CHAPTER IV

REHABILITATION
The tea plantations in Assam were usually situated on high altitudes and in areas of adequate rainfall. In the beginning, it was supposed that the culture of tea could be carried on profitably if all the plantations be located in the remote forest tracts where indigenous tea had been found. The Assam Company took up land even in the interior of Naga Hills during the early years of their activities, when no other tea company existed. Further, as the Government of Bengal gave additional incentives for the occupation of waste lands by the tea planters, innumerable tea gardens were started amidst the jungles.

Since these gardens were located far from human habitation, they were subjected to the occasional incursions of the hill tribes on the frontier. In the thirties, the experimental Government tea gardens at Sadiya were thus raided by the Singphos and Khamtis. Likewise in the sixties,

1. A.S. Vol. No. 43 of 1871, No. 108, Hopkinson to Govt. of Bengal, 23 September, 1871.

2. Ibid.

* Since the discovery of tea it became the policy of the Government to encourage the opening out of the sparsely populated tracts of the province by the offer of land on specially favourable terms. From 1838 to 1851 the principle on which waste lands were granted for tea cultivation was that they should be held on a leasehold tenure for long terms at low rates of assessment, the cultivation of the land being secured by stringent conditions as to clearance (Dutta, K.N, A Handbook to the Old Records of the Assam Secretariat, P.5 Para 2.)

3. Ante-P. 161
seventies and even in nineties, Nagas in Upper Assam and Mizos (Lushais) in the Cachar District created panic among the immigrant labourers. Instances were not rare when the Nagas even murdered the tea planters. The immigrants in some of the gardens, therefore, had to live in constant suspense for such a sporadic tribal menace. The remote situation of the gardens from the district headquarters and the absence of police outposts greatly facilitated the predatory tribes to carry on such raids.

Moreover, immigrants had also to live under a hostile climate. In Upper Assam, in the vicinity of gardens there were patches of rice-fields, but generally, on all sides there were jungles, which consisted of reed grass rising fifteen to twenty feet in the height or of forest in which the canebrake was so dense that even an elephant could with difficulty pass through it. The surface of Cachar in the Surma Valley was broken into innumerable small hills or "teelas" which were also covered with jungle. The decaying vegetation,

5. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
humid atmosphere, high temperature were the natural elements to generate the germs of various diseases. These made many gardens in the earlier days practically unsuitable for human habitation.

The unhealthy climate resulted in excessive mortality among the new arrivals. The majority of the skilled Chinese artisans, imported before 1840 by the Tea Committee, died in the course of their stay in Assam. It is elsewhere stated in the official record that many of the Dhanga labourers also shared the same fate in the subsequent period: out of 1960 labourers in Nowgong, no less than 436 died within a period of six months in 1866. In some of the gardens, the mortality was as high as 54 to 60 percent in ten months. During 1866, out of hundred labourers 95 died within one year in a particular garden. In the same year, even in the well-managed gardens under the

9. Ibid.
10. A.S.Vol. No. 6(a) of 1842(Misc), No. 72, Hamilton to Jenkins, 25 April, 1842.
12. A.S.Vol.No.34 of 1867, No.70, Hopkinson to Government of Bengal, 21 March,1867, also vide Report of the Proceedings of Committee appointed under Section 44 of Act VI of 1865 to enquire into the fitness for human habitation of the garden of Alni (B.G.P.E., February 1867, Page No.4).
13. Ibid (Name of the garden is not recorded).
### TABLE NO. I
**RAT OF MORTALITY PER 1000 LABOURERS WITHIN SIX MONTHS.**

(Compiled on the basis of the Report of Labour Enquiry Commission, 1867)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Gardens</th>
<th>Rate of Mortality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nagagholee</td>
<td>162.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doomboomer</td>
<td>223.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rungelating</td>
<td>388.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welton</td>
<td>161.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moran Company</td>
<td>246.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilladharee</td>
<td>393.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rungajan</td>
<td>234.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherido</td>
<td>365.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deopani</td>
<td>351.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiphook</td>
<td>217.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chota Jallingah</td>
<td>140.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majogram</td>
<td>160.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royapore</td>
<td>301.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ootergatch</td>
<td>251.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joypore</td>
<td>374.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diglee</td>
<td>257.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jhulnacherra</td>
<td>199.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claverhouse</td>
<td>147.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alyen</td>
<td>188.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roopacherra</td>
<td>196.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monierkhal</td>
<td>164.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sappanulla</td>
<td>390.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamanee</td>
<td>413.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyah</td>
<td>307.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pabhai</td>
<td>344.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pertanbgher</td>
<td>277.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aumchung</td>
<td>198.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiphook</td>
<td>245.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffloo</td>
<td>182.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylhet &amp; Cashar Tea Co.</td>
<td>220.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheragong</td>
<td>556.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teelaghur</td>
<td>162.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherragong</td>
<td>137.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assam Company during the same year out of 6574 labourers 1201 actually died.

The common cause of mortality was cholera due to drinking of impure water and of eating unwholesome food. Among other causes of mortality were dysentery, general debility, enlarged spleen, colic, continued fever and over-congestion. Many women died either during their confinement or even after child birth. But very often, the planters attributed the cause of excessive mortality to importation of large number of sickly labourers. On the other hand, some of the District Officers assigned it to be due to lack of sanitary measures. Opinions differed even among the medical men who attended the labourers. Some of them made climate to be responsible for this; while others were of opinion that it was not due to climate, but due to want of medicine and supply of proper nourishing food.

In these circumstances, the employers had the primary

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* Table No. 1 will indicate an alarming rate of mortality during sixties.


16. Ibid.


18. Ibid.

responsibility of arranging proper rehabilitation of the imported labourers; and at the same time the Government had also the duties of compelling the planters to do so. How far these expectations were fulfilled? - these are analysed under the headings as given below:-

ACCOMMODATION.

From the very beginning the immigrant labourers were provided with free quarters. They were quartered within the tea garden areas and generally in the long barracks made of thatched roofs and mud floors. Their split bamboo walls were plastered with mud and cow-dung mixture. Usually, the employers themselves arranged for the building of such barracks. In certain cases, the immigrants were provided with the necessary materials and also were paid wages for the time spent in such construction. However, almost all the materials for the construction of such labour barracks could be procured from the adjoining hills, and the employers were, thus, greatly relieved from expending a large outlay for constructing labour quarters.

But since the beginning of depression in tea market in 1866, the employers became indifferent and, in some cases, utterly negligent in providing labourers with quarters. Writing in October 1866, Hopkinson, the Commissioner of Assam, stated that such neglect and indifference were also found even in the

20. A.S.Vol. 41 of 1870, No. 92, Commissioner of Assam to Government of Bengal, 10 May, 1870.
cases of well-managed gardens under Assam Company. In certain cases, as the Protector of Labourers, Upper Assam, writes during March 1867, although the labourers were provided with quarters, their construction was defective in many respects. Neither the floors were raised above the water lodgement nor the walls plastered with mud and cow-dung mixture. It was, therefore, wholly unfit to protect the labourers both from cold and damp and as such it was detrimental to the health of the labourers. H. Thompson, an honest planter, who came to join his new service, early in 1867, as the Manager of the Central Assam Tea Company found,-

"The coolies lines were in a most disgraceful state, there were two long barracks dividing into compartments or had been so, but the walls were all broken, the roof tumbling in with age, in front of each barrack a filthy swamp full of slimy fluid. The place (was) stunk, only a few old coolies had a separate and decent house to live in and they only had machans to sleep on, all the others, sick or not sick, had a sleep on the bare damp floor".

In March 1867, addressing a letter to the Government of Bengal, the Commissioner of Assam, while reporting on the attitude of the planters, strongly emphasised the need for immediate measures of control. Later, a member of the Labour Enquiry Commission, which was appointed in 1867 to consider the problems of labour in Assam observed:

22. Ibid.
24. B.C.P. File No. 303 of 1869-73, No. 5999, Statement of Mr. Higgs, 28 December, 1868.
"All that is now require is that the proprietors of the gardens should be compelled to build their coolie houses and lines after a uniform plan to be decided by the Government, on sites selected by a committee, and that the estates should be visited quarterly to see that the coolies are properly housed according to law."

In spite of that the majority of the members of the said Commission differed on this particular point and they took a very lenient view on the subject. Instead of compelling the planters for doing so, they expressed, that they would provide by law to issue a notice to the planters should they be found neglecting in providing quarters—and for this purpose the case might be referred to a Committee. In reviewing the report of the Commission neither the Commissioner of Assam nor the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal expressed views favourable for its acceptance. The Commissioner was in favour of compelling planters for the rigid compliance of a standard plan. On the other hand, the Lieutenant-Governor objected to such a standard plan, as it would not suit all soils and climates for all sizes of gardens. Further, the Lieutenant-Governor did not like to refer such a matter to a Committee, as suggested by the Commission. He clearly stated that in the matters relating to such an important problem the Government must reserve rights to frame rules in the matter. The decision of the Lieutenant-Governor eventually received the concurrence of the Governor-General of India and in the Act II of 1870 it was provided that:

25. Ibid.
26. The Calcutta Gazette, 23 March, 1870. P. 596 vide article Nos. LXXII, LXXIV and LXXV.
(1) Sufficient house accommodation was to be provided by the employers and any breach of the proviso was made punishable by a fine not exceeding 500 rupees. Further, in any case, where proper or sufficient accommodation found to have not been provided, the Magistrates were empowered to order the employer to provide so. In spite of this if the employer was still found to have willfully omitted to comply with such order he was to pay a fine not exceeding 100 rupees a day for every day that such omission continued.

(2) Lieutenant-Governor reserved right to make rules defining the nature of house accommodation and inspectors of labourers were empowered to make enquiries and arrange compliance of the same with the help of the Magistrates.

With the enforcement of the above measures in 1870, the employers became more cautious in discharging their statutory obligations so far as the residential accommodations were concerned. Improved quarters were constructed in several gardens. Lines were built in long pucca barracks on small "Tillas" either with a natural or made up drainages along with the opportunities of getting free air. In some of the gardens, instead of long barracks, the lines were built in such a way that they looked like a village in the Eastern Bengal, the houses were water-tight, well-plastered and nicely ventilated along with raised floors.

In spite of this, a good number of cases were brought to light in the later period, where quarters provided were found to be not sufficiently spacious even to accommodate 5 or 6 persons. The houses were huddled together and air was unable

to circulate freely through the lines. Action was taken against some of the gardens, where the lines were found badly constructed and the employers were compelled to rebuild the lines on more suitable sites. And as such, negligence in providing accommodation gradually became rare.

More improvement in respect of accommodating labourers was made after 1890, when the big Tea Companies began to construct barracks with corrugated iron frames 300 feet long by 16 feet wide with 18 inches only of roof projecting beyond the eaves. It was, of course, left upon the individual Manager to decide according to his need for housing at the time as to how many labourers were to accommodate in such barracks. This type of barracks continued to be largely used in good number of gardens even beyond 1901. But with its first introduction in 1890, it was certainly an improvement from the previous system of housing, although it had its various disadvantages which could be removed not earlier than 1906.

WATER SUPPLY.

Although, some provision for housing was made from the very beginning of the experimental tea cultivation in Assam, arrangement for the supply of water to the labourers was extremely inadequate; and with the increase of labouring


31. Ibid. Para 2.
population in the gardens the problem became all the more difficult. It was, however, a problem not in tea gardens only. Difficulties of getting drinking water was experienced everywhere in rural areas. Since the beginning of tea industry in Assam, labourers procured drinking water either from a pool of muddy-stream, nearly stagnant for greater part of the year, or in certain places a distant river, loaded with decayed vegetable matters and other impurities, or an old tank, which was used for every purposes when water was required. Water from the last named source was always foul, as will be seen later, with human excreta. Owing to their caste prejudices, the un-country labourers and the Kacharies never took drinking water from a common tank although better drinking water could be procured from there. On the otherhand, they made their separate tanks, rather small ditches, in the vicinity of their quarters. Naturally, therefore, the water used by such labourers was impure for drinking purposes. Inspite of this, no action seemed to have been taken by the planters during the early years to supply good drinking water either by providing preserved tanks or even dug-out "kachha" wells.

In 1866, when average mortality in the gardens rose

33. Infra, P.225.173
34. B.G.P.File No.320 of 1871, No. 87J, D.C.Sibsagar to Commissioner of Assam, 25 September, 1871.
35. Ibid.
upto 300 out of a thousand immigrants, the matter could not be ignored altogether. Many among the Government officials, including the doctors, believed that drinking of impure water might be one of the potent causes of such mortality. The Labour Enquiry Commission of 1867 also recorded a similar sentiment in its report. Immitably, the need for compelling planters to provide drinking water became imperative. Accordingly, provisions were made in the Act II of 1870, for the supply of good drinking water to the plantation labourers by their employers and failure to this duty on the part of the employer was made punishable by a fine upto Rs.500/-. Notwithstanding the measures of compulsion, no improvement seems to have been made until the year 1876-77, when the planters realised that what a great loss they had to incur on account of labour mortality in the past few years for their utter neglect and indifference in supplying pure drinking water to their labourers. "The provision of pure water for the labourers means" writes the Chief Commissioner of Assam in 1877 "prevention of pecuniary loss to the planter, owing to a high death rate among his coolies".

Since 1877, attempts had been made to introduce

36. Infra, P.164

37. Vide article LXXV of Act II of 1870. If the employer wilfully omitted to comply with such requirements he was also made liable to pay a fine of one hundred rupees a day for every day that such omission continued.

Norton's Tube Wells in some of the gardens of Assam. A wide publicity was given by the Government of Bengal with a view to popularising it in the gardens. Side by side, improved wells were also dug out in some of the gardens by using large glazed pipes to form the shaft. Thus, with the introduction of Norton's Tube wells and pumps along with improved wells, the possibilities of supplying pure drinking water to the labourers appeared to some extent easier. Inspite of this the cases of employers indifference and neglect in making such arrangements in some of the gardens were reported even during the last decade of the 19th century.

**SANITATION**

Observance of proper sanitary measures was most essential in the gardens in the interest of the labourers. But from the very beginning the management of the tea enterprises paid little attention in that direction. It is not unreasonable to think that the importance of any expenditure towards labour welfare had never been realised fully in the earlier days, and probably this was considered wholly unnecessary. No arrangement was made in the early years of tea industry in Assam for providing labourers with latrines, nor any arrangement made for

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39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
proper drainages in the labour lines, nor precautions taken to keep the drinking water pure from being polluted. For want of latrines, the labourers went either straight away to the nearby jungle or sometimes they finished the business even within the boundary of their quarters. Under such circumstances, specially during heavy showers when a large portion of the surface soil of the gardens washed down the slope into the tank at bottom, the soil being impregnated with human excreta, poisoned the water of the tank and inevitably this resulted in an outbreak of cholera. A little attention in this direction might have saved many lives from premature death. If all the sides of tank had been raised sufficiently to prevent the water being fouled with human excreta during showers and if labourers had been instructed not to use the same tank for all purpose, much better result, possibly, would have resulted. The system of drainages in the plantations, in many cases, was unsatisfactory particularly in the gardens where labour quarters were situated in the low lands. During the close of 1869, as many as 18 gardens were inspected by two district officers and they found that the surroundings of the quarters were in dilapidated and dirty state. No attempt was made at all for drainages. Thus, in large number of cases the conservancy of

43. B.G.P. File No. 320 of 1871, No. 87J, D.C. Sibsagar to Commissioner of Assam, 25 September, 1871.

44. A.S. Vol. 41 of 1870, No. 92, Commissioner of Assam to Government of Bengal, 10 May, 1870 (vide reports of Capt. Gragory and Capt. Campbell.)
the gardens remained wholly unattended. Negligence of sanitary measures in the gardens was possibly one of the important causes of excessive mortality in the early sixties.

The Government of Bengal, even being fully aware of the fact, remained silent; although, need for sanitation was emphasised by Hopkinson early in 1861. No provision was made in the Act III of 1863 to safeguard the interest of labourers in the gardens. Immediately after the passing of the said act, the Commissioner of Assam repeatedly reminded Government of Bengal of the necessity of incorporating measures of control. Even on the eve of passing the Act VI of 1865, Hopkinson, addressing a letter to the Government of Bengal in October 1864, clearly expressed that "the Act must give power to the Government to make by-laws for conservancy and sanitary arrangements". Further, referring to the excessive mortality in the gardens, which the Commissioner supposed to be due to lack of proper sanitation in the plantation, remarked if such a disastrous mortality would have resulted in any place other than Assam the importation of labour would have been entirely stopped. In spite of such a forceful remark, the Government of Bengal did not include any provision, whatsoever, even in the Act VI of 1865. It was not until the passing of Act VII of 1870, when for the first time measures relating to

45. B.G.P.File No. 375 of 1861, No. 170, Judicial Commissioner to Commissioner of Assam, 1 June, 1861.

proper conservancy were adopted. Neglect of this duty was made punishable by a fine upto Rs. 500/- and the Lieutenant-Governor reserved full rights to make by-laws, regulating sanitation of the gardens from time to time. It may be mentioned here that no additional measures were included in the acts subsequently passed during the rest of the period under review.

In spite of the enforcement of the Act II of 1870 improvements were made very slowly. No effort was made at all immediately after six or seven years of its enforcement. In large number of cases, as official record shows, the previous dilapidated and filthy condition of garden remained. Instances were not rare when far worse situation also prevailed in some of the gardens.

It may be mentioned in this connection that the labour lines were, generally, separated according to caste and communitywise. Usually, Dhanga and Kachari lines were most dirty and filthy and were beyond any control as they did not like outside interference. They were always in the habit of keeping their dwellings in an extremely unhygienic condition. Writing in September 1871, Captain L.Blathwayt, Assistant Commissioner, Golaghat, gave a horrible picture of such a labour line when during heavy showers the entire boundary

47. Vide article LXXV of Act II of 1870.
49. Ibid, 1892, Para 27.
was made repulsive to sight due to grazing of domestic 
50 pigs, ducks and other animals. Further, as has already 
been stated, some of the quarters were usually very con-
gested and air could not freely pass through them. Some of 
them were too old and awaiting for collapse. During cold 
weather, air inside such houses became poisonous. Its effect 
was felt gradually which was usually fatal.

The Commissioner of Assam collected "mass evi-
dences shewing the connection between cholera and drinking 
51 water fouled by excreta." Dr. De Renzi, the Sanitary Commis-
ssioner of Assam, in his yearly Sanitary Report of 1877 
52 also very seriously viewed in this respect. With strong 
words he emphasised the need of particular care for keep-
ing drinking water pure by providing suitable precautionary 
devices in the plantations. Under direction of Keatinge, the 
Chief Commissioner of Assam, the copies of the above report 
were distributed among the leading tea planters of various 
53 districts. In 1879, on the suggestion of Sir Steuart 
Bayley (1878-81), who succeeded Keatinge, the Inspector of 
Labourers were also alerted to take the help of the inde-
pendent European Medical Officers in-charge of the tea gardens

50. B.G.P. File No. 320 of 1871, No. 208, Blathwayt to D.C. 
Sibsagar, 22 September, 1871.

51. A.S. Vol. 43 of 1871, No. 120, Hopkinson to Government of 
Bengal, 29 September, 1871.


53. Ibid.
to exert their influences in the implementation of proper sanitary measures for the general well-being of the plantation labourers. Neither the appeal of Dr. De Renzi nor the persuasion of the inspectors had any desired effect. Instead of implementing the sanitary measures in their gardens, the planters laid the entire blame on the climate of Assam. In 1891, Geo. M. Giles of Indian Medical Service, who was deputed to Assam to make a special study of the tendencies that prevailed among the planters and to evaluate the standard of welfare and sanitation, rightly remarked:

"There is..... too strong a tendency to impute everything to climate. Climate is the scape goat on whose shoulders not only the laity, but also the medical men, are only too ready to lay the blame of all diseases whose causation they may not clearly understood. It is a well sounding word and its mere pronunciation ensures a comfortable feeling that all is well accounted for..... climate has wonderfully little to do with production of diseases, and a foul water supply will do more to raise the death rate than all the changes of climate to be found between the equator and the poles. Nothing shows this better than the uniform good health enjoyed by bodies of man under the most diverse conditions of climate wherever the requisite of good sanitation can be, fulfilled."

Giles suggested certain measures for the general improvement of the garden sanitation of which maintenance of proper drainages, precaution to keep drinking water pure from pollution and construction of latrines were worth mentioning. The suggestions of Giles met the same fate as

54. Ibid.
55. Assam Immigration Report, 1887, Vide Appendix of the report.
previous recommendations to improve the condition of garden life in Assam. Recommendations had never been implemented during the rest of the period under review and the problem of garden sanitation and welfare became the heritage of the post 1901 period.

HEALTH.

Connected with the problem of sanitation was the problem of extending medical facilities to the plantation labourers in Assam. In the early days of tea industry in Assam it was not possible to provide adequate medical facilities. Neither there was independent doctor nor any civil hospital in the province other than small hospitals under the jail authorities. For want of precise information nothing definite can be stated as regards medical facilities extended to the tea labourers in the experimental gardens of the Government at Sadiya. The expediency of sending qualified medical person to Upper Assam to attend the sick labourers was repeatedly emphasised in the early tea proceedings of the Government of Bengal. However, in August 1839, Dr. Lum Qua, a Chinese medical man, was appointed an interpreter of Chinese establishment in Assam with a salary of Rs. 400/- per month. He was also entrusted with the duties of attending sick labourers. In addition, Kala Chand Dey, Sub-Assistant

57. B.R.D.C. (Tea), 26 April, 1839, Sl. 246.
Surgeon of Sibsagar Jail Hospital was specially permitted by the Government to attend the tea labourers periodically for which he received Rs. 70/- as boat allowance and Rs. 100/- as his remuneration. Inspite of that adequate medical facilities were not available at the moment of necessity partly because Dr. Lum Qua remained in Calcutta for the greater part of the year and partly because of heavy engagements of Dr. Kalachand Dey in the district headquarters. Brue reported in 1840 that the sick labourers had to be sent down from Sadiya to Sibsagar in two very small canoes lashed together which itself was sufficient to kill a sick person suffering from fever. In 1839, when the Assam Company was established, the task of extending medical facilities to the tea labourers became all the more difficult. Although, at the beginning, the Company had only two Native Medical Assistants along with two compounders, their services were inadequate, and frequently, therefore, the Company obtained medical aid from the Government Civil Surgeon stationed at Sibsagar. But the lack of adequate accommodation at the Civil Hospital soon demanded an independent hospital establishment in the garden. With the consequent

58. Ibid, 20 September, 1839, Sl. No. 203
60. Ibid, P. 445.
61. Ibid.
increase in the employment of immigrants the situation still further deteriorated. The cases of sick labourers multiplied and it became next to impossible even to offer that volume of already inadequate service from jail hospital as was possible in the earlier days. On the other hand, owing to continued pressure of sick immigrants in the jail hospital, it became equally impossible on the part of the civil authorities to provide medical facilities to the resident population as well as to the convicts. In view of these difficulties, in 1864, the Government of Bengal discontinued the practice of referring the cases of plantation labourers to the jail hospitals in order to extend full medical facilities to the resident population of the district.

Attempts were, therefore, made in some of the tea districts, such as in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, to establish charitable dispensaries. In 1865, a Charitable Dispensary was established in Dibrugarh. This was followed by the establishment of similar hospitals at Tezpur and in other tea districts. Inspite of that, sick immigrants could not be accommodated in all the cases. Instances were not rare when even the village Namghar (prayer house) was used as a temporary hospital for the treatment of small pox and other contagious diseases. For want of adequate medical facilities, very often,

62. Ibid, P.446.
the condition of sick labourers became very much miserable. I.B. White, Assistant Surgeon, Lakhimpur, states: "These people have rarely any friends or families with them and when they got ill have no one to look after their wants and one ruthlessly turned on to the road side to die". The situation demanded immediate need for incorporating legislative provisions in compelling the planters to provide medical facilities in their own gardens. Accordingly, it was provided in the Act VI of 1865 that:

1. Sufficient hospital accommodation (for one in every ten of the labourers employed) was to be provided along with the medicines as per directions of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal.

2. One Medical Officer, holding a diploma, was to be employed in the gardens employing three hundred or more labourers.

3. A fine of rupees not exceeding five hundred was to be imposed upon the employers in case of evasion of law.

Inspite of the enforcement of the said act no immediate improvement was made possible in all the gardens because of paucity of qualified doctors in Assam. However, during the interim period of implementation, the sick labourers, of small gardens as usual, were sent to the Civil Hospitals where room was available on recommendation of the planters. But on account of distant situation of the Civil Hospitals from the plantation areas very often death occurred before the patient could be shifted. There was a constant pressure of patients

66. Vide articles VII and VIII of Act VI of 1865.
in the Civil Hospitals and at the same time there was 
congestions in the charitable dispensaries. Funds at the dis­
posal of the charitable dispensaries were also found extreme­
ly inadequate to defray the ever increasing expenses of immig­
rant patients. Even the funds at the disposal of the Civil 
Hospitals were found, in certain cases, at the lowest ebb and 
barely sufficient to defray any additional expense. Naturally, 
there resulted in what may be called a tug-of-war of evasive 
tendency between the charitable dispensaries and Civil Hos­
pitals in providing a seat to the patient. Each was in the 
habit of avoiding taking extra cases and always pushed the 
patients to other. As a result, patients could neither be 
accommodated in the Civil Hospitals nor in the charitable 
dispensaries. Very often, they were temporarily sheltered by 
the Civil Officers in some sheds. Occasions were there that 
even during the night time only a split bamboo unplastered 
fencing was provided to exclude the loose ponies and cattle, 
which took shelter in the same shed with its human occupants. 
Under such circumstances, it was but natural that many died 
simply due to severe cold; and many for want of care and pro­
per medicine.

Notwithstanding the legislative measures even some

69. A.S. Vol. No. 33 of 1864-66, No. 80, Civil Surgeon Tezpur 
to D.C. Darrang, 28 October, 1865.
70. Ibid, No. 79, 28 October, 1865.
of the big tea companies failed to provide adequate medical facilities. The Commissioner of Assam, writing in October, 1866, reported: "I am quite unable to account for the neglect of the sick at the hospital at Nazira, the head-quarters of the (Assam) Company and under the very eye of the Manager." During February 1867, the Commissioner himself visited a good number of hospitals in Upper Assam. Below is an extract of his remarks made in his inspection report:

"... the hospital shewed a total want of care for the sick in it, they had no proper clothing, no beds, no bedding, nothing but the bare damp mud floor to sleep on and cleanliness appears to be perfectly disregarded... some of the patients were wearing cloths, stiff with the matter flowing from the sores on their bodies.

What struck me most about the wretched creatures was their worn-out mated appearance, they were little better than living skeletons and it was evidently the pressure of their bones on their skins when lying down on the hard mud floor that hurt caused the foul sores and ulcers with which in several cases their bodies were covered. They, one and all, seemed fitless, apathetic and dead to pain with a scant unintelligible expression about their eyes, as if they were thinking of nothing cared for nothing, and were waiting only for the breath to leave the bodies to be quite off their miserable existence. A man in attendance at the hospital told us that he had thrown away in the jungle two dead bodies that morning and the corpse which was lying in the verandah was the third death that day.

.............. I had never before witnessed and could scarcely have imagined so sad a scene of human misery and degradation."

Further, one of the conditions of the Act VI of 1865

71. Ibid, No. 402, Hopkinson to Government of Bengal, 11 October, 1866.

was that a hospital should contain all the medicines generally tabulated by the District Officers as per direction of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. But it appears from the statement of an honest planter that even in a well-managed tea estate like that of Central Assam Tea Company where he himself became a new Manager "the factory was almost without medicines and for those diseases most prevalent, such as diarrhoea, dysentery and fever, there was little or no medicine and quinine."

Besides indifference and neglect of the planters there were other practical difficulties in providing adequate medical facilities to the plantation labourers; of these paucity of doctors was the most important. Already there was a pressing need for doctors all over India at that time and under the circumstances no doctor was found willing to serve in the tea gardens in Assam under trying conditions. Demand for doctors in Assam was so great that if a man identified himself to be a person of medical profession, immediately he could procure a job for him and even could continue until detected. Thus, the Assam Company appointed in 1866 such a quack as a Native Doctor. A good number of labourers practically died as a result of his treatment. In several cases, it was also found that persons engaged as native doctors had neither passed from any institution nor had they adequate experience. In spite of this,

when unhappy incidents occurred both the planters and the Government immediately transferred responsibility to the shoulders of these unfortunate persons.

Thus, for the difficulties that were experienced from time to time, incorporation of further measures of control was considered extremely necessary. The Labour Enquiry Commission of 1867, whose reference has been made earlier, in course of its investigation in Assam, affirmed the earlier reports.  

It recommended the following measures:

1. Substitution of diplomaed Medical Officer for every one hundred of labourers in place of Native Doctor.

2. Establishment of a Central Hospital and appointment of qualified European Circle Medical Inspector in place of Labour Protector in the pay of planter.

The Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal stood opposed to these measures with the remark that planters would be forced to bear too much financial burden to implement such recommendations specially at a time, when their industry faced depression. Further, he pointed out "where are properly qualified doctors to come from?" The Governor-General concurred with the Lieutenant-Governor; and as a result the only additional measure, which was incorporated in the Act II of 1870, was that the employer or any person, through whose wilful neglect the medical facility would not be provided, was to be made liable to pay a fine.

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76. Ibid.
for every week till compliance of the provision of the previous act (Act VI of 1865). But the amount of fine was not mentioned. The other provisions remained, more or less, the same as previous act.

With the improvement of the financial position of tea estates after 1870, however, the employment of unqualified doctors was, more or less, discouraged. In many of the gardens, the employers were forced to maintain improved hospitals along with diplomaed doctors. Proper medicines were also forced to be kept in the stock, quality and description of which were regulated from time to time by the Government of Bengal. After 1872, the situation was much improved due to Sir George Campbell, who kept a personal watch over the tea estates in Assam, and for that reason hardly it was possible for any employer to ignore maintenance of hospitals and qualified doctors. This improvement demanded no change in the Act VII of 1873. Since 1874, when Assam became a separate province under the Chief Commissionership of Keatinge, the implementation of the provisions of the Act was rigidly made. However, some slacknesses were found in some exceptional cases in implementing the provisions of the act. Therefore, fine for such a neglect for each week was made upto £.200/- in the Act I of 1882. Incorporation of such a severe

77. Vide article LXXXVII of Act II of 1870.
79. B.G.P. File No. 42 Paper 3 of 1873-74, P.II.
80. Vide article No. 168 of Act I of 1882.
measure completely changed the situation; and neglect in providing hospital provision had never been reported during the rest of the period under review.

MARKETING FACILITIES.

The immigrant labourers in Assam also experienced, among other things, considerable difficulties in procuring their necessaries of life. Hardly was there any bunsah or moodees (shopkeeper) in the gardens who could supply their requirements. They had to buy all these from the weekly markets, mostly situated at a great distance. Specially during rainy season, owing to impassable roads it was extremely difficult for them to bring their weekly requirements from markets. Under these circumstances, some arrangement was considered necessary to facilitate easy availability of the articles generally consumed by the labourers in the plantations.

In 1866, Henry Hopkinson, the Commissioner of Assam, first took the initiative in the direction. He endeavoured to convince the Government of Bengal the necessity of forcing employers in supplying principal articles of food to their labourers. He proposed that the Managers of the tea gardens should be compelled under legal sanction to keep a store not

82. The Friend of India, Editorial, 27 June, 1867, P. 756.
only of rice, but of dal, chillies, turmeric, tobacco, salt and ghee for the purpose of immigrant labourers. But the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal did not agree to the proposal on the ground that in some localities these articles were really not wanted. "It will suffice" writes Secretary to the Government of Bengal, "...if the Lieutenant-Governor is empowered to make rules for provisioning labourers." Thus, the question of making legislative provision in compelling the planters to keep stores did not proceed further.

As a matter of fact, the planters in their own interest maintained such stores with sundries along with the chief staples of food, in the long run. For such a development, the situation needed no Government interference. Further, with the settlement of time-expired labourers who produced and sold some of these articles to their fellow labourers total dependence on the garden stores gradually lessened. But such dependence could not be wholly avoided altogether for some essential commodities like salt, mustard oil and rice.

REHABILITATION OF THE TIME-EXPIRED LABOURERS.

After 1865 some of the labourers, on expiry of their terms of contract for service, expressed their inclination to settle in the gardens permanently.

85. B.G.P.File No. 303 of 1869-73, No. 5999, 28 December, 1868.
86. Assam Immigration Report, 1896, Para 93.
Naturally, the question of their rehabilitation also came before the authorities. Although no definite policy was laid down neither the Government of Bengal nor even the tea planters could ignore the relative importance of such a question. The Labour Commission of 1867 also greatly emphasised the importance of resettling time-expired labourers and recommended that all sanitary and other provisions, such as supply of water, rice, medical facilities etc, provided to the labourers under contract, should also be extended to them. The Government had examples of resettling time-expired labourers in the interest of other industries. For instance in the sugar plantations of Trinidad, where imported Indian labourers were employed, facilities were given for the purchase of crown land; and by the year 1873, a considerable number of such time-expired labourers without coming back to India already commuted their return passage for the allotment of Crown land. The matter was discussed in the Bengal Council with a view to giving similar encouragement to the time-expired labourers. In 1874, when Keatinge became the first Chief Commissioner of Assam, the matter received serious consideration of the Government. Through his initiative, a definite policy was formulated for encouraging time-expired labourers either to get settled in the Crown lands or

89. Vide P. 341.
90. Assam Immigration Report, 1873 Para 29.
# TABLE NO III

**THE NUMBER OF UN-HEALTHY GARDENS FROM 1882-1896.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District, District,</th>
<th>1882</th>
<th>1883</th>
<th>1884</th>
<th>1885</th>
<th>1886</th>
<th>1887</th>
<th>1888</th>
<th>1889</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1891</th>
<th>1892</th>
<th>1893</th>
<th>1894</th>
<th>1895</th>
<th>1896</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cachar</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylhet</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>57</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
belonged to the gardens. By the year 1879, about 2457 acres of land were allotted in the province to such labourers. The table No. II will indicate the extent to which the time-expired labourers were resettled in the province. A good number of such labourers got themselves settled in the province either as traders, craftsmen or cultivators and some of them again renewed their contracts. Thus, a large portion of waste land of the province was brought under tillage, specially in the Surma Valley, where such settlements increased very rapidly. Consequently, the supply of rice and other staple crops considerably increased due to rehabilitation of time-expired labourers in the gardens.

ACHIEVEMENTS.

With the gradual implementation of various measures of sanitation and for keeping a close watch over the affairs in the gardens, a general improvement was noticeable in the plantations during the last decades of the Nineteenth Century. Many of the unhealthy gardens were made fit for human habitation in the long run. The table No. III will indicate as to how from 1882 to 1896 the number of gardens unfit for human habitation was gradually decreased keeping pace with the gradual implementation of the measures for conservancy. As a result, the rate of mortality, which in the early years of tea industry was

91. Assam Immigration Report, 1899, See under General Remark.
92. Ibid, 1885 Para 10.
TABLE NO. IV

DEATH RATE ON DECREASE.
(1878-1895)
(Compiled on the basis of the Assam Immigration Report)
of the Corresponding year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Death rate per mile.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>66.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>41.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>41.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average 30.7
on the increase at an alarming rate, gradually decreased. The table No. IV will amply exhibit as to how since 1878 to 1895 the rate of mortality was on the decrease. Some variations, however, were those when the rate of mortality, instead of being decreased, had been increased. In such cases, susceptibility to disease to some particular race of labour was responsible. The labourers from the plain districts like Bihar, Bengal etc were unable to withstand the climate of Assam and died when a little irregularity was made in attending them on the part of management. Such occasional rise in the mortality table was also responsible for the opening of new gardens, where during the interim period of implementation of the measures of sanitation many died. This shows the connection of mortality with the climate of Assam and inability of the particular class of imported labourers from plain districts to get easily acclimatised.

Nevertheless, in such cases the attention of the Government was drawn even by raising questions in the British House of Commons for which the Secretary of State for India had to assure the House that suitable action would be taken in the matter.* Whenever such variations were marked it was also invariably followed by agitation in the Bengal Press, for which


* Thus, early in August 1881 the attention of the British House of Commons was drawn by Mr. O'Donnel, himself a member, on the subject and the Secretary of the State, the Marquis of Hartington, assured the House that steps would be taken for its reduction.
### Table No. VI

DECREASE OF BIRTH RATE FROM 1882-1893
(Compiled on the basis of the Assam Immigration Report)
of the respective year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>13.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>11.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>11.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>11.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>10.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>10.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>10.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>10.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>8.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>9.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>8.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>7.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
remedial measures from time to time, as has already been stated, were introduced in.

Notwithstanding the precautionary measures to improve the health of the garden labourers, the birth rate, instead of being increased, was on the decrease. This was not due to lack of proper rehabilitation or any climatic or other natural reasons. One common cause for the low birth rate was the practice of abortion in large numbers. In some cases it was not intentional but accidental. A pregnant woman, at the very time when she could earn double and even more money, did not like being put off duty. She usually worked while she ought to be at rest. The result was abortion, either accidental or intentional. As for months before child birth, the woman was not capable of doing full task or double tasks and again for months after child birth as she was hampred with a helpless infant she was unable to earn as much as she could have earned had she been childless.

The table No. VII, compiled on the basis of the official records, will show as to how rate of birth in the plantation was on the gradual decrease. This indicates, as will be seen in the next chapter, life in the plantation was really hard and low wages were no less responsible for that. Table No. VII will clearly

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* D.C.Lakhimpur, thus, rightly observes: "A child to a good working coolie woman is a nuisance. If she takes proper care of her infant she must in a measure neglect her work and earn less money" (Ibid).
## TABLE NO. VII
**BIRTH RATE AND DEATH RATE COMPARED.**

(Compiled on the basis of the Assam Immigration Report of the corresponding year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Births</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
<th>Birth rate per mile</th>
<th>Death rate per mile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1877</td>
<td>4950</td>
<td>7465</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>5506</td>
<td>11421</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>66.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>4996</td>
<td>6450</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>5904</td>
<td>6657</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>7122</td>
<td>6171</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>7824</td>
<td>7590</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>7887</td>
<td>9535</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>8629</td>
<td>11583</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>9456</td>
<td>10711</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>8740</td>
<td>12059</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>9043</td>
<td>11633</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
exhibit that the birth rate was proportionately low with the rate of death. Inspite of all improvements, it indicates a deplorable state of life that prevailed in the plantation during the period under review.