PART I : INTRODUCTION
1.1 THE PROBLEM

Like any other plantation agriculture, tea plantation also requires a large number of regular labour force under the control of a more or less strict management. Works in plantation are of two types - agricultural and industrial. Works, such as digging, hoeing, ploughing, planting, weeding, pruning, plucking, etc. are essentially agricultural in nature; although plantation has many features in common with organised industry. In respect of its mode of capital investment, management pattern, processing, marketing, etc. it is organised efficiently like an industry. So the plantation is a large-scale enterprise in agriculture which represents the development of agricultural resources in tropical and sub-tropical countries in accordance with the methods of western industrialisation.

In Assam tea plantation was the first capitalist enterprise introduced by the British Government in the early part of the nineteenth century. The British occupied Assam in 1826 and explored possibilities of growing tea. Initially attempts were made to recruit labour from within Assam as that would have entailed much lower cost in the recruitment of labour. But it did not succeed as the number of landless
agricultural workers in the then Assam were few and was readily available. There was virtually no labour force in Assam to work as a fulltime worker in the plantations. During its teething period, the local people, particularly the plain tribal people, were almost the sole source of labour. But quick inflow of British capital for the extension of plantations rapidly increased the demand for labour. This resulted in a mad search for labour. It was because of this labour shortage that a contractual system of labour supply developed. Therefore, by 1853 indentured labour from outside the province of Assam had to be recruited. The labourers were mostly drawn from subsistence agricultural families and families engaged in other primary occupations. They were hailing from the provinces of Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, Maharastra, Madhya Pradesh (M.P.), Andhra Pradesh (A.P.), Madras (Tamilnadu) and Uttar Pradesh (U.P.).

The system of recruitment of plantation labourers and the condition under which they were recruited and transported to tea plantations was ruthless. However, a sufficient number of labourers were brought and children born to the recruited labour multiplied the labour force resulting in surplus labour. After some years, repatriation of time-expired labourers was started (Awasthi, 1975, 226).

Thus, the number of recruited labour for the plantations in Assam far exceeded the demand. A massive...
migration of such labourers gradually created surplus plantations labourers who settled in the adjacent villages after a short span of work in the tea plantations. This section is called the "ex-tea garden labour". The planters and the British Government allowed them to settle in the nearby wasteland areas so that they might be recruited seasonally at the time when their labour was needed. As a matter of fact, both the Government and the planters encouraged the ex-tea garden labourers by giving them land for settlement. The Government was interested to settle them in the unoccupied land to collect more land revenue. The planters or more precisely the tea estate (garden) Managers who were mostly British encouraged this process of creating a labour reserve for meeting additional recruitment of labour during the peak plucking season. The tea plantations required more additional or extra labour at the time of plucking tea leaves than at the normal time. The time-expired labourers started settlement as ex-tea garden labourers from about 1860's. They took the opportunity of taking possession of land for cultivation of crops and thus emerged as cultivators and established new villages where such an opportunity existed. The time-expired labourers came back mostly to the agricultural activities as there were no other alternative means of their livelihood.

On the contrary, those who are employed in...
plantations permanently or temporarily for different types of works right from plantation to factory are identified as labourers. Considering the nature of job, wage or salary, the security and organised labour structure, they may be grouped as workers. According to the Plantations Labour Act, 1951, "worker" means a person employed in a plantation for hire or reward, whether directly or through any agency, to do any work - skilled, unskilled, manual or clerical, but does not include

(i) a medical officer employed in the plantation;

(ii) any person employed in the plantation (including any member of the medical staff) whose monthly wages exceed rupees seven hundred and fifty;

(iii) any person employed in the plantation primarily in a managerial capacity notwithstanding that his monthly wages do not exceed rupees seven hundred and fifty, or

(iv) any person temporarily employed in the plantation for any work relating to the construction, development or maintenance of buildings, roads, bridges, drains or canals. (Dewan, 1988, 59-60).

The workers are classified as - (a) permanent workers who reside inside the tea estate and who are on the roll of workers. Any person who has completed a probationary
period of 6 months in the same work or any other occupation in the industrial establishment is included in this category: 
(b) non-resident workers who reside outside the tea estate, but whose names are entered on the estate roll of workers. Such a worker is not deemed as outside workers if he or she is a regular and a whole time worker; and (c) a temporary worker who has been engaged in a work which is essentially temporary in nature and likely to be terminated within a limited period.

In general, a tea estate employs the following classes of personnel: (a) Executive Officers like the General Manager, Manager, Assistant Managers, Medical Officers, Superintendents, etc.; (b) clerical staff and artisans; and (c) general workers (both factory and field workers). There is no standardised classification of workers engaged in tea plantations. They are broadly grouped as unskilled labour and artisans. Labour includes all manual workers employed in various processes of the field and the factory and includes drivers, peons (bearers), Chowkidars (watch-men), sardars, malis (gardeners), orderlies etc., while 'artisans' include all those who are engaged as skilled and semi-skilled workers like fitters, carpenters, electricians, etc. Personnel staff and artisans are ordinarily paid monthly salary and according to convention, those among the labour class like sardars, chowkidars, malis,
etc. who are paid monthly salary are sometimes described as substaff. The labour class numerically predominates over the rest, constituting about 96 per cent of the total and almost all the enquiries so far conducted have been exclusively devoted to them.

Both the tea plantation workers and ex-tea garden labour together constitute a separate social group known as the 'Tea Labour Community' (the word 'labour' includes both workers and non-workers). This labour community has several distinctive socio-economic traits by virtue of the demands made upon it by the plantation system. The plantation system is essentially an elaborate economy which exhibits a combination of both agricultural and industrial characteristics. Nearly less than a tenth of the working force on the plantations are factory labour and the rest are engaged in plantation works which are agricultural in nature. The very nature of the plantation system is crucial in shaping the life of the plantation labourers and determines their evolution and character as a social group. It is estimated that the total population of the tea plantation labourers and the ex-tea garden labourers would be around 30 lakhs in 1971. Out of this, 14 lakhs belonged to the tea plantation labour population and 16 lakhs were ex-tea garden labourers. At 20 per cent decadal rate of increase, the total population of the tea labour community in Assam is estimated
at 36 lakhs and that of the ex-tea garden labour at about 19.2 lakhs in 1981. Tea labour community constitutes about 10 per cent of the total population of Assam.

The tea labour community had come across a long way to be recognised themselves as a separate social group in Assam. Because of its origin from heterogeneous and backward sections of society and also because of its rural habitation and basically pressurised service condition, it is still largely under the influence of a backward culture. Thus the tea plantation and ex-tea garden labour population in Assam exhibit complex social characteristics. A complex process of adjustments among the different elements has been taken place in the tea plantation and in the ex-tea garden villages. In such a living condition, literacy among the tea labour community is fairly low. The caste-tribe identity still persists. The tea plantation labour being confined in the estates, they have limited outside contact for a considerable period of time and have not found enough opportunity for their exposure to the local culture. Labour management system of the planters is also by and large a barrier against that line.

The plantation system is the product of colonialism. In fact, colonial system is undoubtedly exploitative in nature. Plantation is developed with the aid of foreign capital imported from temperate lands to be
invested in the tropical and subtropical areas of the world. It is labour-intensive and so cheap labour is essential.

Plantations all over the world, by and large, were primarily established with forced immigration and allurement of labour under strict control of the managements for the sole interest of the planters with an intention to exploit labour and resources. Therefore, the output of plantation is greatly influenced by monopolistic control. In Assam, the economic base of the plantation has been inherently colonial. So its growth and development is less contributory to the people of Assam in general and the plantation labour in particular.

1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The tea plantation of Assam is the largest export-oriented sector and the biggest foreign exchange earner employing about five lakh labourers. The number of labourers has been increasing to such an extent that the plantations fail to absorb the entire tea labour population of Assam. It is observed that the replacement of excess labour population is becoming an acute problem. It is unfortunate that though the tea labourers have been working for a long period of one and a half century under more or less organised system of an industry, yet they could not succeed in asserting themselves as a conscious class of people to realise their
legitimate demands from the plantation owners. As a result, they have not been able to improve their socio-economic condition.

A detailed study of such a situation is urgently needed. So it should be the responsibility of the academicians to bring into light the inherent problems faced with by the tea plantation labour.

Such a study is of significance not only for the academicians, but also for the planners, government and all those who are interested in doing something for the welfare of about forty five lakhs tea labour population of Assam.

1.3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The problems of tea plantation in Assam have been studied from different angles, sometimes by a group of persons appointed by the Government and sometimes individually by researchers both in the last and the present century. The scientific, technological, economic and managerial aspects of the tea industry have been discussed in many books and ever since several measures have also been suggested to solve the problems of the industry. But only piece-meal attempts have been made so far to the study the problems of the tea labour community, particularly the plantation labourers. During the rule of the British
colonialist, the life of the plantation labour was miserable. They were being treated as bonded labour rather than workers. In this work, an attempt has been made to trace the nature of growth and development of the plantation labour community since its inception, to analyse their socio-economic condition, and also to search for the causes of backwardness of tea plantation labour community as a whole with special reference to the district of Sonitpur, Assam in the past and in the present. The study also deals with the spatio-temporal processes and patterns of the socio-economic and cultural parameters of labour community of the area.

1.4 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the study are:

(i) to evaluate the nature of development of tea plantation;

(ii) to assess the characteristics of the tea plantation labour;

(iii) to discuss the socio-cultural and economic condition and the problem of employment, and replacement;

(iv) to analyse the occupational mobility pattern among the tea plantation labourers; and

(v) to evaluate the process of the formation of working class.
1.5 HYPOTHESES

i. As the economic base of the plantation in Assam has been inherently colonial and exploitative in nature, its growth and development is not contributory to the economic development of the tea plantation labourers as well as that of the state of Assam.

ii. Diversified social behaviour of the plantation labourers is the product of heterogeneous and backward origin.

iii. The nature of job determines the socio-economic and living condition of the tea plantation labourers.

(iv) Lack of occupational mobility causes unemployment and hinders the socio-economic development of the tea plantation labourers.

(v) The non-industrial labour management is the consequence of pre-capitalist mode of production.

1.6 METHODOLOGY

The study is made in the context of the Sonitpur District of Assam where sixty-one major tea estates accounting for 10.90 per cent of the total tea estates in Assam are located. The estates are classified into two categories on the basis of ownership as follows:
(i) Non-Indian (European) owned, (ii) Indian owned, (iii) Indian-Assamese (native) owned, and (iv) State Corporation.

For the purpose of this study, only the representative tea estates - one from each of the six police stations of the Sonitpur District are selected. The selection of these estates is made in such a way that at least one estate from each category of ownership is included. The distance factor (distance from the urban centres) is also considered in the selection of the tea estates so that some of the estates are found to be located near the urban centres and the remaining are away from them.

Intensive field-work has been done to collect the relevant socio-economic data and information from the sample households of each of the selected tea estates. The collected data and information are processed to analyse the socio-economic condition of the tea labour. Secondary data collected from each of the six tea estates and also from other sources are used in the analysis.

The field-work programme for this study has been organized in three major phases: (i) at the initial stage of the study during the first half of 1989, a reconnaissance survey in the concerned district was made in order to have an overall idea of the tea estates, (ii) after tentative identification of the estates of the region through secondary...
information based on maps, tea areas handbook and records, another field-work trip was made covering the identified tea estates during the second half of 1989. (iii) Towards the first part of 1990, a sample survey was conducted with the help of a schedule (Appendix I) to identify tea estates under different ownerships in a district taking one from each police station area. This was done on the basis of information collected in the second phase of the survey. Taking the size of land holding as a criterion, the families were classified into different categories and then ten per cent households from each category were selected for collecting data and information relating to their socio-economic condition. The caste, tribal and religious factors were also taken into consideration at the time of conducting the survey so as to study the tribe and religion-wise variation.

It may be mentioned here that data and other relevant information of the plantation were collected from a variety of secondary sources, which include mostly published and unpublished records, maps and reports of Government of Assam and the Census of India. But, so far individual estates are concerned, official data were collected for introduction by supplying a pre-finalised questionnaire (Appendix II) to the authorities concerned.
Thus, the study has come out to the present stage after preparation of tables of data and analysis of the same data which provide meaningful explanation. Drawing of figures and diagrams have been done to provide with a better illustrative impression. All these together have helped to draw the conclusion regarding socio-economic and geographical analysis of the tea plantation labourers in the Sonitpur District. It is hoped that the present work would contribute towards the understanding of the inherent problems relating to the tea plantation labour so that proper attention could be given for overall regional development of Assam in general and welfare of the plantation labourers in particular.

1.7 REVIEW OF RELEVANT WORKS

'Labour' is the pivot around which all the activities of the mankind move. As a dynamic and productive force of the society, various aspects and characteristics of labour have been studied by the scholars of diverse disciplines, specially of economics, education, social science and commerce from different perspective since the latter part of the last century, but the subject matter itself is so diversified in nature and relevant with the time and space that it invites more serious attention. So long the studies were mostly confined to economic problems of labour, but in recent times, studies are undertaken on their socio-cultural problems also which are of no less importance.
'Labour' as a subject matter of social geography has not been attached so much importance that it deserves. It is discouraging to observe that methodological studies have not been made by the geographers to analyse the intrinsic problems of labour. Although the two broad divisions of labour, viz. agricultural and industrial are familiar, other divisions, such as domestic labour, contract labour, migrant labour, wage labour, forced labour, plantation labour, etc. cannot be just ignored, which demands intensive geographic study.

In the context of agricultural labour, Newby (1972), Bisselle (1973), Lockwood (1973), Alier (1974), and Knight (1988) have discussed the problems in spatial dimension. Newby (1972) has examined the market, work and status aspects of agricultural worker's class situation. In terms of the market situation, the declining labour force, the highly localized nature of the agricultural labour market, the relatively low level of income, the low degree of union action, and the existence of the 'tied cottage' system put the agricultural labourers in a weak bargaining system. The work situation is characterised by face-to-face relations of between the employer and the employee, and among the co-workers. Bisselle (1973) has discussed four major aspects of the peasant-workers phenomenon in postwar Poland. The first part of the article deals with the
definition of the peasant-worker and various sub-categories.
A description of the magnitude of the peasant-workers
phenomenon forms the second part. Next the etiology of the
peasant-worker movement is described. Finally, the effects
of the peasant-workers are analysed at four levels: the
peasant-worker family, the traditional peasants, the village
community, and the national process of industrialisation and
urbanisation. Lockwood (1973) briefly traced the history of
a worker-peasantry in Yugoslavia and its extent and character
in the postwar period. Alier (1974) in his paper discusses
some of the differences and similarities between a peasantry
and an agricultural proletariat and considers the economic
relations between peasants or labourers and landowners. The
examples are drawn mainly from studies in Southern Spain,
Cuba and Peru. Knight (1988) has mentioned that an
economically autonomous Small holding peasantry which
controlled its land was already on the decline in rural Asia
during the mid nineteenth century. He has challenged the
peasantisation thesis along with its argument that
capitalism perceives this as a suitable method of obtaining a
settled/permanent source of cheap labour.

In India the problems of agricultural labourers, a
distinct economic class in the lowest economic stratum, have
drawn sympathetic attention since the beginning of planning
in the country. The Planning Commission in India expresses
its anxiety about the gravity of the problems confronting agricultural labourers. The first socio-economic enquiry (1950-51) which highlighted the problems of employment, wages, income, cost and level of living and indebtedness could help to draw the attention to the significance of agricultural workers in the country's future development.

Kar (1974) has made an attempt to throw light on different aspects of agricultural labour in Assam. He has found out that not only there is ever growing labour force in agriculture but it is growing with landlessness, unemployment, and under-employment, low real earnings and consumption and consequently, with constant poverty and indebtedness. Das (1980) in his published doctoral thesis discusses the problems of agricultural labour in brief. The author has mentioned that there is a labour surplus in peasant agriculture of Assam most of whom are unskilled, illiterate and poor. Such an excessive supply of unskilled work force is a major constraint, rather than a stimulating factor like capital, technology and organization. Among the different sectors of economy, agriculture accounts for the largest percentage of the working population. The study reveals clearly that the percentage of farm workers to the total workers is high in those areas which are industrially more backward. On the other hand, it is low in the districts where tea plantation is important. Das Gupta (1984) might
traces the growth and development of agricultural labourers in West Bengal under the British colonial regime. The study shows how the growth corresponded to the economic policies of the colonial Government and how the land-man ratio turned against the labourers which not only led to a worsening of their condition, but also brought about a change in their ethnic composition. Breman (1990) considers the effects of labour relations on the transformation of the rural economy of South Gujarat. The impact of increasing prosperity and a major shift in the composition of the rural economy on the region's landless proletariat is analysed. Attention is focused on migrant canecutters coming largely from Western Maharashtra, most of whom belong to low caste peasants of tribal origin. There is a detailed treatment of their working and living conditions.

In the context of industrial labour, Morris (1965), Sharma (1974), Das Gupta (1976), Richardson and Van Helten (1982), Mehta (1987), Datta Choudhury (1990), Fuller, Garnier and Hage (1990), Matzner, Schettkat and Wagner (1990), and Rosa (1990) have thrown some light on the problems and peculiarities of labour as manifested in the industrial sector. Morris (1965) has outlined the process of emergence of Indian industrial labour. He gives an account of changes in Cotton textile industry in Bombay during the period 1854-1947, specially dealing with the problem of
absenteeism, labour turnover, and overtime work. He mentioned that an industrial labour force in an underdeveloped economy does not easily acquire an industrial behaviour. He also mentioned that rapid industrialization may pose serious labour problems. Sharma (1974) has carried out a sociological study based on an inquiry among workers in the automobile industry in India. The author has analysed a number of variables such as absenteeism, job commitment, alienation and attitudes to trade unionism. The author suggests that, despite all the social, cultural and economic differences, the behaviour of the Indian industrial worker is similar to that of his counterparts in industrialised western countries. Das Gupta (1976) has studied the sources of supply of factory labour in Eastern India during the period 1855-1946 in a historical perspective. As regards the labour in the South Africa's Goldmining industry during the period 1886-1914, Richardson and Van Helten (1982) have remarked that "racial exclusiveness" was a conscious policy to maintain control over the labour force. They have shown how the South African mine owners out of fear of labour unrest and wage demands used this mechanism to prevent white workers from taking over the unskilled work of the Africans. Mehta (1987) examines the segmentation of the labour market in India to help in formulating better anti-poverty policies in the country. Segmentation accentuates inequality in labour earning or poses difficulties to workers in low earning
segments from moving to higher segments. The author notes that in Ahmedabad, the lowest segment, dominated by the informal sector constitutes thirty to forty per cent of the total workforce and communitywise it consists predominantly of lower castes of Muslims. Datta Choudhury (1990) described the structure of the economy within which, and the conditions under which, the working population of India operate. The author has forwarded a brief discussion on the influence of Indias' labour standards and industrial relations on its economic prospects in the world economy today.

The third world 'development' is often characterised by rapid growth in trade and service jobs, not in manufacturing employment. Fuller et al (1990) had focussed on how the central state's penetration into rural hinterland sparks growth in trade and service jobs. The authors have explained that the Mexican state has not only employed rising numbers of service workers, it also has legitimated socially constructed forms of work, urbanlike knowledge and forms of status.

The labour market effect of modern technology is now a constant source of scientific and public debate. Matzner et al (1990) have carried out the study of labour market impacts on the introduction and use of modern technology in West Germany, and applied various methods to
investigate the direct and indirect employment effects of new technologies at different levels of the economy.

As regards the employment of women in industry, Rosa (1990) shows that nearly 85 per cent of the 42,000 workers employed in Sri Lanka's Free Trade Zone (FTZ) are young women, a large proportion of them having little experience of wage employment. The author describes the work conditions of them and explains why women are keen to find a job in the Free Trade Zone.

In respect of Contract labour, Ward (1990) describes that the system of contract labour is established in specific political, economic and social conditions to meet the needs of employers, governments and, sometimes, employees. They are maintained if these conditions continue or if one or more of the participant groups have sufficient power or interest to maintain the system. The author examines the interests of government and employers which leads to the establishment of Papua New Guinea's Highland Labour Scheme. He has pointed out that this scheme has opened up a hitherto little known population and untapped source of labour with few previous contacts outside their own tribal group. The author also notes how the highlanders have entered into the monetary economy and the wider national polity.
A widely discussed group of labour is migrant labour. Williams (1971), Breton (1976), Standing and Sukdeo (1977), Singh (1977), Kirchner (1980), Johnson and Lee (1990) have contributed to the study of this group of labour. Williams (1971) examines the effect of migration especially on the Basotho farm sector and finds that the effect is negative. Although cash earnings of migrants could be used as a source of capital formation in farming, this does not happen. The author suggests that the official control is necessary to ensure that migrant earnings are properly invested in accordance with national objectives, and to ensure, by the application of selective labour migration procedures, that prescribed farm level innovations are adopted and maintained. Breton (1976) seeks to throw light on the large-scale and growing migration between countries in South America, which has become an important but still largely unexplored feature of continents' economy and social life. Standing and Sukdeo (1977) have described the salient features of migration of Guyana and outlined some of the Governmental programmes. Singh (1977) has mentioned that the inability of hill agriculture in Northern India to provide the labour force with satisfactory levels of employment and earnings led to continuous migration of adult population in search of jobs. The author has examined the effects of such labour migration on employment and income in the region of origin. Kirchner (1980) has made a case study on the spatial
behaviour of the migrant labourers in the sugarcane monoculture of Tucuman in North Western Argentina. The aim of the author is to contribute to the understanding of how the migrant labour solves the problem of meeting the opposite goals of a wage earner on the one hand and a subsistence agriculturalist on the other. The study gives a picture of the migrant labour force which is largely rural, spatially active, culturally homogeneous, and one in which family labour plays an important role. The author has given a view that although economic reasons, principally the lack of work at home, are the most-frequent explanation for the decision to migrate, the fact that the migration process is a regular year-after-year phenomenon, with many families returning to the same place of employment, indicates that the migrants perceive the process as a way of life and not just as a source of additional income. Johnson and Salt (1990) in their edited volume deal with the institutional factors of labour migration, particularly the role of large private and public employers, and the behavioural aspects at the household level, focusing on information and decision-making. In terms of geographic coverage, the emphasis has been given on Britain, although there are chapters with case studies from the United States, Japan, Netherlands and France. The purpose of the book is to cover selected aspects of labour migration that receive less attention than they deserve in general theoretical statements.
Only a little work has so far been done on the issue of wage labour particularly in Assam. Das (1991) in his doctoral thesis has made an attempt to probe into the problem of the rural labour force of Assam with a case study of the Barpeta District and suggested remedial measures to improve their socio-economic condition. The author has noted that the number of rural labour force is increasing due to the faster growth of population in the agriculture sector. As a result, major portion of rural labourers are landless or have only a tiny plot of land for residential purpose. The rural labourers are still un-organised and the terms and conditions of this employment are traditional in nature. Das (1991) has remarked that though the rural workers are indispensable part of the rural economy, yet their economic conditions are not satisfactory due to irregular employment pattern, low rate of wages, backward social ethos, etc.

So far the plantation labour is concerned, it may be mentioned that works based on methodological study have not intensively done. Till the last part of the 60's of this century this was almost untouched. Recently a "plantation school" has developed which is primarily associated with the Caribbean New World Group, particularly Lloyd Best (1964) and George Beckford (1985). This 'plantation school' has made a lasting contribution to the study of the origins and
development of plantation economies and systems. Das (1931), Mishra (1966), Rubin and Tuden (1977), Das Gupta (1986), Breman (1989), Kurian (1990), Hollup (1991) have contributed to this field of study. Das (1931) in his macro-level study gives a general idea of the conditions of the plantation labour in India as a whole. Mishra (1966) has tried to analyse the role of agrarian relations in Champaran District (Bihar) during the nineteenth century in the development of indigo plantations by European planters on modern lines. Rubin and Tuden (1977) in their edited volume have given emphasis on the background of the slavery of the Caribbean Realm and devoted six hundred pages to the study of development of plantation systems and slave societies, economies, demography, social institutions, slave images and identities, slave revolts, research techniques and problems and implications for the present. Das Gupta (1986) has examined the historical process of evolution of plantation labour system in parts of Assam. The author also touches upon the theoretical implications of the empirical data presented, such as the symbiotic relationship between the deliberately created subsistence economies and the capitalist sector. Breman (1989) has dealt with the construction in colonial and nationalist discourse of the meaning attributed to Coolie. The author has also described the plantation society and the colonial order in South-East Asia. Kurian (1990) deals with the historical development of plantation
sector in Sri Lanka and its significance in the economic growth of the island and also concentrates in his study on the nature of the work-force and the importance of female labour. The overall emphasis is to indicate how certain attitudes towards women have influenced the nature of their involvement in plantation work. Hollup (1991) has examined the unionism in Sri Lanka and observed that both the workers and trade unions in Sri Lankan plantation continue to be segmented along caste lines.

Coming to a review of works on tea plantation industry in particular, it may be mentioned that scholars from various disciplines other than geography have contributed significantly to this field of study from their own angles. In this regard references may be made to the published and unpublished works of few devoted scholars.

Griffith (1967) deals with the scientific approaches to tea cultivation and manufacturing. Awasthi (1975) has presented a detailed account of the history, growth and development of tea plantation and manufacturing with special reference to Assam. The author has made an attempt to study the economic aspects of the tea industry and tried to present a coordinated analysis of different economic aspects of the industry in India. The study covers all aspects of production and distribution. Paul (1978) has dealt mainly with the economic aspect of tea plantation
Industry and its role in the economic development of North East India. Datta Ray (1981), on behalf of the North-East India Council for Social Science Research (NEICSSR), Shillong, has edited the seminar papers entitled, "Problems of Tea Industry in North East India", which is a collection of twelve papers of individual study and research. Containing only hundred and fifty four pages, the book focuses light on different aspects of tea plantation industry right from production, finance, marketing, management, labour and labour relations to policy formulations for identification of basic problems and concrete measures for solution.

It will not be out of context to mention here that intensive researches on tea plantation and its related aspects, more particularly on tea plantation labour of Assam have been pioneered by the scholars of various disciplines other than geography. Bose (1954) and Mann (1967) have contributed to this field of study from different angles. Bose (1954) has dealt with both the aspects of capital and labour in the Indian tea industry. The author observed that the total monthly remuneration of a worker fell far short of what should have been a minimum living wage. Mann (1967) estimated that an average labour family (composed of an adult male, his spouse, and three children) employed on the tea plantations of Assam would require almost double of the
income which they earned to obtain the minimum diet. Harlalka (1973) in his macro-level study has ventured for the first time to reflect the real problems of tea plantation labour. The study is taken up in two parts, one reflecting their social life and the other on economic condition. It is a coordinated attempt to study the different socio-economic aspects of tea plantation labourers of Assam in the light of development of labourers in tea industry as such. The study reveals that in the tea plantation industry of Assam, the awareness is growing for the beneficial effect of the welfare facilities but those are not provided uniformly in all the tea estates as a result of which lopsided development is visible. Less easily accessible location of the plantations, a skeleton inspectorate staff of the labour department, and ignorance of the workers, all together, have played a vital role in depriving the workers from the benefits intended by the legislators to give through the legislation. The author suggests that concerted efforts should be made by the Government, the employers and the workers' organisations to take welfare measures with a view to rendering the services and not to fulfil the legal formalities only. Phukan (1971) has given emphasis on the analysis of the social and economic condition of the ex-tea garden labour population living in the villages. An attempt has also been made by the author to examine their adjustment to local situation. The study has conclusively established that the socio-economic condition of
the ex-tea garden labourers is not satisfactory. The study further reveals that they cannot adequately earn their livelihood from the newly adopted farming occupations and they have to continue farm operation with that of employment in the wage economy offered by the plantations. The author highlights the problems of this section of population who do not get much benefits from the developmental plans and programmes implemented by the Government from time to time. Phukan (1979) deals mainly with the personnel administrative aspect in the tea industry of Assam for over a period of more than hundred years in some detail with special reference to the present day problems. He has also discussed the various factors which have contributed to variations in personnel administration at different time. Datta (1983) has studied the educational and employment aspects of the tea garden labourers of Assam. Behal (1985) has emphasised on the issue of the mobilisation of labour force for the Assam valley tea plantations which was carried under the 'indenture' system. The author has mentioned that under rigorous regime, trade unionism was impossible in the tea plantations of Assam. The form of labour protest was rather individual instead of organised one. Siddique (1990) has observed that the supply of migrant labour for the tea plantation in Assam was not determined by the operation of normal market forces, because the planters failed to offer competitive market wages to attract labourers from distant places. He has also
mentioned that the planters preferred to employ cheap labourers who would be easily available to work at very low wages and would be bound to work in plantations as and when required under their strict control.

No significant geographical works have been done regarding the tea plantation in general and tea labour in particular. However, in some of the geographical works, various aspects of this field of study are dealt with very briefly. Banerjee (1954) in his paper seeks to analyse the physiography of West Bengal to determine its role in the concentration of the tea gardens in the northern part of the State, mainly in the Darjeeling and the Jalpaiguri districts.

In Assam, Barthakur (1965), Singh (1971) and Borah (1984) are amongst the geographers who have contributed to this field of study. Barthakur gives an account of the history of tea plantation in the Lakhimpur District of Assam. The author has discussed the methods of cultivation as well as various processes of manufacturing of tea in the district. Singh (1971) has described the importance of tea on the economy of the Sibsagar and the Lakhimpur districts in Assam. Borah (1984) shows that technological innovations have invariably improved the quality and quantity of production which enable the region to compete in the international market. The author has mentioned that the amount of profit achieved out of the tea industry goes outside Assam and even
the remaining share of profit is consumed by a particular class of people. He has suggested that it will be better to make a plan to spend this amount of money for the regional development rather than allowing it to be enjoyed by a small section of people. He has further suggested that spatial expansion of tea plantation, if encouraged, will considerably widen the scope of employment, specially for the extra garden labourers and also to a certain extent for the educated unemployed persons. He has recommended the necessity of improving infrastructural facilities, such as transport and communication, electricity, etc. for further growth and development of the industry in the region.

The above survey of literature shows that the geographic study of tea industry in general and tea labour in particular in Assam is still in its formative stage. Very little has been done so far in Assam on this subject. Research work on this topic relevant to that of the author of this thesis has not been done so far by any geographer.

1.8 FORMAT OF THE STUDY

The study is divided into three parts with four chapters in the first part, three in the second part and one in the third part. The first part includes the synopsis of the study, a geographical introduction of the Sonitpur District, history of tea plantation in Assam and a general introduction of the tea estates of the district. The second
part is the analytical one with three chapters - social structure, economic structure, and plantation system and labour. The part three consists of the summary and conclusion treated in one chapter.

Chapter I deals with the introduction of the problem, significance and scope of the study, objectives, hypothesis, methodology, review of relevant study, format of the study, and terms and terminology. In chapter II, the geographical setting of the study region has been outlined. The geographical information considered to be relevant to the present study are arranged in this chapter under three sub-chapters - introduction, physical setting and cultural setting. This chapter serves as a base to the analysis of the problem dealt in the subsequent chapters. Chapter III is concerned with the history of tea plantation in Assam since its inception in the context of growth and development. Chapter IV deals with the general introduction of the tea estates and the landuse pattern within the tea estates of the district.

Part two consisting of chapters V, VI and VII forms the core of the thesis as the main analysis of the problem has been dealt in this part. The analysis of the social and economic structure of the tea plantation labour is made in chapters V and VI. Besides the socio-economic structure, working and living conditions of the labour are also
highlighted in these two chapters. The level of socio-economic and cultural development of tea labour in Sonia District is also examined here. In chapter VII, the plantation system, and control and management of labour have been analysed.

Part three consists of Chapter VIII which attempts to synthesize the findings and suggest some measures for the solution of the problems of the tea labour on the basis of the findings of this study. Suggestions have also been made on what lines other researchers may take up some problems relating to the tea estates for in-depth study. At the end of the thesis, there are the bibliography and the appendices.

1.9 TERMS AND TERMINOLOGY

Since some of the terms used in this study have different meanings in different context, it is necessary to spell out clearly the meanings and definitions of such special terms in which sense these are being used in this study. Some of the local or colloquial terms used also need explanation. The following are the terms used in the course of this study.

1. Agricultural Labour: A person who works in another person's land merely for wages in money, kind or share with no direct stake in the cultivation
2. **Bagicha**: A tea estate or a garden locally called bagicha or bagan

3. **Basti**: A village or an unit of settlement generally used to identify the area which is inhabited by the people who are not native

4. **Beel**: A small lakelet or a small pool of water which is formed in a depreeed area generally lying along the abandoned river courses

5. **Bhabar**: Boulder - strewn dry tract along the foothills of the Himalayas

6. **Bordoichilla**: The Nor'westers locally called Bordoichilla. It moves to the North - East India by the second week of April and retreats in the first week of May towards west. The months of April and early May are characterised by occasional thunderstorms associated with Nor'westerns. With the migration of the depression over Bay of Bengal and incursion of the air masses over the North-East India, the frequency of storms increases during this period

7. **Capitalism**: Capitalism is an economic system in which most of the means of production are owned by an individual capitalist or a company.
this system, production is guided and income is distributed largely through the operation of the markets. The distinguishing features of this system are excess production, capital accumulation, expropriation of surplus value of labour and creation of class-division in the society.

8. Capitalist Agriculture: Highly organised type of farming of an individual capitalist or a company. It is based on capitalist mode of production like that of a factory or industry with wage or salaried labourers, and managerial and technical staff.

9. Caste: The word caste is not of Indian origin, but derived from the Portuguese Casta, signifying race. The Indian word for caste is jati or jati which has the original meaning of production or birth of a child. Thus jati now signifies a caste, as every Hindu is born into a caste, and the caste determines the social position through life. A caste may be defined as a collection of families or groups of families. Claiming common descent, the people belonging to a common caste are associated with a specific occupation and they are known
by their specific occupation. A caste almost invariably endogamous.

10. Chapari: Small sandy riverine areas where rabi crops are abundantly grown.

11. Char: Sandy riverine areas situated along river banks in a floodplain zone.

12. Charapbhatti: A shop where cheap country liquor is sold.

13. Clan: A clan is nothing but a wider form of group joined or related together by kinship. It is based on blood relationship, either from the side of the father or from the side of the mother.

14. Class: It indicates the economic position of a group in the society in relation to other groups.

15. Cultivator: A person engaged in cultivation directly by supervision or direction as an owner or as a lessee.

16. Depeasantisation: Partial or full separation of peasant proprietors from their land and means of production.

17. Deproletarianisation: The process which entails imposition or reimposition of unfree
production relations on fully proletarianised labourers whose sole property is their labour power, or the decommodification of landless labour.

18. Enclave Economy: The term is used to characterise a system of production as forcefully inserted into a pre-existing socio-economic fabric. In other words, a superimposition of an economic system upon the traditional one.

19. Endogamous: A group of people is said to be endogamous if marriage is permitted within the group and prohibited outside the group.

20. Estate: A campus or an area specially meant for tea plantation.

21. Exogamous: A group of people is said to be exogamous if marriage is prohibited within the group and permitted outside the group.

22. Fatika: One type of country liquor, a favourite drink of tea plantation labour in Assam.

23. Fold: A branch of a clan. It is synonymous with a sept. In Assamese a sept is called a fold.

24. Garden: A synonym of plantation farm, an estate. In Assamese language a bagicha or a ha...
25. **Gotra**: The enlarged social group is known as *gotra* in Sanskrit and also in Hindi, but *ku*1 in Bengali. The British Anthropologists call it as *clan* while the American Anthropologists refer it as *sib*.

26. **Hat**: A daily or weekly market place.

27. **Household**: A household is a group of persons who commonly live under the same roof and take meals from a common kitchen.

28. **Institutional Household**: A household of persons related or unrelated by blood or having a mix of both, such as boarding houses, hostels, etc.

29. **Jan**: A brooklet.

30. **Kutcha House**: A house made of mud plastered walls and earthen floor.

31. **Labour**: A wage earning manual worker who does not generally possess the means of production except his physical strength and relatively has low status in the society.

32. **Literate**: A person who can both read and write in any language with understanding.

33. **Main-Worker**: A person whose main activity is
participation in any economically productive work, physical or mental in nature or involved in effective supervision and direction of work for atleast 183 days or more during one year according to Indian census.

34. Marginal-Worker: A person who has been participating in some work but such participation is only marginal and not for the major part of the year.

35. Mouza: A revenue area constituted for convenience of collection of revenue.

36. Non-Worker: A person who never does any work. Non-worker includes students, dependant, retired persons, beggers, etc.

37. Parbat: A hill or hillock.

38. Peasant: The self-employed agricultural worker who is largely dependent on his own labour and that of his family members, for whom the contribution of such labour is more important than that of capital. A peasant possesses an operational holding of land whatever may be its type of tenure. Neither a landless agricultural wage labourer nor a plantation labour is considered to be a peasant.
39. Peasantisation: The process of making peasantry called peasantisation

40. Pradesh: A province

41. Pre-Capitalism: An economic system which is transitional between feudalism and capitalism where characteristics of both the systems are prevalent and where labour is exploited by means of extra-economic compulsion. A pre-capitalist economic system is one where or in which the labourers have very little bargaining power and survive on a subsistence income

42. Proletariat: A proletariat refers to a workforce composed of wage-labourers who do not have the capital nor ownership of the means of production, a basic class of capitalist society, whose members are compelled to sell their labour power to earn the means of existence

43. Proto-proletariat: A proto-proletariat refers to a workforce composed of cultivators with little or no land, artisans and de-classed artisans, service workers and lumpens

44. Pucca-House: A house made of brick walls and concrete floor
45. Repeasantisation: The process of formation of peasants from the proletariat whose members were originally peasants. In other words, the process of making the peasants, who were earlier proletarianised, but have now returned back to peasantry is called repeasantisation.

46. Reproletarianisation: The process of formation of proletariat from the peasantry, the members of whom were originally proletariats. In other words, the process of making the proletariats who became peasants, but have now become proletariats is called reproletarianisation.

47. Semi-proletariat: The semi-proletariats are those who are semi peasants and semi industrial wage workers.

48. Sept: A branch of a clan, especially with reference to tribes who believe themselves to be descended from a common ancestor.

49. Sub-Division: It is an administrative areal unit of a district made for convenience of administration.

50. Terai: A belt of marshy ground covered vegetation on the lower parts of alluvial fans in North East India.

51. Town: A settlement with a Municipal Corporation or a
Cantonment and a notified town area, or a place which has a minimum population of 1,000, with at least 75 per cent of the male working population being non-agricultural, and with a density of population of at least 400 persons per square kilometer

52. Tribe: A tribe is a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name which as a rule does not denote any specific occupation. The members of a tribe generally claim a common descent, usually speaking the same language or dialogue and occupying a definite tract of a country. They have a common culture and tradition. A tribe is not necessarily endogamous.

53. Village: A rural unit of settlement with a distinct name. Villages are predominated with primary occupations. In the plains, such a rural settlement along with the land around it form a cadastral or revenue village. In the hills where no cadastral survey has been done, a village is demarcated with a traditionally recognised boundary.

54. Worker: A person working for wages or salaries and whose income is derived primarily from wages.
or salaries. But it does not include high
salary earners nor low earning women whose
husband receives a large income nor person
with large amounts of property irrespective of
their wages

OR

A worker is a person whose main activity is
participation in any economically productive
work by his physical or mental activity. Work
includes not only actual work but effective
supervision and direction of work.

NOTE

1. The Act of fixing the amount of rupees to distinguish a
worker and managerial person has been substituted by Act
58 of 1981, S.3 (w.e.f. 26.1.82)

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