CHAPTER 6
THE LITERARY WORKS OF THE
TEA GARDEN FOLKS

The tea garden folks have been, here and there, in touch with urban cultural elements and after Independence of India they have been more exposed to rural development programmes and government agencies, modern education and modern mass media. These forces have given rise to some educated persons and elites among them. The functionally literate and educated persons have attempted literary writings on their own culture and society. Thus, these folks have created little written literature using their literacy. Literature is one of the channels of communication amongst the vast heterogeneous mass of people. Literature of the masses with little education cannot be considered as a standard literature but that does not mean that they are not worth taking into account. Such literature may not be scholarly but it may well be informative and reflective. This chapter is an overview of the literature of the tea garden writers from the sociological perspective. There are not many writers hailing from the tea gardens of Barak Valley who have penned down their thoughts and views. The literature of the insiders of the garden culture consists of poetry, few short stories, novels, two poetic dramas and a few articles. The chapter is devoted to enumerate the resources so as to locate sociological significance in them. The insiders whose works could be collected are Ashok Verma, Jhumur Pandey, Yamuna Prasad Swarnakar, Kapil Dev Upadhaya, Annapurna Devi, Kajal Demta, Joydmath Goala, Santosh Akura, Babul Narayan Kanu, Amar Nath Sharma, Mira Singh, Uma Kanta Tewari, Suresh Chandra Diwedi, Abhijit Chakraborty, Sanat Koiri, Santoshi Das (Lohar).

Ashok Verma

Ashok Verma was born in the year 1945 and brought up at Lalamukh Tea Estate in the district of Hailakandi. He served as a Mathematics teacher in Kashipur High School for two years and then joined Narsing Higher Secondary School and ultimately retired as the Principal of the school. He is a well-known
poet, short story writer, and editor of various papers, souvenirs, books and journals both in Bengali and Hindi in Cachar district. All his writings have been published from his own publication centre the Balark Prakashan. His publication centre has helped publish the writings of the insiders without which these works would have remained unlettered. He hails from the tea garden; yet, his works are on varied themes highlighting the emotions and feelings of the people. He has eleven collected works of poems, a novel, poetic dramas, short stories, essays and translations of Manipuri, Dimasa, Bishnupriya Manipuri, Bengali and Assamese poems and stories. In Chaturang (n.d) , a collection of Hindi poems, he has contributed; Tu Kaun (Who Are You), Jangir (Shackle), Ap aur Way (You and They), Gulam (Slave) Hamare Prapitamaha (Our Grand Fathers), Dasara (Remover of Evil), Khaddi Youdha (Standing Battle), Salaha (Advice), Arthanad (Heart Rending Cries), Aukat (Capability), Kiya Sunaow Geet (What Song To Sing), Ek Julush (A Rally). In Upekshit Swar Barak Ke (1999), a collection of poems, he contributed Wo A Rahi Thi (She was Coming), Bandana (Prayer), Nibedan (Request) and Parinam (Consequences). In Nistarang Godhuli (9th May 2011), another collection of poems in Bengali, he wrote Rikta (Empty), Phire Pawya (To Get Back), Muho (Attachment), Gupta Katha (Secret), Posha (Tamed), Bektigoto (Personal), Ahata (Premises), Avhijan (Operation), Gangajal (Water of the Ganges), Srut (Waves), Chanchalchitta (Restless Mind), Swarup (Nature), Osoni (Warning), Badha (Obstruction), Jamnabhumi (Motherland) Abdar (Demand), Tumar Sancharan, Ujjal Tapash (Radiant Sun), Poloker Chamak, (Flutter of the Eyes), Dohan (Exploitation), Ujjalata (Brightness), Chirantan (Everlasting), Anirbochaniya (Uncontested), Tota Kahini (Tale of Parrot), Slum, Kacchup (Tortoise), Ashechi Jokhon (As I had Come), Anuyog (Indolence) and Bondhuke (In the Guns). The volume titled Chanchal Mon, Dagmagate Kadam (Verma ed. 2005) has fourteen poems, in all; Wo Ayee Thi (She Had Come), Mukhaute (Mask), Chup Chup (Silence, Silence), Waha (He), Sawal (Question), Jara (Cold), Tum (You), Aj Achanak (Today Suddenly), Waqt ki Raftar (Speed of Time), Ankur (Sprout), Guhar (Entreat), Jagrati (Awareness), Gupta Gopan (Secret) and Basant (Spring). Another book in Hindi Uljhano ke Reshon par (Verma ed. n.d.) has thirty-three poems, in all. The poems are Ichha
Ban Phul (Wild Flowers) (Verma (ed). 2011) is a collection of poems from the writers of the tea gardens of Barak Valley and some outsiders also. But as the study is concerned with the tea gardens the poems of the insiders are mentioned here. Ashok Verma has written Kab Ayega (When will It Come), Drishoy (Sight), Dipawali Ke Dono Pith (Both Sides of Dipawali) Honge Hanuman (Will be Hanuman), Drishya Do (Give Me Vision), Parakrama (Circumambulation), Than Liye (Determined) and Hamare Jawan (Our Soldiers) (pp: 4-13). In his Dhara Barak Ke (1997), Hindi edition, there are altogether seventy poems by various poets of Barak Valley which contains Tulsi Bandana (Prayer to Tulsi), Bharat Varsha (India), Matri Bandana (Prayer to the Mother), and Tarpan (Offering of water) by Ashok Verma. His first poem ‘Pachishe Baishak’ was published in Sramik Pratrika in the year 1956 (Biswas 2006). Ramaprasad Biswas in his article ‘Sahitya Sanskriti Charchay Cha Jana Gustir Obodan’, published in Ishaner Dinkal, Vol. 3, 20th Oct, 2006, analysed the poetry of Ashok Verma and traced the philosophy of the poet travelling the realms of the poetic world, yet, not completely detached from the world of reality with its varied experiences. He traces a relationship between man, nature and time which are interconnected with the unseen power. In his poem Badlegache he is haunted by the past and reflects on the cultural changes around him. The ailing world, the distrust and dispassion in the hearts of the people who move about like a
rudderless ship in the present world are the contents of the poem. Power politics, class consciousness, oppression and subjugation are themes of his poetry. He unmasks the hypocrites of the society in his poem *Mukhaute* (2005) and *Chup Chup* (2005) and *Sangbad* (Biswas 2006) he portrays the fearful and subjugated minds of the village folks (*the kritodas*). *Chup Chup* (Verma 2005 p.4) hushes the voices, ends up questions, teaches tolerance to hunger (*Bhuk lage hai sehana sikho*) and heat of the scorching sun, reminds them of their slavery (*Das baneho,bane raho*) , which does not permit luxury and comfort to them it is the privilege of the rich (*Ghari ghora unkelie*) and they are controlled and subjugated by the pointed index finger (*The Tarjoni*). Ashok Verma is out to sell masks of all kinds in his poem *Mukhaute* (Verma 2005 p.3). He attacks the deceitful politicians and leaders who pretend to be the saviours of humanity and flaunt knowledge and act as though they are Plato and Aristotle shielding their exploitative nature with varied masks (*mukhaute*).

In *Gulam* (Verma (ed). n.d. p.7), he tries to create a sense of awareness amongst his fellow men who have reduced themselves to mere slaves they cry, yet, tolerate and have faith in everybody except themselves. He holds his forefathers responsible for the miseries and the present state of affairs in *Hamare Prapilamaha* (Verma (ed).n.d. p. 8). His forefathers were lured to the tea gardens with false promises of fast and magical ways to money making and were trapped for ever in this land of no return, toiling hard, clearing jungles and growing tea for the Englishmen’s profit at the cost of their family’s happiness shedding silent tears. They tolerated everything with a smile and, finally, the poet questions his elders whether submission and meekness was their only ambition in life. In *Ap aur Wey* (Verma (ed). n.d. Pp: 6-7) the poet points out at the glaring injustice and exploitation by the colonial rulers reducing the workers of the tea garden to mere slaves. He accuses the babus and sahebs who gained position at the expense of the toiling workers who burnt their backs to make their employers fair and healthy who in turn call them ungrateful and low born (*namak haram and harami ke bacche*). Their children are lucky enough, for their bare feet never touched the earth and the *sahib mahashay* and babus mock at the under privilged ones. In *Salaha* (Verma n.d. 2005 Pp: 10-11) he advices his men to weed away the
unwanted grass from their lives and let the light of awareness dawn on them so
that they do not forget their tradition and do not dance at the command of the
foreigners as they are the strength (shakti) reflected in *Tu Kaun* (Verma (ed) 2005
save the world from extinction. He says that the destructive power of men is
greater than natural calamity whether tsunami or earthquake. Men uproot men
from their roots; he reminds his countrymen of the destruction of Hiroshima and
Nagasaki in 1945 and the bombing at Derby Tea Estate in 1945. He calls for
unity so as to stop the outsiders attack not only on the people but also on their
culture. He further said that at such a critical moment the county needs a savior,
to protect the Himalayas like Krishna, who lifted the Goverdhan Mountain on his
little finger to protect his men.

The poem *Karan* (2004) is concerned with the political scenario of the
post-Independence period. It throws light on the political society of India and the
power game which lays a sheath over poverty and hunger of mass; the political
elite never bother to respond to questions raised about the workers’ pitiable
condition. Like Karan of the Mahabharata they are made to feel ashamed of their
status and fear of castigation which does not allow them to question and only
such an apprehension of the poor leads to alienation and subjugation. In *Aukat*
(n.d.) he expresses his desire to do something for the development of his village
and feels helpless as he is not solvent enough. He often got excited when an
announcement was made about construction of bridges which would enable them
to connect with the people outside, and to establish a soul to soul relationship for
a better understanding and a change, for his hopes were shattered again and again
by the never fulfilling promises of the leaders.

Poems like *Tuta Kahini, Slum and Kacchap* (2011) are expressions of
spite for the colonial rulers (*Gora Saheb*), the Indian employers and the power
loving politicians who are called the blood suckers, car riders and phony
(*Khunchusha khai sahebbabu, ghari chora bachon- baj* (*Tota Kahani*, p. 25).
Low wages (*samanya dhan*)(*Tota Kahani*, p. 25), dilapidated houses made of
lime, straw, leaves or polythene(*chun, khar, pata othoba polythene*) (*Slum*, p. 26)
sun-burnt backs (*chamra purey surja tapa*) (*Tota Kahani*, p. 25) do not stop
them from singing their folk songs (lokgiri chorus dhun) (Tota Kahani, p. 24).

Julus was addressed to Dinesh Goala after he got elected as the member of the Lok Sabha and a procession was taken out to celebrate his victory. Through the poem Verma was asking the minister not to get carried away and reminded him that money cannot beget happiness (Bithse chit prasarit nahi hota), for love is the only means to it. At times, when he is tired struggling with the miseries he demands of the divine Mother to make him the sky, the stream, the Himalayas or the sea. He wants to merge with nature and forget his sorrows but, repents. His other poetry collections are Sudhu Sabda Ashe Pashe (1388 Bangla) (Only words around me), Nishabda Angane Tritya Purush (n.d) (A third person in the silence zone), Sabdo Deyo Tabu O Asrey (1392 Bangla) (I am indebted to words), Jibon Bichitra Jibon (1394 Bangla) (Life, variegated life), Nibritir Shikar Bakar (Roots of Loneliness) (Verma 2000).

On the occasion of Gandhi centenary in the year 1969, Government of India provided special offer for travelling the country at a very low price. Taking this opportunity Ashok Verma and six other scholarly persons; namely, Late Birendra Kumar Bhattacharjee and Shanti Bhusan Dhar, both, were successive ex–Principals of Narsing Higher Secondary School, Late Tamesh Ranjan Dey, a teacher in Physics, Late Prof. Amarnath Sharma of Cachar College, Silchar, Milon Choudhury, Headmaster of Jubilee School and Tapodir Bhattacharjee, a Sanskrit Teacher in Narsing Higher Secondary School and, later, on the Vice Chancellor of Assam University, Silchar, visited the historical places of India. Ashok Verma composed his first collection of poems, Sudhu Sabda Ashepashey during his travels in 1969 (Verma, 1388 Bangla). In this collection of poems he brings out the significance of words. Words, sound and rhythm create a poem. Bricks are used to build a house and words are used to compose poetry. The use of obsolete words like Badshah, Begum, Ghazal and Thumri in his poem, Badi Imam Bada instantly transport his readers to the world of Mughals and Badshahs. In his poem, Ajanta Ellora Shilpider Prati he used words of appreciation for the sculptors of Ellora and Ajanta who breathed life into the stones and carved out figures of his imagination which draws the attention of the visitors long after their death. This reflects on the immortality of art. The
homeless people living below the over bridge at Guwahati, the capital city of Assam, and the mute and inactive government finds expression in his poem Drishyantar written on his visit to Assam Sachivalaya at Guwahati. Altogether there are thirty poems in this edition. The second and third editions are Nihsabda Angina Tritiya Purush and Sabdha Deyo Tobuyo Asroy.

The review of Tapash Chakraborty’s poetry book Sabdher Antaralay (Chakraborty 28th November 2004), illustrates the impact of words. Verma refers to words as Brahma (The Creator of the Universe), for words can make or mar an individual or the society. Only the wise can create a peaceful world for himself as well as others, through the words of love. The first poem in the issue Tumito He Kritodas Kakhono Chile Na (You were never a slave) is a reminder to his fellow beings that they were born free then why the sense of fear and subjugation. It is only the awareness which can give them the freedom and let them press ahead, and would no longer hold rallies with torches in the darkness of nights seeking for their rights. The light of knowledge is enough to give them the strength and they would no longer be identified with the weak Durbal (Chakraborty 2004). The poem Bij (seed) reflects on the soul consciousness. Verma writes that nothing in this world is dear for nothing belongs to him. If words are formed from the inner consciousness they are full of wisdom and when uttered they become knowledge for humanity at large. Another poem by Ashok Verma, Taup (Heat) (Chakraborty 2004) expresses how he had to tread the path of humiliation and indifference in the past but, now, people invite him to attend meetings and flag hoisting ceremonies; he wonders at the change of attitude. Ashok Verma was basically a poet but he also wrote a number of short stories. Pagal (Madman) (Pp. 1-8) and Churabali (Loose Sand) (Pp. 8-15) in Tin Dampatir Galpo (2007), collection of short stories by three couples, the contents of which are taken from real incidents (as narrated by the author) and coloured with imagination reflect on his response to the experience of war. Pagal, unravels the horrors of Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, displacement and its impact on the minds of people like Gossain who comes to India during the War and being estranged from his fiancé he loses his mental balance. In Churabali he writes on floods, its after-effects and the failure on the part of the government machinery to provide sufficient relief to
the victims. Manipulations of government grants for development by corrupt officials and politicians hamper progress in the villages. It also reflects on the patriarchal dominance over women and gender discrimination in respect to education. Mewalal and his son vehemently oppose the Chotabahu, (younger daughter-in-law) when she expresses her willingness to continue her studies and Mewalal (the father-in-law) says, “Satanrathay nari bigre” (Independence spoils women). In Sebj Leher ke Log (2011) he wrote two more short stories, Mukul and Madhab Charit. His Madhav Charit (2011) highlights the tendency of the few educated people amongst the tea communities like Madhab Charan who forgets his past life and joins in with the selfish exploiters to exploit his own men for his own personal gains; they are enemies from within. He cheats and threatens Sukhia and brings down her son as a domestic helper, forgetting that he promised the mother to send her son to school. Mukul (2011) is not only the story of Ramiya who earns Rs 60/- a week, spends on country liquor, falls unconscious by the roadside and comes to senses only to find that his wage has been stolen. When he returns home, he is ashamed to face his children and wife and vows not to drink again. But could he keep his promise the next week? It is not that the tea garden folks do not realise their drawbacks; rather, it is the environment around which is crowded with drunken men and abusive wives, cursing and using slangs and leading an unruly life that does not allow men like Ramiya to change. They blame the white sahebs and the brown sahebs for their plight calling them the khunchusua (blood suckers). But are they not to be blamed equally? Thus, Ashok Verma has entreated them through his writings to come out of the deadly clutches of ignorance and become aware of their rights and duties.

His article Cha Baguner Khela Dhula (2003 p:10) on games and sports throws light on various traditional games like Chhur, Bandi, Satgharia, Nakori, Chubi, Lattim, Silguti, Dushpacchis, Bhujoni ,Ekkaduka, Kuth-Kuth, Naguti, Cards, Lukochuri ,Nandai, Sulakori, Kabadi, Takker Khela, Phulguti and Uraphanda, besides Wrestling, Carom, Hockey Badminton, Football, Volleyball and Cricket. He also collected and compiled some Bhojpuri folk songs like Shivgeet, Ramnamami, Ganga Puja Ka Geet, Piriyia, Wayahik Anusthan Ka Geet, Sohar, Tejiyia and Kartik Mas Ka Mahartak (All are ritual and religious

*Jindegi Ka Mor (Ghati ka Pahla Hindi Upanyak)* (Verma 2004) brings out the significance of charismatic leaders like Gandhiji, Netaji and the spiritual leaders like Swami Sadananda Yogibabu for achieving Independence for the country. Gangadhar was born and brought up in a tea garden amidst all kinds of superstitions and beliefs. He was only a school-going boy when he was married to a 5-year-old girl who wanted to play with him. Gangadhar himself did not know what marriage was. But he was happy as he got many new clothes. This child marriage would not have taken place if only Bidyadhar would not have gone out of the village. Bidyadhar symbolizes wisdom and was against illiteracy, child marriage, violence and all other evils. In the end, of course, one finds Gangadhar joining the liberation front fighting for the country. The novel reflects on the folk culture and is stuffed with folk songs and proverbs. For instance, *Bap dada na khaile pan, dat nipo dh ke gail pran* (2005 p.7), (why are you doing something which your ancestors did not do?) And this was uttered by the villagers when Ghura Prasad decided to admit Gangadhar to school. The proverb *Chachundar ke mas par Chameli ke lei* (2005 p.7) which means perfumed oil in the rat’s snot *Nar nahi hota balwan samay hota balwan* (2005 p. 11). Time is more powerful than man. This was said by Ghora Prasad’s mother when they were displaced from their land. She meant to say that good times would also come in their lives.

Earlier Barak Valley was known as Cachar district under the British regime and after Independence this region of Assam came to be dominated by Bengali speaking people, yet, in the year 1960, the Government of Assam passed the Official Language Act declaring Assamese as the official language other than English in Assam. This Act gave rise to mass uprise and protests of the people in Cachar. Government resorted to very stringent measures to stop the movement. On the 19th May, 1961, the police resorted to firing in which eleven Satyagrahis became martyrs. On the theme of this historic movement many writings have come up from the writers of Barak Valley. Ashok Verma who witnessed the movement has discussed it in his writings like *Ar Ek Kunti (n.d.*) , a short story,
and Bhorer Shanai (1995), a novel. Ar Ek Kunti depicts the real story of a revolutionary who took active part in the Bengali language movement of Cachar. One day, when the picketers were shouting slogans in front of the Commissioner’s office, the police resorted to lathi charge to disperse the mob. In the midst of the commotion the hero of the movement darted into the office and hid himself under a desk. He waited for the situation to calm down. When everything settled down, the policemen left the spot. Then the leader emerged out of his hiding place and, once again, took the lead to voice out his demand full-throated for recognizing Bengali as an official language in Barak Valley. His fiancée, who had seen everything, was full of remorse and shame. She then wished that, given a chance she would pray to the Sun God in the same manner as Kunti of Mahabharata, did to beget a brave son like Karna (King of Angadesh which is the present Bhagalpur region of Bihar). Lack of proper leadership results into chaos, rather than solving a problem is what the story conveys (Text of the above contents could not be procured and the details have been given by the author himself). Bhurer Sanai (1995) is also on language movement and its impact. He narrates various incidents of violence that took place during the movement and ends up with the story of a boy from the tea garden who had come to live in Silchar and got involved in the movement and was ultimately caught up in the violence and severely injured. He also narrates the protest by the Muslims and the Bishnupriya Manipuris against the introduction of Bengali as the official language of Cachar. The movement came to end on the 21st July 1961 and conflict was resolved, when the Government made amendments in the Language Act of Assam, accommodating Bengali as the official language for the whole of Cachar district but the memories kept haunting the mind of the writer. His poetic drama Moru Trisha (1994) is based on Islam (religion), the celebration of Muharram, which is a part of ‘Bishadsindhu’ written by Mir Musaraf Hussain. The story unfolds how Hasan was poisoned by Zayida, his wife, at the instigation of Maimuna, the slave woman of Hazrat Mohammad. Ashok Verma gained more popularity through his poetry which throws light on his philosophy.
Jhumur Pandey

Jhumur Pandey was born in Katlichera tea garden in the year 1962. Her father Late Binoy Kumar Pandey was Chaghar Babu and her mother was a social worker. She did her schooling from Chalmars Higher Secondary School and completed her graduation from Lala Rural College. She composed her first poem when she was only thirteen years of age. Her first publication *Jiban Jader Bhangha Chora* (1975) was a short story on tea garden people. She is a prolific writer who composed not only poems but wrote a few novels and short stories. She also contributed to a number of magazines and newspapers. Hailing from a tea garden she is closely acquainted with the life of the tea garden workers, their feelings, emotions, their life style and culture which are reflecting in almost all of her writings.


Pandey’s collection of short stories Swapnagandhar khonje (1406 Bangla) consists of sixteen stories. Swapnagandhar khonje (In search of a dream) (Pp. 9-16), Samay (time) (17-23), Subhadra, mayeta sadagari abong…. (Subhadra, the girl white car and…..) (Pp.24-28), Abarta (Doer) (Pp. 29-32), Ojajseni abong antarnihita (The inner mind of the low born) (Pp. 33-39), Belobati (Pp. 40-44), Lalguaper agastya jatra (Hazardous journey of the red rose) (Pp. 45-48), Akaler Rajkanya Shankhyamala abong ekmothu Bokulphul (Sankhomala, the present princess and a handful of jasmine (Pp. 49-50), Rupantar (Change) (Pp. 51-52), Biborna jyostnay (Indescribable moonlit night) (Pp. 53-57), Krishnakoli abong lal tuktuke pakh (The hazel eyed girl and the red bird) (Pp. 58-61), Atangker Himaghare ami o amar may (Frozen fear of me and my daughter) (Pp. 62-63), Jarul phuler mash (Pp.: 64-68), Gangabhuree alokjatra (Old Ganga’s triumphant journey) (The month of jarul flower) (Pp. 69), Raith puhaik (Let the night end) (Pp. 70-74), Saraswatir sukh dhukho (The joys and sorrows of Saraswati) (Pp. 75-80).

She also wrote two novels; Ganga Gatha (2011) and Alekjander Purer Kathakata (2007).

She has also composed poems which were compiled in her Kichu balar chilo (2004) (There was something to say). There are 21 poems, in all: namely, Knda knda nadi hoi gulaper rat (Flooded the rosy night with tears), Bisalya sakal (Undesirable Morning), Pratyasha (Expectation), Kichu bolar chilo (There was something to say), Aami santaran jani na (I do not know swimming), Parijayi pakhi (Migratory birds), Bishanpurere bou (Bishanpur’s Bride), Aarek samay (Another Time), Akankhita sankalper kache (Expectation from Promises), Bipanna anweshak (Helpless search), Majrate shikorer tan (Midnight Desire for The Roots), Rupantar (Change), Priyo sabder khoje (In Search of Fond Words), Grahan (Eclipse), Bakul gandha shoi (Tolerating the Fragrance of Bokul Flower), Ekanta sahajata (Certainly Inherent), Rupmati (Full of Beauty), Nadir katha (The Tale of River), Oghaboti (Unhappy Sinner), Patharer Janmakaitha (Biography of Stone) and Samay Dharapat (Continuance of Time).

Jhumur Pandey’s Garam Thaner Manushta O Dulia (1997) is a collection of fourteen short stories, written in Bengali. The story named after the title
Garam Thaner Manushta O Dulia, which has been translated into English by Ashok Kumar Nandi delineates, the life of Dulia whose world crumbles down when her husband is taken to jail on false charge of murder. She had to sell her only plot of land for a thousand rupees to bail her husband out. This is not only the plight of Dulia and her husband, but there are many other tea garden people who face the same situation and all of them are grinded between the vicious circle of poverty and illiteracy, on one hand, and the advantageous class of Babus, on the other. The men at the helm of power consider every action illegal that is offensive to their morality and thus threatens the rights and property of the underprivileged class of the society (2002). Dewal (1997) delineates the lawless situation in the tea gardens and power politics of moneyed men like Bishal Sen who grabbed two bighas of land from a villager. When Bonomali tried to stop him he instantly called the police and on false charges Bonomali was sent to jail. On his release Bonomali came back home and found that the conflict was resolved by intervention of the M.L.A. who asked Sen to contribute 50 kg of rice, 10 kg pulses and two sarees to the family whose land was grabbed on the occasion of their daughter’s marriage and Sarala’s mother was offered job in the mill. We also come to know that the M.L.A. intervened at his own interest as, the villagers refused to cast vote in his favour because of Bishal’s highhandedness.

Later on, when Bonomali was about to settle down in the village as a high school teacher Bishal tried to incite him once again as he wanted to frame fresh charges against him and put him behind bars. With this intention, one day Bishal started tilling Bonomali’s plot of land which infuriated Bonomali and this time without a second thought he killed the intruder and was arrested on charge of murder. Laganmajhi (1997) is a story which shows how common people like Lagan have lost their faith in the Government. Republic Day and Independence Day have become meaningless for them. Bonyar chand (1997) reflects on the sufferings of the people during floods and the failure on the part of government to protect the lives of the people and the corrupt leaders even deprive people from the relief items. The stories in Garam Thaner Manushta O Dulia imply social discrimination, subordination, suppression and corruption, creating an anomic among the poor. Marginalisation and power-game, leading to conflicts and violence, devoid of
humanism, reflecting on bewildering uncertainties in the lives of the ignorant folks are all cast through the stories of Jhumur Pandey.

The political scenario in tea garden village is reflected in her short story Adhikar (1997). In Adhikar (Right) the political leaders and their supporters cheat and lure the people with a few rupees and alcohol to buy their votes. Most of the time, the people are deprived of their voting rights, for they do not have the courage to go against the leaders and articulate their rights. But the rare leaders like Biren Bakti can change the political scenario and create an impetus to break free from the hostilities and obstacles. Biren voices out his right to vote “Hamora Vot Dibo. Eta Hamader Gonotantrik Adhikar” (1997: 33 -37) (We shall cast vote, this is our democratic right). When some political workers informed him that his vote has been already cast, Biren became wild with anger and snatching the ballot papers started stamping on them. The policemen who were so long silent spectators tried to stop Biren. Meanwhile, others joined in amidst a lot of violence and bloodshed, shouting slogans “We shall cast vote, this is our democratic right”. The story focuses on the need of leaders to create awareness amongst the Adivasis of the tea gardens not only those of Barak Valley but, the whole of Assam. In this connection it may be mentioned that His Holiness Sri Sri Ravisankar, the spiritual leader, conveyed a message to the politicians of Assam “Do not play vote bank politics”, in an interview with Wasbir Hussain in News Live on the 12th August, 2012 at 9.30 P.M. The term vote bank was first used by M.N.Srinavas in 1955 in a paper entitled ‘The Social System of a Mysore Village’. Vote-bank politics is the practice of creating and maintaining vote banks through divisive policies which encourages narrow communal considerations, often against the better judgment, of the people which is anti-democratic. Ksharan (1997), another story in the same edition, reveals the life of Shonkabhaji who had to live a life of seclusion and hatred as she suffered from a terrible skin disease. She ultimately passed away without any medical attention and was deprived of the love and care from the society.

The tea garden workers are saturated with superstitions. The story Daini (1997: 27-32) throws light on the superstitious nature of the village folks who accordered any misfortune to Dhukiyia, the midwife of the village. Witch burning
is still prevalent in some places of the world and Shyampur village is no exception where Dhukhiyia is burnt alive, for the folks considered her as the embodiment of all evils. Such acts of nuisance stem in a society from illiteracy and blind beliefs. Srimati Chala in Shuk Gacher Galpo (2005: 29) reveals the blind faith of the tea garden villagers in supernatural powers of men possessed by gods and goddesses. The writings of Pandey focused on burning social issues like child labour, its cause and effects, and problems of the slum dwellers and the unprivileged class of folks. She uses local languages like Sylethi and Sadri (Bagani) to drive home crucial points.

The effect of modernization and pretentious attitude of urban populace of Barak Valley against the rural simpletons is highlighted in her short stories like Maduraboti Satar Katey, Kanai Ar Kichukhon and Sukh Gachher Galpo (2005). She castigates the educated elite in Maduraboti Satar Katey, who are devoid of conscience; who are mere cogs in a machine only to be eradicated by time. The name Madhuraboti is derived from the tributary river Madhura which flows into the river Barak. The name Madhuraboti symbolises her culture, i.e., the tea garden or Bagani culture which is a sub-culture of Barak Valley and considered inferior to the mainstream (Bengali) culture in the valley. Madhuraboti, eight years old, is employed as a domestic help in the house of an educated and well-to-do family. Debopriya, the lady of the house, does not consider her as part of the family and exploits her. Tomojit has a different level of consciousness, for he wants to give Madhuraboti benefits of the modern world. He appreciates the girl’s talent for music and suggests training for her. Debopriya is selfish and pretentious, thus, unwilling to integrate and socialize the simple rural girl, unlike the River Barak which accommodates all its tributaries. Hence, Madhuraboti is left swimming in the river of life to complete her journey alone. They are all type characters. Debopriya reads out a speech in a seminar on ‘Child Labour’ indifferent to the presence of the child, employed in her own home. Displacement, migration, haunted memories of sufferings, loss of near and dear ones and rootlessness make the theme in Mukhoda Sundari Harano Prapti, another short story in the edited volume Sukh Gacher Galpo (2005). Mukhoda remembers her son Khokan and her husband who were killed during the partition
of India. She recalls how she crossed the border and reached Karimganj and was then shifted to Meherpur relief camp. She also informs that hers was a child marriage, and she missed her friends and parents. Mukhoda carried folk songs and rhymes which she sings all on her own to relive her mind and to feel close to her roots. The Dhamail songs and the game riddles, all, flood her life to live with. *Ujjan* (2005) (flowing in the opposite direction) unveils a gruesome picture of social change and a generation gap. Getting pregnancy is a small problem for Mona herself but a shocking and unforgivable offence for her mother Mandikini. Mona believes in having affairs. Love has no place in her life, not even for the child she is carrying and she decides to get it aborted as early as possible. Mandikini is caught up against the waves of the changing time as she tries to swim against the current of the time. In such a situation, she turns to the nature for solace, the birds and flowers which are unchangeable and constant companions in the world of dichotomy.

In *Bilorito Swapner Abong Sulochana-2*, Sulochona is a diligent tea garden worker, very nimble in picking tea leaves, for which she was awarded with a silver medal for picking 30 pounds of tea leaves. Pandey portrays her as a dreamer. Through dreams she gathers experiences of the material world. She goes to work in office, visits beauty parlour for threading her eyebrows, she reads story books, attends phone calls, her child plays video games, attends violin classes, watches films, rides a car, her husband drinks whisky instead of hooch. Suddenly she is jerked back from her dream world to the reality for she is a construction worker which she had taken up as an occupational change after giving up her job in the tea garden. Her life is devoid of love, it is artificial and painful under any circumstance, yet, she learns to live through her dreams, for that is a realm invaded and intruded by none. The story projects on the anguish of the rural man in a modernised society.

*Sukh Gacher Galpo* juxtaposes the modern with the traditional, the song *Pyar kiya to darna kiya* from Mughal-e-Azam film with its polar opposite *Chori chori chupke chupke*. Rambashiya retells history, the tale of how Winchester was hacked to death and his daughter kidnapped by the Lushais, a hill tribe in Kamalatilla at Karimganj under Patherkandi block, while his wife escaped with their son.
Rambashiya had to take care of her grandson who lost his parents at a very tender age. He studied up to eighth standard, and as such was unwilling to work in the garden as a daily wage earner and wanted to open an electronic shop. He was materialistic in his outlook and to achieve his goal he crossed the socially sanctioned boundaries. He bought a television, a tape recorder and a bicycle from his grandmother’s savings. He also demanded dowry to get married and ultimately intends to sell off his grandma’s plot of land for money. The last and final shock for Rambashiya was, when police came to arrest him on charges of loot and killing. But at last we find Rambashiya searching for a place to plant the tree of joy once again (sukh gach) having got rid of the anti-social element from her life.

Pandey has another collection of short stories Swapnagandhar Khonje (1406 Bangla) which consists of sixteen stories. Dreams and mad rush for climbing the ladders of success fill the chapters of the book. In the story Swapnagandhar Khonje, Bipasha is eager to get her child Dana admitted in Holy Maria School and charts out a plan for putting the child in art, music and swimming classes. Bipasha is shattered when her daughter misses the chance. She asks her husband: “How can I face the people?” “What is the use of your degree? My friend, Korobi, does not know how to write her name, yet, her child got admitted”, Husband replies “What does her husband do?” Bipasha- “He has a salt business”. Bipasha then beats the child and complains that she is unsmart like her father. Her husband retorts that he does not want to be corrupt like her father and brother. This makes Bipasha aggressive. She points out to her husband his incapabilities to provide her with the amenities of life. At this, her husband slaps her and tells; “People with sickness for modernity should be destroyed”.

Samay (2005: 17-23) is the story of Trisha and her brother Tuhin, hailing from a tea garden. They have fond memories of their childhood which are suddenly shattered after marriage of Trisha to a corrupt man who is arrested on charges of corruption. Trisha was unaware of her husband’s activities and, as she was involved with various organizations, she used to deliver speeches against corruption. Tuhin, a very sensitive boy, who could not accept the changing world full of evils, at the end, joins the unified command of terrorist.
The unsettled and insecure life of the slum-dwellers and their children on the banks of the Barak river, untimely deaths, crimes, alcoholics, gambling, broken homes and disarrayed families full of sufferings and struggle for existence are the contents of *Gang Gatha* (2011), a Bengali novel. The characters delineated in the novel are rickshaw pullers, peddlers, cart-pullers, pickpocketers, black-marketers, the miserable domestic women workers and the greedy, heartless politicians who are seen only during elections. The gruesome reality of the society is exposed and critiqued through her novel *Gang Gatha*. The suspicion that Sita is a ghost, makes, the people too blind to think logically. Harishankar’s wife is believed to be possessed by a deity (*Bipadnashani*) and from then Harishankar was known as Bipadnashani’s husband. The pertinent role of village panchayat in settling disputes and acting as a mediator between the community and erring members is well known. The power of the panchayat is visible in that Phulonti had to get her son married for second time even though her son already got married in a temple before a priest. The elaborate marriage rituals had to be observed again inspite of her inability, and she had to sell off her nose ring to entertain the Panchayat and the villagers. The characters speak the local dialect (*khane, kano, kita, ita, loi ja, khamnai* etc), sing folk songs (*Ashinya rande/ Kartikya khay/ jebor mange shai bor pai, Tora dek sakhigon/ sinan koroin rupashi madhai/dhekite sundar, Dhundu buri nach kore / Saheb dhekhiya salem kore* etc.) and practice folk religion (carrying water from river, bathing ceremony, putting of vermillion etc).

*Alekjander Purer Kathakata* (2011), another Bengali novel by Jhumur Pandey, is written against the backdrop of the tea garden and its folks. As a keen observer she gives a detailed account of the life and culture, the various festivals and celebrations, the aspirations and emotions, the unhealthy family life and day to day miseries of the tea folks of Alekjanderpur. She has also composed poems which were compiled in her *Kichu Balar Chilo* (2004). There are in all 21 poems centered round themes like myths, nature, society, romance, divine relationship of man and nature, conflicting relationship and unfulfilled desires. Poetry is the fragrance of Pandey’s life. Living within the precincts of the tea garden and composing poems of excellence is a record of her contribution to the world of
poetry. Her love for the roots, the village life and its beauty and simplicity and nature in all forms takes her for a nostalgic journey in her mind and are expressed in her poetry. *Majrate shikorer tan* unravels her nostalgic mind which dreams and craves for those bygone days amidst the lush green tea garden. The religious festivities and celebrations, the moonlight night, the owl, Lakshmi Puja, the rongoli (Alpana), the porridge (Raser paiyas), the deer, the tea leaves, jhum cultivation, the ringing of Church bells, the lotus pond (Padma pukur), the sparrow, the stream, the stacks of paddy, are not only recollections but attachments and lived experiences solidified.

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celebration. During Puja priests were invited and they were brought by boats. The priests were assisted by the Deogharis (assistants to priests). The managers respected the priests. Once a priest had got into a boat he could never be asked to get down before reaching the destination. Hence, in some places where the water was less the boat had to be dragged along with the priest. A conflict took place when the Puja was organized for the first time by Satish Roy and Mritunjoy with the help of the workers. She becomes nostalgic remembering the stitching of new clothes and the varieties of sweets. Meat was a special food item for the tea garden people, for which they used to rear hens, ducks and goats months ahead of the festival so that they could enjoy its meat during the Puja. She also tells that in those days people used to crowd at one place to hear the Devi invocation (Mahalaya) as there were very few radios in the villages. The idols of the Goddesses were not dressed in real clothes; the clothes were all painted and all the Gods and Goddesses were placed under a single canopy.

On the whole, all the literary works of Jhumur Pandey are indicators of the unconducive socio-economic and political life of the tea garden folks and the poor slum dwellers of the Barak Valley. Modernization and globalization has little or no qualitative effect on the lives of these people. Change is there but significant positive developments have not taken place due to lack of progressive attitude and awareness amongst the people and failure on the part of the administrative machinery to uplift and secure the lives of the people.

Yamuna Prasad Swarnakar

Yamuna Prasad Swarnakar was a social activist who tried to get rid of superstitions and ill habits of the people of the tea gardens. He was a religious man (Verma 1997). He wrote poems and short stories in Hindi. Bharat, Ma, Ahh, Janmadin (Pp. 58-60) were published in Banphul (In Verma (ed) 2011). His poems Prasna (His question), Tujhe Kiya Mila Bhagwan (What did you get oh! God), Basnamukti (Free from desire), Pathik (Traveller), Shiv, Jeevan (Life), Pranam Tumhe (Homage to You), Unki Abilashha, (His desire), Naya Varsh (New Year), Thandak (Chill), Kagaj ka Kila (Paper house), Kya Raha Gaya (What Remains), Buddh (Enlightenment), Brishtriti (Description), Kartaibhya
(Duty), Cha Rabethi, Hara Rani (Mansingh’s sister) and Jagriti (Awakening) were published in Chal Pathik (n.d).

Prasana is a question to the creator about the disillusionment and unhappiness in the human life, the unfulfilled desires and disorder. The same question continues in Tujhe Kiya Mila Bhagwan where he asks God what He got in return of all the sorrows thrust on man. The poem exposes the psychology of human mind. Men love to put all the blame on others for anything unacceptable that happens. A sense of self pity is found in Jeevan where he says that no one will weep for him after his death as nothing is going to be affected by his departure. Man’s desire to create an identity and get recognition not only while living but even after death exposes his ego. Kagaj ke Kila and Hara Rani, are historical narratives which throw light on Mughal emperors like Akbar and Arungazeb who wanted to marry Hindu women like Bhanu and Hara Rani who sacrificed their lives to uphold their chastity and religion. Jagriti, is a call for awakening of mind and soul doing away with unwanted desires.

In the poems he does not speak directly on the tea garden people or their lives but his short stories are on the tea garden folks. He wrote two short stories; namely; ‘Lotna’ and Bidai’ in Sebj Lehar Ke Log (2011). Lotna (Pp. 1-3) is the story of Daulat Ram and his belief in the rebirth of his mother in the form of his daughter. The house of Daulat Ram was full of merry-making, celebrating the birth of his fifth child. The midwife was dancing and asking for a saree and fifty rupees for her service. Chatti (sixth day) and Barhi (The final purification ceremony after the birth of a child) was to be observed where he would have to feed people apart from the rituals but Daulat was busy gambling. One night he returned home excited after winning 500/-and asked his eldest daughter to demand something as he had enough money at hand. His daughter who was very practical said that the money should not be wasted; instead, it should be kept aside for the birth ceremonies. Seeing her wisdom Daulat felt it was his mother who was reborn in his house in the form of his daughter. Bidai (2011: 4-10), is the story of Ratan, a city boy, who comes down to the Kamalpur village to gather experience of the village life. He meets Mira, the daughter of Singhji, who does not believe Ratan when he says he wanted to help the villagers and would...
come down once he finishes his studies. Mira says to him that it is a sort of a disease with the city people to show sympathy with the villagers without any fruitful result and Ratan is one amongst them. The rich supply excuses to the poor telling that their plight is the result of their deeds and that work is worship and also advise them to work harder and harder. After listening to everything Ratan leaves the village with a promise to return and work for their upliftment. The people have lost their faith and do not trust the urban people.

Kapil Dev Upadhaya

Kapil Dev Upadhaya, a priest from Dulabchera tea garden, has composed seventeen poems which were published in *Ghar Mera Sajade* (n.d). The poems are Tulsidas, Chota Parivar (Small Family), Banade Prabhu (Do It God), Neta (Leader), Chukule (Jokes), Mehenghai (Price Rise), India, Shayri (Couplet), Ma (Mother), Dharamyudh (Holy Battle), Sawan (Moonsoon), Duniya (World), Naaj (Pride), Bibi (Wife), Chahiye (Need), Purana Prakash (Old Light) and Dahej (Dowry) written in Bhojpuri. His *Ek Ghar Bana De* (1995) contains Ganesh Bandana (Prayer), Shiv (Hindu God), Durga (Shiva’s wife), Swavavik (Natural), Geet (Song), Dohey (Couplets), Gazal Geet, Ghazal, Ghar (Home), Diwali Ki Rat (On the night of Diwali), Balbir, Piyar ki Khushiyan (Happiness of love), T.V. aur Bibi (T.V. and Wife), Hota Hai (It Happens), Parivar Niyojan (Family Planning) and Khat Pittro Ke Pas (Letter to Forefathers). In *Dhara Barak Ki* he contributed Jai Bharat and Shaukh. He also wrote a short story *Sawaso Me Pargot* which was published in *Sebj Lehar Ke Log* (1999). *Tulsidas (Poet)* is a narrative poem relating to the life and contribution of the poet. Tulsi was an orphan who married Ratnavali who showed him the path to spirituality. It is believed that with the blessing of the monkey god, Hanuman, he proved his worth to the King Akbar. Chota Parivar and Parivar Niyojan are poems which support family planning. The poet is against gender discrimination and says it is the upbringing of a child which is crucial in making a proper and worthy of being. He puts forth examples of the Himalayas, the Sun and the Moon which are singularly capable of proving their worth and, similarly, the compositions of a single writer are read by many. A man with a small family is solvent and happy. Thus, he advocates for a close-knit, small family. Being a priest by profession he
wrote a few religious poems, invoking and praying to the Hindu gods and goddesses for a happy and peaceful world. Yet, sometimes he questions his forefathers as to why they tolerated silently all the unfair dealings, meted out to them by the colonial rulers and set a trend of tolerating, the subjugation and exploitation for the future generation as reflected in Khat Pitro Ki Pas. The evils of the modern civilisation and materialistic and selfish attitude of men at the helm of power, the political leaders are the honest and expository contents. Neta’s greed for the power and prayers to god (as in Banade Prabhu) to make them M.L.A or M.P. and protect them from incarceration for five years on charges of corruption. They justify their positions before the public saying that it was more than enough that they have prepared speeches and delivered them from time to time. The leader mocks at those who have made him their leader, calls them immature and ridicules them for praying to Kanahia (Sri Krishna) as he was himself a thief stealing butter. The poet loathes the greedy people who demand radio and coloured television as dowry and humourously says that some men consider the television as their second wife in his poem T.V aur Bibi. He displays his wit while driving home the truth that nothing works out without money in his short story Sawasau me Pargat (1999). He wrote that when he was earning Rs. 60/- he could only dream of a wife. But when he started earning Rs. 125/- (Sawasau) he got a real wife for himself as he was capable of feeding her. Thus, the poet says that sath rupiya mein chup chup/sawasau mein pargat (when sixty rupees it is only hush-hush ) when hundred and a quarter she (wife) appears in reality. It can be said that as a spiritual man he could only ask for happiness and peace for humanity, free from the evils, and all steeped in love as in his poem Piyar ki Khusiyia. The poet’s preference for the traditions and wisdom of the past is explicit in his Purana Prakash wherein he desires for charismatic leaders like Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru for his country and refuses to compensate traditionality with the scientific and materialistic world.

Annapurna Devi

Annapurna Devi, born and brought up at Moranhat Tea Estate in Sibsagar district of Assam. She got married to Ashok Verma, a writer from Barak Valley and settled down in Malugram at Silchar. Her medium of instruction was
Assamese and as such she composes and writes mainly in Assamese. Nizora, Sribhu Jononi Kanda are the two volumes of her poems in Assamese ‘Dhara’ is another collection of poems of some composers of Barak Valley. She translated Kalikusum Choudhury’s poem Raktate Samay (Bloody Times), the work of the renowned poet of Barak Valley. Atin Das’s collected poems, in Assamese, Buri Dihing Or Par, were published by Balark Prakashan. She was also the editor of the Shanko magazine (As informed by the author, its copies could not be procured). She even contributed in the Lehar Dil Ki Part1 (2003). Potli (2003: 1) a small bundle or a small packet, Basanti Smriti (P. 2) (In memory of Spring), Swarnlata (P. 3) (A Kind of Creeper) and Sawal (P.4) (Question) are included in the edition. Potli and Sawal reveal her deep dissatisfaction with life, for all her desires are bundled up in her bag of sorrows. She is reminded of all unkept promises and questions, the integrity of man who is indifferent to the feelings of others. Her two short stories Budoday (Expression of Knowledge), (pp: 16-20) and Swapna Brashta (Unfulfilled Dreams) (P. 20-23) are full of social implications which have been published in Tin Dampathir Galpo (2007). The writings are designed to present the changing trends and its effects on the lives of people.

Modernisation and westernisation have made people materialistic and corrupt like Dipankar in Budoday who fails to control himself from taking bribes, as he has to maintain a big and demanding family. At times, his conscience pricks him and then he remembers his past life which was simple, yet, full of love and happiness. Urbanisation brought people like Dipankar, away from their joint families in the villages, to live in a nuclear family common amongst of city dwellers. Busy and working parents cannot give time to children, which makes them devoid of moral and traditional values like Dipa who wears western dress and behaves in a very undignified manner with elders and wishes them saying ‘Hi!’ instead of ‘Namaste’ in the usual Indian style or touching their feet and this ultimately embarrasses her Dipankar. The changes are marked in every aspect with the introduction of telecommunication and media. Traditional letter writing has been replaced by mobile and land phones and internet. People have become more ambitious; they want to rise fast in life and are status conscious. In Swapna
Brashta, Shibani has undesirable ambition for power and status which she achieves. She is the replica of modern women in her dress and habit, contrary to her friend, Moni, who is traditional and old fashioned as she does not wear jeans, does not drive a car, does not drink, does not visit clubs and had never been to the West, but still, she writes letters, has children, loves her husband and is happy and satisfied in life. The story presents us with the significance of traditional values which is fast eroding from the lives of the people, resulting into innumerable conflicts and unhappiness.

*Pat Paribartan* (2011: 69-73) is the story of Chumki who had to struggle hard against odds in order to educate her son. She mortgaged her land and sent her Ladu Gopal to the city for higher studies. When he returns he contests elections and wins. Sending children for higher studies, incurring a lot of money, is not an exclusive case for Chumki as in this globalised world; it is common amongst the urbanites. Of course her case is different as she hailed from a tea garden where many people dare not venture, out of ignorance and fear of castigation from others, specially the babus and Sahebs.

**Kajal Demta**

Kajal Demta, another literary figure amongst the tea garden people, has a number of writings to her credit. She belongs to the Santal community and was born at Larsingah tea garden in the year 1952. Her father worked as a fitter in the garden. Presently, she is residing at Borosingha Tea Garden. She has retired as a teacher from Borosingha L.P.school. Her writings mainly comprise short stories, poems and articles in Bengali language. *Jiboner Anyia Nam* (2008), *Phera* (2010), *Hiramom* (n.d.), *Donda* (1988), *Tirondej* (1989), *Opekha*(2008), *Parbatir Sansar* (1994), *Ekti Sahaj Mritu* (2005), *Anyio Nari* (2008), *Samraher Desh* (2012: 8-10), and *Jeevan Youdha* (2012: 17-20) are some of her short stories. *Cha-Sramik Janagustir Bhasa O Bhasha Sankat* (2012) is a case study on the L.P. School children of Borosingha tea garden to find out the need of Sadri language as a medium of instruction and voices out its need in the tea garden areas in her work *Cha-Sramik Janagustir Bhasa O Bhasha Sankat* (2012). *Shilpo Nai Shilpi Nai* (1989) is an article by Kajal Demta. The cultural gap in urban and
rural context is presented through the character of Jungli. The story Jiboner Anyia Nam (2008) is based on the real life of Shanti (Jungli), a girl from Koomber tea garden, who was given away by her parents to a Christian Missionary from Haflong. Staying with them Shanti, learnt many things but, unfortunately, her father brought her back to the garden and got her married to a drunkard who already had two wives. Shanti had to face a lot of hardships. At one point of time, she had come to Kajal Demta’s house for shelter. Fortunately, her husband died. Shanti joined Holy Cross School, as a cook, where she met a driver hailing from Ranchi and got married to him. She is leading a happy family life now with three children (It was narrated by the writer). In the story Demta does not give a happy ending. Phera (Return), yet, another story in which Sadananda’s entire family dies of tuberculosis and he goes to Haflong as a construction worker. After sometime he suffers from Malaria, but there was none to help him. He returns to his village where neighbours take care of him and he gets cured. He realised that the city has good jobs to offer and of course money but the people have no time and heart to care for others. Thus, finally, he married from his village itself and settled down.

There is yet another story of a boy from the same village where the author lives. Most of Demta’s short stories are facts, not fictions. Hiramon is the story of Duluram Munda, a cowherd and his pet bird, Hiramon. It establishes the never failing bond between animals and man. Duluram dies in a thunder-bolt so his family members opened the cage of the bird to let it go. But the bird neither left the cage nor took any food and ultimately died. Demta’s another short story Opekha exposes the infidelity of women. Kakhoi elopes with a man from the city, leaving her husband, Sunathan Goraith, as he was a simple worker in a stone quarry and did not have much to offer her. Yet, her husband waited (opekha), expecting her to return one day craving for his love and affection. Parbaitir Sansar was first published in Shapath, a magazine, and it was translated into English by Rumi Rani Laskar in the year 2012. Parbati’s Household was published in Barbed Wire Fence— Stories of Displacement from Barak Valley of Assam. Most of Demta’s short stories are facts, revealing the poverty, illiteracy, adultery, unfulfilled love, displacement from land and homes, both political and
social exploitation, uncertainty and insecurity engulfing the lives of the tea garden workers and their children.

_Ekti Sahaj Mritu_ (2005: 17-20) deals with the life of Biroshi and Purinder which ends up in a mess when Purinder commits suicide out of guilt and helplessness at his inability to give up alcohol, in spite of repeated advice from Biroshi. This is a common case amongst the tea garden workers who are caught up in a state of no return for they are unable to give up drinking even when they realise its effects on their lives. _Tirondej_ is the story of a skilled archer Monohor, who is employed in guarding the tea garden from enemies. He had some agricultural land which was grabbed by a landlord. While he was sincerely performing his duty, his wife was busy having an illicit affair with the landlord. One day he comes home after his night duty to find them together under a bush. He could see a snake like thing moving in the bush, so he took out his arrow and shoot at it, but unlucky he missed it and instead his faithful dog was killed. Later on, he realized that the snake was none other than the landlord who escaped. Then, his wife came out and said that she willingly gave herself to the landlord to get back their plot of land diplomatically.

Kajal Demta penned down articles on tea tribes and their plight in many of the journals and magazines of Barak Valley. _Donda_ (1988) is a story which shows class hierarchy which persists amongst the tea garden people also. Pahari was in love with Bonomala who was the daughter of Garjan Singh, a rich contractor and wanted to marry her. Garjan Singh was against the marriage as Pahari was an ordinary boy and not of their status. He did his best to better his lot but failed and one day in a drunken condition he approached Bonomala’s father to ask for her hand but he was badly beaten up and he realized that it was the punishment (donda) for being poor.

Her two recent publications of short stories are _Samraher Desh_ and _Jeevan Youdha_ (2012). _Samraher Desh_ is the story of Samrah hailing from Monohorpur tea garden who comes to know that children from well-off families were not allowed to take mid-day meals by parents from Debanjona who hails from a wealthy, urban family. Samrah was regular, sincere and was always anxious to
acquire knowledge unlike Sukhra, Monicharan, Lakhicharan, Phulmoni and Mangri who never attended classes and roamed about and came back only to enjoy the free mid-day meals. The stories of migrated coolies (tea garden labour) from a far-off land as related by his grandfather, often, created confusion in the mind of the little boy who considered himself to be an alien but his teacher made it clear that Bharatvarsha was his mother land too like, Debanjona and Annirudha and that his country was vast and beautiful, accommodating people, speaking different languages and having different cultures, an unique example of unity in diversity. In the end, things became clear to him and he realized that he was a part and parcel of the vast country India yet, he felt that Monohorpur tea garden with all its natural beauty was the best place for him to live in. *Jeevan Youdha* reflects on the conflict in every man’s life. The teacher of Sujonpur Patshala tells Budhiyia that everyone has to fight a battle for his survival and Budhiyia’s story of life is equally important to historical wars like Sepoy Mutiny of 1957. Both the stories reflect on the role of teachers and its impact on the psychology of the students. Kajal Demta highlighted the significance of traditional art and crafts and their incomparable beauty in her *Shilpo Nai Shilpi Nai* and appeals for their preservation and recognition. The paintings on the mud walls with rice powder, turmeric powder, coloured mud, making of toys out of roots of trees and bamboos, making of brooms, playing of flute with leaves, beating of drums, their dances, spontaneous oral compositions and the like which are fast dying are all her themes.

*Anyio Nari* brings out the unfortunate incident of Lakshmi Orang at Guwahati, the capital of Assam. She captures the tribal sentiment and their rightful claims for recognition as Adivasis, at par with other Adivasis living in different states of the country. Kajal Demta, also translated Mahesweta Devi’s (an Indian writer in English and also a social activist fighting for the tribal cause) story, ‘*Tilkamajhi*’ to Sadri and staged it in Borosingah tea garden during the Christmas festival. Demta, shared the sentiment of the tea garden people with the researcher and said that the young boys and girls were uncomfortable to play their roles in the drama, wearing, the dress commonly worn by them and speaking in Sadri language and casting the play lighting kerosene lamps, for they
felt it would cut a poor impression in the minds of the spectators who are used to the glamorous shows on the television screen. But ultimately the Natak (traditional drama) was staged and was enjoyed by all. In the Silver Jubilee Souvenir of Kristo Jubo Sangho, an article on ‘Barak Upatakayar Adibasider Artha Samajik O Dharmiyia Obosthan’ was published. Other than her short stories and numerous articles she composed many poems. The content of the poems are mainly social and religious. As a young writer she composed religious poems which were published in Nabayug Magazine from Barisal in Bangladesh.

Sanat Koiri

Sanat Koiri was born in 1954 at Silchar and got his education from Radhamadhab Balika Vidyalaya, Durga Shankar Patshala, Adhar Chand High School and Cachar College, Silchar. He is a social worker and the publisher and editor of Silchar Times, a daily newspaper. He wrote Bhasa Sangrame Cachar (1981) and Bhasa Sangrame Purnango Itihas (2008) and Cha Sramik O Cha Sramik Unioner Itihas (2010). These are mainly historical in contents relating the events of revolution and conflicts before the emergence of union bodies of the tea garden workers, all of which have been discussed earlier. He also gave a brief description of the culture of the tea garden workers in his Cha Sramik O Cha Sramik Unioner Itihas (2010). The book also documented some of the old photographs which are very significant.

Joydrath Goala

Joydrath Goala, who hails from Rosekandy Tea Estate and serves as a teacher in Kalikaprasad Rai M.E. School, Barasangan, Cachar, has written a few poems which were published in Karna (2010: 38-39); namely, Manab (Human Beings), Chahiyyia Aram (Desire for Comfort) , Chai (Tea) , Prakriti (Nature) and Pradushan (Pollution). It is also mentioned that these poems were earlier published in Chaman Magazine (Goala 2010). He wrote an article Prani Jogoter Brihator Sarthe Prakritik Sampadh Rakha Kortaibo (2010) where he says that is, it is our responsibility to protect the natural resources for the greater interest of the living world. All his writings are suggestive, it is an appeal to human race to love and protect nature. In his poem Manab, the poet is imploring people to
follow the laws of nature and not indulge in inhuman activities which will destroy the self and pollute the environment. *Chahiyia Aram* is a warning to humanity at large. The 21st century has brought about a mega transformation in the life style of man. Man has started using electronic grinders, instead of traditional hand grinders. Readymade spices and machine made pulses and cereals have taken over. Men wants comfort and ease in life and never bother to ponder over the health hazards it entails. His poem *Chai*, gives us an insight into the lives of the tea garden workers. A sense of unhappiness and dissatisfaction is expressed at the people’s indifference to the importance of tea and the hands involved in producing it. The poem reflects on the simple life of the tea garden folks who celebrate Durga Puja and Kali Puja with sweets from their wages which are moments of happiness for them and their children. The poem *Pradushan* highlights how the poet is still attached to his roots. He shares the sayings of his good old grandmother who used to tell them to keep the air and water free from pollution: *Sudh rakho tum apni hawa pani /ab control koro apni bani*. In *Prakriti* the poet refers to man as selfish (*swarthi manah*) for in this money driven economy, man is engaged in creating space for the self through destruction of the natural and creation of the artificial, forgetting the man and nature relationship. It is again an entreaty to mankind to create a better world for himself, but not by distorting nature. That mother is the pivot of a family with her selfless and caring nature and deserves respect and honour is the theme of the poem *Ma*. In his article *Prani Jogoter Brihator Sarthe Prakritik Sampadh Rakha Kortaibo* (2010) he highlights the importance of protecting nature from destruction through the relentless felling of trees, use of polythene and plastics and pollution of air and water. He also suggests to grow plants and herbs with nutritional and medicinal value; namely, aloevera, papaya, neem, drumsticks and basil. His writings show that basically he is a naturalist.

**Santosh Akura**

Santosh Akura, hailing from Bagbahar Tea Garden of Cachar district has composed 17 poems in Bengali, which were published in *Sahuj Baner Udhas Hawa* (2012). The poems are *Houk Naba Shristi* (Let There Be a New Creation), *Abokhay* (Ultimate Eradication), *Becheki Thakbey* (Will It Survive), *Bharater*
Sadinota (India’s Freedom), Birodhita (Protest) ,Iccha (Willing), Annya Pathey (Another Road), Chancholota (Restless), Basona (Desire), Asha Sundari (The Beautiful Asha), Bisonno Hridayer Suray (Mournful Tune), Sanman Koro (Have Respect), Jathartha Asray (Appropriate Shelter), Bicholito (Perturbed), Dinbodol (Changing Times), Ulto (Opposite) and Jago(Awake). Basona reflects on how people have become materialistic and in the process they have lost their conscience and are devoid of basic human values. Such selfishness gave birth to unforgivable crimes like attack on several key sites of Mumbai, a financial hub of India, by militants from outside the country on 26th November 2008. In Bharater Sadhinota he imagines his countrymen celebrating the freedom by cutting cakes, for he was born long after the country achieved freedom. He tells that the cake which was cut was also the end result of the hard labour of the poor who is deprived of his share. The workers have been exploited by the rich, powerful and corrupt countrymen all along. So, he questions when the working class will achieve freedom from oppression and exploitation. In a sequential manner in Birudhita, he says that pent up grievances and dissatisfaction would eventually explode and destroy the oppressors as the long term sufferers have become aware of their rights. The poet further says in his poem Anya Pathey, discrimination, deprivation and alienation affected his psychology and he is jealous and angry at those who are successful. He further prays to the God (bidhata) for mental strength to bear the injustice and wrongs meted out to him. The same cynical note persists in Chanchalota wherein once again the readers find the poet gripped in a bleak and helpless situation, devoid of hopes. Bicholito encourages the people to do away with the mask of hypocrisy and be the natural and struggle against odds to become stronger and confident to face life with the blessings of the God.

In Dinbodol, he brings out the historical sequence of communication. In the ancient times messages were sent to distant places through pigeons and human carriers. Gradually, with the introduction of post offices, letters were dispatched through the postmen. With the coming of telecommunication and media the gap is bridged and men are able to gather information and communicate within 20 seconds; in fact, the whole world is in our fist. Now, nobody wants to go back to the past and each one of us desire to march ahead and
develop, keeping pace with the present. Material advancement should go hand in hand with spiritual advancement to make the world a better place for living. The poem *Jago* is call to his fellow brothers to awake, arise and move ahead wiping away the wrong beliefs and ideologies. To fight against oppression and exploitation and kindle the light of love in every heart.

**Babul Narayan Kanu**

Babul Narayan Kanu, who hails from Isabheel Tea Garden, Karimganj, is presently a lecturer in I.T.I College, Srikona, in Cachar District. Three of his poems *Badlav* (1997: 33) (Change), *Moth* (1997: 33) (Death), *Desh Mera Bikau Hai* (1997: 34-35) (My Country Is Saleable) were published in his edited volume *Dhara Barak Ki* (1997). His poem *Badlav*’ reflects on the changing life style of the village people. The evenings in a village no longer reverberates with the sound of traditional drums (*dholak*) cymbals (*manjira*) or *jhajki*. Loud quarrelling voices fill the air, no laughter or jokes and congenial relationship between the sisters-in-law have all ceased to exist. The sound of vessels by the banks and tinkling of the anklets are no longer heard. The bread roller now falls on the head of the sister-in-law. The festivals like Holi have become colourless and dull. The brother bleeds from the injuries received from blows by sticks or scratches of nails. The lands have become unproductive; the wells are full of water but the women who gather there to collect water are all skeleton-like figures. The poet feels that the whole village is totally eclipsed. Modernisation implies constant change, offensive indifference, disorder, selfishness and detachment from the roots leading to conflicts. Transition is taking place both within families as well as the world outside resulting in conflicts.

Another poem *Desh Mera Bikau Hai* reflects on the sacrifice by freedom fighters and Martyrs to make the land free from the clutches of colonial rulers. The martyrs blessed the countrymen with a peaceful and prosperous life. But while leaving this land they little realized that the land would be sold off again to foreign powers by greedy and corrupt politicians. In Ban Phul (Verma (ed). 2011) he contributed *Upahar* (Gift), *Sambhalo Khud* (Control Yourself), *Shanti Aur Prem Ki Bhasa Hindi* (Hindi is the Language of Peace and Love), *Sunami Nahi*
(Not Tsunami), Kalpana Chawla Ki Smriti mein (In the memory of Kalpana Chawla) (Verma (ed.) N. d. Pp. 34-38). He also wrote two short stories published in (Sebj Lehar ke Log 2011) Samrajiya Dadi (2011: 53-56) (Kingly Granny) and Wapsi (Return) (2011: 57-61). Samrajiya Dadi is the story of an old granny from Uttar Pradesh who got married as a child and was lured by an agent, Ram Narayan Kohar and brought down to Lalmati tea garden in Assam as a worker. Later on, she was sacked from her job and she started living in the village on her own. To avoid the men she started wearing men’s clothes and stopped wearing bangles and vermillion, for she was already a married woman and the Hindus practice monogamy. She then met a pandit who gave her the information of her husband’s whereabouts and further intimated that her husband had married once again three years back. Dadi was excited to meet her husband and thus goes back home. But she is not accepted and returns to old village where she dies of sorrow. Wapsi records the courage of Satan, worker of a tea garden, who caught the white Saheb by the hip when he was about to whip his brother and saved him. The Englishman was impressed by the courage and called him a morad (a man in the real sense). The story reveals that even the colonial masters gave recognition to brave hearts and despised servile creatures.

Amar Nath Sharma

Amar Nath Sharma wrote two short stories Gobore Padma Phul (A Lotus in the Cowdung) (2011: 13-14) and Atript Vashna (Unfulfilled Desire) (2011: 11-12) which were published in Sebj Lehar Ke Log (Verma (ed.) 2011). Gobore Padma Phul is the story of Dindayal, a Sardar from a tea garden who sold off his agricultural land and to send his son Madan Gopal to the University for doing his M.A. This gesture was not liked by the tea garden manager and the babu and they often made him the butt of their target. On one occasion when Dindayal was late for work the babu told him “Look Dinu you have sent your son to the university but that does not mean that you have become a big shot (laat Saheb) and can come to the office whenever you want. This is not your paternal property.” Ranjit Babu vowed to cut off his moustache if Madan at all passes out. Dindayal was worried about the result of his son, for he knew that if Madan fails the babus would mock at him. Fortunately, Madan secured the first position.
Now, Ranjit Babu commented, a lotus in the cowdung (gohure padma phul), a phrase which implies something unnatural, for, lotus is a flower which blooms in water and does not bloom on cowdung. *Atript Vashna* (Unfulfilled Desire) is the story which unravels the feelings of a tea estate worker, Jhoku, who loved Ramesh, the son of the Babu of the estate and dearly cared for him as his own son. Ramesh grows up and goes to the city for studying medicine, becomes a doctor and returns home to visit his parents. Jhoku Kaka, as he was addressed, was excited to meet his dear, Ramesh. He could not sleep the whole night out of joy, as he was to meet him following day. But when he met Ramesh, he asked, “Jhokuba where are you going early in the morning?” (Joku was addressed by “tu” which was insulting as, *tu* is used for someone who is inferior.) Jhoku now realized that his little Ramesh was a doctor whereas he was still a labourer who was supposed to respect, and not be respected. The class structure of the garden does not permit otherwise.

Amarnath Sharma also composed poems; namely *Gali Se koi Gujarte Ho* (Someone passes through this lane). *Tulsi, Me Kabita Hu* (I am Poetry), *Itihas* (History) and *Balidan* (Sacrifice) which were published in *Upekshit Swar Barak Ke* (ed) (1999). He also contributed in *Dhara Barak Ki* (ed). (1997). In the poem *Pratirup* (Reflection) the poet criticises the writings and speeches of authors, leaders and youths which voices the same old things, full of artificiality and seem to be products grinded out of the same machine. The poet appreciates and honours women in the poem *Nari* (Woman) and he tells that she is a hidden moon on earth, full of genteel and beauty which often goes unnoticed.

**Mira Singh**

Mira Singh, of Borjalenga Tea Estate, is a practitioner in Auryvedic medicine. Her poems deal mainly with women’s issues. She told the researcher that she is a staunch feminist. Most of her writings revolve around woman and her plight in a patriarchal society. The poem *Sas Bahu* (Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law) (Verma 2003: 2-3) appeals to the mother-in-law to be more considerate and loving to her daughter-in-law and ensure a happy family. She also reminds the mother-in-law that one day her daughter-in-law would be a mother and a mother-
in-law in future. *Nari Ki Chetna* (Women’s Awareness) (Verma 2003: 2) has contents which appeal to the women folks to be aware of their role as women. She wrote a few poems on freedom movement also and one such poem *O Mat Rukho Ma* brings out the patriotic fervour and zeal in her and appeals that she may be allowed to fight against the enemies and protect her motherland to which she remains indebted, forever. This poem was published in *Prena Bharati*, the only Hindi newspaper in Barak Valley, on the 25th December 2007 (19th December-25th issue, p.4). *Holi* throws light on the significance of the festival in the lives of the people when everybody joins in merry-making and forgets their ranks and file.

Her other compositions are *Bintuk* (Rhymeless) (Verma 2003: 1-2) in which she says that a rhymeless poem is incomplete and uses similies to establish it. A rhymeless poem is like Gita without Krishna (the mythological god who inspires Arjuna to take arms against his own people). The whole of Gita is knowledge imparted by Krishna to Arjuna and as such one cannot think of the Gita without Krishna. Ram without Sita, river without water, composition without composer, the poet further says rhymeless poetry is not musical. Thus in *Nibedan* (Prayer) (Verma 2003: 1), seeks for inspiration to become a good poet. *Nirasha* (Disapoinment) (Verma 2003: 3-4) is an expression of unhappiness as she waits for the letter from her son who is a soldier. She expects him to inform of homecoming to see his old father but, in vain. *Neta* (leader) (Verma 2003: 4) is a four-lined poem which speaks of uncommitted and selfish leaders who are rare as everyone becomes corrupt, devoid of human values, once they get the position. *Dewana Dil* (Mad Heart) is purely romantic addressed to an unknown lover. All the above mentioned compositions were published in *Lehar Dil Ke Part-1* (2003). In *Karmasheel* (Verma 1993: 45) Singh is positive in her approach to life and she says it is only the unflinching faith in the self which brings success in all spheres of life. One has to realize the human potentialities and move forward and not sit back and blame their fate for every individual, is the maker of his own destiny.
Umakant Tiwari

Umakant Tiwari, in his writing *Anmol Siksha* (2011: 27-29) in *Sebz Lehar ke Log* reveals how culture is affected by modernization and highlights the necessity of upholding one’s tradition. In Uttarakhand there is a custom that every woman even if highly educated has to sacrifice one day’s labour for cutting grass for the cows. All the women take out the cows for grazing and at the same time cut grasses and sing songs. It is a way of showing respect for the customs and traditions of their forefathers. Apart from that, he contributed six poems in *Upekshit Swar Barak Ke* (1999); namely, *Dharti ke Pukare* (Call of the Earth) is the call for unity and love. In *Mahamana Tulsi* (Tulsi- The Great), the poet refers to Tulsi Das who was a poet and a reformer and a great devotee of Rama. He desires for a utopian world where all the people will have faith in the divine and lead a virtuous life like Tulsi Das, the saint. *Mein (I)* signifies the divine self, the consciousness, free from ego. The poet entreats his fellow beings to merge with the Self in order to be free from all entanglements and remain blissful. *Matribhasa Prashasti* (In praise of the Mother Tongue) is an expression of nationalistic ethos and love for the national language which is the string of bond between the heterogeneous people. *Holi*, projects on the present day celebration of the festival of colours. The poet says that the new generation celebrate the occasion in an intoxicated and rebellious mood steeped in freaks thereby creating a polluted environment devoid of love and unity. *Shram Vandana* (Felicitation of Labour). *Banphul* (2011) contains six of his poems: *Mein Ishwar Hoon* is spiritual in content reflecting on the divine presence. *Ramrajya*, he desires for a country free from violence, corruption, poverty and exploitation by big powers. The cow which is sacred to the Hindus should not be butchered heartlessly. He further says that he would continue to live and strive till his nation is freed from the evils. *Bhutal Ban Jayega Swarga* is a critical analysis of the society full of hatred with caste and class differentiation, exploitation of the Dalits and uncontrolled and unlimited desires to reach the skies which is not leading the unreasonable people any where. He further suggests that they should have faith in the spiritual masters like Tulsidas for regaining peace and happiness. *Rahi* reflects on the path of life full of unhappiness and hopelessness and yet when the
traveller loses all hopes the conscience, gives him consolation and assures him of happy days ahead. In his poem *Rashtrabhasa*, he expresses his love for his mother tongue. It is his holy scripture just like the Gita (holy book of the Hindus), it is the language of the art and literature, it is the flute of communication between him and his countrymen. *Tum Chali Gayee* is being addressed to an imaginary figure. He questions her as to why she disappeared suddenly without intimation leaving his boat of life floating in the midst of the ocean.

**Suresh Chandra Diwedi**

Suresh Chandra Diwedi is retired lecturer in Hindi and a social worker (Verma 2011: 77), who translated work of Badrinath Sonar’s *Barak Ghati Shramik Sangathan ka Itihas* (1995) which is a historical document accounting contribution of the tea garden workers of Barak Valley to the freedom movement of India. The work is a narration of how inspite of poverty and strict supervision of the colonial rulers the tea garden folks took active part in the movement with the rest of the country, in which many of them were arrested and sent to central jail in Sylhet. Sonar himself was arrested and kept in jail for three years. Umesh Das, Nikin Das and Cholai Sonar were among the others who were put behind the bars for six months and after their release they never returned to the garden. There is a report of Chargola Exodus of 1921. He also wrote about the establishment of trade union and Indian Tea Association. During the Quit India Movement, the tea garden people were not allowed to participate in it and leaders were not given entry, yet, some brave hearts from Shulgoi Tea Garden, Sonakheera Tea Garden, Dulabcherra Tea Estate, Lakherra, Kalacherra and Ghomai Tea Estate did join the movement and faced trials. It is only under the leadership of Purnendu Kishore Sengupta, Satish Mohan Dev, Upendra Shankar Dutta, Paresh Chandra Dutta and others that they were released. Some of them were also sacked from work. They were the unsung heroes of the country and it is because of their sacrifice that the Assam Cha Sramik Union has got a strong foothold and the Indian National Trade Union Congress got recognition. He also wrote *Bagal* (2011: 30-34), a short story. *Bagal* is the story of a cowherd from Bihar who was brought down to Assam by an agent (*dalal*) after the famine and outbreak of plague in 1890. He was working in the tea garden factory for one
and half paisa as a labourer. One day when he demanded for a wage hike to three paisa he was refused, for which he quarrelled and left the job. It was then that a Babu brought him home and employed him to tend the cows. He remembers his homeland, his father who was a rich agriculturist. He recalls how he used to hide when his mother forced him to drink milk; in his sister’s marriage his father gave 16 tolas of gold and 20 tolas of silver as dowry. He becomes nostalgic, yet, he says wherever one dwells that is his beautiful homeland and the land which nourishes you is divine (Jaha basowu taha sundar deshwa, jo praptipalhe so he nareshwu). The author was a small boy when he heard the story of Bagal’s estrangement from his native and he promised to take him home one day when he grows up, but, unfortunately Bagal died and all that the writer could do was to pray for the peace of the soul. Dewedi, also composed poems; namely, Mat Pharo Us Anchal ko (Do not Tear off the end of that Saree), Nij Bhasa (Own Language), Prakriti aur Jeevan (Nature and Life) which were published in Dhara Barak ki (1997) which are tinged with love for motherland and nature.

Santoshi Das (Lohar)

Santoshi Das (Lohar), in her Mini (2011: 42-43), in the edited volume Sebz Lehar Ke Log (The People of the Green Waves) deciphers the blunt truth of exploitation, inhumanity and pretentious nature of the managers and the politicians. Even the tender and innocent minds of children like Mini are scarred beyond repair. Mini represents all the children of the tea gardens who can only dream of silk and terrylin dress, shining shoes and delicious sweets but dare not endeavour to fulfill such dreams. She learns that the world of the rich and powerful is closed for her, when she is denied access to the arena where the minister and his men were sitting and enjoying sweets and other delicacies. Lohar’s Phaisla Pancho Ka (2011: 38-41) (The Vertict of the Panchayat) beautifully enumerates the political structure of the Bhojpuri community and the role of the Panchayat. Pandit Shib Shankar Dubey, a Brahmin by caste is forced to face the village Panchayat which consisted of members across villages as his only son married a low caste girl. He humbly submits to the verdict of the Panchayat, to pay a sum of two thousand rupees (the money was to be utilized for construction of village road), to organize the reading of the Satyanarayan Katha
and feed the whole village with Indian bread (*Poori*) fried in oil and vegetables (*sabji*). The Panchayat is believed to be all in all (*Parameshwar*).

Apart from the short stories, Santoshi has composed poems like *Khilona*, *Aj ke Devdas*, *Mehengai*, *Nari* and *T.V.* Almost all her poems are critical and suggestive. All poems were published in *Lehar Dil Ki* (ed.) (2003). *Aj ke Devdas* is a romantic poem where the poet gives vent to her feelings. *Khilona* (toy) brings out the falsehood and cowardice of a lover who makes false promises to his beloved to save her from the hands of the lord of death (Yamraj), but fails to protect her from the hands of a few silly miscreants. Women are mere toys in the hands of men. *Mehengai* (Price Rise) is a short, four-line poem on inflation. *T.V.* (Television) is on the evil effects of television on the minds of men who forget that the glamour and beauty on the screen is unreal and not unachievable. It also suggests that none can take the place of a wife.

**Abhijit Chakraborty**

Abhijit Chakraborty served in the Martycherra Tea Garden at Kumbhir since 1977 as supervisor (*Tilla Babu*) and is presently serving at Pathicherra Tea Garden as the head supervisor under Koomber Tea Estate. His long acquaintance with the garden inspired him to write on various themes and some of them are of historical significance. *Garad Tillar Itikahani* (1980) was published in *Sonar Cachar* in three issues dated the 9th, 16th and 23rd March 1980. It reflects on the Lushai’s invasion on the tea gardens attacking the British managers for invading their territory and clearing of the jungles to set up the tea gardens thereby disrupting and displacing them from their settlement. The Lushais used to come down crossing the Barail Hills, bordering North Cachar Hills and the colonial traders constructed barricades to protect themselves. Two such barricades have been referred to in the issues which were built under the supervision of Sheffield More, one at Garad Tilla and another at Tangra Tilla near Koomber. The remains of the barricades made out of bricks and stones are still laying there in dilapated condition and the people of the locality have built many tales around these. One of the stories is about a wandering hermit who came to stay in Garad Tilla long after the conflict. The Saheb did not want him to stay there so he asked him to
move out but as the hermit did not oblige he was whipped very badly. Coincidentally, it so happened on that very night the Saheb’s horse died and all the people came to believe that it was the result of his misdeed.

Short stories namely *Radiol* (Upahar 1980) and *Interview* (Upahar 1980) are informative. The radio was the only means of entertainment in the 1960’s in the tea gardens and this drew the attention of the people and anyone possessing one used to flaunt off by playing it loud for everyone to hear and this is the content of Chakravarty’s *Radiol* (as pronounced by the tea garden workers). The story is about Sonia who ditched her lover Rabi and married Naren as he had a radio. In those days a radio or a wrist watch was considered to be a status symbol.

*Interview* brings out the difficulties often faced by the Colonists to find efficient clerks for the tea gardens in Barak Valley. People did not want to serve in remote areas totally segregated from the main stream under incongenial atmosphere and the managers were constantly on look out for people who visited the gardens. *Interview* is the story of Bimal, from Sylet who went to visit his uncle in one of the tea gardens and how he was trapped by the manager of the garden and employed as a clerk with a salary of Rs 5/- and accommodation. Bimal never got the opportunity to go back to his native and had to settle down in the tea garden.

He wrote two one act plays *Parda Fash* (Udharbond 2008: 81) and *Kakra Bicha* (Udharbond 2009: 63-75). *Parda Fash* reveals the injustice and corruption prevailing amongst the tea garden workers who poise as leaders and social activists and manipulate the funds of their own people allocated by the government under various developmental schemes. Bilay had to pay heavily when he tried to unveil the offenders and he was arrested on false charges supported by the manager. The manager wanted to remove Bilay from the garden as he knew that in future he might create problem for him as he was courageous and had leadership qualities. This was one of the management policies which the managers often resorted to in order to maintain the structure of relationship in the tea gardens. *Kakra Bicha* is also of similar kind. The story revolves round *Master Babu*, the L.P. School teacher of Martycherra tea garden. Master Babu was
sincere and wanted the tea garden people to come out of their ignorance and change for the better which was not liked by the people with vested interest who put him to death for they believed that he was motivating the people against the management which was beyond the norms. The master also related a story to Manjuri about how the Sahebs who were fond of crabs used to export it to their land. The crabs were put in cans without lids for shipping and yet they never jumped or popped out because whenever one of the crabs tried to climb up, the others pulled it down thus prevented escape. The Master Babu compared the plight of the tea garden workers to the crabs (Kakra) for the tea garden workers failed to accept the successful and intelligent ones and often conspired, targeted and wiped them out for they were afraid of change.

The Tarjar Larai (A debating song) which is an extinct feature now was collected by Abhijit Chakraborty and it was published in Udharband 2008. The song is mainly on the policies of the management and government encouraging import of foreign tea and imposing of taxes and its impact on the workers and the deplorable condition of the tea gardens.

The poem Dain (Udharbond 2012: 28ka-28gha) reveals the superstitious nature of the tea garden workers. Often it has been found that unnatural deaths and diseases are attributed to witches (Dain) and in the above mentioned poem the suicide of the uncle (Kaka) is believed to be the working of the aunt (Kaki) who is found to be chanting incantations always. Ultimately, she is arrested and on release from the prison she too hangs herself from a tree. Superstition and fear leads to such psychosis in human beings.

Kumbha Bagan (Udharbond 1998: 26-27) is a poem written in Sadri language, where the poet is full of appreciation for the Koomber Tea Estate. He has written that the garden is rich, developed and the workers get their due ration and wages in time because of the goodness of the Manager. There is also a coloured television in the workers’ club (pronounced as calubghar by the tea garden workers). Moreover we come to know that it is near the airport where the plane (palin) lands. The garden is surrounded by many other tea gardens and is picturesque. It goes to show that the tea garden people have minimal desires and
are not highly ambitious. *Ghum Paranir Gan* (lullaby) (Udharbond 2000:11) and *Ulfa Abey Aleyre* (Udharbond 2000:13-14) are poems which throw light on the insurgency problem in Assam and how the tea gardens were targeted creating fear in the minds of not only the management but also the workers. Children were forced to sleep out of fear while mothers sang songs describing the rebellious activities of the insurgents. Abhijit Chakraborty also wrote articles in various newspapers on folk theatre, Durga Puja etc. and all his writings show his close connectivity with the tea garden moreover, he always identified himself as a *bagani* (one belonging to the tea garden).

**Shankar Deb**

Shankar Deb, a retired teacher and a writer does not hail from the tea garden and yet, is closely connected with the tea gardens especially with those under the Uddharbond block. He is the editor of *Udharbond* magazine which is published every year during the autumn season on the occasion of Durga Puja. It is also known as *Sabuj Tillar Aina* (The Mirror of the Green Hill). The magazine reflects on the culture and life of the tea garden people of Barak Valley. His acquaintance with the tea garden inspired him to write a few articles on the culture and life of the tea garden people. Hence his writings may be taken into consideration. He wrote articles on Durga Puja celebration in the tea gardens of Barak Valley.

In *Phire Dheka: Sarad Utshab*, 2005, he wrote *Saradutsabe Jatra-Cinema Cha Bagan* (P. 17). He said that in 2005, 136 gardens celebrated Durga Puja where people of all ethnic groups; namely, Dimasas, Rajbangshis and Manipuries participated. They went for the immersion on the river banks, wearing their traditional dresses and playing the traditional musical instruments. The male folks of the tea gardens put on Malkuchi dhotis (a long pleated loin cloth worn by men in India) and baniyan or pyjamas with panjabis (loose trousers and loose long shirts worn by men) which were stained with abir (powder colours), women wore colourful sarees and their faces were stained with *sindur* (vermillion) and mustard oil which were mixed together. The little girls wore banti-babli dress, lacha and also ready made churidars. The boys had put on Sherwani and
Women and men sang songs. There were no miking or crackers. Cinema shows were organised in the tea gardens. But, he said, in Dewan Tea Estate there was no open cinema show, for every house had cable connections and this drove the people indoors before 9.pm, specially because of loadshedding. Jatra (folk dramas) were no longer popular and in very few gardens; namely, Pallorbond, Kashipur, Charapur historical dramas like Mughal Haramer Fouj. Balibad, Sesh Pradip were staged. Traditional drums were played by Habul Mirdha from Tamacherra tea garden, Jotan Mirdha from Lalbagh tea garden, Churamon Mirdha from Dilkhus tea garden, Budoi Mirdha from Hathicherra tea garden, Putul Mirdha from Subhong tea garden. He further said that the drummers traditionally belong to Mirdha and Kalindi communities. Of course there is a decline in their numbers, now, and people play cassettes in the Puja Pandals. In Bholanathpur and Haldikuri Community Puja and Thut Kirtan (chorus with action) was performed. Moreover songs were played on radios and live telecasts were given on television. Kali Puja was organized in some places on the second day of Durga Puja (Maha Ashtami). Puja was also organized by the Airforce people at Kumbhirgram Airport.

Other important articles in the same edition by Deb are Tara Tagdum Tagdum, Karigharer Shuke Nai (2005: 2-7) and Bajay Durga Pujer Dhol (2005: 7-9). In Karigharer Shuke Nai (2005:2-7, he writes about the competition in the field of idol making and how people’s tastes have changed and skilled artists are invited from outside the State to make idols, especially during Durga Puja. Nowadays, idols are often made out of cement. Some of them have changed their traditional occupation and the young generation is no longer interested in such trades. He has also recorded names of well-known idol makers of Barak Valley; namely, Girish Pal from Karimganj district, Sadan Pal from Hailakandi district, Ramesh Pal and Fakir Pal from Silchar, Haridas Pal from Panibhora of Cachar district, Jayanta Pal, Nityananda Pal, and Dhiren Pal from Udharbond in Silchar. In 1991, in the Sada Nachta Ridhay Ashanta issue, he wrote Jibon Sriti: Dhakira Dhak Bajay (Pp: 8-9); Shai Sur Shai Gan Kahaje Chiplo (Pp:9-11); Footballer aur Sabuj Sangher Dinguli (Pp:11-13); Lok Sanskriti: Barak Upathaker Chaser Acchar Unusthan O Gan (Pp: 20-23) Lok Sanskriti: Cha Baganaer Utshab O
Gan (Pp: 23-28). In Jibon Sriti: Dhakira Dhak Bajay (Pp: 8-9); Shai Sur Shai Gan Kahaje Chiplo (Pp: 9-11). He once again discussed folk drama of the tea gardens and also the drummers and football game which were very popular amongst the tea garden people in which workers and managers played together. In the article Lok Sanskriti: Barak Upathaker Chaser Acchar Unushtan O Gan (Pp: 20-23) Lok Sanskriti: Cha Baganer Utshab O Gan (Pp: 23-28), he briefly enumerated various rites and rituals of Barak Valley as well as the celebration and songs of the tea garden workers.

There are some others literary writings for instance, I.B Ubhadia, the Manager, Rosekandy Tea Estate, wrote on the benefits of tea in his article Tea: The Health Drink (2005). Tea is considered to be a very powerful anti-oxidant and helps in preventing various diseases like arthritis, eye disease and stroke, dental and skin disease, including cancer. He has referred to various research studies which have established the fact. Sanjay De, a social worker of Lalamukh tea garden in Hailakandi district, wrote Akranta (2006: 37-45), the story of an absconding garden manager and closing down of the garden (name not mentioned) and its consequences on the workers. It relates the story of one Anwar Ali who had to go out in search of some work. He takes up the work of breaking stones by the road side but was unable to bear the pressure as he was already suffering from heart problem and fell down and died on his way home from work leaving behind his wife and children at the mercy of the God. This is not only a singular instance for many other tea gardens in different parts of the country have faced the same situation. Their tales of woe remain unsaid and unheard.

The written literatures are stuffed with lived and living experiences. These materials are repositories of cultural values which inform the present and retain traditions for the future. The fabric of their work is derived from social and cultural context, with a handful of romantic and imaginary production. The works are by the tea garden folks, some of whom are still residing within the gardens and the others have moved out. The writings of the folks, on the folks reflect their memories, both, bitter and palatable, their aspirations, their psychology, their beliefs, their culture, their socio-economic status, the structure of relationship, the
changing world and its impact on their minds and life. Women writers like Kajal Demta (2008, 2010), Jhumur Pandey (1975, 2007, 2011) and Annapurna Devi (2007) Santoshi Das (2003) have written women’s stories which delineate “an act of power, against power” (Chatterjee 2001). Their writings are cudgels against male domination in the family, the community, as well as in the society at large, illustrating a broad spectrum of human conflicts. Ashok Verma wrote on history, politics, socio-economic themes, problems of youth, nature, romance, environmental pollution etc. His writings not only targeted the exploiters both colonial and Indian, but also implored his fellow men to become conscious of their rights and duties and lead a dignified life. Badrinath Sonar (1955), Uma Kant Tiwari (n.d) Kapil Dev Upadhaya (1995), Suresh Chandra Dwivedi (2011), Yamuna Prasad Swarnakar (2003), Dhub Narayan Koiri (2011), Babul Narayan Kanu (1997, 2011), Joydrath Goala (2003), Mira Singh (1997, 2003), Dev Kumar Mishra (1997) Kumari Santoshi Lohar (2003) and Santosh Akura (2012) are some of the other writers who mustered courage and energy to give vent to their thoughts and feelings, castigating the past rulers as well as the present system of politics and economy controlled by selfish countrymen. The written literature of the concerned people is not systematic. Infact, their writings are scattered and some of them are not even dated whereas some others could not be procured because even the authors failed to provide a copy, thus, details had to be collected in the form of interviews with the authors themselves. The available materials have been broadly enumerated and analysed under the following heads: (I) Historical contents (II) Socio-Economic contents.

**Historical Contents**

Raja Rao (1992), an Indian writer in English language, has stated that there is no village in India however, small that does not have a rich legendary history of its own. So is the case of the tea gardens also. The literature of the tea garden people is evidence to this. Both, the oral literature and the written literature contain historical references and contents. Factual content of events such as war, migration, conflicts, poverty, disease and struggle for freedom are referred to in the written literature of the tea garden people. Migration may be considered as a symptom of social change as it involves social and psychological
problems, especially when it is forced by circumstances and not by choice (Bhandel978). It includes dispersal from original homeland, retention of collective memory, vision or myth of original homeland, assimilation in host society and an idealized wish to return to original homeland (Jain 2010: 5) Tea gardens in Assam employed migrated labour force from various parts of the country from the year 1856 onwards. These workers were lured by contractors (Arkatis) with false promises that in Assam trees bear money. Amalendu Guha’s Planters Raj to Swaraj (1977) provides account of the number of workers inducted to the tea gardens of Assam from the year 1884-85, “The Plantation labor force was a multi-lingual heterogeneous society. In 1884-85, 44.7 percent of them were from Chotanagpur, 27.2 percent from Bengal, 21.6 percent from U.P. and Bihar, 0.2 percent from Bombay, 0.7 percent from Madras and 5.5 percent from within Assam. In 1889, half of them were found to have been recruited from Chhotanagpur, about a quarter from Bengal and about 5 percent only from Assam itself”(Das 2009). Assam where tea plantation was first established in India was full of dense forests.Clearing of the jungles for tea plantation required harnessing of huge labour force, which compelled the colonists to procure labourers by mapping prime labour catchment areas of the country and at the same time evaluating which tribal communities would prove hardy and strong to perform the hazardous manual work and also willingness to remain in the plantations under adverse conditions. Agents known as ‘Arkattis’ were employed to allure and attract labourers to the tea plantations, but the labourers so-pulled in couldn’t put up long and often ran away and planters took recourse to 1859 Act of Workmen’s Breach of Contract which empowered them to prosecute labourers who dared to abscond. A report on the Running Away of Labourers’ No. 13 (144) by R. Stewart, Officiating Superintendent of Cachar, Camp, Goomrah, dated the 9th February 1864, sent to the Commissioners of Circuit, Dacca Division, Dacca, states that “Of the 590 cases, 464 were brought for the breach of written agreements and 126 for breach of verbal ones. This I think is satisfactory” (De 2006). Another report ‘Sufferings and Remedy’ No. 135 (148) states that “the principal means employed are forcible detention or flogging” (De 2006 :499). This was the beginning of the economic and political
game in which the Indian Sardars and Babus also joined in and thus the labourers were caught up in vicious net, their plight was indescribable, they were reduced to mere slaves by the planters who often took the law into their hands (De 2006: 500). The managers who were extension of the British imperialists were on round the clock supervision and vigilance to prevent absconding and negligence on the part of the tea labourers. The above historical content relating to migration can be found in the written works of Ashok Verma’s ‘Hamare Prapitamaha’; (n.d.) (Our Forefathers), a poem which questions the forefathers as to why they tolerated so much injustice and exploitation. The poet mentions how the people from different communities in India were lured with false assurances and promises. He further questions his forefathers whether they have come to shake the trees full of money - “Ped se paisa jharne”, or in search of Aladdin’s lamp - “Alladdin ka Chirag” (Gulam, Ap aur w.e.f. n.d.), Sangbad (2006), Babul Kanu’s short story Samrajiya Dadi (Sebj Lehar ke Log, 2011:53-56.) , Suresh Chandra Dewedi’s short story Bagal (Sebj Lehar ke Log, 2011:30-34) also relate the stories of migration through agents. Reference to Gora Sahebs torturing people are found in almost all the writings Wapsi, Jindgi Ka Mor, Chup Chup, Tuta Kahini Lagan Majhi, and many others. Sanat Koiri’s, ‘Cha Shilpo O Cha Sramik Unioner Itihas’(2010) and Badrinath Sonar’s Barak Ghati Chai Sramik Sangathan ka Itihas (1995) relates the history of the formation of the tea gardens and unions in Barak Valley and its various perspectives. Atrocities and inhuman treatments unhealthy and unsafe dwelling units and unpleasant working condition sparked off anger and repercussion which led to the ‘Chargola Exodus’ on the 3rd May 1921 when men, women and children in thousands were leaving the plantation of Chargola and Longai valley in Karimganj. Receiving orders from the British, managers of the tea gardens, the Sub-Divisional Officer of Chandpore-Sushil Singh and the Gurkha Batalion resorted to lathi-charge and shooting indiscriminately in which thousands of the tea garden workers were wounded and many of them jumped into the Padma river to escape but were washed away by the river (Koiri 2010: 54-55). This was the situation in the tea gardens in the pre-Independence period and the plight of the labourers was inexplicable and unpardonable.
Reference to the construction of railways is also found in many of the short stories of Jhumur Pandey, eg; *Chetanai Achamoka Dalimphul* (1997); refers to the bombings at Derby tea estate in 1942 and Saraspur during the World War II in her novel *Alekjander Purer Kathakata* (2007). It was an event of first generation recorded by the third generation. Clearing of jungles took place with the introduction of tea industry in Assam in 1856, resulting in the displacement of the tribals from their settlement. This led to the killing of *Winchester Saheb*, by the Lushais, at Kamala tilla, in Karimganj district where a church has been established and later on the Lushais had visited the place to pray for his departed soul and seek forgiveness. This historical event is recorded in *Sukh Gacher Galpo* (2005:60-66). Abhijit Chakrabarty’s *Garad Tillar Iti Kahani* also reflects on the Lushai invasion and erection of barricades at Garad Tilla and Tangra Tilla to ward off the enemies. History of the tea garden workers is found in Badrinath Sharma’s (1995) *Barak Ghati Cha Sramik Sangathan Ka Itihas* where he mentioned the coming of Mahatma Gandhi to Silchar, Assam, in August 1921, the formation of Cachar Chai Sramik Union in 1955 and the formation of Indian Tea Association of Surma Valley Branch with 52 to 53 tea gardens on the 23rd September 1955. We also learn about the involvement of the folks of Borakhai, Silkuri, Dharamkhal and Durgakona Tea Garden of Silchar subdivision during the freedom movement in 1926 and how the people were brought together on a common platform in Pritamber Kurmi’s house where reading of Ramayana was arranged. Reading of cantos from the Gita and the reading of Ramayana and Mahabharata assumed a special significance during the freedom struggle of India (Nayak 2008). Such narratives reflect the collective consciousness of the colonized people which is similar to Raja Rao’s *Kantapura* (1995) and are of historical significance. Jhumur Pandey’s short story *Mukhoda Sundarir Harano Prapti* (2005) throws light on the psyche of people after the partition of India, the trails of horror, deaths and haunting memories and searching eyes, she waits for her son Khukon to return who was killed during the partition of India in 1947. She cries for her husband, father, mother, Arundhuti and Parul Bala. Ashok Verma’s short story *Pagal* (1997) throws light on the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 and its effect on the minds of the people like Gossain who lost his
beloved Madhumita in the hands of the Muslims. Every moment the horrors of
the war flashes across his mind and he runs around yelling “Do not beat us, do
not beat her. Flee, flee, flee.” The Khan Sena will catch you, will catch the
wives, will catch the beautiful ladies, will catch the old women, will catch the
young girls, flee, flee, flee.” *Ar ek Kunti and Bhurer Sanai* discuss the historic
language movement in Cachar. His poems like *Sudhu Sabda Ashepashey*
transport his readers to the world of Begums and Badshahs, the paintings and
carvings of Ajanta and Elora, the artistic heritage of the nation. Writings of
Amarnath Sharma like *Ram Rajya, Dharma Charcha*, and *Dharma Chinta*, are all
legendary. Yamuna Prasad Swarnakar’s (n.d.) *Kagaj Ke Kila* and *Hara Rani* are
historical narrative poems on the Mughal rule, their power structure and their
dealings with the women folks. Kapil Dev Upadhyay’s *Jai Bharat* (1997) brings
out the history of India, its heterogenous nature and prays for unity and
brotherhood. Reference to *Hawkins Saheb* in *Lagan Majhi* and role of Surat
master, the revolutionary in organizing people against the British rule is history
rewritten. Lagan was kicked by Hawkins Saheb wearing boots which left him
completely demoralised. Reference to Sepoy Mutiny of 1957 is found in Kajal
Demta’s short story *Samraher Desh*. Ashok Verma’s *Jindegi Ka Mor* narrates
tales of how young boys like Gangadhar and girls like Godavari were inspired by
roaming mendicants singing patriotic songs to join in the Mukti Fauj of Netaji.

Toponymy is an important aspect in the study of literature. Place names
provide the history and geography of a region. Place names localize events and
are valuable archives for future generations which survive when used by people
in their vernacular. Place names are integral part of cultural heritage. The novels
and short stories contain names of places like Bharat, Hiroshima, Nagasaki,
Bangladesh, Sylhet, Kolkata, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, Haflong Silchar,
Manipur, Orissa, Karimganj, Kamalpur, Tarapur, Malugram, Central Road,
Udharbond, Salganga, Kumbirgram, Badarpur, Lala, Bhairabi, Gandhibagh etc.
rivers namely Dhaleshwari, Madhuraboti, Padma, Ganga, Jamuna, Singla, Barak
and those tea gardens, for instance, Katlichera tea garden, Derby Tea Estate
Palaichora tea garden, Silcoorie Tea Estate, Kamalatilla tea garden, Borakhai tea
garden, Martycherra, Paticherra tea garden, Kumbha Tea Estate, Dharamkhal tea
garden, Benipur tea garden, Lalmati tea garden, Durgakona tea garden, Lediachora tea garden, Tarapur tea garden, Baladhan tea garden, Borthal tea garden, Thailu tea garden, Lalong tea garden, Bandu tea garden, etc. *Noy Baguner Noy Chora* is both meaningful and humorous and at the same time it records the names of the nine tea gardens of Cachar. Erosion of Colonialism did not resolve the problems of the tea garden workers. The exploitative mechanism marginalized the workers and denied access to important positions in the office, or political positions and if at all they are successful like Bikarna, who won the Panchayat election from Amarapur village, they are instantly wiped off. Amarnath’s *Gobore Padma Phul* (2011), Dindayal, is the butt of target of Ranjit babu only because he sends his son, Madan Gopal, to the university for doing his M.A. Such exploitation again leads to revolts and conflicts like the killing of the dawroga (police personal) by Munni as revealed in *Spandan* a short story by Jhumur Pandey in *Garam Thaner Manushta O Dulia*. A sense of bitterness is there even in the poems like *Birudita* where Akura, warns of a revolution against the impudent exploiters and boastful men of the society (*Asfalankarike daman kore*) and make space for himself. Mira Singh’s poem *O Mat Rukho Ma* brings out the patriotic fervor amongst the writers. Kapil Dev Upadhya’s *Jai Bharat*, Ashok Verma’s *Arthanad, Than liye*, Gulam, Sawal are instances of rebellious voices.

**Socio-economic Contents**

The written literatures of the tea garden community honestly present all kinds of social situation, pleasant or unpleasant. Their economic crises and conflicts, arising out of it, find expression in their written compositions. The writings are outlets of their lived experiences. Family (Kula) was considered to be the fundamental unit or nucleus of society in ancient India. Society was an aggregate of families each comprising several members under the headship of the father, or in his absence, the elder brother or son partook the responsibility. The deification of the householder is common in almost every household (Agarwala 1969). This social unit is the basis of the society. The tea garden family structure is patriarchal and patrilocal whereby the householder is placed on a pedestal higher than the other members of the household and, by virtue of his superior position, he makes decisions and controls resources of the household. The short
stories and novels are full of scenes which relate to the chauvinistic and dominating attitude of men and the sufferings of women.

In Jhumur Pandey’s novel the readdress and criticism of social and family culture is pronounced. In *Alekjander Purer Kathakata*, Bhudwa is aggressive, demanding and rude towards Lakshnimoni and does not take responsibility of his wife and son, Mangal. He is jealous and suspicious of his wife and often beats her to show his prowess and even pours water on the boiling rice pot making a mess of everything in a drunken mood. Female oppression is not a new thing in the tea gardens. Tea industry is one of the few industries where female contribution is great. The female workers are preferred as pluckers because of the dexterity and nimbleness of their fingers. Plucking of two leaves and a bud *ekti kuri duti pata* (Boredtill 2008) should be quick and neat, for “if the leaf is received fresh in the factory a marked improvement will surely be found in brightness and other liquoring properties” (Ojha 1971) “A shoot (a two leaf and a bud) says: Pluck me very softly with fingers fine. Torture me in factory in measured time” (Ojha 1971:24-25). Even Bhupen Hazarika, the immortal singer of Assam could not but appreciate the delicate fingers of the women tea pluckers through his song, *Ek kali do pattiyan, najuk najuk ungliyan* (Hazarika 1953). Life was not easy for the women workers in the tea plantation of Assam during the colonial time. They were sexually abused and tortured by the lusty white planters even when they were overburdened with poverty and estranged from home and relatives. The folk songs are magnus opuses which reflect the oppression and exploitative culture of the Britishers on the women folks of the tea gardens during colonial times.

Ashok Verma’s novel *Jindegi Ka Mor* (2004) narrates the story of Govadari who joins the Mukti Fauj to avenge the white men who raped her. In *Tuta Kahani* (2011) the dirty looks of the *goras* (Britishers) is referred to. The legendary writer and social activist Indira Goswamy (Mamoni Rasom Goswamy) in 1993, aptly uses the Bihu songs translated by Prafulla Goswami to illustrate the “character of the white skinned sahib who seduced the helpless coolie women and exploited them”.

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The sahibs come and open up gardens

On their heads are pan-shaped hats

They make mistresses of coolie girls with a cigar on their lips

Upstream came tea garden sahib

having drunk he threw away the bottle

what's the use of so much wealth

all is useless without a woman (1993:4)

The women in the tea gardens of Assam have been delivering their share of labour unabatedly for the economic gains of both the planters and the State while they were receiving ill-treatment, poor wages, improper and unhealthy shelters, unclean and impure water and every other thing which affected not only their life but the lives of their families. Stereotyped way of life and unchanged and unaffected work culture, lack of education and awareness, amongst the tea workers gave rise to unhealthy habits like alcoholism, gambling amongst male counterparts which created uncongenial atmosphere at home and in work place and reduced the whole family to poverty; it is, then, the women, makes financial compromise on family budget, debt and repayment of loans. Kajal Demta’s short story Ekti Sahaj Mritu (2005 :17-20) reflects on the life of the tea garden women workers like Biroshi who struggles hard with their children to make both ends meet, enduring the violent and inhuman behaviour of the men folks. In all cases, the women compromise on family budget, debt and repayment of loans like Dulia and Lakhmimoni in Garam Thaner Manushta O Dulia and Alekjander Purer Kathakata. Woman like Chumki sacrifice to get their children educated. Pholunti had to sell off her nose ring to feed the panchayat and get her son married.Rambashiya had to part with all her money to fulfill the demands of her grandson.

Jungli, reflects on the life of a village girl who suffers at the hands of her father, who sells her off to a drunkard and worthless fellow, already having two wives. Little boys like Kanai spend their childhood collecting broken articles and selling them for a few rupees and can only dream of feasts in restaurants.
Ashok Verma’s poem *Chup Chup* (Hush Hush), appropriately hushes the innocent questions and thwarts the dreams of the poor. Poverty, broken homes, hunger force them to commit petty crimes and thefts and often their state of helplessness often find expression. The rural and urban dichotomy is beautifully portrayed in Jhumur Pandey’s short stories like *Kanai ar Kichukhan* and *Madhuraboti Satar Katay*, Kajal Demta’s *Phera*. Kumari Santoshi Lohar’s *Mini* exposes out the hypocrisy of the politicians and their supporters. Insecurity, hunger, broken homes, adultery, drinking, gambling, high rate of child mortality, child labor, wife threshing are contents of Jhumur Pandey’s writings. Illicit relationship are developed, sometimes due to sexual urge and sometimes they involve themselves in such activities due to helpless situations arising out of poverty as is found in the story *Tirondej*, where the woman admits to her husband that she wanted to get back their plot of land from the zamindar (landlord) by selling her body.

Pictures of small, unhygienic houses which accommodate both men and animals like goats, cows and hens are portrayed in their writings. The small huts of the villagers built with straw roofs are not strong enough to withstand storm and wind and often crumbles down like Ghura Prasad’s. The villagers keep livestock so that they can sell them off in times of need. They used to keep hens, ducks, pigs and goats two to three months ahead of Durga Puja so that they can enjoy meat during the festival (Pandey:2012). They live in debts like *Lagan* and die with debts. Elaborate rites and rituals during marriages at births and even funerals ceremonies force them to borrow. Phulanti and Ghura Prasad borrow money for their son’s marriage. Lagan borrows when he gets his daughter married and again at the death of his wife and daughter, to perform the last rites which renders him penniless throughout his life. Yet, the people do not consider incurring of such debts as extraneous to situations but a requirement. Some of the women and children save a few rupees in bamboo poles like Lakhimoni and Mangal which helps them when they are hard pressed. They usually get their daily requirements from small grocery shops in the villages on credit which is reflected through their writings. Their biggest investments are on livestocks like cows, goats, hens and ducks.
The literatures of the tea people reflect on their food habits. Wild potatoes are often collected by the people for eating. Arum leaves also form a part of their diet. Budhiyia says he is a poor boy who collects wild potatoes, tubers for his food. Moreover the short stories and novels throw light on the traditional food items of the people. *Muri bhaja* (puffed rice), *chal bhaja* (unboiled fried rice), *chira bhaja* (fried beaten rice), *kachu shak* (Arum leaves), *jangaler alu* (wild potatoes), rice, dal, meat, fishes caught from streams, ponds and rivers, *lalcha ar noon* (red tea with salt) and, of course, homemade liquor (*Haria*) are amongst the ordinary food items. Preparation and consumption of traditional liquor is banned by the Government not so much for public benefit but to increase the sale of wine which helps the government to earn a lot of revenue. In the stories of Pandey, we see how the tea garden people prepare their traditional drinks secretly in the deep forests out of the reach of the visiting officials and inspectors. In almost all the writings whether it is *Parbatir Sansar*, *Gang Gatha* or *Garam Thaner Manushta* the characters indulge in preparation and consumption of liquor on all occasions.

Dowry is one of the greatest menaces of the Indian society today. Dowry was started by kings, wealthy business and other influential people of the society as a means to give girls their due ancestral property as in those times all the money and property went to sons only. Later on, it was used to provide “seed money” for establishment of a new household and the amount of dowry were decided by the parents of the bride. But, now, dowry is demanded by the groom’s parents to compensate for the amount they spent in educating and upbringing their son. It is also considered as a status symbol and the items are flaunted before friends and relatives. Thus, that which started as a simple practice has become a social menace and in spite of the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 it is widely prevalent in almost all societies even the poor practice it leading to various social evils (Chawla 2010). Modernisation ushered in the importance of material status, driving the need to extravagance and to show off as a way of asserting one’s social standing. The conduct of marriages of daughters became an important forum to display new found prosperity and to assert their status within their community and caste (Srinivasan 2005:602).
Kapil Dev Upadhya’s poem, ‘Dhahej’, (Dowry) written in Bhojpuri language exposes the prevalence of dowry in Bhojpuri community and the evils connected with it. Sheker and Hatti (2010 :130) said that the landless labour class desire to imitate the customs of the higher castes in the villages, a kind of sanskritisation process which has permeated to the landless lower castes in their preference to exhibit their standard. Even Lakhinder, in Sukh Gacher Galpo, refuses to marry without dowry as he was educated. In Bagal by Suresh Chandra Diwedi (2011) Bagal proudly announces that his father gave 16 tolas of gold and 20 tolas of silver as dowry during his sister’s marriage (p.32). This establishes that in the past dowry was considered a symbol of status. Of course, we donot find any stories of dowry deaths in the tea gardens which is a common thing amongst the urbanities.

Child marriage is still practiced amongst the tea garden labourers and this is highlighted in Lagan Majhi, where we find his fourteen years daughter married to a man of forty years. Gangadhar gets married as a school boy to a girl of five years in Ashok Verma’s Jindegi Ka Mor. Arranged marriage in India channelize marriage within the same caste and as such when youths make their own choice and marry against the traditional norms they are excommunicated by the village Panchayat and the erring party has to pay fine and follow the customs of purification, eg., organising Ramayana and Mahabharat sessions for a week or a month, washing the feet and feeding of Brahmans and the Panchayat and also feeding the whole village along with the penalty in cash, before being accepted by the community. Such social implications are explicit in short stories like Phasla pancho ka (2011: 38-41) and Gang Gatha (2011: 82-83). In Gang Gatha we see how the Panchayat exploits the people by extending the decision making and arranging several rounds of meeting when the party has to arrange for tea and snacks. Phulonti had to sell off her nose ring to arrange tea for the Panchayat. During the colonial times rules were made in consultation with the local leaders and thus codified patriarchal gender rigidities of caste endogamy and village exogamy. These have been resilient, and caste panchayats (male, local/ caste arbitration body in matters of marriage and family of the caste and village) are becoming more powerful now (Patel 2010: 145).
The belief in caste system and the occupations of the people according to their castes and their position in the social setup is mirrored in the stories. The social system and its obligations and formalities are such that the Brahmins, *dhobi* (washerman), *nai* (barber) and *dhai* (mid-wife) play significant and unavoidable roles in ceremonies like naming of a new born infant, marriage, funerals etc. which give them a sound status. Pholanti, Ghura Prasad, Daulat Ram and Lagan appeases them at times of childbirth, marriages and funeral. The various superstitions and beliefs in Ojhas and evil eye find place in the writings of Jhumur Pandey. Dhukiya, is burnt alive by the mass of the village of Alekjanderpur, who considered her to be a *Diani* (witch). Sarada was believed to be possessed by the spirit of Budhuwa’s mother. Thus, the Ojha (traditional medicine man) of the village tried to drive away the evil spirit and ultimately beats her to death. Lakhimoni did her best to convince the people that Sarda was suffering from fever and needed the help of a doctor and not the Ojha but nobody listened to her. Rumours about blood suckers create fear in the minds of women like Biroshi. In *Gang Gath* we see how the people flee on seeing Sita considering her to be a ghost and Malati’s younger son prays with closed eyes *Bhut amar put, Ram Lakshman buka achay korbay amai ke?* which means ghosts are nothing when Ram and Lakshman are there in the heart and the ghost can do no harm. Phulonti and others believe in *Bipadnashani* (a Hindu Goddess). The Indian psychiatrists refer to such states of mind as possession syndrome (Addlakha 2010:63). Such belief is commonly associated with divine visitation and is a very sensitive issue to be dealt with for the family and society, have full faith and would under no circumstance allow or tolerate interference. During the *Charak Puja* held in the month of April in Barak Valley (worshipping of a mysterious tree) the votaries go from house to house dressed as the different gods and goddesses, especially Shiv and Durga, dancing in a frenzied manner and on the last day the Kali figure believed to be possessed runs through the streets and is pacified by the priest specially oriented and believed to have divine powers. There are also people who claim to be possessed by Manasha, Kali, Loknath and Bipadnashi in Silchar town and they are visited by educated and elite people with
various problems. Psychosis leading to belief in witches (*Dian*) and often resulting in suicidal deaths and conflicts is the theme of *Dian* (Chakravarty 2012).

Various traditional games and their playing methods are found in Ashok Verma’s (2003) article on games and sports. The prevalence of the use of rhymes in children’s games both in land and water is seen. The ‘Taker Khela’ (Money Game) amongst the women folks of the tea garden is also prevalent amongst the elite urban women who play this game with huge amount of money often in kitty parties. Reflections on games like football and Jatra (traditional drama) and playing of the traditional *Dhak* (drums) during Durga Puja are found in the articles of Shankar Deb (2005). Other musical instruments like *Bashi* (flute), *Kartal* (cymbals) and *Khul* (tom-tom) find place in Pandey’s novel, *Alekjander Purer Kathakata*. *Tirondej*, the Sadri drama by Kajal Demta, throws light on the traditional weapons the *Tir - Dhonuk* (bow and arrow) of the tea community. Further, her article *Shilpo Nai Shilpi Nai* highlights the traditional crafts and art of the tea garden people which remained unrecognized so far. The craftsmanship of the idol makers and the crises faced by the traditional artists in the modern world of competition and changes is highlighted in the articles by Jhumur Pandey (2012) and Shankar Kumar Deb (2008). Joydrath Goala in his poem *Chaay* brings out the importance of ‘Tea’ in the lives of the people and also reveals the innocence of the children, living in the tea gardens who celebrate every small occasion with chocolates and balloons.

Celebrations form an integral part of the lives of the tea garden people. The multicultural festivities like Tusu Puja, Karma Puja, Saraswati Puja in the school premises, *Holica* burning and Holi celebration with Hindu traditional songs and dances of Radha Krishna where men dress and make-up like *Gopis* (consorts of Krishna) and also *Kathi Nach* (stick dance) is prevalent. The tradition of visiting the houses of the Babus for *baksis* (tips) and going to other neighbouring gardens for performance all find place in Pandey’s writings. The whole gamut of the folk songs of the tea garden people are sung on different festivals and ceremonies by different individual communities in connection to their rituals and celebrations. Shankar Deb’s (2006) Jhumur Pandey’s (2012) articles throw light on Durga Puja celebration in the past and present and also the
culture involved in it. Thus, the study of folk literature throws sufficient light on the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the tea garden folks, it gives a detailed and realistic picture of the rural setting.

Politics and Power is the bedrock on which the tea gardens of Assam were set up and is still continuing. Colonization and its effects are reflected in almost all the writings of the authors, hailing from the tea gardens. In the tea gardens a formal hierarchical structure is conceived which consists of Maliks (absentee owners of the gardens), Saheb (estate managers and assistant managers), Babu (Clerks and supervisors), Sardars (Supervisors) and the workers. Politics of a community, society, state or nation affects the social and economic life of an individual or the society as a whole. The tea gardens have been set up against the backdrop of unhealthy and dirty politics. The written literature of tea garden people is replete with stories and poems which reflect the politics and power of the colonial people and also the Indian sahebs and babus. The colonists were outsiders with ulterior motives who exploited the Indian hungry, innocent and humble people but when the question of their Indian counterparts, the brown sahebs arises, they are simply unpardonable.

Politicians have been exploiting and as Ashok Verma calls them Khunchas they are sucking not only their blood but their lives out of them. The political leaders are compared to a tortoise in his poem Kachhup (2011) for just like the tortoise they coil back at times of crises and come out only to give false assurances and promises. In Jindegi ke Mor Yogibaba sings, ‘You have put your honour at the feet of the aliens and the Gora Saheb is kicking at your heart/The Motherland is crying listen children /Kill your enemies and become martyrs’. This itself reflects on the politics of the managers of the tea gardens. Folks like Lagan suffer the inhuman atrocities and exploitation in the hands of the Babus who are no better than the imperial masters. He is aware of everything but his powerless position does not allow him to protest. Republic Day has lost its significance for him and he feels that it is a day to parade the false generosity of the politicians who hoist flags and distribute fruits and toffees not out of love but for publicity. Reactions to such socio-political situations can be seen in Lagan’s yelling his heart out under the open sky demanding a life free from oppression.
and miseries. Biren Bhakti, a character in Adhikar, protests openly at the voting center when he is not allowed to cast his rightful vote. Playing of vote-bank politics is a common feature in the Indian political scenario especially in the tea gardens of Assam. In Parbatir Sansar the author shows how the tea folks are not only deprived of their voting rights but also face dire consequences when their names are struck out from the enrolment list without proper grounds and intimation. Pârbatî’s first thought is that the family would be deprived of ration, she is least bothered that she would not be able to cast her vote. As name or no name, they never get the opportunity to caste their own votes. Power is misused in land grabbing and displacement by the Babus and money lenders in the tea settlement. The people are blackmailed and threatened and ultimately cheated and forced to sell off their land at a cheap rate. Such incidents are depicted in the short stories like Kharan and Garam Thaner Manushtha O Dulia. Sexual assault and abuse by the Babus was a common feature which is voiced out in folk songs; Tillar Upar Babu Baisa, Maiyialuka Ghiria Boisa (The Babu is sitting on a hillock, surrounded by girls). Santoshi Lohar’s Mini (2011) throws light on the mean mindedness and exposes the hypocrisy of the political leaders who never hesitate to hurt the sentiment of a child. Many of the poems target the leaders directly as found in Neta, Banade Prabhu, Bharater Sadinota (2012)

Absconding of tea garden managers and its consequences on lives of people is focused through the fate of Anwar Ali and his family in De’s story Akranta. Non-payment of appropriate wages and uncertainty of bonus payment which is a usual problem in the tea gardens leading to confrontation and even killings have been highlighted in the stories. Lagan’s niece, Kunti expresses dissatisfaction at the uncertainty of bonus payment and does not even plan to buy new clothes during Durga Puja. She further relates to her grandfather how the contractor at the bridge construction site cheated the workers by manipulating their time of work. The workers hired for the purpose tried to prove to the employer that they worked for longer hours at which the employer asked them: Toder kache ghori achei? Tora ki janish samay ki?(Do you have a watch? Do you know what time is?)
Psyche and the mindset of the tea garden people are also reflected in their literature. Emile Durkheim (1897) said “Anomie arises generally from a mismatch between personal or group standards and wider social standards or from lack of social ethics, which produces moral deregulation and an absence of legitimate aspirations”. Durkheim associated anomie to the influence of a lack of norms or norms that were too rigid. It is not only the garden management and its agencies that rule over the lives of the tea garden workers but also the village Panchayat exerts a lot of pressure on the people often leading to social anomies like suicide. The Panchayat is an uncontested unit in the tea gardens and erring members of the village are often subjected to harassment and taxed with penalty that they cannot bear, nor can they question or disobey the decision of the committee. Such social norms often lead to untoward incidents like suicides as in the case of Bhim Kurmi. Poverty along with bad habits creates a feeling of purposelessness in life leading to self alienation and perverted behavior, resulting in suicides as in the case of Anil Ree of Borakhai Tea Garden and Purinder in Kajal Demta’s short story Ekti Sahaj Mritu (2005). The inner fear in the minds of the folks is explicit in their literature. Ashok Verma’s poem Chup Chup reflects the fear in the minds of the tea garden workers who have no right to question, as they are to bear all injustices and are yet happy. Santosh Akura’s poems Chanchalota clearly denote the inner fear and lack of confidence. Words like Shunno ami (Empty am I) and Pratibadher sahosh nai mone (No courage to protest) (2012) signify their state of helplessness. Their nostalgic and discontented minds can be read from lines like Kundeshago Baba biyia dili morey-----Mata Pitago monay paray. Alienation and pangs of frustration is voiced out through folk songs: Haire haire haire hai, Ae shaki kiye ki upay-----and Oh Bap chal nago desa jai kutum thain. Bitter experience of young boys like Sadananda who migrate to urban areas seeking better opportunities for decent living sometimes find themselves in adverse situations which makes them realize that urban society may not always be accommodative and the people are far more individualistic and self centered. Solidarity is common amongst the tea garden folks and each one of them comes forward at times of need. Community activities like games, ceremonies, dance, songs, gambling, drinking, merry-making, jatra
and different festivals help the tea folks unburden their unwanted miseries and wants.

There is a never-failing bond between man and nature. The tea garden people’s inherent love for nature is reflected through Mangal’s character, the innocent and pure soul runs through hills and jungles in search of bird’s eggs which he brings home with great care and, on one occasion, he brings home a tiger’s cub to the great surprise of the villagers. The innocent folks do not miss the sound of the birds and animals and feel its effect on their lives. Lakhimoni associates the events in her life with the calling of the birds. Worshipping the nature and its objects is in their culture. Their poems like Pradushan, Pani, Prakiti, Manab, Drishyio, Krishak, Gupta Katha, Kedya Kedya Nadi Hai Gulabper Rat and Nadir Katha reflect the relationship of man with nature. Poems and songs on Tulsi and Neem implicate the importance of such plants in their rituals and rites. Nature provides them with fish and vegetables generously which they collect from ponds, streams and the forests at times of need.

Changes in the Written Literature

With the changing environment the perceptions of the people change which find expression in their behaviour and language. Society is composed of groups of people with structured relationship which designs and modifies the mutual behaviour between the individuals. Human beings are dynamic and get tired of old values, ideals or culture thus, bring about modifications with passage of time resulting in social changes. With changes in the physical environment man changes his style of living to adapt to new environment. Acculturation, accommodation and adaptation to other cultures lead to changes. Economic growth and development and educational advancement also bring social changes in the outlook, language, manners and lifestyle of a society which reflects in their culture and literature.

The literature of the tea garden people reflects on the changes which have taken place in their culture and lives. Folk songs and narratives of the tea garden people of Barak Valley of colonial period were full of unpleasant expressions delineating hunger, poverty, alienation and anger towards imperialism. Use of words like garibo (poverty), abagini (poverty striken), nitur (inhuman), bideshi
(alien), **haire hai!** (Alas!), **phaki diya** (cheating) **khunchus** (blood-suckers), **kamak choak** (licentious eyes) **harami** (notorious) **nich** (mean) are glaring evidences which show how the culture of the people was affected by the imperial process. Language evolves with social attitudes and experiences. The folks use certain terminology to demean, diminish, uplift or embrace a situation, person or event through their folk literature. The Jhumur songs reflect their acquaintance with the modern world. Names of popular actors, viz, Amitabh Bachchan, Govinda throws light on their knowledge of the Hindi films. With improved communication, it has become possible to visit the towns which are full of attraction for the folks of tea village. The mention of dress names of the town people (**Kabuli blouse**) in their composition gives them an added air. Their folk tales now include stories of school and activities of the teachers and the importance of education. The children and youths are not bothered about colonial rule as they were not the direct sufferers and neither they nor their parents have time to relate the past. They are more concerned with the present and sing songs like **Chalo shaki patshala te jaho** (Come friend let's go to school), **"Assam desha amra boro shuka acche go"** (We are very happy here in the land of Assam). On the other, hand there are others who have a different experience of identity crises and marginalization, for they are neither accepted as Bengali nor Assamese by the main stream people, they are considered as Bagani even after one and half century. Kajal Demta raises pertinent questions through her innocent character Samarah: Where is my land? Is it in a very far off land as my Grandfather used to tell me? Is Assam my land? The queries are answered by the teacher who informs Samrah that India is his land, he belongs to it and he has a language, culture and a history which is also a part of the history, language and culture of India. Yet, finally, we get to know Samarah’s mind when he says that he belongs to Monohorpur tea garden and he loves to be there in the midst of nature.

The literature of the tea folks of Barak Valley articulate very little on issues like the status of the Adivasis of Assam such issues find expressions mostly in the writings of Kajal Demta and Jhumur Pandey. The people of Brahmaputra Valley have expressed greater resentment in this regard than the people of Barak Valley. The **Injot Dahar** (2012), Souvenir of the Adivasis, contains articles from where we gather information of workers suppression and...
threats for filing their first RTI against corruption. These displaced and marginalized people had to pay heavily when they tried to break their silence fighting for identity and survival. The Assam Adivasi Vision, Adivasi Awaz and Adivasis in Assam are some of the magazines of the Adivasi people of mainly Bramahaputra Valley of Assam which voice out resentment and demand for rightful status of the Adivasis in Assam. Kajal Demta has fearlessly articulated her views in support of the Adivasis and strongly claiming for recognition and inclusion of Sadri language as a medium of instruction in the schools of the tea gardens. Other changes that can be found in the present literature are the interest of the writers like Ashok Verma, Jhumur Pandey, Kajal Demta and Joydrath Goala to write on pollution, dowry, role of Sarva Shikha, child labor, stories dealing with rural and urban continuum and vote banking, Poems, for example, Badlechache, Badlow, articles on Jatra Akal O Shakal, Cinema Cha Bagan Muhkorito and Oi Sritigulo Amai Hashay Kadai Ghumariye Dei deal with deviance of the village folks from traditional means of entertainment and relationship reflects on the educated mind, respecting values of traditional culture. Alienation and marginalization are the sole contents of the texts.

Summing up, the writings of the tea garden people are suggestive. Most of them express their emotions and sentiments but there are writings which reveal that the educated few do want to mobilize and change the fate of their fellow beings and educate them. Their language and style may not be elegant and grand, yet, the works have emotional intensity of feeling and pathos and they reflect the life and mind of the tea community. Gender discrimination, caste inequalities, religious rites and ceremonies, man and nature continuum, glorification of nature, and their mental agony and seeking transformation for better life find expressions in the writings by the tea garden and ex-tea garden literati. Most of the writings have been published in local press and have not reached far off, or drawn the attention of readers outside the region, except for one or two writers. Moreover their printed rate is minimal, ranging from three rupees to hundred rupees only. Here it can be said such low prices are indeed an underestimation of their writings.