta contractors. The Government passed the Transport of Native Labours Act of 1863 for licensing recruiters and to regularize the recruitment system. The contractors were known as Arkattis. The poverty ridden tribal people were the main target. The workers were transported at their expenses of the planters. The Act was amended in 1870 when it recognized the Sardari System. However, the earlier system of recruitment through the Arkattis also continued and both the systems of recruitment were in practice till 1915, although many laws had been enacted to end the contractor system.48

With the rapid growth of tea industry, the demand for labour also rose. As a result of the Act of 1932, the Tea District Labour Association was formed with its head quarters at Calcutta for the purpose of recruitment of labour. The Tea District Labour Association (TDLA), included 19 depots, known as Local Forwarding Agencies, and extended its network from Nasik to Tinsukia and recruited from six recruiting provinces of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, M.P, U.P and Madras. In Guwahati

47 Ibid, Pp-82-83
48 Section 492 of the IPC, Act. XIII of 1859 (Workmen’s Breach of Contract Act) and Act of 1914 to establish Sardari system for the development of labourers.
there was huge depot with several European officials and a British Chief Medical officer. It continued up to 1960, after which further recruitment was stopped due to surplus labourers in Assam. As the contracts were only for a limited period, after the end of their terms, the labourers stayed back and settled in the adjoining areas of tea gardens.

Being a labour intensive industry with unique characteristics and supporting a huge labour force with obligatory responsibilities, the problems of this vital sector are diverse. For the recruitment of labourers Acts were passed in 1870, 1873 and 1882, the first two by Bengal Government and the third by Government of India. They remained in force till 1933.

The days of colonial *sahibs* have long been over but the fate of tea workers has remained very much the same.

After independence, the Government of Assam has framed certain rules to regulate the working condition of Tea Garden workers under the Plantation Labour Act, 1951. The rules were framed keeping in mind matters like inspection of the gardens and health welfare activities. Subsequently there have been some other enactments like The Tea Act, 1953, Assam Tea Plantation Employer Welfare Fund Act, 1959 along with the Assam Plantation Labour Rules, 1956 for prosperity and social security and well being of workers.
The main provisions of Plantation Labour Acts are that every worker and their family have to be provided good health and hygienic environment, housing facilities, pure drinking water, good working condition and other welfare benefits like- maternity and sick leave with pay, canteens, crèches, education and employment.

Yet in its history of more than 160 years, we see the pathetic condition of labourers in Assam, when compared to their counterparts in other parts of India.

At present the large tea community comprises of more than a hundred different castes and tribes but according to Government records there are only 90. These people have their own language and culture. But over the years there has been an assimilation of cultures and these different communities exchanged their traditions. A common culture and tradition has emerged, known as ‘Cha Bagania Sanskriti’ (tea garden culture). A new language has also developed. Most of the

people speak, that is ‘sadri’ or ‘Sadani’ (a mix of Hindi, Bengali and Assamese), as a common form of communication.50

The tea industry employs males, females and adolescent children. The workers fall under two categories, viz. those who stay within the garden premises i.e., resident workers and those who stay outside or Ex-tea garden labourers. Resident workers are permanent labourers of the estate whereas outside workers are temporary or casual labourers. The following table has shows the total number of labourers employed in tea gardens in Brahmaputra and Barak Valley from 2003 to 2007 51.

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50 According to the Census 2001. In Sivasagar district, the number of Oriya speaking people is 18,843 and, Santhali 3,293. Most of the people speak Assamese.

51 Statistical Handwork of Assam 2008.
### Table 1:3
District – Wise no. of Gardens, Area, Production and Average Yield of Tea in Assam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Gardens (Number)</th>
<th>Area under Tea cultivation in hectares</th>
<th>Production (in ‘000’ kg)</th>
<th>Average Yield (Kg. per hectare)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>41037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dibrugarh</td>
<td>21388</td>
<td>22392</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>93076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagaon</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>7994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>15735</td>
<td>16375</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>74807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Cachar</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>32008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karbi Anglong</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karbi Anglong</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>39151</td>
<td>40795</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>266512</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Estimated and subject to revision.

Note: 1) Since 1998 figures are inclusive of Small Tea Gardens operating in different tea producing District of Assam.

2) The data furnished in the table are as per old district of Assam.

Source: Statistical Hand Book of Assam, 2008
Table: 1:4  
Showing the number of labourers in the Brahmaputra and Barak Valley

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6,18,630</td>
<td>6,20,750</td>
<td>6,23,727</td>
<td>6,30,642</td>
<td>6,34,214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5,89,854</td>
<td>5,97,835</td>
<td>6,00,035</td>
<td>6,00,180</td>
<td>6,00,549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent</td>
<td>47,726</td>
<td>37,025</td>
<td>35,038</td>
<td>28,678</td>
<td>25,187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12,56,210</td>
<td>12,57,610</td>
<td>12,58,800</td>
<td>12,59,500</td>
<td>12,59,950</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table we can see that around 50.34% female workers, 47.67% male workers and only 2% adolescents are engaged in the tea gardens. Most gardens employ temporary labourers during the peak season.

The following table shows the average daily number of labourers employed in the tea plantation of Assam.

Table: 1:5  
Estimated average daily number of labourers employed in the tea plantation.\textsuperscript{52}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>118730</td>
<td>117785</td>
<td>117866</td>
<td>117719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>9980</td>
<td>9976</td>
<td>9980</td>
<td>9987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>9406</td>
<td>9451</td>
<td>9450</td>
<td>9527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dibrugarh</td>
<td>202212</td>
<td>202725</td>
<td>203245</td>
<td>204186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>14160</td>
<td>13850</td>
<td>13865</td>
<td>13578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgaon</td>
<td>19260</td>
<td>19125</td>
<td>17110</td>
<td>19054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>160073</td>
<td>159136</td>
<td>159243</td>
<td>160077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cachar</td>
<td>69902</td>
<td>69793</td>
<td>69815</td>
<td>69824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karbi Anglong</td>
<td>4898</td>
<td>4905</td>
<td>4890</td>
<td>4954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.C. Hills</td>
<td>10701</td>
<td>10772</td>
<td>10675</td>
<td>10837</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{52} Statistical Hand Book of Assam, 2008,p-194
The table reveals that Dibrugarh district has the highest number of labourers followed by Sibsagar district, Darrang district, North Cachar Hills and Cachar.

A Report on child labour in the tea plantation of North East India states:\textsuperscript{53}

'Most of the child workers are employed as casuals, children are found to do such strenuous work as plucking under very severe climatic conditions. They are assigned to nursery work, fertilization, carrying of heavy loads and household works. They are also made to work in the factors, against established law.'\textsuperscript{54}

The Plantation Labour Act of 1951, prohibits the employment of children under the age of 12 on any plantation, but permits and regulates the employment of children aged 12 through 14 as well as adolescents, defined as those between the age of 15 and 17. The act requires both children and adolescents working to obtain a "certificate of fitness" from a certified medical practitioner. In addition, they may not work more than 27 hours a week, or at night. The Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act of 1986 amended certain portions of the Plantation Labour Act of 1951 by raising minimum age for employment from 12 to 14 years of age. In 1990, Government of Assam estimated that there were 96,535 children employed in tea gardens in Assam, making up over 14 percent of the total workforce.

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Ibid}, p-10.
Health and Hygiene:

In the tea gardens medical facilities, safe and hygienic drinking water facilities are not always available and the labourers resort to using unhygienic water from various sources. There are no well equipped latrines in the working sites except the factories. The same condition is also applicable to the labour lines. The majority of the workers suffer from Anemia and tuberculosis. Malaria is rampant. Children and women are the worst affected. The infant mortality rate is also very high. During peak season (April-July), hundreds of labourers die due to epidemics like gastroenteritis. The All Adivasi Students Association of Assam claims that around 1000 people die in the tea garden areas every year due to lack of proper medical facilities.\(^5\)

Most of the tea gardens have no proper housing facilities. They live in tiny quarters in joint or nuclear families, consisting of five to six members, along with their pet animals. In most of the gardens under investigation it was found that man and animals share the same house and as a result the residents get infected by many diseases. Around one third of the workforce do not have proper housing facilities.

Education:

The literacy rate among the tea garden workers and their families is a poor 20%. After lower primary school, children are forced to join the tea labour workforce as unskilled workers with no educational and alternative employment opportunity. Generation after generation, they remain tied to the gardens. For

\(^5\) The Hindu, March 26, 2006.
example, a survey conducted in 2002, shows that while in Assam as a whole 25 percent of the children in the age group 6-14 years age group are out of school, among the tea garden workers, their proportion is forty-three percent. There are 2, 46,843 children in this age group and 1, 05,821 (42.87) % are out of school\textsuperscript{56}.

The main source of income of the labourers is their daily wage, but their wages are not commensurate with the number of hours that they put in. The Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS), which is the only recognized union representing the tea workers for the last 60 years, states there is not a single tea plantation where the Plantation Labour Act is fully implemented in terms of wage structure. The wages of plantation Labour in other states like Tamil Nadu, Kerela, West Bengal, is far better than that of Assam. In 2005, the daily wage of tea labourers in Assam was Rs. 48/- while in the same year the tea labourers of Kerela got Rs. 78.04/-, Tamil Nadu Rs. 72/-, and Karnataka Rs. 71/-.\textsuperscript{57} The present wage of an adult labourer is Rs. 58/- per day i.e around Rs. 1, 200/- per month, in addition to subsidized rations and bonus. Obviously this amount is not sufficient to meet the expenses of sufficient nutritional food, clothes, education, and medical of a family. As a result the families are forced to sell the labour of their children and other dependents for manual work in other sectors. With this background it is not surprising that most of the workers are in debt. They have to pay high interest for the money borrowed and are able to repay it only after getting the bonus.

\textsuperscript{56} Fernandez, W.S. Barbora and G. Bharali, \textit{Children of Plantation Labourers and their Rights to Education}, Guwahati, 2003, p-1

\textsuperscript{57} Pratidin, Oct, 4, 2005.
Bonus is another great problem for both management and labourers. During the Durga puja season every tea garden releases bonus to labourers ranging from a minimum 8.33% to 20%. The bonus issue very often leads to strikes, hartals and lockouts for the redressed of grievances.

There is no opportunity for empowerment of women. Most of the women are generally busy in garden work while the rests are engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Due to social invisibility they have no opportunity for social development. Their health is a matter of concern and they suffer from frequent illness.

The tea garden labour community faces manifold problems. As people are illiterate, they are not conscious of issues relating to their health and hygienic. Most of the labourers both male and female of all ages consume intoxicants like ‘hariya’ (home made liquor), betel-nut and tobacco.

Unemployment problems have hit the tea sector as well and the grievances and demands of the youth find expression in their petitions and memorandum to the management and government.
Review of literature:

About the history of tea garden labourers and their present socio-economic status, considerable work has been done on various aspects of tea gardens in Assam.

Awasthi R.C (1975), in his book ‘Economics of tea industry in India’ has highlighted about the recruitment of labourers in tea gardens and their woes were also discussed through the various acts that were implemented in gardens.

Baruah, Pradip (2008), ‘Tea Industry of Assam: Origin and development’, highlights comprehensive analytical study of the tea industry, since its inception, which covers on the aspects of origin, development over the years, production, marketing, quality factors, problems and prospects etc.

Behal, Rana Pratap, (2000), in his essay ‘Wage structure and Labours : Assam Valley Tea Plantations, 1900-1947’, takes up the case of the Assam tea plantation and specially the relation of the wage structure of the industry with various indices of workers living standards.

Bhadra, Mita (1992), ‘Women workers of tea plantation in India’ has examined the nature and work situation of the women workers of the tea plantations in respect of Dooars and Terai region of West Bengal.

Dutta Roy, B (1981), on behalf of the NEICSSR, Shillong has edited the seminar papers entitled, Problems of Tea Industry in North East India, focuses on different aspects of tea plantation industry right from the production, finance, marketing, management, labour related policy formulation for identification of basic problems and concrete measures of solution.

Dutta, A.K. (1992), ‘Cha Garam! The tea story’, has described the history of Tea Gardens in Assam during the initial stage and the role of tea Planters towards labourers.

Dutta, M.L. (1983), in his research work, ‘Education and employment of the tea garden labourers of Assam, with special reference to the district of Sibsagar has studied the educational and employment aspects of the tea garden labourers of Assam.


population characteristics such as distribution, composition, change fertility, mortality, mobility, residence, population policy, food supply etc.

**Goswami, Debotpal, (1992)**, in his research work, 'A study of the tea labour population of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam', considering all aspects established that their condition was not at par even with that of the workers of the unorganized sectors as well as the local peasantry. He observed that had it not been for the socio-cultural barriers, many of the garden workers would have come out of the plantations for good and joined the local peasantry even as landless peasants.

**Griffiths, P (1967)**, in his book ‘The history of Indian tea industry, has analysed the tea industry from historical point of view ignoring the description of the Socio-economic and political life of garden labour.

**Guha, Amalendu (1977)**, in his book, Planters Raj to Swaraj, Freedom struggle and Politics in Assam (1826-1947) have highlighted the socio economic and political history of tea garden labourers.

**Harlalka S.S (1973)**, ‘Socio-economic study of tea garden labourers of Assam’, had for the first time to reflected on the real problems of tea plantation labourers.

**Jain, Shobita (1983)**, in her work, woman workers in a tea garden of Assam has highlighted on the patterns of recruitment, employment and exploitation of labourers in Assam by the British tea planters.
Jha, J.C. (1996), 'Aspects of Indentured Indian Emigration to North East India (1859-1918)' has attempted to focus attention on some important features of indentured migration to North East India from 1839-1918. First the term 'INDENTURED' and 'MIGRATION' are explained and then both the 'push' and 'pull' factors are examined. The process of recruitment, transport through road, rail and river end the working of the immigration laws and glimpses of plantation life have been focused. The work does not touch social and economic aspects.


Karotemprel, S and Dutta Roy, B (1979)(ed), 'The garden labourers of North East India' reflects the economic and socio-cultural aspects of tea labourers in North-East India along with their origin, migration and a case study of some selected gardens.

Phukan, U.N (1984), 'The Ex-Tea Garden Labour population in Assam', has given emphasis only on the social and economic conditions of the Ex-Tea garden labour population living in the villages.

Saharia, U.C (2005), 'Tea Labourers of Assam': Special reference to Dibrugarh District, a research oriented book on population Geography of tea labours in Assam with special mentioned about Dibrugarh district highlighted on socio-
economic and religious status on the basis of migrational pattern and its impact on the economy and political aspects of Assam.


Sen, B.Binoy (ed), (2008), ‘Origin and Development of Tea’ comprising of some articles written by national and foreign writers on the growth and development of tea industry in Assam as well as India.

Sengupta, Sarthak (2009), ‘The tea labourers of North East India – an Anthropo-historical perspective’, a compiled book on seminar papers, presented in 2005, at Anthropology Department, Dibrugarh University has discussed various aspects of labourers, such as education, welfare measures, health issues etc. about the tea garden labourers of Assam.

Siddique, M.A.B (1990), in his book, ‘Evaluation of Land grants and labour Policy of Government: the growth of tea industry in Assam’, (1834-1940) has observed that, the supply of migrant labour for the tea plantation in Assam was not determined by the operation of normal market, because the planters failed to offer competitive market wages to attract labourers from distant places. He has also
mentioned that the planters preferred to employ those labourers who would be easily available to work at very low wages and would be bound to work in plantation as and when required under their strict control.

Singh, Narain and Kumar, Purnendu (2006), (ed) 'Socio-economic and political problems of tea garden workers', highlights the origin and migration pattern of tea labourers in Assam, specially Barak valley.

Most of the works that has discussed are not sufficient to understand the real position of labourers as the works are confined to vast areas in general. Therefore it is very essential to know about the actual picture of the people through various Acts and measures that have been implemented by the Government after independence to redress their grievances in the present position.

Objective of the Study:

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To study the various Acts / bilateral agreements that were signed / enacted for the development of tea labourers.
2. To study various schemes that have been implemented in the tea gardens.
3. To find out the extent to which these schemes have been implemented,
4. To find out the extent to which they have benefited the workers.
5. To study the present condition of the workers.
Data Collection:

The study was carried out to understand the problems of the tea labourers of Assam, especially in Sivasagar district and evaluate their socio-economic condition. Efforts were made to find out the strength and weakness of the welfare activities, which determined the lifestyle of the people.

The study was based both on primary and the secondary sources. Primary data was collected from the sample tea estates through field survey with the help of questionnaires, personal interviews and observation schedule during the period from 2005-2009.

Secondary data was collected from published books, newspapers, articles, reports, Gazetteers, magazines, pamphlets, archives, research works and necessary reports and documents from offices.

Methodology:

The Survey Studies based on Descriptive Method has been used to conduct the research work and to arrive at the findings. The total area under study comprises of 92 registered tea estates in Sivasagar district. For the purpose of sampling, 10 tea gardens were selected according to size, easy accessibility and time constraint. A random sample of 50 households from each garden were selected for questioning to represent socio-economic conditions, educational status, aspirations and the present position of the welfare activities under the Labour Plantation Act 1951. All households represent both permanent and casual labourers residing in the gardens. The total sample used was 500 from the 10 selected tea gardens.
Tools Used:

To fulfill the objectives of the present study, the following tools were used,

1. Interview schedule,
2. Observation

The primary data were collected from the field through questionnaires, interviews and observation.

Data analysis:

For the present study, the investigator employed the percentage analysis as the main technique for the analysis of data from a historical perspective.