CHAPTER – 2

LIFE AND CULTURE OF THE TEA GARDEN COMMUNITY OF ASSAM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE ORIYA PEOPLE

2:01 Origin:

The tea garden laborers; now constituted as a community are the descendents of those poor immigrants, whose fate forced them to come to the tea plantations of Assam; victimized by bribery, coercion and deceit. The immigration continued for more than a century; from 1841 to 1960; i.e., even after independence in 1947.\textsuperscript{32} Tea plantation in Assam was growing and the demand of such cheap laborers equally increasing. Uniform recruitment procedure of transporting laborers advised by the Government became lucrative business under unscrupulous contractors, appointed by the Planters Association. The ‘Indian Emigration Act, 1873’, passed by the Government to recruit laborers within the British colonies was applied in case of the recruitment within the country.\textsuperscript{33} The first batch of 652 people recruited by the Assam Company from Hazaribag in 1840 met with disaster and decease and how many of them could reach their destinations is unknown.\textsuperscript{34} Disarrangement, unhygienic lodging, lack of medical facilities and food supply together with the cruelty and hardship in their garden life made them realize their guilt. They wish to leave but all in vain. Statutory right of their repatriation was legalized only in 1932. By this time they had either

\textsuperscript{33} op. cit., Borpujari, 1963, p.231
\textsuperscript{34} ibid.
forgotten or had kept only some fake idea about their native States. Fate made them grasp the tea plantation for the sake of their livelihood.

The people living in the tea plantations of Assam, depending on tea production directly or indirectly consists of two groups: the tribes and the castes of roughly 40:60 ratio.\textsuperscript{35} The tribes mostly belong to the Chhotanagpur plateau and its adjacent areas of hilly tracks and thick forests. The area comprises of the south western part of present Bengal in the east; the Nagpur principality on the west; Ganges in the north and some parts of the northern Orissa in the south. This area at present includes Jharkhand, Chhatisgarh, a part of Madhya Pradesh and a major portion of Orissa; bordering areas of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. All the tribal origins from these areas could be identified among the tea garden communities of Assam.\textsuperscript{36} The castes; originated from the agricultural groups were the inhabitants of almost all the plains of Orissa and partly from the plains of Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhatisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. Very few from the plains of Tamil Nadu may also be seen among them.

These castes, with their several linguistic segments were separated with small regions under a king of a small principality during the British period. The king was either a pensioner or a tributary ruler. The regional language, though having its own literature is distributed into a number of segments in the form of speaking served as a boundary of such principality. The rulers


\textsuperscript{36} loc.cit., Das, K.B. & Mahapatra, L.K.
of these areas with their traditional administration were responsible for the fate of these people till the British occupied their territories. They were the protectors of their subjects in difficulties in one hand and suppressive following the age old traditions, believing them to be beneficial for the king to show their importance in the society. The traditional 'jhakor' became instrument of oppression with some people of the high rank, unknowingly backed by the ruler himself. The British administration broke the system, equalized all as human being and became responsible for the suppressed class to see life with new vision.\(^{37}\) That was the cause why the people of lower category did not participate in the 1857 revolution with the ruling class. Prior to the British reformation policy they intentionally wanted to leave their regions to get rid of the age old suppression as a lower caste.\(^{38}\) Thus, they began to take risk, going with the recruiters into the tea plantations of Assam. The drought, famine etc. were secondary and artificial factors prepared by the British as one of their administrative policy.\(^{39}\)

The tribes on the other hand were dissatisfied of the land policy of the British administration; imposing taxes on their forests and hills which they had never known in their life. The Kol rebellion(1831) and the Santhal rebellion(1855) were such rebellions against the British policy.\(^{40}\) The British compelled them either to pay tax in cash or to leave lands for the person who had no way but to leave their homelands and to go for work for their livelihood. Masses of such landless tribes at last fall into the trap of the recruiters of the plantations of Assam. The

\(^{37}\) Smith, Vincent: 1983: The Oxford History of India, New Delhi, p 733

\(^{38}\) Ibid., p.734.


missionaries were permitted to preach the gospel, change the mind of the individual into pro-British thinking and thus made them easy accessible for the plantations.\textsuperscript{41} The Company Government was successful to earn revenue against these lands and at the same time permitted to immigrate people from the disturb areas to their tea plantations in Assam. The policy helped the planters to open virgin lands for new plantations. Within a period of 50 years tea garden grew from 295 in 1881 to 883 in 1937.\textsuperscript{42} Progress of the tea plantations in Assam helped the government to wipe out the growing dissatisfaction among the tribal people in their previous provinces.

The average annual recruitment of the labourers was 30,000 between 1859 to 1909 minimum at 200 and maximum at 1.10 lakhs. Till 1910 the total number of the immigrants was 15.60 lakhs which extended to 32.40 lakhs by 1950.\textsuperscript{43} The present population of the tea garden community is approximately 70 lakhs as claimed by most of their social organizations out of which some 20 to 30 lakhs are directly or indirectly dependent on the tea plantations.

2; 02: Immigration, Origin of the plantation and the Labour supply:

Discovery of the indigenous tea in Assam is credited to Robert Bruce, who was introduced with it by the Singphow Chief Bisa Gam in 1823. Prior to this, Mandebelo has written about tea in 1640. Sir Joseph Bank tried to grow it in 1788 with foreign seeds. Beside, the people of Assam had a habit to drink

\begin{itemize}
\item[41.] Ibid
\item[42.] Bora, Luhit Kumar, Asomor Chah Janagusthir Samaj aru Sanskriti, Dibrugarh, 2006. p.12
\item[43.] Phukan, U.: Ex-Tea Garden Labour of Assam, New Delhi. 1984, p.11
\end{itemize}
‘Fanap’ which was actually tea, noticed by Col. Letter in 1815. After the annexation of Assam by the East India Company in 1826, the probability of tea cultivation was confirmed and Lord William Bentinck, the Governor General, allowed to cultivate it in experimental basis under the Government initiative in 1834. A few boxes of the produced were sent to London in 1839 for its taste. The result was satisfying. So, by 1852, European planters began to rush into Assam for tea cultivation. There were 20 tea gardens in Assam in 1851, which increased to 883 in the next 50 years. Now, the tea industry of the North-East produces 77 percent of the total tea production of the country. The value of tea crops in this area is more than 600 Crores. It earns Crores of rupees a year and contributes in the major part of the foreign exchange of the country.

Tea is an agricultural crop and so requires a large number of labour force for its cultivation. Initially, the planters opened virgin lands, clear jungles employing the local indigenous people like Kacharis, Chutias and Nagas. But these people desert plantations during the plucking seasons for their paddy cultivation in the villages leaving the planters with heavy loss due to not harvesting the crops. The condition forced the planters to think about the other sources of labour supply and approach the government.

The East India Company’s government, as it was a profit-making trading Company, was using their administrative system to increase the exchequer of the company from every source. After occupation; virgin lands were opened for taxation which

44. Chakravorty, R.N., Socio-Economic Development, Dibrugarh, 1997, p. 30
45. Ibid. p. 29
46. Ibid. p. 43.
was untouched by previous rulers being inhabited by indigenous tribes since unknown times. The high lands of the Chhotanagpur plateau inhabited by most of such tribes fell on their eye resulting clash with them.47

The Company used various methods to desert these people from their land and out of starvation; compelling them to do anything for bread. The Company's government advised the planters to recruit these hunger stricken people to employ in their plantations. This way, the Company's government wiped out the growing dissatisfaction of the tribes in one hand and opens a new source of taxation from the virgin lands of Assam by providing the planters for tea cultivation against small taxes, on the other.

The people from the plains were also affected by the land policy of the government. The Permanent Settlement, 1793 could not improve the condition of the riots, illicit Zamindars paying fixed sum of money to the company own the Zamindaris and started to snatch more and more from their riots for their own luxurious living, neglecting improvement or irrigation of the lands. Lands were left barren without cultivation.48 The cultivators were made victim of excess payments than their capacity, leading them to become beggars. These people of the plains, most of who were from the castes of the lower category also fell on the eye of the recruiters to come to the plantations of Assam for work. The drought, famine took place during that time in these areas were due to the revenue policy of the Company's hunger which was artificially imposed on them by the Company's Government to compel them to go the British.

47. Saharia, Dr. Umesh Chandra: Tea Labourers of Assam, Dibrugarh. 2005 p 52
colonies including the plantations of Assam. The other causes of immigration were completely social such as transgression of the social conduct; individual looking for adventure; etc. but all were victimized by coercion, deceit and bribery.

The immigration can be distributed phase wise according to its nature and periods. The early immigration started in 1841 by the Assam Company had no statutory control. Some 1000 people from 'Kol' race were brought from Singbhum area. Later the hunger stricken people of Bengal, United Province and Madras Provinces were ready to go anywhere or do anything so that they could feed their families. Such people were easily deceived for better life in Assam. They were cheap rated labourers for the recruiters; whom the Planters' Association allowed to recruit for them. Unscrupulous persons entered into this business who enticed such people; promising cultivable land, good wages and better life in Assam.49 Most of the tribes of the Chhotanagpur area were victimized during this period which continued till 1859. After that the 'Workman's Breach of Contract Act 1859 came into force enforcing a worker to work for the planters for 5 years with whom he had signed and agreement.50 Thus the Coolie trade started from the Kol's brought by Assam Company in 1841 and the immigrants brought there after were also began to be called 'koli' or 'kuli'.51

The second phase starts with the 5 years and later 3 years agreement labourers immigration. The Act of 1859 was amended and 'Licensed Contractor System' was introduced in 1865. There after licenses provided to the contractors. More

49. op.cit , Guha, Amalendu, 1988. p.43.
50 op.cit , Griffith, Sir Percival. 1967. p.294
legal rights to the managers were given to keep their recruits under their control as the previous Act did not give much protection against dissertations. The Act also reduced 5 years contract to 3 years. The time bound contract attracted many people with the hope of earning money and to return after the expiration of the contract. But their objective went into vain, as after their expiration, they did not know where to go or how to reach their native states. Most of the time expired labourers either re-entered into fresh contract or turned towards the neighbouring villages; where they opened new lands and settled down. Individual planters sent out their garden 'sardārs' to recruit labourers from their own areas, also legalized in 1870. The 'Tea District Emigration Act 1883' permitted free recruitment outside the provisions where the term did not exceed one year. Thus, during this period the pāānch-bachhriā, tin-bachhriā, no-māsiā, chho-māsiā, tin-māsiā contracts were also allowed for recruitment.  

The third phase started with the abolition of the Contractor system in 1893 and the recognition given to the 'Sardari' system of recruitment. The indenture system was practically abolished in 1924 and came into effect from 1926; only there after the garden labourers did not require signing any contract for their employment. The Tea District Emigration Labour Act of 1932 provided statutory rights to all immigrants to be repatriated from Assam, with their families at the expense of their employer after three years. The Act also provided with permission for new non-government organizations for recruitment and repatriation of the labourers. A controller of Emigrants was appointed by the Government to look into the matters. Thus, during this period several steps were taken to improve the

52. Informer: Sri Ratan Tanti (65) on 31.12.2004
53 loc.cit., Griffith,
recruitment and repatriation matters. The new improvement also allowed the garden labourers to sign as permanent labour force; slowing down the settlement in the village as ex-tea garden labourers. This condition, of course, could not stop importing labourers from outside and came to an end only when stringent penalties were imposed on illicit labour transport. The Industrial Committee on Plantation declared recruitment of labourers outside Assam illegal in 1957.54

Immigration of labourers under a number of Acts systemized the illicit labour transporting and not for the improvement of the condition of labourers during their transportation. Recruitment continued for a century and how many were actually recruited and repatriated are not known. Unscrupulous people engaged as contractors had their interest in the number of the recruits than their quality. Many died on the way or in the unhealthy sanitation system in the plantations as reported by the Enquiry Committee appointed by the Bengal Government in 1861.55 Thus Patel remarked:-

"The horrors of slave trade pale before the horror of coolie trade of Assam and Cachar in the year of 1861-62". (Patel, 1965, p.27).

The number of labourers recruited during the year1859 was 2000, when during 1909 it was 1.10 lakhs an average of 30,000 were recruited annually during this period, numbering to 15.60 lakhs. And between 1911 and 1950 it was 32.40 lakhs. The gross import of labourers till 1950 was 48 lakhs in both the valleys. The unassisted return or ex-tea labourers and officially

repatriated people were not included. The official record of repatriation till 1950 was 2.0 lakhs only.

2:03: Life in the plantation:

A cup of tea early in the morning freshens up a person for the whole day. The life of the people who produce this famous beverage is however dull and drab, toiling eight hours a day under certain disciplines. So the nature of job they are engaged is more important; to understand their life in the plantations.

The planters put the immigrants in the confinement of the tea garden 'line' to avoid any kind of outside influences over them. About a century they were kept aloof completely unknown of the changing situation of the country. The 'Indian National Congress' was born; their matters were discussed in the Second Session of the Calcutta Conference. The independent movement started; the Second World War and the ultimate gain of independence; very little of those changes were known to them. This was due to the special measure taken by the planters not to allow any influence of the independent movement on them.

The tea gardens were a kind of independent states within the country in those days. The managers of the garden enjoyed magisterial power to arrest defaulter or deserter of the garden and to punish them. The poor labourers had to work ten to twelve hours a day but could not earn their wages. Because wages were given on nirikh work or on completion of a certain limit of work for the day. The nirikh work was such that even a healthy worker could not complete it in time. This way, out of a

57. op cit., Chakravorty (1997) p.49
week they were given three or four day’s wages. A small quantity of ration and other materials were also provided to them by the management, so that they need not go out to purchase it. Weekly and fortnightly markets were arranged for them inside the garden premises. Permission was to be taken to contact an outsider. All judicial, including the socio-cultural matters had been looked after by the garden managers. There were no leisure hours; even on Sundays works had to be done. Few fortunate who were pluckers in the garden, used this day in their paddy fields mostly on wet areas in the garden provided to them by the management. This kind of lands were in damp areas under the free grants of land which were unfit for tea plantation, so given to the labourers against a small rent for paddy cultivation.⁵⁸

The labourers had to work in the open garden facing all the happenings during the day on their head without much protections offered by the management. The routine work starts early in the morning for the next eight hours; with few minutes break in between, to have their breakfast. They have no lunch hours. They could not leave the working place until they finish their work without which they will loss the wage of that day.

The nature of works is different according to the main two seasons of the year. The winter seasons is used for harvesting seasons of the green leaves and manufacture it into the solid brown tea. The works of the winter season done on nirikh system; tough enough to get full wages; while the summer works sometime allowed with thikā works; making the workers more harvest.⁵⁹ A small number of workers, mostly the males

⁵⁹. loc. cit., Chakravorty
are engaged in manufacturing work in the factory during the late night when the temperature is suitable for the tea. The manufacturing work followed in the time bound discipline and without stop. From the factory manager to the shorting and rolling babu and all the workers are engaged in this continuous process. The extra works provided with extra benefits, called thikā.  

In such a busy and detached situation, the life style and the socio-cultural activities they borrowed from their forefathers saw no change and the traits of their originality still remain among them. Simultaneously, as habituated with hard lives, they could not think about changes in their lifestyle. Gardens remained as private properties and impregnable, so organized protest was impossible. Even the trade union movement came among them lately and only after independence.

Situations slowly changed after independence. The white managers from the tea garden began to go replacing their posts to the native managers called kālā-sāheb by the garden workers. The mystery of the kālā-sāheb was that, most of them had no concern with the Indian national sentiment and were more suppressive. So, in true meaning, independence could not come to the laboring people of the tea gardens of Assam when the entire Country enjoyed it in 1947.

After the independence, the Congress Government, by the initiative of the INTUC, provided the 'Plantation Labour Act, 1951 which was passed in the State Assembly for implement as

60. Ibid.
61 Tanti, B.: Karam Festival: A Socio-Cultural Study of the Tea Garden Community of Assam (unpublished dissertation for the M.Phil Degree to Gauhati University in 1997-98. p.11.
the 'Tea Plantation Labour Rule 1956'. The planters there after liable to provide with the facilities provided in the Act to the labourers. But the Act could not wipe out the tears of the plantation labourers permanently. Very soon, the clever Kala-Saheb of the tea garden detected the drawbacks of this Act and appointed law experts as 'Personnel Manager' to use them for the interest of the management. For instance, tea factories and the permanent workers were reduced into a limit that the provisions of the Act only could be maintained only. The trade union organization 'Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha', the 'Assam Tea Tribes Students Association', the 'All Adivashi Students Association' and all other organization have been demanding amendment of the Plantation Act, 1951. But the open door policy of the government for privatization and the impact of the globalization stand against the changes they require.

2:04: Social condition:

The people who had been recruited for the tea plantations between 1840 and 1950 belongs to the different parts of the Country; mostly from Bengal, Central, Eastern and Southern Provinces, comprising the present States of West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. These states were originally divided into a number of cultural regions with small principalities and therefore the people immigrated carried with them varieties of cultural differences. Their dialect also varies from region to region, caste to caste and tribe to tribe; unintelligible to one another. With these varieties, they began their life in the.

62 op. cit. Chakravorty, 1997 p 51
63 Ibid , p.47
64 op.cit , Griffith. (1965) p.445.
plantation, in a similar condition provided by the planters. Initially, they had to face a number of difficulties during interaction with their co-worker. The garden management on their part was successful to find out some persons from among them, who could understand some of the common words from the dialects or languages. The words, specially required for working condition became intermediary in the work. Gradually, such words developed into the garden-Hindi; used by the managerial staff and the baabas. But among the workers themselves a new type of saadri developed as intermediary unwritten language. This language played the major role during their initial interactions with each other. This intermediary language helped them to come closer which gradually developed in to the tea garden community of the State.65

The tea garden families are patriarchal like other Indian families and composed of father, mother, sons, daughters and sometime brothers, sisters and grandparents under a single hearth in which the father is responsible for its growth or fall. He is also responsible to keep the rites and rituals of the family intact and thus place his family as one of the part in the kutumb. The kutumb consists of a particular creed belonging to several clans. Several kutumb consists of a language group or a society. Such groups may be seen several in numbers in a single tea garden. But in the basti or village, sometime such groups are found intermixed with people from other castes and tribes. The father and mother, both of whom as wage earners are responsible to support the family with their income.66

The tea garden community is composed of two main groups. The tribal people of the hilly tracks of Chotanagpur.

65 Ibid., p.317
66 loc.cit., Chakravorty.
plateau including its adjacent areas and the scattered castes from the semi-plains of the eastern and central India. The Oraon, Munda, Santhal, Kharia, Sabar etc. are such tribes with their individual dialects and clans. The castes originated from the agricultural groups could be classified linguistically as several social groups such as Bengali, Bhojpuri, Oriya, Chhatisgarhi, Khortha, Kurmali and Paanch-Porgonia, Telegu and Tamil speaking people. In the environment of tea garden, their languages intermixed with each other and at present none can speak the pure regional languages originally belonging to them. This is due to their common living style in the lines of the tea garden. Now, this community becomes the unavoidable part in every aspects of life of the State.

Both the castes and tribes of the tea community are composed of more than a hundred sub-castes or clans. They are- Āryamālā, Bhaktā, Bhuuyān, Bediyā, Beldār, Bāsor, Bonjārā, Bhātt, Bāsphor, Dāndori, Dondosh, Dushād, Gond, Ghānsi, Hāri, Holār, Klut Khātuwā, Khodāl, Kohār, Komār, Koirā, Lohār, Mādāri, Mirdhā, Mājubor, Nuniā, Nāth, Jolhā, Pāshi, Pāidu, Pānikā, Pāno, Rājwār, Turi, Teli, Chāmhār, Pātro, Tānti, Bodi, Asur, Boigā, Bhumij, Binsiā, Birhod, Birjā, Chero, Chik, Bārāik, Dhānuwār, Gāuḍ, Gorāit, Kuwār, Karmāli, Koruwa, Kol, Khāriā, Kherwād, Koyā, Kondpān, Kishān, Khonyor, Lodhā, Māhli, Mālpāhādiā, Mānki, Mundā, Nāgāsiā, Nāgbānsi, Orāng, Porjā, Prodhān, Sabar, Sāwrā, Sānthāl, Gāḍā, Kurmi, Māhāto, Abhir, Gowālā, Chowdhri, Bāḍhori, Bhondā, Mudi, Telegā, Toshā, Tontubāi, Pāntānti, Pouri, Karmakār, Ghātwār, Lodh, Gonju, Porān, Rājput, Karan, Khondāit, Mohānti, Pātnāyak, Nāyak, Nāg, Sāhu, MOhāpātra, Beherā, Pator,

68. op.cit. Tasa (Ed), 2003, P.25.
Pātwā, Māli, Kishān, Bāmon, Kondho, Kāsāri, Modi, Rajak, Bākti etc. 69 These are the main titles. Now-a-days a number of them are known from their clans thus the Oraon writes – Ekkā, Khālkho, Minj, Kujur, etc. while the Santhals like – Mājhi, Hemron, Tudu etc. and the Mundās like – Bhengrā, Tuti, Tiggā, Soreng etc. The tribes, originally belong to the present Jharkhand, They like to be called ādivashi rather than attach themselves with tea. This is because most of them have already left the tea gardens and settled in the villages with other occupations. 70

The list of the 115 castes mentioned above includes both castes and tribes which have their own sub-castes and clans. Deoram Tasa has mentioned only 75 such castes and tribes. The major tribes are the Oraons, Munda, Kharia, Santhal, Bhumij, Koya, Saora and Kondho. The other six, he has mentioned are actually the branches of the Munda family. I have found 17 distinct tribes in his list. A few of the sub-castes of the Munda family are mentioned by him as major tribes. Similarly, the castes have also their own sub-castes. 71

The present condition of these castes and tribes is in most of the cases unidentifiable as they are already mixed up to each other and very few can say about their individual identity. This is the result of the registration of their names in the plantation records not by caste or tribe but with the family identity of husband and wife. The other cause was that the identification as caste or tribe had not yet recognized by the Government when they were immigrated.

69 Ibid
70 Ibid
The tribes and the castes have their own clans and within the clans they also have totem (gotra). Totems represent their individual duty in the clan. Most of the caste and tribes of the tea garden community writes the name of their caste or ‘jati’ rather than their totem or ‘gotra’. For example, those who write Oraon as their title, they have their own ‘gotra’ or clan as Tirkey, Kujur, Ekka, etc. Representing their duty as totem they show respect to the item related to their clan. For example, those who bear the totem ‘Nag’ (Cobra) never kill a ‘Nag’ or the snake rather they fold their hands in obeisance taking up some dust from the track through which it passes; place it on their head as mark of veneration. Totem incest is known as ‘gotra-bodh’ or clan murder.72

Some totems compose clear supposed to have descended from a common ancestor or a mythical figure. More than one totem found with individual status, higher and lower in its clan itself. Only among the tribes like the Oraon and Munda there are more than twenty clans. If clans are counted the total number of the clans among the tea garden community will be more than thousand.73

The castes and tribes of the tea garden community has also suffered the same situation what the others met with in the past in their original places. They were the people who had to suffer for centuries under the so called high castes in the society. This was one of the causes why they did not hesitate to leave their forefathers land permanently. The roots of the caste system tried to renew in the situation of the plantation also.

72 Ibid., pp.163-180.
Sometime the plantation management themselves tried to enhance it for their own benefit. The immigrants belong to the higher castes were provided with special kind of jobs and the people belong to the lower castes were given to the jobs of cleaning the hospitals, bungalows, offices etc.\textsuperscript{74} The situation still existing but the common living condition of the whole working people led them to think that they are the common sufferer in the hands of the foreign planters. Directly or indirectly the National movement left a positive impact on them. The present situation, however, saw complete change and racial differences get prominence in the family rituals only.

\textbf{2:06: Economic condition:}

The tea garden community is divided into two major groups. The tea garden labors living and working in the tea garden and the tea garden laborers living in the neighboring villages occupying limited plots of land provided by the planters against a very nominal tax which was under the free grant of land.\textsuperscript{75} A few of them are also successful to acquire lands in the villages and they are permanently engage in agricultural activity. The formers are fulltime worker in the tea garden earn their bread by working for the production of tea. The later are named as Ex-tea garden laborers depend mainly on their cultivation. Besides, there are two other groups which have emerged recently. One of them is the outcome of the labor cut policy of the tea garden management. After seventies the planters rejected excess laborers in the tea garden and began to employ them only during the plucking seasons. These seasonal workers are not other than the name cut without completing their terms and the children who have attained the

\textsuperscript{74} op.cit., Tasa, 2002. p.5.
\textsuperscript{75} ibid., p13
age of being employed but have to live unemployed due to the negotiation of 'replacement' by the management with the ACMS.\textsuperscript{76} The other factor of the growing of the Ex-tea garden labor is due to the limited land against the growing family with children and grand children.

The total number of the permanent laborers is 4 lakhs in more than a thousand plantations while the seasonal workers are between 15 to 20 lakhs.\textsuperscript{77} These seasonal workers or the phāltoo workers have no right to claim any facilities from the management according to the Tea Plantation Labor Act 1951. Recently, they are allowed for seasonal deposit of their Provident fund with accommodation, ration in low rate and medical facilities during their working period.\textsuperscript{78} They work more than six months a year during the plucking seasons. They live either in their relatives houses in the villages or in the tea gardens in the temporary chāli made of bamboo and thatch attached to the quarters of the permanent workers. The managements forbade such attachment in the company's quarter but never take any action as these people form reserve labor force to employ during the plucking seasons. It is interesting to note that the phāltoo laborers are also giving their contribution of membership in half through pay cut in the pay roll by the management for the ACMS. During the off

\textsuperscript{76} Informant: Sri Juseph Rona on 25.12.2002
\textsuperscript{77} Bose, A. Demographic Diversity of India, 2001 Census, B.R.Publishing Corporation (p) Ltd., Delhi 122-123
\textsuperscript{78} Informant: Sri Rupesh Gowala on 20.4.2006.

(The replacement of the parents after their retirement benefited only the two children when the rests left unemployed. They have to depend on the seasonal work only. In Tinsukia district such laborers could be noticed in the central places of the town, staying for 'hazira' work from early in the morning at 6 am. The towns falling under the NH 37 & NH 38 are having such distinct places for waiting of these laborers).
season they are oust from their work and they have to depend on daily 'hāzirā' work they manage to get from outside. The other group is the emerging educated class who are the professionals in different Government, semi-Government and private departments. Most of them have come from the villages and are from sound economic background. A very few also found involved in political activities, small contractors and businessmen etc. This fourth group, though small in number, may also be called the educated class are socio-politically aware and participating in the process of the socio-economic development of the whole community. About 90% from among them are engaged in one or the other social organizations and playing their part for the development of the society.

To understand more clearly about the economic condition of the tea garden workers it is important to know the history and development of their employment at the initial stage. It is well known that the forefathers of the above four economic groups had been brought into Assam to work in the tea plantations since 1840. They were indenture laborers for 5 years and 3 years terms for a century and repatriation of them by their employers was bound by law. But unfortunately the planters did not take interest to repatriate rather they were intrigued by the planters for new contracts with advance-payments. Those who did not enter into new contracts had no idea about how to return. They entered the nearby villages, opened virgin land, and began cultivation. These people later named as Ex-tea garden laborers by the State Government. The economic condition of these people; if possess sufficient land, is better than those of the tea laborers depending on their daily wages working in the tea garden.79

During the early period there was no resemblance of wages for the laborers in the different gardens. Most of the planters used to supply their essential commodities rather than paying of the wages. Salaries left unpaid for long for which a number of riots and strikes took place for these arrears since 1847. The "Transport of Native Labor Act 1863 amended for equal wages in all the gardens at Rs. 5 for man, Rs. 4 for women and Rs. 3 for children workers.\textsuperscript{80} This new rate of wage however, met with objection of the planters complaining of their higher expenses without return. This rate of wages continued till 1910 for a period of 45 years when the price of the essential commodities risen three to four times higher than it was in 1865. Thus the economic condition of the tea laborers was such that they could not think about other things than what they required for survival. The planters wanted them to work permanently in the plantation for their benefit. Recruitment of laborers from far away areas was costly during this period. The British Government helped the planters in various ways to earn profit by tea sale throughout the world. Nearly half of the world populations were habituated to consume tea by this time.

During the post independence era tripartite meetings between ACMS and ABITA joined by the Labor Commissioner to the State Government to decide on the wages of the tea plantation laborers.\textsuperscript{81} In such meetings, however, plantation problems get more importance than the price hike on which wages should be decided. It was observed that when price of rice rose to double in ten years the wage of a worker increased to 20\% only during this period. The recent increase of wage of a garden laborer is roughly Rs.60/- while Rs.31.60 was continued till the starting of this century. Thus the economic

\textsuperscript{80} op.cit., Guha (1988) p.16.
\textsuperscript{81} op.cit., Kurmi (Ed) 2003 p.477.
condition of the tea garden laborers is worsened year after year. They are more concerned thinking about how to save themselves and their children from starvation and could never think about other things related to development.\textsuperscript{82}

The economic condition of the Ex-tea garden laborers is equally deplorable. A good percentage of them use to meet their shortage of food by working in the neighboring gardens during plucking season. Very few could depend on their cultivation. Due to shortage of land a vast number of them become wage earners outside the garden in other industries or enterprises. A small number of them are drivers, handymen, craftsmen, carpenter, mason worker, iron worker, road laborer, mechanics, electrician etc. All of them are newly emerged skilled workers, but as not trained in the ITI, and without a certificate cannot claim for proper placing in the employment. They form the cheap rated artisans under the different enterprises including the plantations.\textsuperscript{83}

The forth group, though small in numbers, are educated and professionals. Their economic condition is not different than the average professionals of their ranks. A good number of educated are however, unemployed and unskilled who engaged themselves in the socio-cultural activities joining the organizations established for that purpose. Sometimes they attract the public opinion towards them and are successful to get some contracts in the tea plantation or other profit making

\textsuperscript{82} loc.cit., Bora

\textsuperscript{83} During my field work I came into contact with such artisans in many tea gardens. For example Sri Bijoy Nayak of Baghjan T.E. and Sri Hiralal Robidas of Deamooli T.E. in the district of Tinsukia.
organization. For this, they have to show their relation with the local political leaders and do not hesitate to become tool of them during the elections.  

A good number of the illiterates, both in the plantation and villages are haluwa (contracted season worker) under sound cultivators. A few are small bepari (salesman) dealing with firewood, fish, vegetables etc. The physically unable old women or the sick use to sale murhi (dry crakers made of rice) and hadia (home made drink) etc.  

The overall economic condition of the tea garden community is meager even though they work hard wherever they are engaged. This proves that the managements of the plantation and the Government labor policy are not adequate to meet their poverty and so responsible for their backwardness.

2:07: Political condition:

The tea garden community is related with the daily rated work in the tea garden since the beginning of the plantation. The fortunate few, who come out from the tea gardens and become cultivators, somehow managed to educate their children. Many of them are involved in local politics. The huge numbers of uneducated are still ignorant about their voting rights.

Sense of politics came to them through trade union activities. The independent movement has very little impact on them as they were kept isolated from the influence of the movement by the British planters. The Congress men did not

84 Most of the recent ex-ATTSA leaders are found engaged in this process.
85 It is a general scene in the worker's 'line' of a tea garden.
take any interest to involve them in the National movement; rather the National leaders advised their State workers not to involve them in the agenda of the National movement.\textsuperscript{86} Perhaps, this is the causes why the pro-communist AITUC (All India Trade Union Congress) first took interest to organize them under their trade union. During the pre-independent era, this organization had a significant influence over them due to its leftist character. But the situation before and after the Second World War, which was an atmosphere of anti-communist mentality of the allied powers pull them back from more penetration into the working class of the tea garden. The British Government in India, a member of the allies could not tolerate AITUC activities among the working classes in India and allowed the Congress men to work in the plantation.\textsuperscript{87} Only after 1947 the Congress workers realized to organize the tea workers trade union. This was the long run impact on the plantation workers as it opened a new path for organized trade unionism. In 1947, the INTUC (Indian National Trade Union Congress) came into existence as the organized sector of the working class under the Congress party.\textsuperscript{88} The INTUC, began to work for the tea workers under mutual understanding with the tea garden management. In 1958 the ACMS (Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha) was founded as an INTUC affiliated trade union organization of the tea garden workers.\textsuperscript{89} The later history of this union involved with the vote bank politics. Almost all of the political leaders coming out from this community after independence are belong to this trade union and from the Congress ticket.

\textsuperscript{86} op.cit., Guha (1988) p.293
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.p.294.
\textsuperscript{89} loc.cit., Guha.
Before the INTUC a number of trade union activities were there during the pre-independent era. A few of the secret were unions stealthily functioning in many tea gardens under the "Cachar Chah Bagan Mazdoor Union" in the Barak valley.\textsuperscript{90} The "Assam Tea Laborers Federation" founded in Sibsagar in 1945 by Mr. P. M. Sarwan had it's affiliation to this organization of Cachar. Mr. P. M. Sarwan, a Christian educated youth strives for the welfare of the tea garden community in alliance with the British planters.\textsuperscript{91} At the end of the war, the "Indian Tea Association" laid down some condition on which trade unions could be recognized. The major conditions were that an office staff of a tea garden cannot be a member of their union and there should not be communist influence directly or indirectly.

CITU (Center of Indian Trade Union) a CPM (Communist Party, Marxist) affiliated union has little impact among the tea garden laborers though it is working among them since independence. The other unions came into existence before and after independence were "Hind Mazdoor Sabha", "Axom Chah Sramik Union", and "Sram Parishad". These trade unions, all of which backed by certain political parties tried to build vote banks for their respective parties.\textsuperscript{92} But now they have very little impact left of their parties among the tea garden laborers.

There are also a good number of socio-cultural organizations belong to the students, youths, cultural groups etc. are functioning for the development of the tea garden community. They all claim to be non-political organizations but directly or indirectly their involvement with politics becomes

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} op.cit., Kurmi, (Ed), 2001.p.482.
\textsuperscript{92} loc.cit., Saikia.
clear during the elections. ATTSA (Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association) very often claims to be non-political organization. But this organization has been used as ladder for political uplift by almost all the present political leaders and the persons in the high posts. The organization was used for political gain beginning from Late P. M. Sarwan to Mr. Durga Bhumij, the present Congress M.L.A. from Doom Dooma Legislative Assembly seat. He left the portfolio of the President of ATTSA in 2004 only to contest in the election.93 Another students’ organization, AASAA (All Adivashi Students’ Association of Assam) an outcome of the Bodo atrocities on the Adivashis claiming to be the only organization working for the betterment of the Adivashis is also involve in political affairs.94 The other organizations with their sudden leap during the election period are clear instances of the political exercises of their leaders through them.

The “Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha" an INTUC affiliated trade union is the only performing union among the tea garden laborers since its establishment in 1958. The head quarter of this union is in Dibrugarh and it has 21 branches in all tea garden areas of both Brahmaputra and Barak valley. In Cachar, the name of this organization is Cachar Chah Mazdoor Union. ACMS is now the major political instrument of the Congress party in Assam and whatever achieved for the benefit of the tea workers, the credit goes to this organization.95

94. ibid, p 1
95. op.cit., Guha, 1988, p.296.
2:08: Education:

Education means knowledge and knowledge means knowing something. In this sense, the tea garden laborers recruited to the tea plantation of Assam were educated as an average rural Indians. It is well known that the rural Indians since the historical period were deprived from the royal supported 'Sanskrit based sophisticated education' which was reserved only for the people of upper strata or the royal family. So the rural Indian society developed their own way of understanding the things of importance. The knowledge passes from mouth to mouth which later become oral tradition and source of education for them. The main feature of Indian culture actually transmitted orally from generation to generation and the tea garden laborers are one of the carriers who possess some of the features from among them. The tea garden laborers belonging to the rural Indian family possess the oral tradition inherited from their forefathers.

The people emigrated though from the backward areas had some knowledge about the literacy and their scripts. The Oriya people who have come from the Central Province had some literacy idea about Oriya and thus the people from Bengal. Even there were some people who had formal education up to metric standard. A number of such literates


(Sri Benedict Kujur (85) of Powai Tea garden was such a person who retired in 1985 as Health Assistant in the Garden Hospital since his appointment. He was in class VIII when he came from Ranchi to Assam as indenture labor in 1946. He possesses a very good handwriting that he was identified as a literate person and was provided that job. He was compensated Rs. 0.50 paisa per day with his usual daily wage. Sri Magan Tandia (75) of Baghjan T.E. who retired in 1987 and Sri Kalicharan Tanti (80) of Deamoolie T.E., who was an artisan, were also such persons educated in Oriya and had-
were termed as indenture laborer and they had to pass their life doing manual works. However, there are instances that the planters used such persons in literary activities providing with a small compensation without affecting the contract.\textsuperscript{98}

The Indian renaissance was urban in nature and it had very little impact on the rural Indians. They were living in their old order specially the tribal people did not wanted to leave their isolated life. The traditional life style of the rural Indians, specially the tribal people became burden to the revenue policy of the British in India and when the administration affected them it went with chaos and rebellions.\textsuperscript{99} The British had to take special measures to control over the growing dissatisfaction of the rural people. The measures taken in two ways; one was to destroy their traditional method of life style through missionary works and another was to create situation of hunger and starvation that they would intentionally come out to go to the plantations of Assam and the British colonies in the other areas of the globe. Missionary works were permitted to preach gospel providing special facilities to those who follow them. They opened English schools in the interior areas and began to educate the rural people in English. This was the first entry of the modern education among the rural Indians.\textsuperscript{100} The price was to leave their age old tradition and become a Christian. It was found that a good number of early immigrants were Christians and so educated in English.

100. op.cit., Tasa (Ed) 2003, p. 42.

--some idea about Assamese. A very good number were from the Bengal Province literate in Bangla. The people who were the early immigrants and left the tea garden at the initial stage had the opportunity to learn Bangla in Assam as it was the medium during that period. The small number of these educated were the people who emerged as early trade union worker after independence).
Formal education in the tea plantation began with the provisions on elementary education provided in the Plantation Act 1951; that free primary education is to be given to the children of the permanent workers by the management. Thus, the formal education began in the tea plantation after 1956 when the Act was considered as Labor Rule in the State assembly and the children of the workers began to take formal education in Assamese.\textsuperscript{101} Prior to this, a few of the planters tried to provide education by their own initiative. The laborers were also interested to practice their individual languages in the atmosphere of the line. A number of informal night schools were running during this period. The Oriya people were the first to practice this kind of literary program in their lines where they had the majority. Till the eighties of the last century the night schools existed in almost all the lines in the tea gardens.\textsuperscript{102} This is because of their hope of going back to their native country. This situation was prevalent in the tea plantations for more than a century affecting the assimilation process with the rests of the Assamese society. This is one of the instances of awareness that the early tea garden workers were known about the literacy. The formal primary education helped the successful children to proceed to register their name in the high schools and after that, colleges. The formal education in vernacular language was the first step to bring the tea garden workers into the main stream of the Assamese society.\textsuperscript{103} The primary education continued to educate the children. New high schools emerged at the neighboring villages to fulfill the demand for higher educational and finally colleges also come out they were in central places and far away from the tea

\textsuperscript{101} Informant: Sri Ranjit Tanti (59), on 23.2.2007.
\textsuperscript{103} op cit., Tasa, (2002), p.15.
gardens. Besides, these difficulties tea community educated people began to grow, though very slowly. The tea garden managements were alarmed for the limited supply of the labor for their garden work. They began to restrict the supply of the children to the garden schools indirectly. Initially, if a child did not go to school the ration of the parents was deducted, but now if the worker could not complete the days nirikh, not only the ration but their wages were not given. The workers compelled to take their children help in the work. Their limited income also forced them to send their children to work in the garden.\(^{104}\)

The overall situation restricted supply of tea garden students to the higher educational institutions though they were built in the neighboring areas of the tea gardens. The literacy rate of the tea garden people becomes very poor. In the district of Tinsukia only 3% of tea community students are in the Colleges. The Dibrugarh University, which is surrounded by tea garden population, produces 2 to 5 Master Degree holders every year of this community.\(^{105}\) This is the present condition of education of the tea garden community of Assam. One of the main causes of this set back is the economic condition of their parents, who engage them in teenage in the garden to earn something to meet the expenditure of the family.

The ‘Sarbasiksha Abhijan’ launched in year 2000 shows some improvement on the literacy rate of this community.\(^{106}\) The program is trying to cover all the children including the plantation and having good response. But the result is the increased number of primary passed students becomes problem

104. Ibid.
105 Ibid., p 16
106 loc cit , Tasa
for the high schools due to the limitation of seats. Even though the Sarbasiksha Abhijan promoting literacy among them, stagnation and unsuccessful in higher classes become another cause of their low percentage in the higher education.

The Adult Education Program launched in 1978 and the TLC and PLC by NLM (National Literacy Mission) launched in 1988 had left very little impact on their literacy problem. Only the Sarbasiksha Abhijan may be given some credit for the rapid promotion of literacy among those people.107

During the initial period the tea garden workers had no interest to send their children to the garden L.P. Schools of Assamese medium. Those who sent their children, was not to educate them but to make them understand Assamese. They were interested to learn English and their own regional languages rather than learning Assamese.108 This was one of the causes of the low admission rate in most of the tea garden L.P. Schools. Sometimes the teacher, who was not, accustomed with their dialects also a matter of their negligence. This is because English would make them efficient. Even the 'babu' in the garden, though 'Assamese' or 'Bengali' by caste they were not allowed to speak their mother language when dealing with the laborers but to speak 'Hindi' with the workers and 'English' with the managerial staff. Thus, language bar was one of the major causes of their stagnation in many respects for a very long period.109

109. ibid. 5% (Census1991) p.115 but 12'63% according to AIR Guwahati on 10.9.2006.
The percentage of literacy of the tea garden people is 37% at present NLM report. The percentage is far behind that of the State and National percentage of literacy. Illiteracy of the majority of their population is one of the major causes of their stagnations in other developments also. They are still far behind to take part in the important services of the State. Their illiteracy is misused by self interested politicians for years and if the condition exists there is no hope of development in near future. Only a revolution on awareness building may only bring them into the track of the main stream. Without which they will be the cause of the backwardness of the State as well as the Nation.

2:09: Language and Literature:

The tea garden community of Assam includes more than hundred castes and tribes of different cultural background. According to one sample survey the ratio of castes, tribes and of others as 45:40:15. The castes speak their regional languages in different form while the tribal people use their own dialects among themselves and the ‘sādri’ when interacting with others. The general people are related to the regional languages from where they have come. When interacting with the managerial staff they use Hindi. This was the language background developed in the environment of the tea plantation during the initial period of the plantation in Assam.

During the initial period of the recruitment trafficking of these people was not so easy. The contractors and the Sirdārs appointed by the planters had to use a middle person for

110. op.cit., Saharia, 2005, p.136
112. Ibid
interaction at the initial moment. Generally, the headman of a group of people had little idea about Hindi and thus the ‘sādri’\textsuperscript{113}. The middlemen initially helped the Contractors and the ‘sardārs’ convincing people about better life in the plantation of Assam. The ‘Kols’ from the Chhotanagpur were the first to be recruited in to Assam by the Assam Company. Perhaps they felt the middleman as their fellow brothers and did not hesitate to come when better life is assured to them in Assam. The persons who contracted them felt that the ‘Kols’ are easy accessible so began searching the ‘Kols’ in their latter visits in other areas also. Ultimately the people who wanted to come to Assam expressed themselves as ‘Kols’ and the other immigrants recruited latter got the name ‘Kol’ or ‘Koolie’in the mouth of the planters\textsuperscript{114}. Perhaps the development of this word ‘Coolie’ took place this way and later those who were ready to work in the shipyards or ports as porters named as ‘Coolie’. And it was found that the people immigrated abroad to work in the British colonies also named as ‘Coolie’. This assumption can not be laid aside because the word came into the dictionary only in the middle of the nineteenth century and the meaning given there upon is ‘people who work for others’ or ‘porter’, and in India, the unskilled worker. If the word existed prior to this period the word ‘Niger’ for the working people in the cotton plantation in America would have been used. Thus, the word ‘Coolie’ representing a particular race or tribe began to be used in respect of the other batches also who had been immigrated in to Assam. In Assam, all the tea garden workers got this name which later represented as the most neglected people for other Indian. The word also divided them from the other Indians.

\textsuperscript{113} ibid.

\textsuperscript{114} loc.cit, Vol-3, 1929.

According to Srinivas Kolis are decidedly inferior to the Rajputs of Gujrat and are from distinct castes. (Srinivas, M.N., 2006 New Delhi, p.161).
The recruited coolies from different socio-cultural and linguistic background accommodated in the small colonies called 'line' in the tea gardens. They had to live common lifestyle arranged by the planters e.g., early rising and after having some food supplied by the planters they had to work for whole day, from rising of the sun to sun set. Thus, they had to share their difficulties and sorrows. This situation of common living let them come closer to each other. Some of the words they used in the plantation were common and intelligible to all of them. The resembling meanings of similar words from other languages enter into their conversation. Numbers of such words incorporated from the 'sādri' of Chhotanagpur, 'khorthā' and 'kurmāli' from Purulia & Hazaribag, 'bhojpuri' from Central and North-Western Provinces, 'gond' from Chhotigadh; and thus Oriya, Gujrati, Marathi, Bangla etc. to construct the tea garden 'sadri'; the language of interaction among them. Different form of 'sadri' in different tea belts are the proofs of such incorporations.\textsuperscript{115} The majority of tribes or castes of the belts are responsible for these differences as they impose majority of their own word in to the local 'sādri'. Thus, the 'sādri' of the tea gardens, is far more difference then the Chhotanagpuri 'sādri'. But retained the name and become intelligible to all, but in the different form; which cannot be claim by any of the castes or tribes of the tea garden community to be their own. Gonesh Chandra Kurmi observation the 'pānch-pargiā' and 'khorthā' 'boli' are not only but wide ranges of other languages also contributed in this development. Because the process of development of this language began as soon as the immigrants engaged in the plantation.\textsuperscript{116} Also the individual dialects of the Kol, Bhil, Santhal etc. who were the early immigrants may claim for this development. At present, the 'sadri' developed out of

\textsuperscript{115} loc cit , Aind (Ed)

\textsuperscript{116} op.cit., Kurmi (Ed) 2001, p.10.
the words of various regions of the country becomes intelligible to the people from Sadiya in the east to Gujarat in the west and Allahbad in the north to Nagpur in the south.\textsuperscript{117}

The managerial staffs speak Hindi in their interaction with the workers while they talk English among themselves and with the ‘bābus’. The official language is English. The ‘babus’, who are either Bengali or Assamese, use to speak Hindi with the laborers. This method began at the very beginning of the plantation and still in use. Even after establishment of the Assamese medium L.P. Schools and the laborers though know Assamese have to face an Assamese ‘bābu’ in Hindi. The language barrier is used by the management to take needed work from the workers. The line Chowkidar, who is informed to announce the works for the next morning, uses Hindi in his announcement. Thus, Hindi for interaction with the laborers and English with the ‘bābus’ is used for maintaining discipline in the plantation.\textsuperscript{118}

The workers in their daily own environment talk ‘sādri’ with the co-worker and with the family members, relatives and the people from the same caste, use their own dialects. The Oriya people in Oriya with ‘individual form in accordance with their own group; the tribe like Santhal, Oraon, Munda, Sawra, Porja, Kondho, Gond etc. use their own dialects in their families and tribes.\textsuperscript{119}

After the independence, the close door of the plantation gradually began to open. Outsiders become easy access to the

\textsuperscript{117} op.cit., Aind (Ed), 2000. p.8.
\textsuperscript{119} During the field visit the researcher saw Hindi medium L.P. Schools in Powai Nagapara Division, Namdang T.E. and in Dirok T.E.
workers in the garden market, or the 'pheriwalla' roaming through the lines. 'Hindi' is usually talked to these people. But the neighboring villagers who talk Assamese and hardly other languages interact in Assamese. They are the supplier of the local fishes, vegetables and most of the edibles other than rice and wheat. A few of youths from tea labor family could acquire qualification to get the job of a teacher in the garden L.P. School of Assamese medium. At present almost all the people in the tea garden can speak Assamese. There are also a few of the tea gardens running Hindi medium L.P. Schools.\textsuperscript{120} In these tea gardens learning Assamese is little slow. The Barak Valley tea gardens Schools have adopted 'Bengali' medium, thus the plantation workers as well as their children there speak Bengali. These differences of two languages in two valleys of Assam do not make any difference as both the languages are intelligible to both the groups and their literary form is also similar.

\textbf{Literature:}

'Sādri, though spoken language of the tea community throughout the Brahmaputra and Barak Valley does not have a literary form. A number of books, however written in Chhotanagpuri 'sādri' using Devanagri script and a number of research works in this language have been going on. The Christians, originally belong to the Chhotanapur area use their religious books and their prayers written in 'sadri'. Even the 'mass' conducted by the priest in the church use 'Chhotanagpuri Sadri' in there adoration. A few books and magazines like 'Niskalanka', 'Adivashi Awaz', 'Gheraya Guith' 'Auguwa' etc. published from Ranchi, Siliguri, Shilong and

\textsuperscript{120} Informant: Sri Dimbeswar Tasa (58), Jorhat on 14.6 2006
North Lakhimpur respectively are in 'Chhotanagpuri Sadri' and in Devanagri script. Recently, a weekly newspaper named 'Johar' edited by Jiten Lakra has been published from Guwahati includes all its editorial in 'sadri' but the script is Assamese. The new generation of Chhotanagpuri background and educated in English are trying to establish their regional 'sādri' among the tea people of Assam rejecting the tea garden 'sādri'. The N.E. T.V., a private T.V. Channel from Guwahati has already started news reading in this language. The tea garden community, however, do not accept the claim of the Chhotanagpuri 'sādri'. A group of educated people under the leadership of Ganesh Chandra Kurmi and Sanjoy Tanti, trying to establish the 'sādri' spoken by the tea garden community in their interactions is widely accepted. This group as preliminary activity formed the literary organization; 'Chah Janajati Sahitya Sabha' for preservation of the literatures related to the different subjects of the tea garden community of Assam. Their main objective is to place the community in the proper status in the social-cultural atmosphere of the State. Accepting the achievement in Assamese literatutre the Jorhat Sahitya Sabha has proposed to name it on Late Deoram Tasa as Deoram Tasa Sahitya Sabha.\textsuperscript{121}

After independence the new generation who were fortunate enough to be educated and whose medium was Assamese afford to write about of the socio-cultural activities in different newspapers and magazines. A number of books also published on different subjects in Assamese. Meghraj Karmakar was the first to edit a hand written School magazine of George High School, Dibrugarh in 1937. Maghraj Karmakar may be credited to be the first writer of such kind. He had published a few of small books like 'Pan ke Dathi', may be counted as first

\textsuperscript{121} op.cit., Tanti (Ed), 2000. p.51.
individual afford.\textsuperscript{122} During the seventies of the last century a number of writers come out who wrote their own books on socio-cultural matters published by their own or by the "Assam Sahitya Sabha". Seniram Kurmi, Ganesh Kurmi, Prahlad Tasha, Deoram Tasha, Sushil Kurmi, Narayan Ghatowar, Maghraj Karmakar etc. become the forerunners of the tea community as writers. The important personalities of the later groups are Samir Tanti and Sananta Tanti, whose writings in different forms crossed the boundary of their own society and become popular in and out of the country. These two writers have also established themselves as poets in Assamese literature. Appreciation of Humen Borgohain, the ex-president of "Assam Sahitya Sabha" and the editor of 'Nilachal' and 'Nagorik' newspapers in Assamese in his editorial about Deoram Tasa and Prahlad Tasha is clear instance of their strong hold in Assamese literature.\textsuperscript{123} It is said that Narayan Ghatowar's articles do not required to edit for publication as he never make mistakes in his writings. Deoram Tasha's investigations on the socio-cultural life of this community are important research documents. Prithivi Majhi, have introduced himself as the investigator of the Santhali language and composer of a dictionary on Santhali-Hindi-Assamese language in 2006.\textsuperscript{124} Beside, a number of other writers come out of this community, are engaged writing about the different topics of this community. A few newspapers like 'Hamder Awaz' edited by Amal Kumar HorO; 'Johar' by Jiten Lakda etc. and a few of monthly, tri-monthly like "Adivashi Awaz" by Wilfred Topno, 'Sanor Asom' by Bulu Tanti etc. are present publications related to this community. The magazines provide scopes to the educated youths whose writings relate the socio-economic,

\textsuperscript{122} op.cit., Tasa (Ed), 2003. p 28
\textsuperscript{123} Informant: Biren Koiry 36, on 15.3.2007. (The work is yet to be published)
\textsuperscript{124} op cit., Kurmi (Ed), 2001.pp.478-482.
cultural and political issues of this community. Their works preserve the later development in almost all spheres of life of the tea garden community. They are the treasures of the researchers. Then the ACKS established 1947, ACMS in 1958, ATTSA in 1947 had tried to keep records of the socio-cultural activities in written forms in Assamese. Most of such materials are preserved in article form in the souvenirs of these organizations.

The literature related to the tea community of Assam initially was in Bengali and English and a few in Assamese. 'Chah Bagichar Kuli' in ‘Mou’ in 1883, written by Bali Narayan Bora was perhaps the first article on this community in Assamese. Prior to it the article in Bengali news paper “Sanjiboni” by Dewarkanath Ganguli a worker of the Brahmo Samaj on immigrated coolies' condition in Assam was perhaps the first article written in native language. Both of the articles were related to their socio-economic life and had created controversies due to the opposite opinions. Dwarkanath Ganguli was a social worker of Brahmo Samaj and Bali Narayan Bora was a civil servant under the British Government in lower Assam, had their personal experiences about the tea garden laborers of eighties of the nineteenth century. Ganguli’s article became popular and created chaos against atrocities of the planters on Coolies in Assam and Bora’s article created objections from various circles in the State due to its pro-planters propaganda. Laksminath Bezbaruah, an Assamese youth in Calcutta was quite adamant to support Gangulis opinion.

After Ganguli's investigation a number of social workers,

125 Sarma, Dr Satyendranath(Ed): Mou, 2003, pp.77-88
researcher came out to study about the socio-economic life of the plantation worker. But those work, most of which were in English could not be published openly. These works, however, come out only after independence. Their average opinion was that the condition of tea labors of Assam is like queasy slave and whatever Act or law passed during pre-independent period were against these poor victims in the tea plantation. The law was adhered by the Government to save the accused planter against his crime on innocent coolie. Mulkraj Anand's, "Two Leaves and a Bud", a work in English is the expression of the misery of the plantation laborers. The opinion, however, supported in the report of Mr.Henry Cotton, the then Commissioner of Assam to the Governor General Lord Curzon.¹²⁷

2:10: Custom and Belief:

The tea garden community has emerged only after the establishment of the tea plantation in Assam. It is a composition of a number of castes and tribes immigrated in to Assam from the different parts of the country. Due to their immigration from the different parts of the country their customs and beliefs differ from caste to caste and tribe to tribe. The differences are more distinct in relation to caste and tribe and sometime the regional situations also responsible for differences within a single caste or tribe. The differences however, gradually narrowing within the sub-castes or sub-tribes and finally end at clan level in the environment of the plantation.¹²⁸

Unlike the average Hindu cultivators they also remember

¹²⁷. op.cit., Kurmi(Ed), 2001, p 158.
¹²⁸. Informant: Sri Bhojo Tanti (64) on 15.11.2006
goddess "Lakshmi", the Goddess of Wealth according to their own ways. Before planting of the seeds and reaping of the crops they worship the cultivable land in the name of God generally offer a duck, hen and milk with an earthen candle with scented stick on the spot. After dedication of the items they consume it on the spot. It is taboo to take them home. They follow some rituals before using the crops as food. This practice is common to almost all the Indian cultivators. The birth rites, they observe are not as rigid as some of the races of upper strata but influence of the later may be observed in their rituals. Keeping the mother and the child out of touch of the others and special care for few days is common practice. The marriage ritual is also carrying similar rituals like following astrology on deciding upon the matches of the boy and girl and day of wedding is same though the media is different. To predict on the most of the matters they use rice, small sticks, water on a basin; to count days from the first moon or after full moon to fix the date of wedding etc. Most of the community do not invite ‘caste brahmin’ on their wedding. They have their own Brahmin in their castes who is responsible to carry on the rituals. Some time they select an experienced person from the caste or the group for the necessary performances. The tribes and a number of castes do not use 'yagya' (sacrificial fire) during the marriage ceremony. Using of important equipments related to cultivation or hunting; using of important plants like mangoes, bamboo, banana, ‘jam’ (plum) or any other fruits of good taste placed as symbol of fertility on the wedding spot. ‘Aruwa’ rice, turmeric, beetle-nut, and pan, till etc. are of common use. Music and dance with traditional instruments are

130 Informant: Sri Preman Tutli (50) on 17.2.2006
common to all and a few of them like 'dhol' is used by all of them.\textsuperscript{132} Living with husband after marriage for a bride is common like the traditional Hindu society. Provision for a groom to stay as 'gharjāmāi' (groom in bride's family) with the bride's family is also practiced in special cases. Unlike the Hindus they also observe eight types marriage accepted in the society. Marriage in the same clan (gotra) is felt taboo and not accepted in the family as well as in the society. Boy and girl of a same clan if engaged are out caste from the family and the society and have to live outside the society. Monogamy is common and polygamy could be seen in certain cases but polyandry is absent among them. Widow marriage may be accepted in certain condition. The tribal people have given up some of their marriage system, Selection of the life partner through dormitory of common living are not practiced nowadays due to their common living with other people in the plantation.

The death rites are also similar to those of the traditional Hindus. Both burial and funeral is practiced; and in certain cases like infant, child mother, snake bites etc. are not cremated but buried. The snake bite is left floated in the river on a 'bhur' (made of bamboo or banana stem) for an expert ojha to save the victim if possible.\textsuperscript{133} Observation of 'tiloni' is common and the family is prohibited to take salt, oil and 'aisa' (taste of fish) during the three days. On tenth day, observation of 'dohā' and on eleventh day 'srādha' is also common but with limited rituals without attendance of a 'brahmin' by caste. On the death of the parents the sons tonsure their heads on the 'srādha'. The soul of the dead is invited every evening to an isolated spot outside the house, offering little food in a 'dona' (temporary dish made of leaves) by the son or the person who

\textsuperscript{132} op. cit., Tasa, 2002, p. 6
\textsuperscript{133} Informant: Sri Gridhar Nanda (58) on 25.10.2008
keeps 'brat' for ten days is also common during these days. Among a few of the tribes and most of the castes invitation of the spirit of the dead into the house during the midnight of the day of 'srādha' is also common which is called 'chhāhir-ānā'; 'jee-dhukā' or 'māsān-dhukā' ceremony. Taking bathe, shaving and cutting of the nails after burial is compulsory.\textsuperscript{134} The caste 'Hindus' follow 'brat' with limited rituals. There are some castes and tribes who do not follow these rituals.

Deoram Tasha has explained about seventeen social folk religions. Among them, 'karam-puja', which was a family observation, now become popular festival and celebrated during the 'bhādo-ekādashi' every year in the common platform. There are a few 'karam' observed with little differences of rituals, music and dances; are still observed by individual families of some tribes every year. It is compulsory for the family to observe it annually at least for three consecutive years. If neglected bad omen falls on the family. The observation may be stopped only completion of 3, 5 or 7 times observations.\textsuperscript{135} The 'push-parav' celebrated on the last of the month of 'push' is similar to the 'tushu-puja' which is observed in the name of Goddess Lakshmi in Bengal and present Jharkhand while in Orissa it is 'usaha-parav' or 'surjyahi-parav'. The later is celebrated at the interval of twelve years, and in few cases five years.\textsuperscript{136} The main feature of this celebration is to continue the ritual from rise of the sun till the noon when the sun is on the head top. In this celebration fowls are dedicated but should not be taken back to the house. The family members have to keep fasting and follow certain rituals like proceeding to the 'puja' spot by knee which is called bringing of 'bāri'.\textsuperscript{137} ‘Sohrāi’ and

\textsuperscript{134} op. cit., Kurmi (ed), 2001 pp.557-565. 
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., p.106. 
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., pp.96-97. 
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
‘dewāli-utsav’ of feeding with cakes made of rice to the cattle and new rope for fastening them in the sheds with special care to the cowherds on the day of this observation. The cowherds use to express their joy and sorrow through ‘jhāli-geet’ in the midnight roaming every family with songs and by drum beating ‘Grām-pujā’ needs special reference, as all the castes and tribes of the tea community observes it during the month of ‘āsād’ outside the garden line or village for the betterment of the area. The dedicable fowls, goats etc. taken to a spot of little distance from the line or village where the dedication is made only by the men folk of the village or line and nothing should be taken back but to be used on the spot as food and the remainder to be buried before leave. In the morning when the males leaving for the puja the females bring out the spoils of grooms, baskets etc. outside the house, which the male carry them to the puja spot. This is the occasion of clearing the house from old and damaged materials which may be the cause of epidemics in the house. The ‘phuspuni’ is also like ‘grām pujā’; observed during the month of ‘push’ or ‘āghun’ as a protection of the house from mosquito, and other insects. The special feature of this observation is that the males prepare some fire out of the straw hatches on a broken pan; the women folk put the wastes, spider nets etc. in to it after brooming out of their houses. Such wastes are collected from every house with songs and certain actions of the teenage boys. They take them outside the ‘line’ or village. When leaving the dirts they direct the insects and mosquitoes to go to the other village or line telling the name of such village or line.\textsuperscript{138} The ‘baḍ-pāhāḍi’ observation is meat to satisfy the ‘god’ that lives on the mountain. Unlike other celebration, here also fowls, ducks, goats or kids are sacrificed. “Bir-puja” celebrated by the some castes to satisfy “Kamna”, the monkey God related to

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., p.116.
Kamoyamo. They also worship a Goddess called ‘Kamdai Satri’ or ‘kerdal bajodi’ to request her to save from ill-fates. ‘Dharam’ is the ‘brahma-devta’, accompanied by seven other gods worshiped during the month of ‘magh’. ‘Khet-puja’ is observed by the cultivators to satisfy goddess ‘Laksmi’, the Goddess of rice and wealth. Durga, Kali, Manasha, Mangla etc. are such observations which are common to all Hindus. There are certain rituals related to ‘cockfight’, observed by the tea community of Assam. The owner of a cock, when leaves for the field in the morning without having wash or food the woman in the house observes oust from cleaning or any movement outside or allowing outsiders inside are certain rituals to make her man success. No preparation of food during this time is necessary.139 The tea garden community observes a number of rituals according to the guidance of the religious texts related to them. But only few people take help of the caste brahmins.

The Evil Spirits:

The tea community believes in a number of bhuts, prets, māshān, chhāir, dāhins, churgin, kuwāri-bhut, chordeyā, brahma-bhut, sāt-bohni, etc. The chordeyā can be domesticated by offering murhi (dry rice cracker) with milk on the door step through which it enters in the house at night. The chordeva is a spirit of small height roaming door to door with a ‘bhar’ and a ‘tangi’ on its shoulder collecting materials for the house where it lives.140 Churgin is the female demon turned out of the dead pregnant woman who is not burnt but buried. It is believed that she dislikes those persons whom she liked during her life and likes those whom she disliked. Very often she comes out in front of the people like a general woman, but could be identified

139. Informant: Sri Birsha Karmakar (57) on 12.1.2006
140. op.cit., Kurmi (Ed) p.135
as her legs stands back side front and front side back.\textsuperscript{141} Young girl dies without marriage becomes ‘kuwāri-bhut’ whose activities are like that of the ‘churgin’; but very often catches a young man. The ‘sāt-bohni’ (seven sisters) lives under the water in a river, a pond or by the side of a stream; also attracts young man and takes them away. Most dangerous evil spirit believed by the tea community is the ‘dāhin’ (witch); a living woman turns herself into inhuman behaviour and harms human using certain ‘mantra’ (chants). A ‘dāhin’ usually takes help of cat, specially a black one to drink human blood by using thread from the top of the house hanging it on the chest of a sleeping human.\textsuperscript{142} Generally, only the female likes to become a ‘dāhin’. A man can also transformed himself into a ‘tiger’, popularly known as ‘ultā-bāgh’ by certain action accompanied with some ‘mantra’; specially, when it feels drinking blood of animals. Bhut, prēt, māshān, chhāhir etc. are the evil spirits some time appears in front of a person or overpower on his conscience. When such evil spirit is working on a person it is called ‘chhitā-dhorā’. An ‘ojhā’ can remove the evil spirit from the person by chanting some mantra.\textsuperscript{143}

The ‘chhāir’ or ‘māshān’ is the spirit of the dead person invited on the tenth day of his death into the house. He is remembered with the ‘ista-deptā’ to save the family from evils. The ‘ista-deptā’ is worshipped by the family at least once a year, specially, during the special occasion of ‘nuā-khāi’. This trend, however, observed among most of the Hindu families in different methods.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{141} ibid
\textsuperscript{142} Informant: Sri S.K. Bhengra (65) on 31.1 2007.
\textsuperscript{143} op.cit., Kurmi (Ed), p.134.
\textsuperscript{144} op cit. , Bose, 2004. p.65.
2:11: Religion and Belief:

The tea community as mentioned earlier is a composition of a number of castes and tribes. The composition is the result of their similar living standard provided by the environment of the tea plantation for more than a century. Prior to this event they were the part of the Indian society in large and their religion was common to those of their brethrens. The religion and beliefs of their forefathers transmitted onto them matching with the atmosphere of the tea plantation they retain as it is till today. The unchanging situation of the plantation helped keeping their rituals as it is when they faced big changes in their native States. The present generation fails to recognize some of the rituals as belong to them. This is because, nowadays they do not observe some of the structures what their forefathers did in the past. So, what they observe at present are the religion and beliefs belong to their forefathers. Recently many changes taken place due to the openness of the religious observations.

Generally, the tea community could be divided into two broad groups; one belonging to the Hindu and the other is Christian. The large part (about 80%) of the Hindus consists of the people following both Vedic and Tantric rights. The followers of both the rights are either of Aryan origin or non-Aryans. They are perhaps the assimilated stock of the post Aryan period.145 Mix nature of religion and performances they use to practice confuse one to identify them properly. Only a very few of them could be identified as the follower of the pure Vedic rights. The followers of mix nature of religion are certainly the people from the lower strata of the society.

The few belong to the Aryan origin, as may be identified, are follower of the Vedic rights. Their religious performances can not take place without the help of a ‘brahmin’ by caste. A very small number belong to the present Orissa and Bengal fall among them. The Mahapatra, Mohanti, Panda, etc. are such people who originated from Orissa. The Rajputs of UP and Chatisgarh identify themselves as such. The Bengali Bhatta, Chakravarty, Pandit etc. are found in the plantation of the Barak valley. These people, though living together in the plantation, trying to keep distance from the others they feel belong to the lower castes.\footnote{Srinivas, M.N.: Social Change in Modern India, New Delhi. 2006. p 7}

The large numbers of Hindu people belong to the Aryan-Non Aryan origins are follower of the Vedic rights. They invite brahmin for their religious performances. But most of the beliefs belong to them are of mixed nature. The Vedic performances are performed by themselves or temporary priests belong to the same caste. These people bear the character of both Vedic and non-Aryan character. They are the bearer of mixture of two different cultures; separation of one from the other is now impossible. The titles and sub-titles, they bear may be the only help to identify their non-Aryan origin. The religious performances of a few may be more Vedic and sometime more non-Vedic. They may be identified as the outcaste or separated for some reason from their original groups during the early period. They perform some of the non-Aryan performances due to living together with them. Thus habituated to perform regularly and lost their original identity. The other group is identical with their tribal origin for their non-Vedic performances. They have their own dialects; chant their ‘mantras’ in their unintelligible dialects. So, the caste and sub-castes; their languages and the ‘mantras’ in their own
languages are the only sources of their identification as non-Aryan origin. The tribes or castes identify themselves as Hindus are open and free from any religious restrictions. These openness and freedom from religious bindings embrace all who do not belief in other religion.\textsuperscript{147}

The second group of the tea community is the Christians consist of about 10\% of the total population. They are divided into two major groups one of them is the Catholics and the others are the Protestants. The Catholics do not have any split while the later consists of six different splits with their separate Churches. The special feature of these Christians is that the Catholics follow and worship Mary (Jesus mother) and many saints with Jesus Christ. The protestant on the other hand, worship only Jesus. The groups among the protestant are Baptists, GL, CNI, Penticost etc. These people, though Christians, live the similar life of their Hindu fellow brothers. The interesting thing is that, there are few families whose one brother is Hindu and the other is Christian. Their socio-economic activities are same but their process of worship and their mean are difference. Christians are prohibited to perform rituals. So they do not participate in them even in their own Hindu brother's family. The Hindus on the other hand keep some distance blaming them having no restrictions in meat eating (there is a belief among the Hindus that Christians are beef eater when cow is worshipped by the Hindus as goddess 'Lakshmi'. The Christian, though Catholic or Protestant; believe that they are in the right path following Jesus and those who do not follow him are wrong. They try to convince their Hindu brothers and very often successful to convert them into Christianity. The growing percentage of the Christian from 3\% 

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid, p.81
during 1981 census to 6% in 1991 is showing such picture among the plantation population.\textsuperscript{148}

There are a few Muslims; numbering about 500 during 1991 census. They have no influence over the thousands of people from other religion in this the community. A few of the educated are successful to become members of some of their social organizations. The Muslims among the tea garden community were not immigrated by the planters but appointed from the local people by the management in later periods.\textsuperscript{149}

A few numbers of Buddhists are also found among the plantation workers. They were also not belong to the immigrant labors but engaged recently from other sources.

The family observances as popular beliefs are the women folk should not enter kitchen without bath; the bride has to keep distance from the elders of the groom for the whole life; during puberty and menstruation, keep distance from other people, not to enter interiors of the house and not to use things of common use till the period completes and is cleaned. Observance also attached to a woman during her parturient period. Marriage within same ‘gotra’ is a taboo.\textsuperscript{149}

The placenta of a kitten observed as good omen to the family and it is kept carefully in a ‘dimni’ (a big bamboo basket to keep paddy). Leaving home for travel should not face empty container. While crossing a ‘demoir’ tree not to be neglected but if there is ripe fruit, should be taken at least one, is the sign of success. Curry of meat, if carried somewhere during the night, should be attached with a charcoal or red chili to save

\textsuperscript{148}. op cit, Saharia, 2005, p.171
\textsuperscript{149}. op.cit., Kurmi (Ed), 2001, p.137
from the affect of evil spirit on the way. Before eating delicious food or drink a little portion to be dedicated to the 'ista-devta' is the taboo, some of which could be initiated.¹⁵⁰

2:12: Festival and Ceremony:

The tea garden community is a composition of a number of different cultural groups. The festivals and ceremonies they preserve may be classified into three categories of the folkloristic point of view:

2:12:1: Seasonal festival: The seasonal festivals are celebrated according to the season and not on a particular day or 'tithi'. The tea garden community has very few such festivals and ceremonies which could be counted in these groups. The karam-puja, gram-puja, badpahadi-puja, natunkhowa etc. the festivals observed in one of the convenient day of the season.

2:12:2: Calendar festival: The popular 'karam' festival widely celebrated by this community. This is a calendaric festival celebrated on the eleventh day of the moon of the month Bhado (August/September). But it is also celebrated in any convenient day of the month kati and choit. Kali-puja, Sahrai-parav, Tushuu-puja, Durga-puja, phaguwa, push purnima, kirtick-purnima, and usha festivals are the calendar festivals celebrated by the tea community of Assam.

2:12:3: Limited participatory festival: Most of the family celebrations among the tea community are fall in this category. The gram-puja, chhathi, some of the performances of the

¹⁵⁰ Informant: Sri Girighar Nanda (it is a general scene during eating of food for the Oriya people)
marriage; puberty rites, death rites etc. are the limited participatory festivals. In case of chhathi and puberty rites most of the performances limited to women only. Some of the rites of *shādi*, male participation is restricted and other few women participation are restricted. The gram-pujā is participated only by the males while the *chhathī* initiation is only by female.

The Durga-puja, Kali-puja and Karam-puja are celebrated as festivals and participated by all. ‘Holi’ is observed publicly and by some groups with different kind of performances. The rituals of ‘holi’, however observed in individual family as well as in groups.

‘Diwāli’ is a calendar festival, celebrated by all of the Hindus but the festival of lightening, burning of the crackers etc. are observed and participated by all indiscriminately. Dice, play-cards etc. are common play during diwali. The belief behind is, profit or loss in the diwali by gambling is sign of good fortune for the year. Missing the color of ‘phagua’ is sign of ill fate.

2:13: Rite of Passage:

Pregnancy, birth and childhood: - A pregnant women in the tea garden community are taken with special care, even if it happens in unsocial means. Rites related to pregnant woman is not found among these people. However, there are a few of restrictions, which, according to them are taboos rather than rites. The pregnant woman among some tribes and castes are restricted to dig, climb, cross or do male work. A pregnant woman should not come out during the eclipses and if outside not to look towards the eclipse sun or moon from side view. Alcohol in most cases not allowed but among the tribes it is flexible. A parturient woman gets initiated on the twenty first
day and only after that her normal movement is allowed. The puberty girl also gets initiated with rituals after her stop and cleaning.\textsuperscript{151}

Beating of drum or tin or by anything so as to make sound is followed as soon as a child takes birth. From that very moment the room, the woman and the infant, with the materials used or touched felt impure or ‘chhutuk’ which lasted till the fall of the naval string. During this period the woman is not allowed to cook or mix-up with others at home.\textsuperscript{152} On the day of the fall of naval string the woman is bathed by turmeric and mustard oil; put on with new clothes for both mother and the child and is allowed to enter the interiors of the house, to cook or to mix-up with others. The restrictions imposed on her are withdrawn after the initiation ceremony takes place on the twenty first day. In this ceremony the baby’s hair on head is removed, nails of the mother are cut and relatives offer presents of new clothes and other things for both mother and the baby. During this occasion, dinner with meat and other beverages to the guests and relatives served as a symbol of joy. The womenfolk from the invitee wish the baby by messaging with mustard oil on its head. This ceremony, as performed by womenfolk is regarded as limited participatory function. The male counterparts are engaged in secondary activities.

The placenta is buried at the ‘pāni-chhāchhā’ and under permanent shadow. The belief behind is, that the baby will be able to bear thirst in future.\textsuperscript{153} The ‘bhurshi’ or the charcoal used to warm the woman also to be thrown to the isolated place

\textsuperscript{151} Informant: Smt Hemo Nayak (65) on 9.7.2007.
\textsuperscript{152} op.cit, Kurmi (Ed), 2001, pp.128-129
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid
to avoid human footsteps, without which certain effect may occur. The 'dhāi' or the midwife engaged looking after the mother and baby, since its birth is presented with new clothes, edibles and other materials. Milk of goat is given to the baby during this period by some families. In such cases the mother should not take mutton in her meal.\textsuperscript{154} In most of the families the 'naamakaran' (performance of selection of name for the baby) performance observed during the occasion of 'chhathī'. A 'guniā' (village observer) is invited to act as chief performer in this occasion. If the 'naamakaran' ceremony is not organized the baby is called 'bābu', 'chhoto-bābu', 'boḍo-bābu', 'bhāyā', 'budhu', 'munu' etc., in case of a male child; and 'mini', 'chhoto-mini', 'boḍo mini', 'bhāyā', 'budhi' in case of a female child are used to call the baby. After three or four months some of the labor family performs the 'annaprashanna' ceremony in very light manner. Milk, sugar in moulded rice is used as chief edible in this ceremony, which is first given to the baby and then taken by others.\textsuperscript{155}

The family members where death taken place are felt 
\textit{chhutuk} (unclean) and allowed free movement only after the ritualistic initiation. Person visits the parturient woman or funeral has to be initiated by sprinkling basil mixed water or smoked after bath and only after that his free movement in the house is allowed

\textbf{1: Initiation Rite:}

The observation of initiation rites prevalent in the tea garden community are of little differences according to the

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
cultural heritage of the groups. The tribes belong to this community observe very few initiation ceremonies while almost all of the castes follow them strongly.

In a tribal family, a mother feels no restriction to enter the interior of the house or to cook after birth of a baby while among the castes it is strictly prohibited. Only after the chhathi, observation such families allow their womenfolk to do family activities. Girls are allowed to mix up with other matured women only after attaining their puberty. Marriage is considered only after the maturity of a girl.

Both the boy and the girl, only after their marriage, are allowed direct participation in the social activities as they are considered as one of the family of the society after their marriage. The pair, if living with their parents, however, not get the privilege to participate but to represent, if elders of their family are absent.156

In case of inter-caste or inter-religion marriage, initiation plays major role. In such cases love matters or other problems are also ignored. Usually, both the partners discuss about their initiation of one to the other before marriage. A Hindu boy, if marrying a Christian girl; first confirm whether he is going to be christened or the girl is turning to be a Hindu. In such cases less rigid has more chances of initiation. Between lower and upper caste marriages certain observations are to be performed in which the kutumb, demands fine in case or kind; special feast with beverages is acceptable in such cases. Sometimes, the parents also blamed to be guilty and are punished. But in case of marriage between Hindu and Christian the Christians are satisfied if the non-Christian accepts Christianity.157

2: Betrothal and Marriage:

Marriage system of the tea community has no differences from those of the other castes and tribes in India. However, there are certain features in their marriage system which focuses on their socio-folk customs.

The community in general is patriarchal in character. This results with less relevant and rampant to the development of the female education. Their education and general mixing in the society discontinued after attaining of puberty and also restricted after the ceremony of betrothal. Some of the matriarchal characters of the few tribal groups have long been lost and habituated adopting the customs of their neighbors. Thus the whole community should be studied in patriarchal point of view.

For marriage, betrothal takes place as soon as the children get adulthood. Boys around the age after twenty, if he becomes a regular wage-earner to feed his family and the girl after eighteen, if she gets puberty and can do the jobs to run a family. Thus, the betrothal starts by appointment of a aguādāār (middle-man) who is known to both the families.158 The aguadaar appointed by the boys family first sent to the girls family discloses the matter informally to know the acceptance of the girl’s parents and then the formal talk continues further with the guardian of the family including some person of the kutumb. The informal acceptance followed by few of the ceremonial get together between the two families, called ghardekhā, māngan, lotāpānilsindrādāān,(ring ceremony), etc. These functions are accompanied with singing and dancing,

feast with beverages etc., that take place for about a year and only after that the main function of marriage comes. The ring-ceremony, or sindra-daan or lotapaani is a performance for the boy and girl, to show their acceptance in front of the ‘kutumb’ and the public.\textsuperscript{159} Date of marriage is decided by the help of the ‘kutumbs’ in this ceremony. The date, however confirmed by the help of an astrologer from among the ‘kutumb’ itself, whose system of date fixing is generally related to the counting of the days after the first moon or the full moon. They use certain method so that both the families, who are illiterate, could remember the day.\textsuperscript{160} Now-a-days the literate families use written ‘panjika’ to decide on the date.

Generally, the families of the tea community do not invite ‘caste brahmin’ for the performances of marriage. Experienced person in the ‘kutumb’ is invited to do the activities of the Brahman by following the rituals of the caste or tribe. Going of ‘barat’ by the groom’s family is not compulsory as the place of marriage also decided on the ‘sindrā-dān’ ceremony. No dowry system is found among the tea community, rather in some castes price of the girl, called ‘pon’ is to be paid by the groom’s father on the rate decided in the sitting of the ‘kutumb’ of both the families\textsuperscript{161}. It also includes ‘mā-sāri’, ‘nāni-sāri’, ‘māmā-dhoti’, ‘kākā-dhoti’ with traditional ‘pithā’ and molasses, ‘murhi-chewrā’ and also delicious dinner for the ‘kutumb’ are compulsory. Sometime, the dinner followed with ‘hādīā’. After the marriage, the line ‘chowkidār’ takes both the bride and the groom to the garden manager in the next morning to introduce them as husband and wife. The line chowkidar entitled to get a chicken and a bottle of alcohol in return.

\textsuperscript{159} ibid p.199, also see Kurmi (Ed), p.141.
\textsuperscript{160} ibid., p.200
\textsuperscript{161} loc.cit., Kurmi (Ed.)
All the eight types of marriage systems prevalent among the Hindus are seen in the tea community. But there are certain differences in the nature of such marriages with those of the traditional Hindus. The ‘gandharva-bibah’ or love-marriage in unacceptable condition of the parents is known among them as ‘bhāgā-bhāgi’. The ‘asura-bivah’ is identical to the marriage by ‘mohni’ or cheating.\(^{162}\) There is another type of marriage prevalent among them is called ‘dhuku-dhukā’. In ‘dhuku-dhukā’ the girl intentionally comes to the boy’s house and refuse to go back if the love affair between the pair is refused by the girl’s family. Besides, there is another kind of marriage, in which, the boy or the groom personally accepts to live in the girl’s house as ‘ghar-jāmāi’. This happens when the boy’s economic condition is weaker than the bride’s family. Cultivator families of sound economic condition are sometime keep ‘ghar-jāmāi’ to work for the family or to look after the property. Forcing a girl for wife by any other mean is also prevalent. The tea community feels that passing a single night with the boy, the girl losses all hope to go back to her parent’s house and bound to become wife of the person. Certain herbal medicines used as ‘mohni’ sometime to tame a girl or a boy. Widow re-marriage is also prevalent. Sometimes the younger brother of the dead marries his elder brother’s wife.\(^{163}\)

3: Death Rites:

Among the tea community both funeral and burying of a dead is prevalent. They float snake bite into the river and do not burn a pregnant woman.\(^{164}\) The death rites follow as soon as the person dies in a family. The members in that family stop

\(^{164}\) op.cit., Tasa, 2002, p 34.
their daily activities from that moment as they are considered to become ‘chhutuk’ or impure. They should not change clothes, not to cook or eat or mix up with others or make any program.\textsuperscript{165} The neighbors, relative and the persons in the ‘kutumb’ arrive as soon as the news of the death spreads. They perform the rest of the work, like removing unwanted materials from the dead, lit a candle and scented smoke at the head and leg side of the dead. A piece of white cloth covering the whole body also is laid. The relatives, who visit, bring such white cloths to cover the body as showing respect to the dead. Then the body is put on a ‘māchā’, made of bamboo or a roped ‘khātīā’, upside down and carried to the burial or funeral ground.\textsuperscript{166} When marching towards, the burial ground the procession stop in three places; preferably a corner or a crossing of a few roads, where they call on ‘hāri-bol’; three times in each stopping, offering ‘ākhoi’ etc. in the surrounding. In the burial or funeral ground the guardian of the dead, buy a spot of land by offering a few coins with ‘pān-tāmul’ and the dead put on to cremation or burial keeping head on the west or north. The first fire or earth is to be offered by the guardian; then the others, all on their left hand, first and after completion leave the ground without asking others to accompany, crossing a thorny branch laid on the way of return. At the arrival of the house, first to take bath with the clothes on the body and taking some mustard oil on hand and face, smoke of scent and sprinkling the basil mixed water is necessary, without which it is believed that the person remain impure or ‘chhutuk’ simply because of going to the burial ground.\textsuperscript{167} Then the persons went to the burial ground, gather in the house of the dead and decide

\textsuperscript{165} ibid., p.3.
\textsuperscript{166} op.cit., Kurmi(Ed), 2001, p.131
\textsuperscript{167} ibid , p 132.
on about the day of the 'tiloni' and 'srādha'; and give few guidance to the family.

It should be mentioned that the womenfolk are not allowed to go to the burial ground. They can go up to the first stop where they message the face of the dead with mustard oil and pasted turmeric and gives prepared rice on the mouth as the last farewell.

On the day of 'tiloni' (third day of the dead) the relatives; from the maternal family cook food, mixing salt, oil and a taste of fish called 'āisā' and feed the family. Only after this performance the family allowed to cook their own food.\textsuperscript{168} The main function of 'morā-kāj' or 'sradho' takes place on the tenth day of the dead. In this performance the 'kutumb' and relatives belong to the maternal families play the major role. Few dedications are made in the name God for the piece of the dead in other world as ritual and the guests are offered with non-vegetarian dinner. There are certain customs in some castes that a kid killed by thrust in case of an immature boy's death and some cases fish is to be offered.\textsuperscript{169} Thus, the death ceremony is completes. There are certain families who perform the annual observances of the dead in the family, inviting relatives and 'kutumb'.

The eldest son of the dead generally keeps 'vrat' for ten days during which he has to keep certain restrictions. He has to keep away from his usual daily works, cook his own food without salt or oil in a earthen pot only once a day; sleeps on the ground on straw bed; only a piece of cloth on his body etc.

\textsuperscript{168} ibid.
\textsuperscript{169} Informant: Sri Udey Nayak (65) on 15 7.2007
all of which are abandoned on the tenth day of the sradho at the bathing place. The sradho ends with pindo-dāān, which sometimes takes place later if the person on vrat wishes to take the ashes to some pilgrimage spot. In case of burial of a person or death of an infant, limited observations are followed.\textsuperscript{170}

The Christians among the tea community, follow the rituals prescribed in the bible or guided by the priests and bury the dead enclosing in a coffin. Though, their death rites are followed according to the guidance of the priest, the ceremonies like tiloni, dosdiniā (sradha) etc. are practiced and they pray for the dead during these days and offer dinner to the relatives or the people who were present during the burial ceremony. They never burn a dead.

All the members from the paternal families among non-Christians are felt chhutuk or impure, so they have to observe the death rituals guided by the kutumb. The member from the maternal family, however, helps them during the restricted period with food and other supplies. The immediate sister, daughter is also counted as the member of the maternal family.

Another important ritual takes place during the midnight of the sradha is called jew-dhukā or chhāhir-ānā ceremony. This is a ceremony to invite the spirit of the dead to live in the house to whom dedication are made annually and on special occasions. A sthān prepared in the interior as reserve place inside the house. This practice is however, prevalent among a few of the caste Hindus and most of the tribal groups. The performance of the pinda-dāān is now replacing this performance.\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{170} op.ct., Kurmi(Ed), 2001, p.133.\textsuperscript{171} ibid
2:14: Recreation and Games:

Recreation is necessary for a busy person for refueling his capacity and interest in work. The tea garden laborers try to find out some recreation hours around their very busy daily routine. The general recreation time for them is usually the evening hours after the garden work. The seasonal outdoor games are played by the younger while the old pass time with playing-cards; gather in a certain place to have talks of different kind. Jokes, riddles, proverbs, tales, myths are also come out in such gatherings. They remember about their old days or about their predecessors; sometimes try to convince others about some ideas of their forefathers’ land etc., specially, during the summer season when the temperature is high and they need to sit under some shadow. They usually gather under a ‘pippal’ tree or any shadow with sufficient space for seating at least five to ten persons at a time. During the winter, they gather some straw, dried cane or bamboo baskets; occasionally found from the wastes in the tea garden. They make fire out of them and gather around for the chats. These sittings are the main contexts where the differences and individual beliefs come out from among them and shared helping gradual assimilation to each other. The younger, and even the children join such gatherings and the transmission of the ideas continue from one generation to the other. The places are also the contexts to share their difficulties during the garden work. They sit sometimes till dark during summer and by five or six o’clock during winter evening.

During winter season the pruning, ceiling, cleaning works in the garden etc. are done which complete a little earlier; they generally go to help others collecting paddy from the nearby

172 Informant: Sri Giridhar Nanda (58) on 17.4.2006
beel as modoid and that evening they pass with special dining with beverages in the host’s house. The same things happen during the summer seasons but on Sunday as the other day the garden works continue till evening. The other recreation hours for some of them are the cock fights taking place every Sunday during the winter. The monthly film shows which the tea garden management had to arrange during the off seasons were also recreation hours for the young people till eighties of the last century, now replaced by other activities like Karam-sanmilan, Bihu-sanmilan etc. The weekly holiday of Sunday is used according to individual wishes in the garden environment. These are the simple and individual recreation hours for the tea garden workers in the plantations.

The garden managements in most of the old tea garden which are sound and fall under the Plantation Act, 1951 provide with Labor Clubs with facilities of T.V., Carom-board, Chess, etc. to which the young and the children use to enjoy during the summer evening. Sometime the religious documentary or a T.V. serial; if shown on Sunday are enjoyed by them. This practice of course, now becomes occasional, as some of them could afford to have a TV at home, which is followed by the recent electrification of the tea garden lines. The summer evenings in the tea garden are also the time of football playing by the youths. Some ‘babus’ and even the manager or assistants take part and arrange matches in between gardens. Till the sixties of the last century, most of the tea workers are originally belong to the present Jharkhand use to play hockey. From last decade, cricket among youths and

173. Modoids – ‘modoids’ system is a system of collective help to the fellow worker in a household work other than the garden work without wage, but in return demanded some kind of work and so equally benefited by all.)
174. The facility provided according to the Plantation Labour Act 1951.
children become popular though in poor manner. Other plays like volley ball and badminton etc. are participated by limited youths from the workers side, which is occupied mostly by the youths from the garden staffs. The other traditional plays related to teenage are the ‘khuti-bāḍi’, ‘kābādi’, bhāwrā’, flying kites, marbles, playing cards etc. are also sometimes, participated by children and aged.\textsuperscript{176}

A number of games among the children are also played which are sometime common to both girls and boys and sometime restricted to each others. The ‘khuti-bāḍi’ is played by male children only while the ‘loka-guti’ played by the girls though not restricted to boys. The ‘bhāwrā’, is played by boys only. The tough plays are not played by girls. Even there are some games which differentiate the children on age basis. The small children use to play ‘marble’, ‘etnā-etnā pāni’, ‘am I? Yes’, ‘mithā-pāni-titā–pāni’ etc. while the more aged among them play the ‘luklukāni’, ‘bāgāl-o-bāgāl’, (participated sometimes with small children also), ‘chor-pulish’, etc. In these playing, the children follow their own discipline. Sometime they themselves invent a new play and start. The ‘bor-kāniyā’, related to marriage, has no special rule, but played among children in different forms in different areas.\textsuperscript{177}

The women, who work in the tea garden, could rarely enjoy the recreation hours like their male counterparts. After coming from the garden work they become busy with their daily household works like cleaning, cooking, feeding of the children etc.; which are common during morning and evening hours. But they could afford to enjoy talks, tales, jokes, riddles, proverbs etc. while they are working in the tea garden. This, of course

\textsuperscript{176} loc.cit., Tasa.
\textsuperscript{177} op cit., Tasa (ed), 2003, p.18
happens only during plucking hours but during the pruning it is impossible for them to confine themselves in such relaxing talks to one another; because the work is tough and full concentration is needed. But such talks can take place while they are bathing in the common bathing place of the tea garden line or during the household works, if two or more women join.\textsuperscript{178}

During the Independent and Republic Day the garden management; with collaboration of the committees of the workers and staff competitions are organized of different games. The workers and other participants sometime become successful to get prize by the hand of the manager or his wife whom they call 'mem-sāb'. Climbing oil mixed pole; rope play, cockfight, breaking earthen pot are the occasions for their entertainment. A few of them specially, women play like 'musical-chair', 'breaking earthen pot' etc. Reservations for the female are mostly occupied by the 'bābuwanis' (wife of the babus). A few of the gardens offer best prizes to the best pluckers of the year. The Independence and Republic Days are the two occasions when the Managerial Staff, the Babus and the workers join for a common event during the whole year.\textsuperscript{179}

\textbf{2:15: Folk Medicine:}

Folk medicines the tea garden use are of two kinds. They are the herbal and the magico-religious. They also use another kind of medicine derived from the animal substances. The people emigrated from the tribal areas of the present Jharkhand State had some idea about herbal medicines as well as the megico-religious treatment. They had idea about the medicines

\textsuperscript{178} Informant: Smt. Mela Dhanowar (45) on 26.12.2006
\textsuperscript{179} Informant: Sri Suresh Tanti (52) on 15.8.2003
derived from the animals.\textsuperscript{180} The magico-religious medicines associated with their usual belief in the spirits and various supernatural powers. The people originated from the plains of the then Central Provinces areas are the castes who have little idea about herbal medicines but depend mostly on the items easily found in their household environments and animal substances.

The tea garden community as they are originated from both the forest and hilly areas were late to experienced with the modern medicine as being enough poor to afford expenses for this medicines. This is the cause they had to depend on herbal medicines for a very long time. At present also they are attached with of herbal medicines as immediate treatment of their ailments. They also take help of the shamans or the 'diari'; who is believed to be capable of inviting spirits through whom he learns certain herbs or 'mantras' by which ailments could be cured.\textsuperscript{181}

The folk medicines include the oil, powder of bone or meat of the animals and birds. Bird like cock, owl, crow, crane, bat, vulgar, pigeon, eagle and peacock etc. Snake, fish, fox, mongoose, tiger, buffalo, pig, bear, deer, cow, elephant, rhinoceros, heir, gohi, etc. are some of the beasts, the parts of which they use as medicines. But the common 'baidh' or medicine man may does not know the use of all the above as medicines. They use one or the other from the above in the wide spread community. This is because their traditional origins were different in the past. But most of the articles mentioned are based on special preparation, mixing with other materials to prepare the actual medicine. Even sometime color of a beast or

\textsuperscript{180} Informant: Sri Jonok Paramanik (40) on 3.9.2007.
\textsuperscript{181} Informant: Sri Gulap Tanti (52) on 26.1.2007
bird play major role to use it as medicine. Black chicken, black cow are such examples.\(^2\)

The herbs found nearest to their reach are used as medicine frequently. Being manual worker with necessary tools in hand they generally face scratches, cuts, itches and bite of bees or wasps or affected by leech etc, are immediate met with treatment on the spot by the herbs of immediate reach as the garden hospitals are far away from their working places. The \textit{phul-hābi} mixed with \textit{sādā} and \textit{chunā} is the immediate treatment of a scratch or cut. The leaves of the \textit{gendhā} flower if found, is also used for the purpose. Use of \textit{pādri-lot}, its shoot, stamped it into paste or drops is use as treatment against fever and pain. Mustard oil, turmeric, garlic, black chilly, \textit{mungā}, bosh, leaves of \textit{temrosh}, \textit{phudnā}, \textit{nembu}, \textit{neem}, \textit{dābā-tengā}, \textit{hortoki}, \textit{āwīlā}, \textit{bet-dog}, etc. are the few herbs and seeds used for immediate treatment of abdominal diseases. \textit{Pipal}, \textit{neem}, \textit{mungā}, \textit{lath-lathi}, \textit{lāzwanti}, cane, mango, beetle-nut with \textit{pāān}, coconut, \textit{karanz}, \textit{till}, \textit{jāḍā-tel}, bamboo, pineapple, \textit{bel}, \textit{chālthā}, \textit{thekrā}, orange, \textit{tulshi}, \textit{kāmrenga}, \textit{kushum}, \textit{kudrum}, \textit{demoir}, \textit{jāmūn}, \textit{titākhādi}, \textit{doodh-hābi}, etc. are among the various herbs, they use for different ailments.\(^3\)

A number of other articles like cow-dung, urine of the calf, placenta of the cat, oil of the chicken, earth from the \textit{diā-māti} ant, black shoot from the hearth, waste of the peacock, released skin of the snake; the earth where snakes mate or the clothes mixed with it, oil of the \textit{sisu} etc. are used as medicines against different diseases.\(^4\)

182. Informant: Sri Benedict Kujur (85) on 17.8.2006
183. Informant: Sri Kujur
184. Informant: Smt Jospin Kujur (68) on 27.12 2002
Big trees like *pipal* and *bad-gāch*, high hill etc. are supposed to be residence of the 'bhut-pret', which, if not offered puja or neglected may cause ailments or misfortune. They worship these articles of nature sacrificing fowls or flower to keep of their houses from evils. They hang net, chains, *jhādā-pātā*, *chhitā-pātā*, etc. on their doors of the main entrance; bind their houses with *mantra* using egg, fowl or mustard seeds throwing all around, believing they save their houses from evils. The *diari* who can invite spirit on him helps and guides about the medicines related to a particular diseases. The *diāri*, when the spirit is on him, touches the infected or bite the spot of the disease and the patient feels having cured. Sometime the cured patients offer the demanded fowl or anything else during the next occasion of coming of the spirit on the *diāri* as thank giving. The non-cured blamed to be no faith on the devta.\(^{185}\)

2:16: Material Culture:

The tea garden community belongs to both the tribal and non-tribal origin. The nature of the material culture they have borrowed from their tradition is of rural background. The raw materials were different in their forefather's land depending on the geographical situations. After their settlement in the tea garden they use to work on their varieties of materials with the common raw materials found in the tea garden areas. Interchange of the crafts helped them to develop more beautiful materials which gradually become common craft having no trace of their origin. The crafts they build are of high utility but lack artistic beauty. Their huts, they used to construct were such with no windows, single door and too low straw roof on the top or sometime covered with earthen tiles. The utility of this kind

\(^{185}\) Informant: Sri Bati Mahanandia (75) on 26.4.2003.
of houses were more useful in those situations of their previous land than in Assam. But as a habit they construct same kind of houses out of mud and straw. The houses are well polished by mud and beautified with various symbols on the wall. The arts, most of which are made by the females are of flowers, birds; specially of peacocks, symbolic human itself or its steps or beasts or trees, generally, white in color made out of the pest prepared by rice. The arts on special occasion symbolize the festivity. They sometime specially decorate the house on sacrificial occasions make human footsteps out of their fists in certain position covered with the rice pests. Such symbols are felt lucky. The door of the house as mentioned earlier, are as low as a person enters require to low his head or to hit the top. Sometimes small holes left to use as windows, which hardly supply necessary light into the house A half wall room may be shaded from the main room and used for their hearth in which the pidor or the puja spot locate. They use bamboo slices on which the straw or earthen tiles fastened on the top of the house making two sides slopping with an angle on the top at the middle. The exterior parts of the walls attached with a pindā (sitting spot of about one foot or more in breadth and height) all around which is also the foundation of the house itself, attach with the earthen wall. In Assam, the garden workers live in the quarters supplied by the management. Those who left the gardens use to make bamboo-straw houses like other villagers in Assam. Their houses of course, show certain symbols through which one can easily trace the identity of its owner.

186 Informant: Sri Mahesh Gowala (40) 5.6.2005
187 Informant: Sri Rajaram Tanti (65) on 13.9.2006
The roofs they make out of thatch or other leaves are much sloper than that of an average Assamese houses.\textsuperscript{188}

The castes belong to the Orissa, Bengal and Bihar use to sleep on a portable netted \textit{khātiā} made out of wood and coconut rope. The architect of the \textit{khātiā} needs artistic idea. Others, who are unknown of this technique use to sleep on bamboo \textit{chang} or sleep on the ground on their traditional mat. Their furniture in the house is nothing but a few \textit{piḍhā}. Very recently, some of them began to use the cane made ‘mudha’ or cheap rated wooden chairs and tables. Most of the household works they do on the ground. To keep the dish, sauce or utensils etc. they prepare straw made hanging stands fastened with ropes to keep milk or special curry out of the reach of cat is called \textit{sikā}. The surroundings of the quarter or the house used as \textit{bāḍi} to grow vegetables. Bamboo \textit{beḍhā} is required to save it from domestic animals. They are less interested to keep flower garden, but, a \textit{tulsi} plant as worship spot may be seen in front of their houses. They also use one of the corners in the courtyard for washing purposes, called ‘pānisāāl’.\textsuperscript{189}

As mentioned earlier, a few of the tea garden family are not only working in the tea garden but possess some cultivable land to keep their reserve foodstuff, specially, rice. The cultivator families immigrated from Orissa, prepare \textit{purā*} out of rice straw to keep their reserve rice. Others keep rice in \textit{dimni}, made out of bamboo and the very few who are full-time

\textsuperscript{188} The researcher such houses in Ex-TGL populated village in Ulup village in Margherita Sub-division.

* (They keep the interior of the house dark and without light for the ‘piddor’ inside).

\textsuperscript{189} The researcher found many houses in Line No.15 in Samdang T.E. during his field work. It is a usual scene in other garden also.
cultivators and living in the villages, began to use bhāndār (bhoral-ghar) to keep their reserve rice. Use of bhāndār, which is a chāng-ghar out of reach of the cattle, perhaps they learnt in Assam.¹⁹⁰

The tools they use in their work are not much different than those of the others in Assam. Plough with its attaches used for paddy cultivation. The basket, tukri and tupā made out of bamboo supplied by the employer every year. The khoḍom; made of wood with a piece of thick lace fastened to support the leg, are of special kind. This is due to the women workers sometimes become shorter to reach the leaves to be plucked on top of the bush. A bindā on their head top to support the lace or rope of the tupā, made out of the pieces of clothes to carry leaves on their back. The ‘bāhāngā’ to carry two tukri at a time on shoulder used by the males is no difference than those of the bāhāngā carrying paddy stuff.¹⁹¹

1: Crafts: Originally the title of castes identified the name of their crafts. The tea garden people have castes like ‘kāmār’, ‘kumhār’, ‘karmakār’ etc. the name of which is the identification of their crafts itself. Such are also the ‘Bonār’, ‘bāḍoi’, ‘turi’, ‘koiri’, ‘tānti’ etc. But in the plantation situation they have no time to continue their trade. A few of the Karmakār, Bāḍhoi and Koiry are sometime appointed by the garden management for garden supply.¹⁹²

The traditional drink hadia bears special crafty idea. Wild leaves applied on boiled rice, keeping of which for a few days

¹⁹⁰ Informant: Sri Nicolas Lakra (55) on 2.10.2007.
¹⁹² Informant: Sri Sures Das (59) on 9.7.2007.
produces liquids on the bottom which used as hadia is probably of Austro-Mongoloid origin. The Ahoms in Assam also use the same kind of drink called ħāj.

Among the other household materials the ‘lāo-chungā’ to keep salt and dried articles, bamboo ‘chungā’ to save coins etc. are also a few of their special crafts.

The hunting materials like gorhā-draunk, thothi-dhanuk, tir, hel, gurdhel, phārsā etc. are also the crafts of special kind, they bear. They use a bow shooting of which only could be done by applying the legs.

The traditional Indian village was self-sufficient and producing everything what they required for their existence. The foodstuff; the tools essential for producing different materials like utensils, dresses, ornaments and so on. But the craft of different items were distributed among the experts with individual craftsmanship who took it as his own occupation recognized by the craft which he began to use as his title. This happened in the long past and continued from generations to generations for special identification of a particular craft to a certain family. This way the title or the sub-caste associated to a particular craft came into existence. Originated from such traditional background a number of castes and tribes in the tea community are known from their titles are related to a certain crafts. These sections of people, as they were habituated with their particular craft tried to continue the tradition in the environment of the plantation also. Their expertise sometime noticed by the management and they used it in the development

193. op.cit., Kujur 1989, p 160
194 ibid., p 68
195. ibid., p 69.
of the plantation. Those who did not get such favour gradually began to forget their age old tradition in the environment of the plantation.

2: Architecture: The caste Hindu people use of make earthen stall inside the house, near the hearth, which is used as sthān of their pitri-purush, called piddor; worshipped annually and during special occasions. General worship of the grām-devtā, outside the village in a small hut made of bamboo and thatch and a few small earthen sthan on the ground, on which the dedications are made. The 'Manasha-puja', 'Kali puja', 'Ganesh-puja' etc. are also symbolize with such small stalls. The architecture of the tea community is at present intermixed to each other and cannot be identified separately. There are of course, some musical instrument like the tohqā of the Kisans, lisān of the Oriya etc., keep the individual identifications.196

2:17: Costumes:

The cultural background of the caste and tribes in the tea community are different. So, the costumes are also varied according to their cultural differences. But, like the average Indians, in their native states, the essential commodities were produced on their villages. They were, though rural in nature, differences in crafts and in their productions.

Till seventies of the last century, some of the castes and tribes tried to save some of their traditional costumes in tact. Unlike the Assamese gāmuchhā they had also certain clothes common to their respective castes or tribes. The traditional 'Sambalpuri' saris have become most respective clothing among Indian women and even in abroad. But the present price of this

196. Informant. Sri Sanjay Kisan (47) on 23.11.2004
item cannot be afforded by this community, though they were the originator of the production. Ornaments, most of which are of gold, used from head to foot, both by male and female among them was a general scenario in the plantation prior to the middle of last century.  

The tea garden people favor golden and silver ornaments on their forehead, ears, nose, neck, arm, ankle, finger of both hand and foot. The traditional khoglā or hānsli and necklace made of silver coins are common to all of the tea garden community women. The bāhtād, kutriā-bundriā, ghunshi, ‘poiri’ etc. are used by most of the women which could be seen in their traditional feasts and festivals. The common ornaments, still used are tilak, khongso, kān-phul, nāk-phul, mālā of silver and gold, baju are used by female while the common ornaments for a male are hansli, ghunshi, bala and earnings made of gold or silver. The ornaments bear symbolic identification of the caste or tribe to which it belongs with its special craftsmanship. A few of such ornaments for a certain caste or tribe are felt taboo to use by others. The female ornaments are not used by the male as it has special identification for the female.

Earlier, there were handloom dresses for both man and woman. Man wore a piece of dhoti, most of them above their knee and the woman a piece of saree of some thickness, which could cover up to the knee when bound on the waist. The smallest dresses were the lengti for male and āngiā for female, respectively. The traditional dress continued for a certain period of time, till they frequently traveling to their past States, bringing these clothes from there. Very soon, the Manchester

197 Informant: Sri Bisu Deep (57) on 2.3.2006.
198 Informant: Smt Hemo Nayak (61) on 12.2.2007
clothes, supplied by the English planters occupied the indigenous dresses. The foreign clothes were of cheap rated and they include sāris and dhotis including the pants and shirts. The warm clothes were also supplied to the workers from England. Though the cotton spanned items changed, the ornaments did not. These items were sold during the food crisis in the seventies of the last century. During this period their precious ornaments gone to the hand of the rice seller or shop keeper located around the garden against a few ser of rice or wheat. These grocery shops were allowed to open their business near or inside the garden at least one in each line called gola; occupied mostly by the 'Marwaris', permitted for the easy access of foodstuff for the laborers.¹⁹⁹ In the tea garden atmosphere the costumes for a female are the khachal or phāndri, petticoat, gāmchhā, blouse, a piece of cloth on head called urmāl and a bundle made of clothes to support the leave-basket on head. Besides, a piece of apron around the waist is essential to save the clothes from pinch of the branches and from long wet. Very recently sāri and mekhelā-chāddar are replacing the khachal or phāndri. The man-folk wear a dhoti above knee or a short pant, a gāmchhā on their waist, a gānji or shirt on body, are the limited dress they wore during their work. Very recently, the young workers used to wore long pants and chapels, specially, during winter seasons. Unlike the female, male also need apron to save their clothes from pinch and long wet. Besides, a pair of tall-heeled khoḍom made of wood is used when plucking leaves in the garden. All these dresses are mean for their work in the garden. The high heel khoḍom are specially made for female so that they could reach the leaves on top of the bushes. The man-folk, who are engaged in other works; like factory duty, bungalow duty or pruning of the bushes during off season do not require to use

The costumes like suizār-kurtā, pājāmā-kurtā, jacket, sweater etc. are also used nowadays by the people in the tea garden.

The tatoo called khodā, drawn on the different parts of the body of a female is widely practiced. Pinching by a pin and pouring mustard oil and shoot called dhumsā on the spot, takes permanent artistic sign on the body. The womenfolk of almost all the tribes and castes use to take this on their chests, arms, hands, ankles and foots. The hill-Kondho of Orissa uses it on the whole part of their chicks, neck and chests. They were mean to save a woman from the lusty eye of their land lord or Kings. There are also a few tribes, like the Oraon of Chhotanagpur area wore three parallel line of about half an inch on both the sides of their eyes. Some females use small spot on the forehead, between the eyes. These small spots on their face increase their beauty rather than their appearance as ugly. Khodā with special identification mark for a certain tribe or caste is necessary and not having the identification mark is a taboo. They believe that it saves from untimely death and saves one from loss after death.

The women folk of some of the tribes like Munda, Oran fasten small knifes in their khopa. The Oriya women make their khopā on their left side back on the top of the ear. A few of the tribes wore earthen comb on their hairs made by themselves. Long hair for women and even for some man is a symbol of beauty. Before the soap, they cleaned it with the soapy earth found by the banks of the river. For body, the female frequently

201. op.cit., Kurmi(Ed) p. 541.
use turmeric for its cleaning. Now-a-days, the cheap cosmetic found in the market are used by both male and female.\textsuperscript{203}

\textbf{2:18: Food habits:}

Unlike the other communities of the north-east, the tea garden peoples chief foodstuffs are rice, \textit{roti} made of wheat powder, pulses, potatoes, vegetables, fish, egg and meats in their routine dish and fruits of different kind, drinks etc. are occasional. Due to low wage earner they use cheap items then the costly ones. They boil rice and dry it for food, sometime take it with the liquid called \textit{māḍ-bhāṭ}.\textsuperscript{204} Sometime, during the festivals, they mix it with milk and sugar called \textit{jokhā} which also u to dedicate to their forefathers on special days. Different kind of rice used for different foods. They prepare \textit{pithā} of different kind, \textit{lāḍu}, \textit{māḍḍā-pithā} etc. and drinks like \textit{ḥāḍliā} widely used among them unlike how the urban people use cold drink. Originally, their food habits vary according to the production of the items in their individual areas. Rice is available in almost all the areas of their origin. There were other items also like \textit{bojrā}, \textit{jowār} (maize), \textit{māḍuwā}, \textit{gundli} etc. which could be used as chief food such as rice and \textit{roti}. \textit{Chānā} and \textit{māhuwā} were also widely used. Except rice and pulses they do not produce the rests in Assam.\textsuperscript{205}

In the environment of the tea plantation, what is produced does not matter to the tea garden laborers. They can hardly cultivate for themselves due to the shortage of time. They are kept in the confinement of the tea garden and whatever edibles supplied by the management or the authorized shops in the line

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204. op.cit., Kurmi (Ed) 2001, p.139.
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or in the garden bazaar, are their foodstuff. The ration which includes rice and wheat supplied by the garden authority plays important role in their food habits. During the initial period, when the gardens were opened, cleaning jungles and virgin areas, the planters had to supply all the necessary foodstuff and essential articles to the laborers. During this period food prepared in common hearth for all. The mostly used beverage among them is the chāh-pānī or boiled tea mixed with little salt supplied by the management during the working hour which helps acquiring new strength for work. All the tea laborers including their children take this with roti or rice or anything as meal. They cannot afford to have tarkāri (curry) with their morning roti. So they take it with the chāh-pānī, mixed with little salt. Sugar, sugarcane, molasses, creams, milk are not known to them. The management supply tea as ration. Thus, tea drinking becomes important part in their daily life.206

Hadīa, the alcoholic beverage, made out of rice and few herbals is also widely used by them. This drink is similar with the haj, mostly used by the Ahoms and Kacharis of Assam who were its first producer, is still unknown. It is assumed that the 'boḍo-kachārī' were the first to work in the tea plantation perhaps responsible to teach the technique of preparation to the later tea laborers. The tea communities' forefathers were preparing such native alcoholic drinks only of 'mahuwa' mixing with rice, jowār, madūwā or gundli etc. They were also mixing matikathal, banana etc. with the rice and herb mixture for different taste.207

They take dinner as their chief food after the whole day hard labor. This includes only rice and a torkāri prepared from

207. loc.cit., Kujur.
pulses, potatoes or any green vegetables within their economic reach. The second major meal they take is the roti made out of wheat powder during the morning before setting out for work. This roti however, taken only with a boutful of chāhpāni mixed with salt as torkāri rarely used by them with it. This because shortage of time during morning hours. A few of the rotis is also taken to the working place to use as lunch in between work with the chān-pāni supplied by the management. The rice prepared at night in abundant so that to remain after the family's consumption, is called bāsi-bhāat which their children and others who are at home take it as lunch during the day time. On Sunday, which is a off day from the garden work, their meal is supported by some curry, like fish, which they collect from the nearby stream or beel or a chicken from their own small poultry most of them used to keep. Eating chicken curry and fish are common practice if guests are at home. But most of them use mād-bhāat with little vegetable during Sunday or holiday. Sunday dinner sometime taken with fowl by some families whose males goes to the murgi-ākhḍā for cock fight and if he is lucky enough to bring a cock which is injured or died during the fight. During the festival like 'Durga-Puja' and 'Kali-puja' many of them take duck as their curry. During 'holi', 'diwali' and other common festivals they take puri-tarkāri, or 'traditional pithā etc. In most of their rituals chicken, pigeon, kid etc.; are offered and ate with homemade alcohol.²⁰⁸

Now-a-days some of their rituals, which are similar to that of the 'bohag' and 'magh bihu', special food become common with those of the average Assamese people. During 'magh-bihu' they observe it as makar-sangkranti and use til-pithā, doi-chewrā, kāndā etc. The traditional pithā like oḍsā-pithā, bhājā-

²⁰⁸ ibid.,p.158.
pithā, ghilā-pithā etc. are common in their festivals. Hādiā with chakhna** is widely used during festivals and ceremonies.209

Tobacco, beetle-nut with leaf, hukā, bidi, etc. are also widely used by both males and females. In recent days another beverage, called chulāi-sārāp is widely used among them due to its cheap price. The chemical used to prepare this are fatal for human health. This beverage is playing decisive role on the economic development of this community.210

2:19: Performing Art:

Performing arts includes song, dance, drama and varieties of physical actions in different contexts of rituals, ceremonies, observations etc. The cultural heritage of the tea garden community is rich in the context of performing art-form. The traditional songs and dances and other forms of performing arts they have inherited, are practiced at present also. They were originally belong to the individual communities gradually becomes common tradition for all of them. However, some of the songs, dances, and dramas, with their performing instruments are different and through them a caste or tribe can be identified. But gradually they are forgetting some of their individual character, like the mantra, songs and individual dialects, opening ways to be assimilated with others with its common factors. Such are the ‘Karam’, ‘Tushu’ and ‘Sohrai’ artifacts common to some of the communities. ‘Karam’, widely celebrated both by the castes and tribes of different groups in

(Chakhna usually prepared by the spoils or unused parts like head, foot, intestine etc. are separately prepared to use it with hadia. If there is no such things ‘chana bhaja’ is replaced. Other sabji or curry, murhi-chewra, etc. are also used as chakhna with the hadia).

210. Informant: Sri Motlram Koiry (65) on 6.6.2003
different forms; now become common celebration. Tushu, which was borrowed from Bengal, now amalgamated with mānghiporob. Likewise, ‘sohrāi’, also called ‘jāhli’ becomes common though observed by individual family possesses cattle. This is due to their common identification in some of the spheres of their livelihood.211

Most of the tribes and castes are related to animistic character. The pujāri among them is able to call deo or spirit on him, which is worshiped by the rest with full dedication to get rid of evil happenings. The performances of a pujāri to invite the spirit or after its coming are same among different groups and even similar to that of the deodhani performance in Assam.

The people originated from Bihar, Orissa and Bengal borrowed with them the famous Ramayana related drama which is called ‘Rām-Lilā’ performance attended with spirit of dedication and worship. The recent TV serial Ramayana and Mahabharata, shown on every Sunday, attracted large number of aged men and women into it; a few of whom even attended them with candle and dhup. ‘Rām-Lilā’, though a street play can be compared with the bhāona performed in the baishnavite nāmghar in Assam as both of them bear all the artifacts required for the performance. The modern drama is not yet popularized among them rather the motion pictures occupied their sense of thinking unpopularizing the traditional Rām-Lilā.