CHAPTER – III

(WORK AND LEISURE: LIFE-STYLE OF THE TEA PLANTERS)
The tea Planter’s way of life within the gardens of Cachar during the British period has been discussed in this chapter. They were the pioneers in the field of tea plantation in India, and belonged to English, Scottish and Irish people.¹ Most of them were commercial agents or officials of the East India Company, members of the metropolitan bourgeoisie or the gentry.² They came from different backgrounds, and mostly belonged to middle and lower middle class family, retired personnel of armed and naval services, officers of engineers and medical departments.³ Besides these, a number of businessman, clerks, shopkeepers, and retired police personnel were also involved in the establishment of the tea plantation in colonial Cachar.⁴ It is known from the sources that, most of the tea planters were engaged as Managers and owners in different industrial fields like, rubber, coffee, jute, indigo, opium plantation or any other industrial sector before the introduction of tea plantation in Cachar. Typical of such men were, George Williamson, who had started first tea plantation in Cachar at Mouza Barsangan in 1855. He had been a sugar planter in Bihar before starting tea.⁵ R B Magor, was originally an assistant at the Great Eastern Hotel, Kolkata, before taking to tea.⁶ William Bisset had been a farmer’s assistant and wheelwright before his appointment as a tea garden assistant; Robert McAlpine had been the Manager of a Rum Distillery; C J Scott was formerly a mate on a river steamer Captain J H Williamson of the legendary Williamson brothers himself had been a steamer captain before taking to tea.⁷ Andrew Yule who came from a family of yeoman farmers in Scotland, worked as a warehouseman in Manchester before seeking his fortune in India as a tea planter.⁸ Charlie Ansell came into the field of tea plantation as Planter after he had been a mechanic on a

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¹ Griffith, John, *Tea – The Drink that Changed the World*, Carlton Publishing Group, London, 2007, p.120.
⁶ Ibid, p.29.
steamship. It was, therefore, owing to their involvement in plantation sector that helped them to manage and control the industrial relation and labour problems. It cannot be denied that, the formation of the ‘Tea Committee’ in 1834 by the Governor General Lord William Bentinck had brought favourable changes in the field of tea plantation, and resulted in transformation of large funds for investment in this field with a view to earn more profit. Moreover, the Government policy of leasing land for plantation to the European Companies or Planters at a nominal rate for the cultivation of tea gradually led to the establishment of a large number of tea gardens in Cachar during the colonial period. Thus, within a very short span of time with the help from the Government and willing power of the Planters they were able to expand their business in various regions including Cachar. In Cachar, the first tea plantation was established at Mouza Barsangan (present Kathal Bagan) in 1855 by Williamson and Company.

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9 Ibid.
11 File No- 103-199 BG State Archives and Record Room, Guwahati.
12 Letter No. 211 of 1855, 4th September 1855, District Record Room, Silchar.
Cachar (present Cachar and Hailakandi district) during the colonial period was one of the earliest regions that introduced tea plantation in the year 1855 at Barsangan (present Kathal Bagan). In those days Cachar was an unknown land vested with heavy jungles with large number of deadly wild animals, waterborne and malaria affected diseases, hot and humid climate.\footnote{Dutta, Arup Kumar, \textit{Cha Garam – The Tea Story}, 1992, p.89. and also Griffith, John, \textit{Tea – The Drink that Changed the World}, Carlton Publishing Group, London, 2007, p.124.} It was dreadful to think for anyone to come here and to establish tea plantation in such type of condition. Further, the communication at that time was very negligible; roads were virtually non-existent, the only means of communication at that time was through paddy fields and jungles on elephant back or by country boat.\footnote{Dutta, Arup Kumar, \textit{Cha Garam – The Tea Story}, 1992, p.93.} The early tea planters specially relied on the elephant, which not only gave him transport through the dense jungle but also provided protection from many wild animals.\footnote{Pugh, Peter, \textit{Williamson Magor – Stuck to Tea}, Cambridge Business Publishing, Great Britain, 1991, p.18.} Besides this, most of the tea Planters came to Cachar without any prior knowledge of geography and language of the area.\footnote{Ibid, p.41. and also Griffith, John, \textit{Tea – The Drink that Changed the World}, Carlton Publishing Group, London, 2007, p.125.} Thus, the early tea planters had to go through tremendous hardships in the initial period of the establishment of the tea plantation in Cachar.

Among the various problems as faced by the early tea planters while undertaking the tea plantation in Cachar, the major one which they did not escape was of the malaria and blackwater fever.\footnote{Dutta, Arup Kumar, \textit{Cha Garam – The Tea Story}, 1992, p.95} Due to the dreadful weather and the diseases of the region, the planters could not adjust themselves and therefore many died in the plantation area and others returned to their motherland. Records of the Assam Company and Jorhat Tea Company mention many such deaths and disablements.\footnote{Ibid, p.90.}

Alfred Berry, for instance, came from England on January 26, 1873 but died the following year from tetanus.\footnote{Ibid, p.91.} William Bisset, in 1880, suffered from heat apoplexy
due to over-exertion and had to retire from service. Ramsden, himself suffered from malaria, a few years after joining. He uttered, “as it happened, about four years later, I had three months of malaria myself, with an attack every afternoon lasting from four o’clock till six. I got so bad that I had to be sent down to the School of Tropical Medicines in Calcutta, where I was given the world’s worst medicine – carbon tetrachloride – 80 minims of which drove out the hookworms, and in two days I was as right as rain. Coolies incidentally are given two doses of 40 minims on account of their lower vitality and a slight overdose can snuff them out in an hour.” Early entrants to the Jorhat Tea Company, such as, A Macdonald and F M Proby retired within a year of joining due to ill health, John Graham Price, died in Kolkata, in 1864 before he could depart for England. Ralph Cripp died in 1879 from heat apoplexy, due to bad health Henry Hammerton Burkinyoung took the early retirement. Edward L French died of epilepsy in 1873; B G Stevans had to leave Assam in 1865 due to ill health. Even the doctors were not spared. Dr. Robert T Stobie, the first Medical Officer appointed by the Jorhat Tea Company, died within two years of his joining in 1865 from delirium tremens. Dr. John Elliot died of heat apoplexy in 1876.

Another major problem faced by early tea planters was the transportation. The communication from the London to Kolkata was no problem, it was made on 30-35 days by steam-liners which was beautifully decorated and filled up with every imaginable comfort. At Kolkata after the long journey finding accommodation was no problem, as G M Barker tells, ‘Calcutta – gigantic city though it is boasts of only one fairly good hotel, the Great Eastern, carried on by a company. Here can be bought everything. The premises under the hotel have been fitted up as a vast store which is kept freshly supplied with the latest English novelties by the continuous stream of ships coming out. The hotel itself is fairly comfortable, the table being

20 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid, p.96
kept on a very liberal scale, and the general arrangements as complete as can be expected in a huge establishment of this kind. As there are many extensive boarding establishments in the town, the hotel is mainly used as a place to put up at for a few days, until some more permanent arrangement can be made with one of the boarding house keepers, if a lengthened stay is contemplated. Many of the best houses in Chowringhee facing the Maidan, and formerly private mansions, have been converted into boarding houses to meet the demand for this kind of living.²⁸

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**Early Tea Planters**

The tea planters would now boarded a steamer that would carry him from Kolkata to tea districts in Assam and then country boats on its tributaries, which takes two months to reach Assam.²⁹ It is found from the sources that when the Scientific Commission of Lord William Bentinck’s ‘Tea Committee’ visited Assam in 1835, it took four half months by country boat to reach Sadiya.³⁰ The account of the journey from Kolkata to Assam tea estates in those days have been given by a planter, which goes thus, ‘a voyage up the Brahmaputra is attended with many obstacles not to be met with upon the Ganges. In the dry season there are no beaten paths to facilitate tracking; the boatmen must either force their way through the high

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reeds on the crumbling perpendicular bank, or scramble along the bottom; or, what they prefer, keep upon the shoal side the river, where the sand bank affords good footing, though with great drawback of the boat getting often aground. During the rains the navigation is very much impeded, the banks are overflowed and little or no tracking ground is left, so that pushing along by the slowest of all processes, the bamboo, is the only means of advancing. The prevailing wind from the east adds no little impediment to the journey. During the cold weather the Brahmaputra is clear and transparent but in the rains thick and turbid, and at the full flood covered with rafts of pine trees swept away by its mountainous torrents; or by large masses of soil, with the reeds and long grass still adhering.  

Tea Planters With Their Wives

In the 1840s, to facilitate the better communication, Lord William Bentinck, the Governor-General of India introduced Government Steamer Services.  

But their trips to Assam were irregular and uncertain, it was only from 1860s, when the Indian General Navigation Steam Company came into the picture, which made a regular

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31 Ibid, 97.
steamer services to the Brahmaputra Valley. These steamers were captained by European who carried lucrative trading on their own. Moreover, they stocked a host of consumer goods, such as, wine, cigar, ammunition, tinned food and medicines.

Thus, having finally arrived at the tea plantation, the planters undertook their duties in their respective tea gardens.

Though the early tea planters faced a lot of problems in the beginning of the tea plantation in Cachar, but, it was because of their adventurous nature and hard work, they were able to overcome it and established successfully the tea plantation in Cachar. They had given their sweat and blood to make the plantation economically viable and prosperous. Starting from the scratch, they had selected site for plantation, factory, residential area, labour lines and small rivulets and nalahl to make permanent reservoirs. They also spread trolley lines in the entire plantation area.

Such works were unthinkable during those days where no developed machine and electricity was available. The machinery for the purpose was brought from London to Calcutta port by sea route and from Calcutta it was brought to plantation area by river route. The services of elephants were also utilized in bringing machinery from the river ferry point to the factory site. The pioneering planters were the eyes and ears of the tea estate administration where they played the role of farmers, industrialists, traders and finally benevolent guardians and father-mother (ma-baap) of the wage earners, that is labourers, whose life depended upon their progressive industrial policy and humanistic approach.

The history of tea plantation in Cachar district during the British period thus reflects that the European planters worked hard under inhospitable climate and proved to be the excellent workers who left no stone unturned to establish tea plantation in the difficult terrain and that too without any infrastructure. They showed the highest feat of adventurism in the plantation exercise. Their hard labour ultimately led to the rapid expansion of tea plantation in the region and within a

33 Dutta, Arup Kumar, Cha Garam – The Tea Story, 1992, p.97
34 Ibid, p.97.
35 Singh, S N, Socio-Economic and Political Problems of Tea Garden Workers, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, 2006, p.67
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
short span of time the wastelands were covered by the tea plantation. The large scale expansion of the tea plantation demands a large number of labourers for doing manual works constantly. In the beginning of the establishment of tea plantation, the nature of work involves – road making, building and repairing, bridge buildings, clearing jungle, earth cutting, drain cutting, nursery making, planting of tea bushes and finally plucking of tea leaves. In the factory, labourers are required to busy themselves for manufacturing the tea boxes, a small whole in the lining of a tea-chest will cause serious injury to the contents. This is a work that requires a large number of workers right from the nursery to the final dispatch of the boxes for sale in the market.

At the same time, it is also required for the planters to supervise every details of work which is related with the plantation. This is why, a manager of tea garden, wrote G M Barker in 1884, ‘Must be a rather out of the ordinary sort of man. To be of any use he must be of strict integrity, in order to gain the confidence of his employers; sober, business like, a good accountant, not easily ruffled, handy at carpentering and engineering, know something about soil, and have a smattering of

38 Carson, Thomas, Ranching, Sport and Travel, Susan Skinner and Janet Blenkinship, London, 2007, p.3
information on all subjects; or to put it concisely, he must be a veritable jack of all trades.\textsuperscript{39}

The labourers having agricultural background can only maintain such hard works. It was therefore, felt necessary for the tea planters to arrange such type of labourers for smooth running of the plantation. In the beginning of the tea plantation, they thought that they would manage the tea plantation in Cachar with the help of local labourers.\textsuperscript{40} But, in the subsequent time, it was realised that the local labourers were unfit for the hard work of the tea plantation, as they were found lazy, loathsome, physically weak, and opium addicted. The local labourers were also found absent during pick hours by showing simple excuse of illness, stomach disorder, religious festivals, domestic works or other ritual functions.\textsuperscript{41} In their opinion, the employment in the garden was below their dignity and status, and their self-sufficient economy further discouraged them to join tea plantation.\textsuperscript{42} Thus, this attitude of the local labour compelled the tea planters to make other alternative arrangements.

\textbf{Planters While Playing Cricket}

\textsuperscript{40} Commissioners Letter Book, File No. 211, 1855, Districts Record Room, Silchar.
\textsuperscript{41} Singh, S N, *Socio-Economic and Political Problems of tea Garden Workers*, Mittal Publication, N.Delhi, 2006, p.13
\textsuperscript{42} Anil Kumar Dosadh, an interview conducted on 25\textsuperscript{th} October 2010 at Katakhal Tea Garden, Silchar.
However, as there was an urgent requirement of hard working labourers for the tea plantation, who could be readily available without any break, therefore, the planters along with the colonial British administrators decided to bring labourers from outside Cachar. They thought that, the immigrant labourers could easily be controlled if they are provided the facilities of housing and paddy land within the garden itself.\textsuperscript{43} The execution of the plan was immediately brought into action and accordingly emigration of labour (British called ‘Coolie’) started in Cachar from famine effected provinces of present Bihar, UP, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Madras and spread over the entire plantation valleys (planters called circles) of colonial Cachar.\textsuperscript{44}

Accordingly, in the subsequent period, the labourers were brought into the tea gardens of Cachar from the flood and famine affected areas and subsequently they adjusted themselves in the new plantation environment. Now, the responsibility of the tea planters increased with a view to smooth running of the tea plantation. They not only performed the duties of supervision of tea tracts, agricultural practices and the control of processing but also maintained the management of the large labour force employed, the construction of roads in the estate and often the erection of buildings. They had to therefore, combine as far as possible the knowledge and skill of an agriculturist, engineer, administrator, as well as concern for his markets.

The tea planters had placed watchman to keep a look on the immigrated garden labourers so that they could not tried to escape from the garden and if anyone found he was beaten mercilessly.\textsuperscript{45} The Planters maintained such way that, nobody, not even the British Civil Servants can enter their garden without their permission.\textsuperscript{46} They made themselves the monarch of all gardens which were under their control. They were not only the masters of the labourers but also magistrates to decide

\textsuperscript{43} Dutta, D, \textit{Cachar District Records}, Silchar, 1969, p.15
\textsuperscript{44} Singh, S N, \textit{Socio-Economic and Political Problems of Tea Garden Workers}, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, 2006, p.38
\textsuperscript{45} Guha, Amalendu, \textit{Planter Raj to Swaraj Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947}, Indian Council of Historical Research, N Delhi, 1977, p.44
disputes, arrest and punish the labourers. They governed the labourers like autocrats and their words were the laws.

Tennis Party

In subsequent period, the pattern of garden management had taken shape. At the highest post Manager itself and he was assisted by two or three assistants, they were all Europeans, including Mistry Sahib or the factory engineer and one assistant and of course a Doctor Baboo. The Manager was also in charge of the office, staffed by Bengali or Assamese Baboos or Clerks. A garden was divided into number of sections and every section was under the responsibility of Hazira Mohurers or garden clerk and Burra Mohurer or head garden clerk. The hazira mohurers had Sirdars under them and each Sirdar had a number of men or women’s workers. At the bottom of the garden management, the hundreds of coolies or tea workers, who were infact, the soul of the garden. Regarding the mode of management of the Sirdar, G M Barker wrote, “He parades up and down between the rows of tea bushes, armed with a small stick and the dignity that his position of

47 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
authority gives him, in and out amongst his pluckers, yelling at the top of his voice, encouraging or swearing at them, and always inciting them to make haste and get along faster (Che lao! Che lao!). A sirdar attains his proud position through being one of the oldest and most trusted workers on the estate, or for having successfully recruited and brought up a party of coolies from his won country. They are held in respect by the rest of the coolies, for they have the ear of the sahib, and have it in their power to make it decidedly uncomfortable for any individual who sets their authority at defiance.”

The expansion of tea plantation in Cachar led to the close contact of different hill tribes, namely, Kassias, Nagas, Kookies, Looshais and Manipuris. All the tribes were very similar type except the Manipuris. These Manipuris were a very fine race of people, much more lighter of colour and handsome than the remaining tribes. Women as well as the girls were really handsome. Their laughing faces and graceful figures were very much attractive to the White Sahib. The Khasis were noted for their wonderful muscular development. All their market products, supplies etc. were packed up and come down to the plains with a sort of baskets or chairs slung on the back by a band over the forehead. These people were fond of games, such as, tossing the caber, putting the weight and throwing the hammer. The Kookies and the Nagas on the other hand were restless, warlike, troublesome and addicted to head hunting. They periodically raided the tea gardens to secure for bullets and heads as trophies. Among the tribes, Lushais were the most important one, so far as the attack of tea gardens in the plains area of Cachar is concerned. The Lushai (now called Mizos) were a sturdy tribal people living on hunting, fishing, food gathering and slash and burn cultivation called jhuming. Often they committed raids, plunders, kidnapping and head hunting on the people of the foothills. These raids executed by the Lushais ultimately led to the British

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51 Ibid, p.p.135,136
52 Carson, Thomas, Ranching, Sport and Travel, Susan Skinner and Janet Blenkinship, London, 2007, p.10
53 Ibid, p.2
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid, p.10
56 Ibid
Government to take severe measures with regards to them which ultimately brought the Lushai tribes under British regime on 27th January 1898.58

Treatment towards the labourers by the Planters from the very beginning was unanimously barbaric as well as pathetic. To keep a look on the labourers, the Planters placed watchman so that they could not tried to escape from the garden and if it happened, he was beaten mercilessly. Even in slightest offence they were mercilessly whipped. This was done in order to make them disciplined and as a warning to the others.59

Tea Garden Bungalow

The European Planters did not allow any worker or staff moving on horseback or on cycle, they were not even allowed by them to put on ‘dhoti’ down their knees.60 If any Sahib visited the section, sardars used to say ‘chhata bhango’ (fold umbrella) and everyone had to say ‘salam sahib’.61 This was also maintained

58 Ibid, p.8
60 Singh, S N, Socio-Economic and Political Problems of Tea Garden Workers, Mittal Publication N Delhi, 2006, p.81
61 Ibid.
by the subordinate official staff, who sometimes behaved roughly with the workers and scolded them in filthy languages irrespective of age consideration.  

Ramsden, a tea Planter, describes in his book ‘Assam Planter – Tea Planting and Hunting in the Assam Jungle’, “the symbolic way of greeting to the Planters by the garden labourers when he arrived in the garden that, ‘they all salaamed deeply and some of the little girls ran up, knelt in front of me and touched the ground with their foreheads. This was not a gesture of obeisance or fear, nor done in the hope of winning favor. It was simply the coolies way of expressing their allegiance. I touched the little girls on the head when they got up, and the older people on the hands.”  

Even at present, the way of labourers greetings towards the Managers exists and had not vanished completely.

The women labourers, on the other hand, composed of a major part in the tea plantation, who, not only maintained the household work but also helped their husbands by engaging themselves as labourers in the tea plantation. These simple nature women were not given honour in the tea plantation, they were exploited by the Planters without any human consideration because of their simplicity, illiteracy and innocence. A tea Planter may take girls after girls from the labour lines to keep him company at night, yet, there will be none to dispute his action or authority. In the next morning, he presented a sari to them. It was not known, whether it was for their acknowledgement or a gift for second time visit.

The physical exploitation and the inhuman treatment of the tea garden women workers of Cachar by the tea Planters during the colonial days has been written in the pages of the history of tea plantation and newspapers in those days, which makes us know the occasional sexual harassment committed on helpless and rootless women workers by the European tea Planters. Woman labourers were occasionally tied up to a tree and their clothes lifted up to the waist and were beaten

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62 Ibid.  
on bare buttocks with leather trips or boots.\textsuperscript{65} Many women committed suicide as they could not bear their physical assault.

\textbf{Planters Horse Riding}

Behind their barbarous deeds, it is found that, the tea planters who came to Cachar were totally cut off from their beloved wife, as she did not dare to come in the wild jungles. Their long physical gap and continuous workload led them to take some refreshment. As their wife were not available, they therefore, met their needs from the more comely females among the collies.\textsuperscript{66} Taking undue advantages of their poverty, ignorance, illiteracy, the Planters exploited them as much as possible. We have found abundant such cases of maltreatment towards the women tea garden labourers of Cachar by the tea Planters during the British period. Few heartthrobing stories are mentioned below –

“The sensational Khoreal shooting case during April 1920 in which Regineld William Reed, Assistant Manager of the garden shot down from his revolver to Gangadhar, a garden worker and his son Nepal for not allowing him to

exploit the chastity of his daughter named Hira, who was also a female worker in the garden. This heinous crime aroused sensation among the plantation workers.º67º

Another European Manager named Mr. Dowson of Badarpur TE used to dance in his bungalow along with women workers in a romantic fashion.º68º Drinking and dancing with them was his style of living at his residence. Those women who put objection or resisted were harassed and removed from job on simple pretext. As there was no union of the workers in those days, the women had no alternative but to surrender unwillingly.º69º The European Planters were so powerful at that time that none could dare to protest them.

The Baladan murder case of manager and a native woman Sadi in Bungalow on 11th April 1893 is another glaring example of atrocity perpetrated on women by the European manager.º70º The Manager used to call beautiful women workers in his bungalow and ask to share bed. This had aroused feeling to assault him. The case of murder of the Manager was given different colours and many innocent persons were falsely implicated.º71º

These stories of harassment thus, revealed that how the tea Planters exploited the women tea garden labourers of Cachar without their willingness. These ultimately led or drew the attention of the Nationalist leaders especially Mahatma Gandhi, who took it as a serious concern and in his journal ‘Young India’ he warned both Indian and European Managers of the tea gardens to refrain from dishonouring womanhood.º72º Though it was raised by the Nationalist leaders, but it continued as a sensational chapter till the Indian independence.
Planters With Pig Sticking

There is no denying of the fact that, the early tea Planters who mostly belonged to English, Scottish and Irish people were professionally business minded whose main concern was profit making. With the help of British imperial policy, they adopted all types of rigorous measures to establish the tea plantation in Cachar. Further, it was because of their continuous effort and hard labour that the tea Planters ultimately made the agriculturally rejected land to become commercially valuable.

The greatest fear of a planter in those early days was that of illness or epidemic which carried the life of the labourers very frequently. The diseases like, waterborne disease, malaria, dysentery, kalazar, jaundice, cholera were very much common to the labourers.\(^{73}\) Oscar Lindgren, in his book, ‘The Trials of a Planter, 1877’ went on to talk of diseases, “It was no uncommon thing to have 50% of one’s labour force down with malaria, without counting stomach complaints, which are always large items amongst coolies in jungle areas. In addition, wounds from thorns and cuts during clearing operations wee naturally numerous.”\(^{74}\)

\(^{73}\) Dutta, Arup Kumar, Cha Garam – The Tea Story, 1992, p.95.
As there was lacking of Doctor and medical amenities, the early planters with the help of medical books did the treatment of the labourers. The basic medicine that they were provided to the labourers was – quinine, chlorodyne and castor oil.\textsuperscript{75} Foley, in his ‘Reminiscences of a Pioneer Tea Planter (1867), gave his own first hand experience, “When I first came to Sylhet there was not a single doctor, except the civil Surgeon, in the whole district, and of native doctors, there were only half a dozen or so attached to the Civil Hospital and Dispensary in Sylhet town. As for tea gardens, the manager did the doctoring with an intelligent high caste coolie to act as dresser and to dose the patients, when epidemics arose the most that could be done was to segregate the patient.”\textsuperscript{76}

However, it was only in 1863, after the passing of the Act of 1861 that the appointment of Medical Officer was made compulsory for every tea garden with a salary of Rs. 200/- . He was also assisted by two native doctors at a salary of Rs. 30/- a month.\textsuperscript{77} Accordingly, the hospitals were laid down in every garden comprising of a Doctor, assisted by his staff. But it is found that the hospitals which were established in every garden were not at all satisfactory and sufficient. A R Ramsden, described his first visit to the garden hospital, ‘We entered the first brick outhouse. A man lay on a hospital cot, one eyeball was opaque white, he had lost the fingers of one hand and the toes on both feet. A woman lay beside him on a charpoy or native string bed.

“Well, what do you make of that?” said Jack.

“Leprosy, obviously”, I replied.

In another ward there was a case of anthrax. The wretched man had his arm permanently supported on a tripod above which was suspended a two-gallon kerosene tin full of some disinfectant. Jack told me it was made in the factory by the simple expedient of passing an electric current through a saturated solution of salt. Cotton wool was hanging through a tiny hole punched in the bottom of the tin and for three weeks the disinfectant had been dropping continually on to the back of his hands, all the bones of which were showing. He recovered.’

\textsuperscript{75} Dutta, Arup Kumar, Cha Garam – The Tea Story, 1992, p.95
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid, p.75
The maternity ward: ‘We had a look around. Most of the women certainly looked healthy enough, but there were some appalling cases of pernicious anaemia, legs and arms fearfully swollen, faces puffed.

‘The death rate here must be pretty astronomical, isn’t it?

‘Yes, somewhere around the thirty per thousand mark, I imagine, but so is the birth rate.’

Central fever hospital: ‘In the first room we entered was what had once been a fine figure of a man, now pitifully thin, propped up in bed thickly covered with coarse blankets and breathing with great difficulty. Under the bed was a flat dish on which lay a heap of red hot wood ember.

‘The Doctor babu said nothing, and Jack went on to me. He’s one of my best sirdars, a real good old scout. Just watch how his nostrils are dilating – that’s pneumonia, a very frequent complication after malaria. Doctor babu, how is that child in the next ward that had convulsions yesterday?’

‘Sir, she is very bad; two more convulsions and I think she’ll die’

‘well, you’ve damn well got to save her.’

‘Sir, I can not.’

‘We entered that next ward and had hardly stepped inside when the baby started writhing on its cot and with foam on it lips turned up its wide open eyes, flung itself round, and died.’78 In the later stages, he Doctors were able to identify the principal carrier of malaria and thus scientific measures were taken for its control.

The planter was not only concerned with the growing and manufacturer of tea, but also with the personal problems of his workers, such as, their quarrels, financial and family matters, marital disappointment and illness.79 For the workers, they had more faith in the planters justice and therefore went to him rather than civil courts to settle their disputes. The workers submitted to him innumerable disputes as it happened in their surroundings, such as, boundary conflicts, breaches of contract, unpaid debts, damage caused by cattle, minor blows and wounds, insults and cases

of defamation, infringement of caste rules etc. After listening to the evidences put forward by both the sides, the planter made the impartial decision basing on their tradition and this was to be acceptable for both the party. G M Barker testifies on this ground that “Scarcely a day passes but there is some row in the lines, whereupon the jemadar (head man in the lines) brings up the delinquents on the following morning to the bungalow, with a view to getting at the true cause of the disturbance, and the punishment of the evil-doer. The sahib acts as judge and jury, and sits in judgement, listening to the evidence brought forward, or more correctly speaking, endeavouring to listen, as the prisoner, plaintiff, and the witnesses on both sides talk their loudest, and all at the same time. The jamedar makes ‘confusion worse confounded’, exerting himself by dint of yells, threats and the free application of a stick, to silence the whole party and state what he knows of the case – usually not very much. When silence has been procured, an effect never accomplished until every one has his or her full say, and there is no more breath left in the bodies of the conflicting parties, contradictory statements are carefully sifted and a decision given on the general aspect of the case, for it is impossible to believe one word that a native utters in an affair of this kind. Some very complicated cases frequently arise, in which a hasty decision would cause great dissatisfaction amongst the coolies. Diplomacy is much needed, therefore, to arrange the verdict with a view to every one’s satisfaction.”

Life of the tea planters in the tea estates though lonely was comfortable. There were a number of servants who were always ready to serve. The planter and his family were well looked after. Each planter had a kitmutgar or waiter to attend his wants at dinner, next there was a bearer to look after the bedroom and act as valet, then the khamsama (cook) and his assistant, two or three paniwallahs (water carrier), the mater (sweeper), two chowkidars (watchman) one for night and the other for day duty, punkah wallahs (two or three for pulling the punkah during the

hot weather), malee (gardeners), moorgiwallah (to look after the chicken) and a few others. There was no bell in a Bungalow, so servants were summoned by a call.83

A planter’s greatest headache then was the efficient management of his work force. As the tea plantations were newly established, it required much labour with less paper and office work than today.84 Regarding their daily works, it is stated, “The tea Planters typical day started at 5’o clock when a gong sounded. Then he took the prescribed dose of quinine, picked up his walking stick, put on his cap and sailed forth on a round of the garden. Supervising the pluckers, a visit to the tea house and doing other duties he returned to his bungalow at about 8.30 am for have a breakfast. The breakfast consists of fruit – papaya, banana, orange – followed the eggs and toast. The next round began at 2pm, when the pluckers were again sent out to work. This time he spends in the field to check the standardity of work, to supervise any new work and just to communicate with the workers. He also have a visit to the schools and Hospitals and at last he returned to the office to draft letters and prepare reports. At 6’o clock the gong sounded again, represent the retire for the day. The Planter had also to allot the next day’s work, instructing the Sirdars as to which section needs plucking, which hoeing etc. If it is a pay day he will assist in the distribution of wages and if a ration day ensures that the subsidized provisions are properly issued. By the time finishing his day task he returned to his Bunglow and retires to bed.”85 This is continually maintained by them as regular basis, but sometimes it could change depending on the work load.

One of the chief attractions of the early tea Planters was their Bungalows and their location. Most of the Bungalows were generally well decorated and located on the top of the hillock surroundings with numerous tea gardens which can be reached only through designed making steps. It is to be noted here that the earlier Bungalows of the tea Planters were very primitive and unglamorous one.86 The Bungalows were generally built raising 14 to 15 feet high from the ground, it is done

85 Ibid, p.109
so for keeping away from the mosquito and snakes. The Bungalows were initially made entirely with temporary wooden stilts covering roof with straw and leaves erected by the natives, but in the subsequent period, iron ones were used. These Bungalows were generally comprised of four or five rooms, made with all timber covering wide verandas on all their sides. A description of them is provided by A R Ramsden, a tea Planter in his book, ‘Assam Planter – Tea Planting and Hunting in the Assam Jungle’ in this manner: that “Bunglow was almost brand new and much the same as the burra bungalow, but built entirely on iron columns and raised fourteen feet off the ground. This way of building bungalows in Cachar, so to speak on stilts, has a curious history. It started before it was known that the anopheles mosquito is the cause of malaria. At that time the fever was believed to come from miasma rising off the ground. So the early tea planters built their bungalows well off the ground and the custom has survived ever since. It certainly has its uses, for it keep out snakes.”

In every Bungalows, the tea Planters had a stove, a bunk type bed made of bamboo, a table and chair or murrah (cane or bamboo stool) and a shelf to store medicines.

The interior of the Bunglow, according to custom was divided into three rooms, partitioned off by walls made of the same material as the outside walls. But if the Bunglow was not large enough, there were only two rooms covering sixty feet by forty. The central of the three room was used as sitting, dining and general reception room; the two others served as the owner’s and friend’s bedchambers. To each was attached on the outside, a gosolkhana (bathroom).

91 Dutta, Arup Kumar, Cha Garam – The Tea Story, 1992, p.94.
93 Ibid.
In front of the Bungalow there was the verandah, where the planter used to take rest or make interview with the officials. At a distance of twenty or thirty yards stood the bawarchee (cook house).

In the early days, electricity was not available in the Bungalows, they depended mostly on the kerosene lamp. Radio was the main source of communication to listen the overseas news and information. In each Bungalow, there were many servants each of which had a clearly defined role. Their duty was to keep the Bungalow clean, purchase the foodstuff from the hut or local market, employed as cooks and bearers etc. Because of the nature of the environment, a big log fire had to be been kept nearby the Bungalow throughout the night to keep away the wild beasts.

Often garden workers were employed as cooks and bearers in the managerial Bungalows. Wives of married planters were hard task mistresses and properly trained their servants. But it was different stories for the bachelor’s, they had to make do with the best they could get. A servant working for bachelors was the most carefree creature, siphoning off with impunity food and drinks bought by the chota sahibs as well as money given to him to purchase the same. Generally, foodstuff were purchased from the local market, but in special cases, special items were imported from Kolkata. Many planters, especially, married ones had their kitchen gardens and domestic cow, which provide vegetable and milk. Fish, however, was abundant, mushrooms and other edibles found in the jungles. But the problem was meat. Religious taboos kept beef and pork out, while mutton was not readily available. This resulted the planters to depend on the moorgi (chicken), which were available in the market.

94 Ibid, 99.
95 Ibid.
100 Ibid, p.100.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
So far as drink is concerned, it was available and it was depending on the mood of planters for having it. A R Ramsden quoted in this regard, Choosing your wines at a splash dinner party in Assam presents no problem. It is whisky with the soup, whisky with the fish, whisky with the entrée, whisky with the joint, whisky with the sweets and whisky with the savoury – and whisky afterwards.\textsuperscript{104} Assisted by the workers, the planters enjoyed the drink by making chota (small) and burra (large) peg (measure) whenever they want. It was the most common indoor pastimes for the planters.\textsuperscript{105}

In the beginning of the tea plantation, the Planters besides time had no economical sound to take recreation for themselves, as they were made fully busy to the expansion of tea plantation with a view to achieve their profit motive. However, as the decades passed, life became more organized and gardens were successfully established, a relaxation came into being in the daily life of the Planters and gradually they were interested to establish Clubs, arrange sports and recreation among themselves.

Winter in a garden that is the from November to February was a season of relaxation, where there was nothing much happening on the estates and the Planters had enough time to get enjoyment for themselves. During this time, the Planters got together in the clubs and arranged different sports within and outside of the club. Club was accorded as the hub of social life for all the estates. Though it was several miles away from the garden, but attendance during the leisure time was generally good or huge. It had a large lounge, a reading room, a billiard room, a small card room and a couple of tennis courts.\textsuperscript{106} The bar within the Club was obviously the most popular room and the barman knows everyone’s preference.\textsuperscript{107} A lot of fun had been arranged at Club, getting together for games, exercise and talk was really a very important part of the club life. Their constant isolation and burden of work forced the pioneer Planters to take such type of recreation in the Club.

\textsuperscript{104} Ramsden, A R \textit{Assam Planter – Tea Planting and Hunting in the Assam Jungle}, London, 1945, p.134
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
The present Silchar town became an important place where all the European tea Planters used to meet. The Planters first organized Cachar Club in Silchar in 1897 like Jorhat Gymkhana Club or Planters Club, Mariani, which was at the pick of its glory during the British days. Besides the Cachar Club, there were some local Planters Club within Cachar, they were – Monacherra Club (near Hailakandi), Longai Valley Club (in Karimganj district), Lalung Golf Club (Dewan Group), Barjalenga Golf Club, Chorgola Valley Club and Happy Valley Club where the tea Planters took to meet and recreated themselves. Every week of Wednesday and Sunday, particularly, Wednesday was observed as the Club day. Every European Planter and their wife became member of this Club and used to attend all the way from their Estates passing lot of obstacles. In the beginning, the Planters and their family attended the Club with the help of horse-back and later on after 1914 one by one by their private motor cars. In these two days anyone could play squash and tennis, swim, dance and play billiards.

Spending time or even attending the Club days was a delightful treat. A full day meal was available at the Club any time of the day or even late at night. The Club store was always stocked with fresh Mackerel, Sardines and Bhekti fish flown from Kolkata in addition to fresh vegetables from Shillong and a large variety of imported foodstuff. There was a separate ladies club where lady members were allowed to spend the night with their families. The Club also had tennis courts, a well stoked bar, full of imported alcohol, a billiards room, card room and separate accommodation for male members. From present ‘Devdoot Cinema Hall’ passing Cachar Club up to the ‘John Smeal and Company Ltd.’, present Sadarghat of Silchar station, placed the shopping center for Europeans, where the road was particularly

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109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
113 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
used by the Planters and rarely any Indian dared to pass that way. After enjoying
the play they enjoyed cinema in the first floor of Cachar Club and after taking dinner
went back to their own gardens. Some of them spent knight at the Club and went to
their gardens next day. During the Christmas time, they used to hold a camp in
Silchar with all types of games and funfair.

One of the early tea Planter has given the information regarding the daily
life of the Planters in the Club in this way – “you could very easily get bored after
about 11 o’clock in the morning, there was nothing to do except have people come to
bridge or coffee – and then the gossip started; scandal, gossip and conjecture. The
husband came home to lunch and after lunch you went your siesta. After that you
went to play tennis at the Club. Then you sat drinking at the Club until you came
home to dinner and then you may have gone on to a dance or a party. That was the
life. That was how it went on every day.”

Sports particularly in the cold season was accepted as the best time and in
this season the sports like - Tennis, Polo, Gymkhana, Rugby, Football and Cricket
were arranged in the Club with great enthusiasm. Besides sports, hunting, fishing
and pig-sticking were also very popular for pastime. The tea Planters considered the
sports as an essential part to keep the body fit and to remove some dreaded diseases,
that is why they maintained the various sports activities in the Club. In the early
days, it is said that Clubs started as Polo Clubs before developing the other sports
activities, such as – golf, tennis and squash. The Planters organized Cricket and
Polo whenever possible. Cricket was somewhat easier – the Planters along with
natives maintained the numbers by fielding for both sides. Polo, on the other side,
was one of the India’s original sports which the Planters took up with great
enthusiasm. Polo originated in Manipur in the 16th century and was played under its

115 Gupta, Basudev, History of Cachar Tea Industry – As I Know, in the Souvenir of SVBITA, 1901-
116 Das, Debendra Nath, My Early Days in Surma Valley Branch Indian Tea Association Office:
117 Pugh, Peter, Williamson Magor – Stuck to Tea, Cambridge Business Publishing, Great Britain,
1991, p.76
118 Ibid, p.78
119 Ibid,pp.19,20
Manipuri name ‘Kanjjei’.\textsuperscript{120} The Manipuris brought it to Cachar where they were joined in the 1850s by a few early tea Planters. The Europeans referred to the game as hockey on ponies.\textsuperscript{121} The play ‘Polo’ described by Thomas Carson, a planter in his book ‘Ranching sport and Travel’ in this way, “Twice a week in the cold weather we played polo, sometimes with Munipuris, a hill tribe whose national game it is, and who were then the undoubted champions. The Regent Senapati was a keen player, and very picturesque in his costume of green velvet zouave jacket, salmon-pink silk dhotee and pink silk turban. In Manipur even the children have their weekly polo matches. They breed ponies especially for the game, and use them for nothing else, nor would they sell their best. Still, we rode Manipur ‘tats’ costing us from 50 rupees to 100. They were exceedingly small, averaging not eleven hands high, but wiry, active, speedy, full of grit, and seemed to love the game. As the game was there played, seven formed a side, the field was twice as large as now and there were no goals. The ball had to be simply driven over the end line to count a score.”\textsuperscript{122} It was only later, the name ‘Polo’ came from Kashmir. Captain Robert Stewart, Deputy Commissioner of Cachar and Lieutenant Joe Shearer as Assistant, joined the Manipuris for Polo game whenever they could get the time. Later on, it was Shearer who founded the first Polo Club in the world in 1859 – the Silchar Polo Club.\textsuperscript{123} After that it spread to Dhaka and Kolkata. In Kolkata, the first Polo Club was founded in 1863 that is after four years of the establishment of the Silchar Polo Club.\textsuperscript{124}

Another favourite recreation of winter during the early period of tea plantation among the Planters was hunting or shooting. As the hunting was more practical and dangerous, during the game the experienced local people (i.e. local sikaris) were made to accompany the tea planters. Sometimes memsahib’s were accompanied their husbands and spend days in the shooting camp.\textsuperscript{125} As the region

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid, p.81
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid, p.91
\textsuperscript{122} Carson, Thomas, \textit{Ranching, Sport and Travel}, Susan Skinner and Janet Blenkinship, London, 2007, p.2
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid. p.82
was vested with full of jungles consisting of dangerous wild animals, birds and poisonous snakes, the Planters enjoyed to slaughter as many animals and birds as possible. During the time of greener and snipe shooting season, thousands of birds were shot down. As A R Ramsden records, “With the cold weather also came the greener (green pigeon) and snipe shooting season. Invitations to greener shoots on various gardens in the district showered in. We would set off by car at about 4.30 a.m. to take up our stands just before day break. After attending one or two smaller shoots, Joe took me one Sunday to the best of them all. That day our sixteen guns got four hundred and fifty birds, which was quite good, as we had some pretty bad shots”. Elephants were often used during the shoots and a great many animals killed. Fresh fish could also be caught by getting bamboo traps. Thus, when the hunting was over, the Planters arranged garden parties, dances, hockey tournaments, tent pigging and pig sticking. In these parties, the distinguished person including Viceroy of India attended with great enthusiasm. There was always organized fancy dress ball and a children party where Father Christmas entered on an elephant. Adding to this, during mid-winter, the great annual Mela was organized by the planters, which lasted a couple of weeks, where fun and jollity with both planters and labourers took place.

Thus, throughout the span of British ownership of Cachar’s tea garden, the European Planting Community, that is, Planters maintained the weightage of their standard within the garden and were remained aloof from the local people. It is the undeniable fact that right from the beginning the European Planters were the masters of the land (i.e garden) and they always humiliated the tea garden labourers very much. For example, a labourer had to put down an unfold umbrella if he passed a Planter or any other White Sahib, even if it was raining. Natives were barred from the European Clubs; villagers could not cross garden roads and had to head down

that is showing honour before a white man whenever they passed.  

On the other hand, there were kind and modest Planters, who won the hearts of the labourers with their liberal attitudes. They were appropriately termed as ‘ma-baap’, meaning father and mother. The philosophy of ma-baap evolves, where the planters became a kind of paternalistic figure for the workers and earned their trust and good will. But number of such type of Planters were limited. Till the 1940s the local people or the garden labourer’s meritorious children were not recruited in the high posts, these posts were exclusively reserved for the Europeans. However, sometimes especially meritorious children of garden staff were given the status of local assistants, but they could not wear leather shoes and could not go to the clubs. Only after 1947, when India attained independence, Indians were directly recruited into the tea industry in managerial capacities. With the entry of educated and qualified Indians into the service, the image of the planter changed for better. These planters had dual commitments – to the industry and to the social interest of the garden people. However, though India attained independence, the basic patterns of life in plantations have not been changed.

\[131\] Ibid.  
\[132\] Chatterjee, Piya , A Time for Tea: Women, Labour and Post Colonial Politics on an Indian Plantation, Zubean, N Delhi, 2001, p.120  