

## **Chapter 8**

### **SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

‘Perspective from below’, the main concern of subaltern studies, analyzes consciousness of masses in their social situations. The thought-process used to derive the meaning of the situation they live in constitutes their consciousness which is the main concern of the present study. While giving his opinion in an article in ‘The Times Magazine’ the British historian E.P. Thomson used the phrase ‘History from Below’. The term ‘Subaltern’ meaning ‘of inferior rank’ term adopted by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), an Italian Marxist and Communist Party Leader, refers to those groups in society which are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Subaltern is someone who is of low rank in social, political or other hierarchy. It can also mean someone who has been marginalized or oppressed. From the Latin roots ‘sub’ below, and ‘alternus’, all others, subaltern is used to describe someone of a low rank (as in military) or class (as in caste system). Subalterns occupy entry-level jobs or occupy a lower rung of the corporate ladder. But the term is also used to describe someone who has no political or economic power, such as a poor person living under a dictator. Different synonyms are used for the word ‘Subaltern’ like common people, lower-class, underprivileged, exploited, inferiors, minor, poor, downtrodden and weak people etc. From the linguistic point of view, the word ‘subaltern’ is used to mean overlooked, neglected, disregarded, and treated with unconcern and indifference. the subordinate, common people, lower class, underprivileged, exploited, inferior minors, weak, secondary person, assistant, person of lesser rank, adherent, attendant, auxiliary, deputy, follower, junior, satellite, below the mark, casual, dependent, inconsequential, inconsiderable, lesser, minus, negligible,

paltry, petty, piddling, slight, small, subsidiary, tacky, trifling, trivial, under, unimportant, conditional, dependent, enslaved, slavish, subjugated and soon (Sahoo 2014). *Webster's Dictionary* defines subaltern: 'A commissioned officer below the rank of captain/a person holding a subordinate position/particularly with reference to a related universal.' This definition links subalternity with the notion of '*marginality*' and Derrida's notion of 'presence' as the subaltern subject, owing to either race, class or gender, marginalized and placed in a subordinate position in relation to the determining authority of 'the centre'. In other words, the centre is designated as an invariable 'presence'; it is a point of reference or authority from which norms are established. It means that what is outside the centre or in the margins is designated as the 'other'. In the thousands of years of the society's history-writing there is clearly seen the existence of two kinds of people; viz., superiors and inferiors. The superiors have been given more importance. Therefore, subaltern studies write the history again, making it free. The inclusion of lower people or common men's history has been agreed. This trend of writing consists of the agony of exploited workers, labourers, oppressed class, caste and women's income beyond the world of thoughts. The consciousness and autonomy of lower class consciousness is the foundation of subaltern studies. Accordingly, in the subaltern studies it is necessary to reach up not only to the ideological part but also to the livelihood of common people, i.e., poor farmers, shepherds, workers, labourers, oppressed castes and women. They are also human beings, they also think, take decisions, decide the way to live and grow in the society. On the basis of this lower class people's consciousness, not giving a self-dependent form, writing of history is to write a never-before-history of the society or nation. In subaltern studies it is expected to include the farmers, workers and the puppets

in the hands of national leaders, or the people who die without food. The study of all these lower class people is expected in subaltern studies. Thus, one can imagine the subtle nature of subaltern studies using perspective from below (<http://www.webster-dictionary.org>).

‘Subaltern studies’ is a foreign trend of thoughts, the philosophical foundation found in the writing of the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci. The notion of the subaltern, meaning ‘inferior rank’, was adopted by Antonio Gramsci as a concept referring to the groups in society subjected to the hegemony of the dominant ruling classes. More concretely, Gramsci first used the term as a euphemism or original covert usage for the proletariat in his “Notes on Italian History”, a six point project that appears in his Prison Notebooks (1973). He also claimed that the subaltern classes had been just as complex a history as the dominant classes. However, this ‘unofficial’ history was necessarily fragmented and episodic, for even the subaltern when they rebel are always subject to the activity of the ruling classes. In Gramsci’s theory, the term ‘subaltern’ is linked up with the subordinated consciousness of non-elite groups. The concept was then adapted to post-colonial studies from the work of the Subaltern Studies historians’ group. This group used subalternity as a catch-all concept encompassing all oppressed groups – working class, peasantry, women, and tribal communities, i.e., a name for general attribute of subordination. The project as such was led by Ranajit Guha (1982) with the explicit aim of expanding and enriching Gramsci’s notion of the subaltern by locating and re-establishing a “voice” or collective focus of agency in post-colonial India. The purpose of the Subaltern Studies project was therefore to redress the imbalance created in academic work by a tendency to focus on elites and elite culture in South Asian

historiography. Since 1982 the Subaltern Studies collective has produced eight volumes and several monographs. Ranajit Guha edited the first six volumes (1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1987 and 1989). These volumes include very few themes related to the working-class movement, or to work, or production. Most of the studies concern protests by peasants and by tribal people, but have no connection with the broader context in which they occur. Beginning with Volume 7 (1993), the editorship of the series was shifted from Ranajit Guha to Partha Chatterjee and Gyan Pandey. The themes in volume 7 and 8 are different from those in the previous six volumes. They revolve mainly around the nation, the community, the Bengali middle class, forest people, colonial prisons, India's partition and historiography, and Indian religion and language (Ranjit Guha and collective editors, *Subaltern Studies 1982-97*). The editorial groups of Subaltern historians have moved from documenting subaltern dissent to dissecting elite discourse, from writing with socialist passion to following the post-modernist fashion by Michel Foucault, J. Derrida, Rola Barth, Habermas, Rayan, Leonard, Frederick Jemson, Cristefar Norish and so on. Intellectual history, reframed as 'discourse analysis,' is emphatically not subaltern studies. Given the influence of Subaltern Studies among the younger generation of scholars in India and now abroad, some such challenge seems justified because intellectuals' writings do affect the real lives of people, often as public policy.

Sociologists, historians, economists, anthropologists and those who combine the methods of history and sociology have produced commentaries on the Subaltern Studies collective and on the monographs produced individually by some of its members. Indian sociologist and historian Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1988) in his article (1988) on 'Illusion

and Reality' found two major flaws in the assumptions of the founder of the Subaltern Studies: one, Guha's use of 'peasant' category is not appropriate because it is devoid of real life variations among peasants and their contemporaneous social base. Thus, this categorization is ahistorical and astructural. Two, Guha draws parallels between countries by the sweeping use of a large span of time (four hundred years) in history across the universe (Atal 2003). Mukherjee also thinks that Guha's exclusive cultural analysis is based on Weberian appraisal of reality and he reminds of one out of the similar efforts made by the British imperialism "for a cultural understanding of contacts among conflicting groups". Mukherjee's concerns are echoed by Rosalin O' Hanlon and David Washbrook (1988, 1992) wrote in a critique of Gyan Prakash's discussion (1990) on 'Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography': "What all this begins to look very like, in fact, is a new form of that key and enduring feature of Western capitalist and imperialist culture: the bad conscience of liberalism, still struggling with the continuing paradox between an ideology of liberty at home and the reality of profoundly exploitative political relations abroad, and now striving to salvage and re-equip itself in a post-colonial world with new arguments and better camouflaged forms of moral authority" (Atal 2003).

In Subaltern Studies Shahid Amin has analyzed 'Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-22' to know the effect of Mahatma Gandhi on the minds of the farmers who participated in non-cooperation movement. He has tried to know the intention of different elements of Indian society related to Chouri Choura incident (1995). He has also expressed his thoughts about the dangers and bad effects on history writing from the point of view of any religious group. In the trend of Subaltern Studies Sumit

Sarkar's important writings consist of the history of common people in national movement, history of neglected group, leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in national movement and the dominant nature of foreign colonial government (1997). Sivaramakrishnan (1995) notices in the Subaltern analyses a "movement from Levi-Strauss to Ricouer-Geertz, culture as text and as neo-romanticism, and finally there are glimpses of Foucault". Part of the problem appears to be the creation of new binarisms in place of old ones, and the reification of power, as a result of which subalternists analyze power in a way that does not raise the spectre of disunited subalterns, or differences. Some scholars like Spivak (1988) have critiqued the subaltern project for a certain degree of insensitivity to the problem of women, others like Chatterjee (1992) have optimistically contended that women's writings as well as their sheer presence in (their own and others') letters, autobiographies and fictions preserved a crucial place for traditional values during a period of embattled nationalism". The issue of literacy is highly pertinent because Subaltern Studies emphasize the written 'text' and has extended the analytical domain of history, as Gyanendra Pandey (1992) has suggested, including poetry. Chakrabarty's *The Rethinking of Working Class History* (1991) has drawn the attention of A. K. Bagchi, V. Bahl and Ramchandra Guha. Bagchi, critiqued *The Rethinking Working Class History* (1991), linking the author's arguments to those of the *Royal Commission on Labour in India* (1930), and said that, both, in effect, discuss the Indian mill workers as 'uprooted' Indian peasants. In addition, Bagchi observes that Chakrabarty treats the "uprooted peasants as an undifferentiated mass liable to be governed by 'primordial' loyalties and liable to break out into primeval violence from time to time". Bahl and Ramchandra Guha (1995) also shares with Bagchi a

concern about the Subaltern School's lack of sensitivity to historical processes and to historical dynamics, as well as its insistence that “there is no such thing as a social system such as capitalism or colonialism with its own systemic exploitation and oppression”. Ramchandra Guha (1995) criticizes Gyan Pandey for the promotion of writing ‘desk history’ by urging scholars to look inside the elite discourses. This process calls for a “complex and deep engagement with elite and canonical texts”. Guha’s historic literature suggested that the development of Indian national consciousness was an exclusive elite achievement which failed to acknowledge or interpret the contribution made by “the people on their own”, that is, “independently of the elite”. In this respect, “the politics of the people” should be understood as an autonomous domain that operates outside elite politics (Ludden 2001).

Studies of tribal and peasant revolts or movements a dominant tradition both in the history and in the ethnography of India for quite some time, have some pioneering accounts; viz; the Bhumij revolts and Kol insurrection in Chhotonagpur by J. C. Jha (1964), Kalikankar Datta’s (1944) work on the Santhal insurrection, B. B. Kling’s (1966) study of the Blue Mutiny the indigo disturbances (1859-62) in Bengal, Ravindar Kumar’s writing (1968) on the Deccan riots (1875), the Tanabhat or Birsa Munda and his Movement, the Rampa rebellion of 1924 and Sunil Sen’s study (1972) of the sharecroppers’ struggle in Bengal. Similarly, studies by Majid Siddiqi (1978) and Kapil Kumar (1984) on the agrarian /peasant revolt led by Baba Ramchandra in Pratapgarh and Faizabad districts of Oudh. Siddiqi (1978), Kapil Kumar (1984), Gyanendra Pandey (1978) and Dhanagare (1983) have started an important debate on the precise linkage between the peasantry and the Indian National Congress and Gandhi in particular.

However the middle peasant thesis (like that of Eric Wolf and Hamza Alavi 1965) and Barrington Moore's hypothesis (1969) on the role of commercial agriculture as a factor conducive for peasant mobilization have been thoroughly examined by only a few of these studies. Nonetheless, most of them have brought to light enormous source material to the contemporary social scientists. Who most authentically reconstruct the peasants' revolts in India in the 1920s and 1930s, but most of them basically belong to narrative history or ethnography. Some of them like Siddiqi, Pandey and Kapil Kumar do identify and probe the historical conditions that facilitated the progressive development of consciousness of the insurgent peasantry or tribals who were the main actors of those movements. However, barring exceptions such studies seldom transcend specificity and are rarely inclined to get into questions of theory and generality as if they are irrelevant to the history and sociology of social movements. Suresh Singh's work (1966, 1983) on the Birsa Munda movement has produced abundant evidence of the strong millenarian elements in the Birsaite movement and Stephen Fuch's study on the Indian aboriginals has also gone into the millenarian movements among Indian tribals under the influence of Christianity. The notions of 'primitive rebels' and 'social banditry' introduced by Eric Hobsbawm (1972) have not been used fruitfully by the researchers of tribal and peasant revolts or insurgencies until Ranajit Guha (1982) and his colleagues launched the 'subaltern studies' approach. Getting immersed in the depths of the micro level reality and not rising above it in order to enter the realm of theorization and conceptualization was the tendency characteristic of the mainstream sociology and social anthropology as well as history and ethnography which was received in India as a part of the imperialist legacy for the social sciences.



These studies, except those of subaltern studies, mostly use objective or elite perspective but to focus on people's politics. A few of the studies on tribal movements have used subaltern perspective, i.e., perspective from below. Among the subaltern masses tea garden labour forms a mass of heterogeneous groups of people and the (Adivasis) among them tribes belong to extreme subaltern groups which were brought from Central India, Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal to the tea gardens in North Bengal and Assam. In the contemporary time they are called Adivasis, categorized as tea tribes, a sub-category of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and More Other Backward Classes (MOBCs) in Assam. Tea garden labour in Assam, specially Adivasis, make a genuine case of subaltern groups. Adivasis, the people of forests and hills or the original inhabitants, have since long lived in the forest hills and naturally isolated regions, known by different names such as *Vanyajati*, *Vanvasi*, *Pahari*, *Adimjati*, *Adivasi*, *Janajati* and *Anusuchit Janajati*, out of which the term 'Adivasi' is used most extensively, though '*anusuchit janajati*' or scheduled tribe is the constitutional name for them. In India the tribal concentration which is next to Africa is an integral part of the Indian civilization. In fact, tribes have been the earliest inhabitants of the country. According to Vidyarthi and Rai (1985) mainly four races and cultures have welded together into these people; namely, (i) Austro-Asiatics in their primitive form represented by the Kol and the Munda, the Kharia and the Nicobarese, (ii) the Mongoloid people speaking dialects of the Sino-Tibetan family, largely found in the sub-Himalayan region, represented by Nagas, Bodos, Kuki-Chins etc., (iii) the Dravidians represented by the Mala, the Oraon, the Gond and the Khond who speak a tongue of the Dravidian family and (iv) the Aryans who are supposed to be the last race to come to India. Thus, the first

racial and cultural elements made a great contribution to the formation of the Indian people. The Adivasis in North Bengal and Northeast have encountered a complex of cultural, structural, traditional and modern forces in a typical situation, which were brought in by the colonial planters (British) as indentured labour from the Chhotanagpur Plateau region, Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and Central India. They are one of the most backward and exploited tribes in India, though newer generations are comparatively educated and they have now some intellectuals and professionals in various fields (Vidyarthi and Rai 1985). The Adivasis in Assam, being basically tea garden labourers, live in villages, inside the tea estates established by tea planters. The estates located in interior places contribute to their backwardness as well as exploitation by the tea planters. The labourers, in a way, have to live with the basic facilities provided by the tea-planters. The tea planters usually exploit the Adivasis in every possible way. Violence and agitation of labourers against the management is common, where the state machinery normally protects the tea planters. Illiteracy, poverty, addiction of males to country liquor, poor standard of living and health facility are characteristics of their life. There are instances when tea planters do not even supply the life saving drugs when workers are dying out of epidemics. The Adivasis are found mainly in the districts of Cachar, Darrang, Sonitpur, Nagaon, Jorhat, Golaghat, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia of Assam. The tea-tribes comprise a large number of linguistic and social identities such as Santhali, Oraon/Urang/Orang, Munda/Mura, Bhumij, Mahato/Kurmi, Sora, Bhuiya, Pahariya/Mal Pahariya, Kharwar, Kharia, Chero, Mahali, Bhils, Asur, Sora, Sabar, Garait, Kisan and Ho. Majority of these tribes belong to the Munda branch of the Austro-Asiatic language family. They are still confined to the tea garden setting and are largely occupied with the

labour there. In the given conditions of hardships, exploitation and suppression they have lived with a consciousness of their kind which is reflected, in their literary and oral knowledge. The present work is therefore an attempt to understand the subaltern consciousness of the tea garden labour in Assam, specially the Adivasis. Yet, no subaltern studies are available on the tea garden labour, including the Adivasis. Therefore, the present study analyzes subaltern consciousness of tea garden labourers, specially Adivasis in Assam. It focuses on (i) patterns of the consciousness like feelings, percepts and specially the structure of common sense of the tea garden labour, (ii) the class consciousness located in a collective, i.e., actual mass level consciousness, (iii) subjective dimension of consciousness which is different from its more readily observable objective manifestations of actions, socially structured relations, the historical dimensions of such actions and social relations and their crystallization in cultural practices, ideologies and organizations and (iv) the actual, collective consciousness, self-consciousness, thought and linguistic expressions.

## II- OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the objectives of the study:

- (1) To understand the nature of consciousness (self- improvement, self- progress, self- dependence, self- respect, self- confidence, self- protection and existentiality) of the tea garden labour
- (2) To analyze the ideology, rights and identity of the tea garden labour
- (3) To find out patterns of exploitation experienced by the tea garden labour
- (4) To know the politico-economic position of the tea garden labour in their consciousness

To achieve the objectives the study attempted the following research questions:

1. Do the Adivasis have any sense of self- improvement, self- progress, self- dependence, self- respect, self- confidence, self- protection and existentiality?
2. Do the Adivasis feel subjugated and exploited?
3. Do they find themselves as weak and helpless people?
4. Do they perceive 'others' (elites') as strong, privileged and exploiters?
5. Do these feelings have a general distribution across the groups of the Adivasi masses?
6. Are these feelings perceptible in historical or contemporary events of resistance, rebellion or movement?
7. Do subaltern feelings of Adivasis express in their cultural practices of resistance or otherwise?
8. Are subaltern feelings of Adivasis reflected in an ideology of resistance or otherwise?
9. Have subaltern feelings of Adivasis crystallized into organizational forms (like All Assam Student Association ( AASA)?)
10. Do subaltern feelings get expression through language?
11. Is there any subjective expression of subaltern feelings through individuals among Adivasis?

### III- METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

While probing into the subaltern consciousness of the Adivasis/ tea tribes; viz.; Santhal, Munda and Oraon, Bhumij, Mahato/Kurmi who form a large size of the tea

garden labour population in Assam. The study has used historical and empirical data to analyse the subaltern consciousness of the labourers particularly the Adivasis. The study has sourced documents and field data. Documents like books, journal and literary texts like poems, roddles, folktales, folksongs, folk-recollections and slogan have been used. From the field oral narratives, songs, riddles and slogans have been collected from persons and organizations and interpreted to understand the subaltern consciousness of the Adivasis.

The tea garden setting in Assam dominated by tea garden economy is divided into two regions; namely; the Brahmaputra Valley and the Barak Valley. Both the regions have Adivasi population in the gardens. Their forefathers were brought from Odisha, Bengal, Bihar and Central India. In recent decades they have formed the organizations of state level which have raised their voice for rights as well as expressed resistance against atrocities. Of these Adivasis, Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Bhumij and Mahato/Kurmi constitute a significantly big section of the population. These groups have constituted the universe of the study while for oral and literary data collection individuals as well as organizations were sourced as units.

For the present study five Adivasi communities; namely, Sathal, Oraon, Munda, Bhumij and Mahao/Kurmi having sizeable populations amidst the Adivasis in Assam were purposively selected. These are found in both the Valleys of Assam; viz; Barak Valley and Brahmaputra Valley. Again, two tea garden villages; namely, Doloo and Achabam in Cachar and Dibrugarh districts respectively, having maximum of the Adivasi groups, were purposively selected under the two valleys respectively to derive contextual understanding and identify individual and organizational sources of oral and written

literatures. Then a sample of 150 households from the Adivasi communities from each of the two villages, totaling 300 households, was taken by random sampling method. Doloo tea garden village has 1112 Adivasi households and an Achabam tea garden village has 1057 Adivasi households. With the help of the well-informed villagers, individual sources of the oral folk literature and authors of written literature were listed. The sources of oral and written literatures were contacted to collect the literature expressed or authored by them. An interview schedule was constructed and administered to the total of 300 selected households of the Adivasis in Doloo and Achabam tea garden villages.

### III. FIELD OF THE STUDY

The two tea gardens, Doloo and Achabam, have big residential settlements of labourers in Cachar and Dibrugah districts respectively of Assam. The labourers include Adivasi groups in large size and number in both the gardens. The gardens comprise two types of populations; namely, Adivasi and non-Adivasi. In the Doloo Tea Garden of Cachar district there are 1112 Adivasi families and 1574 non-Adivasi families. Its total population is 10,880. On the other hand, Achabam Tea Estate of Dibrugarh district has 1057 Adivasi families and 587 non-Adivasi families and its total population is 6,849. Adivasis in Doloo Tea Garden belong to five communities; viz., Santal, Munda, Oraon, Bhumij and Mahato/Kurmi while in Achabam Tea Garden has 12 Adivasis groups; namely, Santal, Munda/Mura, Bhumij, Oraon/Urang, Mahato/Kurmi, Kishan, Kalar, Parja, Nag, Saora, Sabar and Majhi. Non-Adivasi families population in Doloo comprises various castes; namely, Brahmin, (Bengali and Non-Bengali), Kayastha (Dutta, Dey, Dev), Routh, Sinha, Suklavidya, Das

(fishermen), Barber, Dhoba (washermen), Malakar, Ganju, Teli, Bagdi, Bouri, Ree, Tanti, Dushad, Rekiason, Gouri Das / Rabidas etc. Besides, Achabam Tea Garden has 11 non- there are 1112 Adivasi families and 1574 non-Adivasi families and non-Adivasi/caste groups; namely, Brahmin (Bengali and Non-Bengali), Kayastha, Kaibarta, Karmakar, Barber, Dhoba (washermen), Tanti, Paik, Kondo, Gour, Barik etc. In both the tea garden settlements, the people are engaged in tea plucking which is their main occupation. Besides, they also cultivate rice and seasonal vegetables like potato, cabbage, cauli flower, *Palak* (spinach), *lai pata* (mustard leaves), *ramash*, *lau* (pumkin) etc. along with animal husbandry and poultry farming. Tea plucking job is provided in the tea gardens. Agriculture and animal husbandry are the activities by these families carried on the land holdings provided of the tea garden authority and both the settlements have schools, Post Office, Tea Garden Hospital, Nach Mandap, and Creche, temples/ Namghar/Churches, Clubs, Golf play ground and weekly market.

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE OF THE ADIVASIS

1. In both, the tea garden, Doloo Tea Garden and Achabam Tea Garden, all the Adivasis generally practice usages of avoidance; for example, father-in-law avoid daughter-in-law; daughter-in-law must avoid mother-in-law and son-in-law must avoid mother-in-law and other female relatives of his wife. Even some relatives must avoid each other in their everyday relationships and in that way, they do not speak to each other, do not touch each other, do not sit together, do not mention each other's name and even do not look each other in face during interactions. Besides, there is joking relationship between sister-in-law and brother-in-law, between brother's wife and her

husband's younger brother, between grandfather and granddaughter. Thus, the Adivasis are still continuing their traditional kinship usages. The Adivasis use Bengali kinship terms in Doloo tea garden of Cachar and Assamese kinship terms in Achabam Tea Estate in Dibrugarh district as they have forgotten their own kinship terms because they (except Sathals) have not practiced their own mother tongue for the last three generations in the tea plantations and they have adopted Bengali and Assamese languages in the Barak and Brahmaputra valleys respectively. There is observed a process of acculturation due to contact with the majority community, i.e., the Bengali and the Assamese respectively.

2. The Santhal villagers belonged to two clans; namely, Bitol Murmu, Soren; Munda belonged to three clans; namely, Tesa, Hen and Barla; Oraon/urang belonged to three clans; namely, Kachhap, Tirki and Baguar; Bhumij belonged to three clans; namely, Nag, Tesa and Khejur and Mahato/Kurmi belonged to three clans; namely, Kathiar, Soyar and Kishab.

3. Adivasis do not follow their traditional ways of spouse selection. They are depended on family to choose spouses and sometimes Adivasi choose spouse through the professional matchmaker. Thus, they are influenced by the patterns of mate selection and marriage prevailing in non-tribal population. Divorce and re-marriage is permitted among the Adivasis. Traditionally breach of marriage and re-marriage are common phenomena in the Adivasis.



4. In both the tea gardens, Doloo tea garden in Barak Valley and Achabam tea garden of Brahmaputra Valley, all the families are nuclear.

5. In both the tea gardens, 71.34% of the Adivasi families have a size of 3 to 4 members, 22.66 % of the families each have 1 to 2 members and 5 to 6 members respectively and the rest have 7 to 8 members. So, the average family size of the Adivasi labourers is 3 to 4 members in both the tea gardens.

6. The tea garden economy is based on tea leaves plucking, tea processing and tea manufacturing which are carried out by the labourers. The tea tribes are basically involved in seasonal tea plucking, lasting from March to December. There are two kinds of tea plantation workers, viz; permanent and casual. The wage of the labourers is paid weekly. The daily wage of the labourers in Doloo is Rs. 75/-Rs. per day for permanent and casual, male and female, labourers. The fixed monthly salary of labourers is Rs.2250/- whereas in Achabam Tea Garden labourers are paid wage of Rs.115/- per day and the fixed monthly salary is Rs. 3450/-.

7. Out of the 1105 Adivasi families in the Doloo Tea Garden village most (80.18%) have permanent labourers and 19.82% are casual labourers. On the other hand, in Achabam Tea Garden village out of 1057 families 79.95% are permanent labourers and the rest (19.94%) are casual labourers. Thus, there is no significant difference of the labour employed in the two gardens.

8. Ration is the part of the monthly salary of the labourers in each tea garden in Assam. In the Doloo tea garden, every adult labourer gets 3 kgs and 20 grams rice and 1 kg. 20 gram flour every week and for child labourers get 1 kg and 600 grams of rice and the same

quantity of flour. In Achabam tea garden, every adult and child labourers get 3 kgs of rice and 3 kgs of flour every week. Thus, ration provided in the two gardens is almost the same in quantity and kinds.

9. In Doloo tea garden, over half of the families support Indian National Congress; one third support Communist Party of India (Marxists) and 18.67% support Bharatiya Janata Party. On the other hand, in Achabam Tea Tarden near half of the families support Indian National Congress; over one third support Communist Party of India (Marxists) and 15.33% support Bharatiya Janata Party. All the tea tribes participate in political parties, by supporting them directly or indirectly. Indian National Congress seems to be the most popular party in the villages and the next to it is Communist Party of India (Marxist). Indian National Congress party is old one, its roots have been there among the labourers since pre-Independence period and CPI (M) is also having roots among them through their work.

10. Bagan Panchayat in Doloo and Achabam Tea Garden has of positions like President, Vice-President, Secretary, Assistant Secretary and Members who are democratically elected for four years. Cachar Cha Sramik Union and Dibrugarh Cha Mazdur Sangha, both the union are affiliated to Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), supervise the elections in the respective village. The office bearers are selected by the permanent workers in both the tea gardens. In both the tea gardens, there is a Bagan Panchayat one each situated between the management and the labourers, on the one hand, and between the labourers and the trade unions, on the other hand all of the problems regarding various demands, implementation of various agreements, settlements of bonus

disputes and increase in wages are placed before the managers by the Bagan Panchayat. The minor problems, individual or collective, like house repairing, water supply, Provident Fund advance for treatment etc are placed before the authority through the panchayat. Recruitment of labourers in place of the retired or expired workers from the same family is also suggested by the panchayat to the manager. Some matters which are left for the panchayat to sort out, and the managers do not like to interfere, are kidnapping, pre-marital sexual relationship between their boys and girls etc. Such matters which are ignored by the managers are brought to the notice of the Cachar Cha Sramik Union by the Bagan Panchayat.

11. In both the tea gardens, the villagers are locally controlled by an Adivasi Panchayat each headed by a Mukhiya/ Murabbi/MuroI/Manjhi. It maintains discipline and social cohesion among the Adivasis within their group. As the situation demands in the plantation society there are informal institutions like Adivasi Panchayat at the community level, whose members are exclusively from one community. This panchayat meets for settling the disputes of the community which arise from time to time. The disputes are generally related to custody of children of separated parents, inter- community marriage, etc. In a plantation where a community is numerically very small no such panchayats can be observed. The other Adivasi Panchayat is found at the level of residential sector or at the plantation level whose members are drawn from a number of communities. It decides the cases of inter- community quarrels, theft, witchcraft, inter- community marriages, inter-religious marriages etc. The traditional leaders are today replaced by trade union leaders to a large extent because of the politicization of the workers. Thus, in Doloo and Achabam tea garden the Adivasis continue their traditional politics at community level

but the major changes have taken place in the wake of the democratic political system constituted through panchayat /state assembly and parliamentary elections.

12. The Adivasi people are believers of Hinduism. They are animist. Worship of traditional gods and spirits is still continuing by the Adivasi people. Each one has its traditional ancestral deity. Along with their traditional practice, the Adivasis have in their respective location adopted the Bengali and Assamese religious festivals or ceremonies like Ganesh Puja, Jhulan Yatra, Biswakarma Puja, Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Laxmi Puja, Swarasati Puja, Shiv Puja, Holyor Dol Yatra, Basanti Puja, Charak Puja and Chaitra Shankranti in Doloo tea garden and on the other hand,in Achabam tea garden, Bihu, Pitha Sankranti, Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Laxmi Puja, Swarasati Puja, Shiv Puja, Holy or Dol Yatra and Charak Puja as the main festivals, organized by the tea garden labourers. Thus, the Adivasis practice the Bengali and Assamese Hindu religious ceremonies in their respective locations. These are commonly organized in their respective village communities or families.

13. In both the tea gardens, the youth Adivasis wear full pants and shirts. The women wear sari with blouse and petti coat. The women especially younger generations wear informal dress like salwar, jeans pant, skirt and top, frock, nighty (maxi) trousers and top. The Adivasis love ornaments and decorate themselves with a variety of these, generally made of brass comprising hair-pins, earrings, necklets, necklaces, armlets, wristlets and rings. Flowers are used by both sexes for decoration. Tattooing is still another form of decoration and the women get their forehead, neck, arms and palms tattooed. Thus, they

have retained the traditional sense of decoration and tattooing along with adoption of various ornaments available in the market.

14. Adivasi people traditionally secured food through two methods; namely, hunting and gathering and agriculture. They have changed their traditional food by adopting the Bengali food like rice, dal, vegetable, curry, all kinds of fish and Sidol (a kind of processed fish), red mutton and chicken in Doloo tea garden of Barak valley and the Adivasis of Achabam tea garden in Brahmaputra Valley adopted Assamese food like rice, dal, vegetable curry, all kinds of fish with tenga, gahori (pork) Kethli Pitha, Bash Pitha etc. But in the both valleys most of the Adivasis (over 95%) take rice beer and red wine. It appears that they have continued the tradition of taking rice beer on festive and ceremonial occasions. Bottled wine is now emerging as substitute to their traditional rice beer. On religious and ritual ceremonies such as death rituals they take both pure vegetarian and non-vegetarian foods which are considered sacred and offered to the gods or goddesses and ancestors. This has been adopted from the Bengali and the Assamese culture where pure vegetarian food is served in the day and non-vegetarian food in the night after the period of impurity on account of death is over.

15. Both the tea gardens, the Adivasis (permanent workers) are living in semi-pacca quarters which are provided by the tea garden authority. These are built of bricks and mortars with mud floors. The casual labourers live in kachcha houses made of bamboo; mud walls and tin or polythene roofs. They make these by their own labour.

16. Both the tea gardens, the tea management authority extends grid power supply to the labour quarters through the state electricity board. The cost of internal wiring and maintenance inside the quarters is entirely borne by the management. But the cost of procuring electric bulbs and consumption of electricity is totally borne by the labourers.

17. In both the tea gardens, traditionally the Adivasis have been illiterate. But now situation is somewhat better and educational level of Adivasis in the tea gardens indicates improvement. It has improved by efforts of the state. In both the tea garden, 80.73% of the Adivasis are literate and rests 19.20 % are only illiterate and in Doloo tea garden, near about seventh tenth of the Adivasis (69.83%) are literate and only 30.17% persons are illiterate. Besides, in Achabam tea garden, over nine tenth (92.64%) of the Adivasi people are literate and only 7.35% are illiterate.

18. All the Adivasi labourers are dependent on tea garden hospital but in Doloo tea garden, the labourers prefer to going to Silchar Medical College and Hospital, Silchar Civil hospital and private clinics in Silchar due to lack of medicines and proper medical attention whereas in Achabam tea garden labourers never visit to Dibrugarh Medical College and Hospital, private clinic or Naharkatia Block Hospital because they have a good well-qualified doctor with two nurse and one compounder and four ayas (helpers) with 24 hour services. The hospital has got enough medicines from the tea garden authority for the staff and labourers.

19. In the Doloo and Achabam tea gardens, the Adivasis have traditionally depended on rivers and ponds for water. But the Adivasis of both tea gardens have now got P.H.E supply water in each and every line or residential supplied area three times a day. So, now they are used to P.H.E supplied water and in addition they also use well, river and pond water for cleaning clothes and bathing.

20. Latrine facility is part of health and it contributes to health, hygiene and proper living. Both the tea garden authorities, Doloo and Achabam, do not provide proper sanitation. All the Adivasis have kachcha latrines and toilets in their houses. The Adivasi people

have made holes in the ground to make toilets, without water connection. These are made of bamboo and thatched walls.

21. Over three fifth of the Adivasi uses mobile phone and rest 32.67% do not have the phone in the Doloo tea garden and among of them most of the Munda (90%) uses the mobile phone. On the other hand, in Achabam tea garden near about the nine tenth (86%) of the Adivasis uses the mobile phone and rest of the Adivasi do not have the mobile phone and among of them Santhal is highest (96.67%) user of the mobile phone. Thus, in both the tea garden, near about eight tenth (76.67%) of the Adivasis uses the mobile phone and rest 23.33% of the Adivasi do not have the mobile phone. In generally, Adivasi uses the mobile phone to call relative house, friends, tea garden office and some other emergency occasion.

22. In both the tea garden, television and radio are very common elements to all the Adivasis in both the tea garden. Adivasis are entertained the television by various Bengali serials, Bengali and Hindi movies. Bengali and Hindi movie songs are very popular among of them. Sometimes they saw Bagani Dances with songs by higher DVD from local market.

23. Radio is very common instrument for the Adivasi families because it is very easy to use and low cost. The Adivasis listened news on current events of politics, crimes. Radio sports news is very popular. Sometimes, they listen film songs, drama etc. for entertainment.

24. In the tea garden of Doloo, the Adivasis' families are using mechanized mode of transport; viz., bicycle, bus, taxi and sometimes auto riksa for go to Barkhala market, Silchar, Udharband, Silchar Medical College. But in Achabam tea garden only depends on the auto riksa to go Naharkatia, Duliajan and Dibrugarh town for medical treatment, marketing and sometimes they go also relative house.

25. The Adivasis are a large Dravidian group categorized as the Kolarian on linguistic ground. All Adivasis are bilingual and they speak either Bengali or Hindi in Doloo tea garden and Assamese or Hindi in Achabam tea garden in Assam. Their mother tongue belongs to the Austro-Asiatic family of languages like Mundari or Santhali. Now, the present generation of the Adivasis speaks a new dialect which is mixed with Hindi, Bhojpuri, Bengali and Assamese, locally named as Bagani vasha or Sadri in Doloo and in Achabam tea garden.

#### IV. MAJOR FINDINGS

The following are the findings of the study:

##### A. SUBALTERN COUNCIOUSNESS OF THE ADIVASIS EMERGING OUT OF THE WRITTEN SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

There is objective literature based on written documents like books, articles, and news articles and written form of various historical texts etc created by social scientists on tea gardens which started from the last part of 18<sup>th</sup> century in India as well as subjective literature in forms of the writings of the people from the tea gardens which has mostly come up after Independence of India. The written literature highlights the following:



## **1. Historical subjugation, resistance and subalternity of the tea garden labour through the objective literature**

The objective studies tell about discovery of the tea leaf by Shingpho Chief Visaguama and his killing by the Britishers, historical immigration of the labour to Assam from Central India and other parts of India most of whom belonged to Adivasis and low caste Hindus, Chorgala exodus, some British rules regarding tea gardens like the 'breach of contract' by which all the indentured labour became 'slave or bonded labour' under East India Company, monthly wages, socio-cultural discriminations like gender discrimination, caste inequalities, religious rites and ceremonies. All these literary attempts analyse the exploitation of the tea garden labourers by the past and present tea planters as well as revolts, strikes and day-to-day resistance of the labourers (Guha 1981; Sen 1986; Bhattacharjee 1995; Kairi 2010).

After getting the plant from Visaguama, a Shingpho Chief, the British killed him in the Jorhat jail and credited the discovery of the Assam tea plant to themselves. The very first incident that took place with indigenous people of Assam during the establishment of tea garden gives the clue the way planters might have treated the workers in tea gardens in the time that followed ([http://www.fmltea.com/tea\\_info/tea-cultivation.htm](http://www.fmltea.com/tea_info/tea-cultivation.htm)). Sensing the labour crisis in 1837 when tea cultivation started in Assam, the Britishers compelled the local labourers to work in the tea garden but this was failed and, then, planters moved to Central India, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal for indent labour. In this year (1837) the Britishers made another rule for labourers called 'breach of contract' by which all indentured labour became 'slaves', 'Coolie' or 'bonded labour' under the company but nobody knew about the rule. Hence, shameful epic started

with the tea cultivation and terrific system 'Girmit' (black laws) also originated with the labour act. The planters appointed 'Arkatis' as agents to recruit labourers (Bhattacharjee 1995). Assam tea garden labour movement of 1920-21, alongwith the famous 'Chargola Valley'tea labour exodus in early May 1921 as its climax, is probably the most significant episode in the history of Indian labour movements, at least in Eastern India. They, themselves, indulged in all sorts of myth making and accepted Gandhiji as a messiah an Avatar. Their suffering ultimately goaded them to follow the Gandhian path—go back to their village and live a simple and plain life. In 1848, the first strike in tea garden was organized by the tribal people in Assam due to pending wage. In 1859, agitation took place on large scale against arrest of the labour leader Madhuram and the hanging of Maniram Dewan. After that several strikes and lockouts were organized in 50 years that followed (Guha 1981). Sanat Kumar Kairi has analysed the role of tea labour union in mobilizing the labour and fighting against the planters (2010).

## **2. Subalternity and subaltern consciousness of the tea garden labour voiced through the subjective literature**

Kamal Kumar Tanti, a promising young voice in contemporary Assamese poetry, who belongs to the Adivasi tea garden labourer community in Assam writes in his *Marangburu Amar Pita (Our Father Marangburu)* (2007), *Nimnaborgo Somaaj Oitijya (Subaltern Society's Legacy)* (2007) and *Uttar-Ouponibeshik Kabita (Postcolonial Poems)* (forthcoming fiction) subaltern historiography with specific reference to colonial history and culture of Assam. He tells that the Adivasis have not deserted the past-'where we come from'. Subaltern conventions and culture saturated them and their consciousness, reflecting- pain and suffering, love and well-being, the

indescribable dialectic of conflicts that constitute the flow of life and beyond as his poems attempts to expose.

Sanat Kairi's *Cha Sramik O Cha Sramik Unioner Itihas (2010)* basically highlights the history of the tea garden labourers relating with the various revolts and conflicts in the union bodies of the workers, management-worker conflict and conflicts among the different kinds of labourers. He depicted the cultural life of the workers and documented the socio economic, cultural and health related problems in the tea gardens of the valley.

Regarding the tea gardens and labourers particularly social sciences have lot of empirical studies from tea discovery to contemporary socio-cultural and economic problems. These studies do not have any emotion or sentiment because these are purely based on field observations. The subjective writings bring out the sufferings, exploitation, tribulations, pains, pangs and moments of happy life of the labourers including the Adivasis.

Jhumur Pandey in her story *Binti Burir Golpe* depicts the life and tragedies of the life of a female labourer who became a pauper at the end. In her another story entitled *Kharan*, Jhumur Pandey dwells on how the tea labourers started to get organized. She writes "the day when all of their hands will be clutched". The same tune could be separated in the story titled *Dewal*. Another story *Daini* depicts the life of the labourers in the grip of the superstitions. In the story *Adhikar*, she writes how a labourer Biren Majhi became while working in the tea garden. She collected a little sum by working for 20 long years as a labourers but his illness made him penniless. As such, Biren Majhi wonders whether he would still enjoy his right to vote or somebody would cast his vote

before he could reach the polling booth. Is not it a farce in the name of voting? In this story also, she sketch the life of the tea labourers depicted in sorrow and also the deprivation of female labourers. In the novels of Barak Valley, she again writes the aspect of deprivation and oppression of the tea garden labourers. In a fictional literature entitled *Alokjender Purer Koto Kotha*, she analysed the story of joys and sorrows of the people of the tea garden community and also of interior villages. The story superbly elaborates leading the subtle issues like the birth and death of tea gardens, child marriage, illiteracy, half-literate, superstitions and prejudices. The novel brings forth the power structure prevalent in the tea gardens vis a vis the colonial state machinery. In the novel *Alokjender Purer Koto Kotha* she mentioned of the raid by the Lusais, murder of Winchester Sahib, Second World War, dropping of bomb at Derby Tea Estate by the Japanese, appointment at Arkati, the arrival of labourers from outside the valley, set up of railway line at Bhairabi and the evolution of the society of these areas. A description of a love story also flows in its own course in this novel. She also highlighted the routine day to day incidents like the death of Sulochona, marriage of Sumanta, the unfulfilled dream of Subala, the running away of the wife of Pulu etc. All these are parts of a broad canvas wherein she has portrayed the socio-cultural scene of the tea gardens. Not only in the literature of Barak Valley, but the tea community has also contributed to the growth and development of culture of this region. As the labourers have come from various parts of the country, their own cultural traits have assimilated with the culture of Barak Valley. The language spoken by the tea labourers of Barak valley reflects such an instance of assimilation. The rituals and religious beliefs and practices have also witnessed such assimilation. Those who have migrated from Bengali dominated areas, they have a

tendency to do Tusu, Bhadu, Durga Puja, Monosa Puja and the like; whereas those who came from Hindi speaking region observes Chat Puja and other such occasions. In the dramas and play house performances of Barak valley, the culture of the garden has been well depicted. Such play house performances used to take place in the gardens only during certain occasions. Very often the life and its various aspects were depicted in such performances. Apart from this, the *Jhumur Songs* also expressed the everyday events of the life of the tea garden community. They even perform dance to the beats and tune of this *Jhumur Music* which seems like the up and down tides in the life of the labourers. Again, the tea labourers have also molded Durga Puja in their own way. They construct pandals in the garden and do Durga Puja. They also participate in the Durga Puja organized by the Bengalis with much fanfare. Their prolonged stay in this valley have resulted in a change in their habits and customs, dressing, food habits etc., which clearly bears a stamp of the regional influence. The influence of Bengali culture could be found among the tea labourers of Barak Valley, whereas traces of Assamese culture could be discerned among the labourers of Brahmaputra Valley. Apart from this, a multinational version in their residential environment and food habitat could also be observed. Another new addition in the cultural tradition of the tea gardens of Barak Valley is Ganghi Puja, Netaji Puja and Bharat Mata Puja. The culture and tradition of the tea garden community has been well depicted by the litterateurs of Barak valley in her works. She the mention of Poush Parban in *Jol Khaben Bono Durga*. On the day of the festival, Bono Durga went to Dholeswari River before sunrise along with her mother and neighbours to fetch water. After that she went around many houses and had sweets. The silent transformation of the society can be separated in the story titled *Jagai Burir Uttaran*. Jagai Buri was a labourer

in a tea garden. She was a skilled person. She lost many of her near ones due to the conspiracy made by the higher officials of the gardens. Jhumur Pandey in most of her stories has depicted the lives of the tea garden labourers, the torture inflicted upon them, their simple life style and the like. The stories *Belbati*, *Rupantar*, *Bibarna Jyotshna* etc is complete with the culture of the tea garden community. That the wind of transformation is blowing over the tea gardens could be found in the story *Sukh Gacher Golpo* in this story, the author has depicted how with the passage of time, the cultural atmosphere of the tea gardens have underwent a change.

Ashok Varma is also a contemporary writer who is writing on the real life stories of the tea communities, their pains and pathos has often stimulated the emotion and has compelled them to pen down the events related with the lives of tea labourers of Barak Valley. These writings are not mere black words, but rather every word is soaked in emotion. The tea gardens have made a place for themselves in the novels, short stories, poems, drama and songs. That is why the poet wrote:

Eder Sramsikto Dharitrir Upahar ja kichhu

Tar Singhavag oisab swarthapar uchhakangkhi

Bilasi, Dhurta, Lobhira

Niye ney chiniye, Vuliye valiye

Eder Kramer ki habe Brattoy

(Their capability to toil hard is a gift to the earth

However, the lion's share is swallowed by the selfish,

Luxurious, cunning, greedy

They snatch away by cunning lies

Will there be an end to these illegal acts)

Herein shines bright the name of Ashok Verma who has well depicted the story of the toiling masses, as for instance, the story of *Shyam Mamar Goppo* (The Story of Shyam Uncle). In this story, while narrating his memories, Shyam also tells about his experiences of the forest and the garden. His another writing is *Golam*. In this writing he tries to characterize the sense of awareness amongst his fellow men that have reduced them to mere slaves they weep, up till now, abide and have faith in everybody except themselves. He grips that his forefathers responsible for the miseries and the present state of affairs in *Hamare Propitamaha*. His forefather were attracted 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 plant for Britishers profit at the cost of their family's happiness shedding silent tears. They tolerated everything with grin and finally, the writer questions his elders whether submission and humbleness was their only ambition in life.

Yomuna Prasad Swarnakarwrote about the tea labourers came to Barak Valley in the mid of the 19th century, yet almost for a century their literature remained confined to the oral version only. Many opine that Late Yamuna Prasad's *Dinolipi* is the oldest manuscript of the literature of the tea garden community. He has written a number of stories; narratives in both Bengali and Hindi like *Tujhe kiya mila bhagawan*,

*Pathik, Shiv, jivan, pranam tumhe, Unki Avilasha, Naya Varsh, Thandak, Kagaj ka kila, Kiya Rahe Giya, Buddh, Brishtiti, Kartaybya, Cha Rabeti, Hara Rani and Jagriti* were published in *Chal Pathik*.

## B. SUBALTERN CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE ADIVASIS EMERGING OUT OF THE ORAL SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

The tea garden labourers constitute the extreme subaltern of the society in Gramsci's language. Adivasi labourers always thought themselves as to be oppressed people because they are always forced by the tea garden authorities and have low economic status. Here, one can see the relationship of the Adivasi tea garden labourers and the owner as oppressed and oppressor. Due to their economic backwardness and attitude towards the authorities, the labourers have remained the oppressed class in the tea garden. Narratives, songs, poems, riddles etc reveal the subjective experiences of the Adivasi labourers. These are discussed below.

### Politico-economic position of the migrant Adivasi labour

In the nineteenth century the tea garden owners as well as the Britishers 'forcefully migrated' the labourers as well as Adivasis from the regions of Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and Jharkhand who moved out due to various natural or environmental disasters, and famines in their own setting.

One of the tea garden labourer, Dayamoy Munda, narrates:

The Britishers employed, infamously called 'Arkati' who came to us and stayed in our villages for 3 to 4 days and visited each and every household, telling us that he was coming from Assam - the place where money was abundant. He persuaded me if I went with him I would realize how much money was there. He asked whether I wanted to go there. He further said that if I decided to go there, I would be the happiest man of the world'. Furthermore, 'Arkati assured that they would



provide me a big house, large cultivable landholding and huge amount of rice, dal, vegetables, fish, meat and even so many cloths I would get; there was no scarcity; we could live a long life. To this my grandfather agreed to come with them in Assam. Within a week Arkati arranged the rail for us and over thousands of villagers came to Assam. When we reached in Assam, we saw there is nothing except forest (jungle). They were introduced to the Britishers. The sad story started from the time when the Britishers ordered us to clear all the forest area, to cut hills and to grow tea gardens. Arkati had told us that after reaching Assam we would become rich men but in reality he betrayed us and we were made the labourers. These are reflected in following song also:

Chal Mini Assam jabo

Deshe baro dukh re

Assam deshe jabo Mini

Cha bagan ghuriye

**(Source: Dayamoy Munda, age 71, a retired labour of Doloo Tea garden)**

(Oh Mini, come, let's go to Assam; life is so tough in our native land. We will go to Assam and enjoy life in the tea gardens).

And after coming from their homeland to join the tea gardens they felt that the Britishers brought them here for their own interest and they gave them false promises. Another related song is as follows:

Ki nistur Dhaniram

Phaki diya anili Assam

**(Source: Antapriya Bhumij, age 82, a retired labour of Kalain Tea garden)**

(Oh, hard minded Dhaniram, you have cheated us and brought us to Assam. Here, Dhaniram is an Arkati).

One more song reveals the sad story of their life:

Thoke kore niye elore Mini Assamer bagane,  
Chal bole paisha pabi chara gachh hilale  
British shaheb chale gelo hamaderke thoke  
Ekhon amra pore achhi maliker jale.

**(Source: Antapriya Bhumij, age 82, a retired labour of Kalain Tea garden)**

(British Saheb invited us in Assam, saying that money tree is here. He (the Arkati) cheated and left us here. We are still in the trap of garden owners).

The above mentions songs reveal that the Britishers brought the Adivasis to Assam to develop their tea gardens. Dayamoy Munda, a tea garden labour, of Doolo says:

*'Now we are living as bonded labour as they treat us like slaves. We are tortured. At any time, garden manager asks us to do work in his Bungalow.*

Rupak Santhal(26 years old Adivasi boy who is still working in their Bungalow) narrates:

*I am a waiter. I join my duty in the morning at 5.30 in the summer and at 6 in the winter, which it continues till 6 P.M. We do so many outrageous types of work. When the manager comes to the Bungalow, then, he orders me, 'Rupak come here. Open my shoes; clean and keep these in the shoerake'. We did other works like cleaning the toilets, bathrooms and floors of the house and washing clothes. Sometimes we catch fish or kill hen and cook as per their wish. We help them in shopping and other outdoor works also. After finishing all kinds of work, at the end of the day, our daily routine includes to massage head, hands, legs, thighs and even occasionally the whole of the body of many of the family members. If they found any wrong then the whole family of the manager abuses*

*us calling bastard, labourer bachha (child of a labourer), Suyorer bachha (child of a pig) and even they cut our monthly. Sometimes we pay fine also and we are still in the trap of garden owners. We never got any kind of good behaviour or respect from them. We could not do anything without the permission of the tea garden authority.* Concerning this issue, Dayamoy Munda expresses his agony in the following songs:

Ki bolibo Britisher kotha,  
Bolile je lage batha  
Moder chalan korilo Assame  
Rail garilgo chole ghane ghone,  
Desh chere aili Assam,  
Bhulaligo desher nam,  
Assam ashe khuloli bagan,  
banai dili hamrar sonar Assam  
jangol jhar katoli,  
duthu mutha taroli,  
gara dhipa karli saman  
banai dili hamrar sonar Assam  
Haire bidhi ki likhile  
dukh bina shukh na bujhile  
faki diya anili Assam  
banai dili hamrar sonar Assam

**(Source: Dayamoy Munda, age 71, a retired labour of Doloo Tea garden)**

(Britishers transported us from our homeland to Assam by train. We became the labourers and did all the odd jobs of clearing the forests, cutting hills and growing tea gardens. We have converted Assam into a golden one. No one understands the pain that Britishers have given to us).

From the above songs one can feel the agony and pain of the indentured labour which migrated to the tea plantations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The lyrics go on to describe how their dream was shattered by backbone breaking work in the tea gardens and bungalow of managers.

The attitude of the garden authority can be understood from the narrative from one of the tea garden labourers Antapriya Bhumij :

*Government is nothing for us as it does not pay to us. But Government may direct to the garden authority to increase the salary and provide other better facility to us however, ultimate decision can be taken only by the authority. If the authorities have will to solve all the problems of the tea garden labourers, they can do it. But they never do it'.*

She said that 'Jhumur', songs revealed their pathetic life in the tea gardens. Jhumur songs voiced the sorrows and sufferings of the tea garden life, their history of painful migration and transition to the present life. These songs reflect (subaltern) consciousness their daily struggle to survive in the gardens as well.

**(i) Sorrows and happiness in Daily Life**

Adivasi daily life in the tea gardens is communicated in jhumur song as they have to start work every day in the morning at 6 a.m. The long deafening siren just sounded at the Doloo Tea Estate in the Cahar District of Assam and thousands of other workers like Antopriya Bhumij also leave home hurriedly. She iterates:

*The Line Chaukidar (in-charge of the labourers' settlement) had announced two hours ago, even before the sunrise- "Parmet motachalan (permanent listed male workers) will go for plucking to the Line No. 7 Bagan (plantation plot bearing No.7); the faltu maiki chalan (the temporary women workers) will go for Kolom Kata (pruning) at the No. 8 Bagan; the Chhokra Chalan (the adolescent boys) will go for nalakora (deepening of drains) and the Chhokri Chalan (the adolescent girls) will do Thonga Bhora (filling soil in plastic packets for nursery) at the Line No. 7 Bagan".*

Antopriya Bhumij lives with her husband and children at the Tila Line No. 12 of the Doloo Tea Estate. She wakes up before 4.30 a.m., and she walks for 45 -50 minutes to the tea plantation for defecation. Many other women like her have to rise up before it is bright as later on all men wake up and use the same plantation area for defecation. She quickly sweeps the house; boils some rice and vegetables and serves meal to her husband who also has to leave for work. As she expected, the *Sardar*(supervisor) uses so many abusive words and does not allow her to work because she arrived late by 15 minutes. He shouts:

*"Go back home, why did you come here? Why did you come late? Have you now come to show your body to us?"*

She pleads him to allow her to work. Loss of a day's wage is loss of food for the family. She is finally allowed. After she pruned some 40 tea bushes, her energy drains out. The *Sardar* again hurls abuses. If she is unable to complete the quantum of the task given to her, the wage for that day is sliced down to half. Back home in the evening, her children collect fire wood and she cooks food and feeds the family. It is time to retire at 10-11 p.m. Since there is no electricity, and no other task to do, she happily retires to bed.

She has to wake up before it is bright which takes place by 4.30 a.m. in the garden there.

The labourers express this condition of theirs in the following song:

Sairon sairon bajalo offisetelo

Uthlo Minir ma

kame jate hobe,

Akashete uthe rabi

phul phothe bane bane

dale dale pakhi gan kore lo,

phule phule moumachhi ure

Chokidarer hak sona jay

jate hobe sat nombare,

Sairon sairon bajalo offisetelo

Uthlo Minir ma

kame jate hobe,

noita bajle ghuraye dibe,

sharakete shaheb ache,

nambarete bejan pati achhelo,

bela hale gali lutaye jabe,

Sairon sairon bajalo offisetelo

Uthlo Minir ma

kame jate hobe.

**(Source: Krishna Teli, age 16, (nephew of Mukunda Teli and student of Doloo**

**Higher Secondary School)**

(Mini's mother wakes up in the morning with the office siren reminding them of the garden duty. She notices the morning Sun's, coolness, birds' chirruping and eye-catching green trees and honey bees collecting nectar. Watchman announces the venue for the day's work. She has to reach in time, otherwise the British official waiting on the way will not let her pluck tea leaves for the day and replace her with someone else)

The above song reveals that every day labourers go to work in the tea garden for plucking tea leaves with the office siren and anybody reaching late is not allowed to join the work, resulting in even loss of the job.

If the labourers do not get wages fully they cannot survive. Without permission how to pluck the leaves for their survival. Antapriya Bhumij, a retired tea garden labourer of the Kalain Tea Garden narrates the following song:

Cha gachhete phul phutechhe re dhala dhala

Ore dekho bhaya

Shei gachhete modhu ache

Bache hamder pran

Ore dekho bhaya

Rode puri, jale bhiji

tobu-o pata tuli

ore jhaki jhaki

sirish gacher tale goli dhor

tobu-o pata tuli

ore jhaki jhaki

**(Source: Antapriya Bhumij, age 82, a retired labour of Kalain Tea garden)**

(The tea plants are full of white flowers; have honey which saves our lives. We keep on plucking tea leaves in abundance without worrying about sun heat and unpouring rains. The Shirish trees indicate our path in the garden).

It is revealed that:

*After having plucked tea leaves when we come back to the quarter; sometimes we are suffering from fever, stomachache, diarrhoea etc. But nobody feels our sufferings in daily life. How do we survive in the tea garden? When we live with free hand, then we collect honey from tea trees and sell it in the local market and after getting the money we buy rice, dal, oil and sometimes fish as well.* She also described history of tea garden saying that it was established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The following song inform about when the tea garden owner as well as the Britishers brought them here and started their oppression:

Assam deshe kacha sona chai ke bagan re

Kato naro nari dekhi rakhilo pran

Seito sabai jane,

Bagane janmili jakhon

dukkho achhe sarakkhan

chal bhaja cha pani rakhilo pran

Seito sabai jane,

Bina kheyte rakhilo pran

Seito sabai jane.

**(Source: Antapriya Bhumij, age 82, a retired labour of Kalain Tea garden)**



(Tea is a green gold of Assam. But so many tea labourers have starved to death. Only black tea and roasted rice is there to save the life).

The Britishers indentured them to the tea gardens of Assam. After coming from their homeland the tea garden owner engaged them for preparing the tea garden with very low wages. So the labourers could not purchase the necessary commodities to survive due to unaffordable high prices. In that time, they took only black tea and roasted rice. And that is why so many tea labourers lost lives that time. According to her 'This is our daily life; we have accustomed to it since our childhood'.

**(ii) The Labour breeds labour only-Perpetuation of exploitation**

The labourers are trapped in such a life in the tea gardens as their generations cannot come out of the trap. Their children are born and brought up in the pathetic conditions and are destined to be labour only.

In this respect Antopriya Bhumij tells:

*We are born and brought up here. We are growing in the pathetic condition. Everyday we are struggling with unhappiness. Money and power whatever we do not have. We have only the crises and sorrows in our life.*

She expresses the plight in the following song:

Sabuj pata sabuj dale  
kato rango khela  
Cha bagichay cha sabuj ranger meye chheler mela  
haigo meye chheler mela  
Hamra joto Assam basi cha patay mora

cha bagichay cha sabuj ranger meye chheler mela

haigo meye chheler mela

Kine de ma hamke chhopi chhata,

hamke chhopi chhata

Tor sange jabo mago thika pata

mago thika pata.

**(Source: Antapriya Bhumij, age 82, a retired labour of Kalain Tea garden)**

(In the garden of green tea leaves one looks many other colours coming up; even one looks a collection of green people. We all inhabitants of Assam are wrapped in the green tea leaves. O mother! Buy me a Chhopi Chhatav (large hat made of tea leaves). I too as a contractual labour will also accompany you for plucking tea leaves. )

From this song it is revealed that one comes to know how the children of the tea garden labourers are socialized into the contractual labour. The infants in the tea garden labour families acquire the skills necessary for a functioning member of their society in order to survive.

**(iii) Consciousness of self existentiality**

The adivasi labourers are conscious of their existence in the given situation and the life they live. As it reflects in the following song expressing love:

jokon fulti kali chhilo takhon vramora ailo gelo

ebe vramor kon fule mojilo

purana pirit chere vromor natune mojilo

nabo nabo tarulata, kusume sajilo

emon samoye shakha bideshe rohilo

purana pirit chere vromor natune mojilo  
pirit pirit bisama pirit, piritike bolego valo  
bideshi sange prem koriye, hamar vabite pran gelo  
purana pirit chere vromor natune mojilo  
antore jala dilohe, hamar panjorai sel dilo  
purana pirit chere vromor natune mojilo

**(Source: Haren Bhumij, age 18, a student of Achabam tea Garden in Dibrugarh)**

Above song states that love is the common factor of human being. Tea garden labourers also fall in love. Haren Bhumij said, an Adivasi boy changes his lover every time when the new one comes to him. He explains again change is universal phenomena. Without change life becomes sluggish (boar).

Another song reveals the feelings of the folks after marriage;

Pita mata diye biday,  
Kanya swami grihe jay  
Mitir kutumb sabaik kadai  
Hai grihe udash bohe jai  
Bidhir bidhan eikhan chalite je tai  
Swami grihe tui chole jabi,  
Swami sathe sukhe sangsar garibi  
Swami prabhuke deva sama gayan karibi  
Pita matak na volaibi  
Hamder katha sada mone rakhibi

**(Source: Himangsu Baraik, age 18, a student of Achabam Tea garden)**

In the Adivasi society, marriage is one of the holy rituals. At the day of marriage Adivasi women collectively perform dances with song. The above song reveals that husband is the pravu like God. After completing the rituals bride goes to the husband's house. After the bride leaves the family members miss her much.

**(iv) Expressions of exploitative patterns of the tea garden authority**

The cruelty of the tea garden owners and the Britishers which the founding labour of the tea gardens in Assam faced. The masters extracted their even without providing them fair compensation. Hence, the song relates to the nature of exploitation of the labourers:

Chal Mini Assam jabo  
deshe baro dukh re  
Assam deshe jabo Mini  
cha bagan ghuriye  
O dada Dhaniram  
Shaheb bale kam kam  
Babu bale dhore aan  
Shardar bole nibo pihther cham  
O dada Dhaniram  
Kodal mara baro kathin kam  
Ek poysar puthi mach  
Kaya gharer tel go  
Nonir bape mange jodi  
Aaro dibo jhol go

**(Source: Antapriya Bhumij, age 82, a retired labour of Kalain Tea garden)**

(O, Mini, come let's go to Assam. Our life is so tough in our native place. We will go to Assam and enjoy the tea gardens. Mini send message to her brother, Dada Dhaniram—O Dada Dhaniram, Babu, orders to work and only to work, Shaheb challenges not let us escape and Sardar threatens to beat us and de-skin our back and Mud cutting with a spade is very tough. Then you will able to buy a handful of Puthi fish, which you can cook only by borrowing oil from some other's house. And after feeding the whole family only gravy is left for the second serving).

This song clearly highlights the history and enlightens us about the piteous condition of the earlier tea garden labourers who were physically oppressed by the owners. The labourers were sometimes beaten by the manager, Assistant manager, sardar, tila babu and even by the arkatti (agent). They were always threatened that if they did not work obediently then their entire family would be destroyed. They did not have sufficient food, though the Britishers guaranteed them to provide ration in every household of the labour family in proper way. It was all false.

Dayamoy Munda brings out the daily exploitation which they undergo in their daily life

Sramiker sukher jibone

Ke anilo dukhe bhara

Hamder sukh santi

kere nilo kara

bhai kere nilo kara

Sramik shoshon korlo jara

Chhira jama kapor pore

Sramik roilo bhanga ghare

Hamder sukh santi

kere nilo kara

bhai kere nilo kara

Sramik shoshon korlo jara

British shaheb ke tariye diye

Deser nagorik holo saheb

Dakho! paka building banailo

kara bhai

Sramik shoshon korlo jara

**(Source: Dayamoy Munda, age 71, a retired labour of Doloo Tea garden)**

(The tea labourers lived in a very bad condition. They were exploited to the abyss. Who exploited these labourers? The Britishers started this exploitation and thereafter, our own country men became Shahebs. Our exploitation continues. Till date the exploiters live in the concrete houses; the laboures still live in the broken huts. Now, the exploiters are our own countrymen.)

Dayamoy Munda narrates:

*Tea garden labourers have been exploited in every way of life. When their forefathers came in the tea gardens in 150 years ago, they thought that Assam was very nice place. If they go there, then they would be able to bring happiness to their families. But it was a lie. They worked very hard yet they did not get the wage, food, house and clothes they were entitled to. So they were put into a very bad condition. At the time of Independence in August 1947, when the Britishers*

*left, the labourers thought of to be salvaged from their pathetic world but nothing happened to meet their expectation. Situation did not change as our own countrymen have become the managers and the owner’.*

The managers and other officials oppressed the tea garden labourers in various ways and Naresh Bhumij through the following song:

Ek nambore pata tula,  
Dui nambore ojon  
Pati tulogo Mini tin patar niche  
Gali pahi dharo age age,  
Ailo ojoner gari  
Bar hobigo दौरा दौरि,  
Babur kolomgo Mini ghore rai rai  
Kiba ojon sale,  
Bhalo kore re babu ojon saribi  
Gariber hok na maribi.

**(Source: Naresh Bhumij, age 58, a carpenter of the Doloo Tea Garden)**

(There are specific lines for plucking tea leaves and weighing them. Only three soft leaves have to be plucked from a tea twig. Once the weighing vehicle reaches in the garden, hustle-bustle starts among the leaf pluckers to finish their work and to leave for home. The leaf collectors weigh hurriedly cheating the labourers. The labourers request the leaf collectors to weigh properly, as they are unfortunate and poor people).

This narration reveals that after tea plucking; the labourers submitted the tea leaves to the leaf collectors. Each and every labourer plucked 21 kg per day and got Rs

77/- Rs per day. But the leaf collectors cheated or pilferaged the leaves and every day they faced the said situation. So, the labourers generally lost some part of their daily wage.

After the exploitation and oppression labourers express their feelings and thoughts which is being given under the following case.

Vaisa jok

hami heki vaisa jok

loker deher khun chuse chuse

hamar gat vaki kori

gater boj lite nahi pabe

chuchrai chali hami hamar deha

Roje hamar dusraker

khun chusar dhanda

kintu jobe hamar mukhe gire nimkher chitka

ahedin naikiya hoy hamar vaisa joker ahangkarita

Hamar rakam vaisa joker

aj kal manusher majheo janma hoiche

orao nirdoshi sadaran manusher khun chuse chuse

nijor sampatti brididi kore



Dukhiya janaganer kandoner aoyaj vaisa joker kane nai ghuche

ohe khatir ora oja jai

akh bondho kore

Manusher majher vaisa jokder vi

ekdin moron dasa hobek

ohedin dukhiya, shosit bhai bohin

hasi hasi jibek

**(Source: Himangsu Baraik, age 18, a student of Achabam Tea garden)**

Above folk songs reveal that the Britishers handed over the tea plantation in Assam to Indian Government as well as private owners at time of Independence and the labourers rejoiced that now Indian Government will understand their problems, sympathetically but actually the situation is totally different. Our Indian owner/ manager compelled us to more work with very less salary. They got more profit from our labour. Now the labourers are more exploited by the owners socially, economically and culturally also. Even though, the labourers expect that all the unhappiness will have to remove from our life. The labourers can punish them (owners/ manager).

**(vi) Consciousness of Self- protection and existentiality**

Chail geli golaghat

barpathar sarupathar

ar chail geli uriam ghat

dop dop kai jaliche tar ghar

goru bachhru hai gelo char

mor didi ga jalai dilo tor ghar  
dui hajar chaidda chane  
bar August mahina me  
daya maram nai charkarer  
sibire tor naiko apan ghar  
mor didi ga kandi kandi bohi che lor  
kohile koha jay  
na kohile pran hil jay  
Acham desher janajati chuke kune  
kandi ache mone mone  
mor didi ga jalai dilo tor ghar

**(Source: Mangal Hembram, age 63, a Leader (Mukhiya),  
Chemgelijan,Jaipur,Naharkatia Dibrugarh)**

Mangal Hembram dedicated this song for tea tribe those who died in the santhal and Bodo' clashes in lower Assam and he told that the tea garden labourers are very poor, weakest people of the state. All the Adivasi belong to the below the poverty line. They do not have well furnished house. They live in a type of hut which is made of bamboo and mud wall with tin roof and this is the weakness of the Adivasis and other tribes took this advantage. Bodo people smolder their houses in the lower Assam. Bodo and other tribes thought that tea tribe is not indigenious of tribe of Assam, not the 'son of the soil'. They are migrants here, destroying our food and property. Its impact comes to the upper Assam also. But the state govt was silent. They do nothing for Adivasis. Even political leaders did not express any sympathy.

**(vii) The Agonies and Pains of the Adivasi Labourers**

Ha mujhe janam leli, chai bagan majhe re

Baganiya jibon baro dukher jibone

Jingani katali, dhire dhire boro holi

Baganiya dasa dekhi,

Ali pahar gali kinar, chai bagan ghurali

Bagane janmili jakhon,

dukkh ache sarakkhan

Chal bhaja cha pani rakhilo jibon

seito sabe jane.

**(Source: Dayamoy Munda, age 71, a retired labour of Doloo Tea garden)**

(The tea garden labourers including the Adivasi opine....We are born in the tea gardens and the life here is very pathetic. Gradually, we have grown up in these gardens, roamed around and learnt how tough the life is in this garden. And we have realized that, since we have born in the tea gardens our life is to be very tough. Black tea and roasted rice are all what we survive on).

The life of the tea garden labourers is very painful because they are property less and they do not have anything to live on. The correct information is about the realities of the gardens was concealed by the Britishers from their forefathers and it continues; they are born in this pathetic life situation. Nobody listens their voice. Black tea and roasted rice are all what they got and survived on. The riddle stated by Antopriya Bhumij makes the meaning explicit. It is as follows:

Machh maribi khaibi shukhe

Lekha pora korile moribi dukkhe

**(Source: Antapriya Bhumij, age 82, a retired labour of Kalain Tea garden)**

(The tea garden owners try to convince us by saying: Catch fish; eat meal and live in peace. If you start going to school then, your life will be horrible.)

The Britishers convinced labourers that if labourers started going to school then their life would become horrible. It means that they will be happy and comfortable by remaining illiterate only. The actual intention behind such persuasion is that if the simple and credulous labourers started to go to the school then they would come to understand all things about the Britishers. If the labourers got education in a proper way, then, they would come out from their clutches and never work in the garden. So, anyhow, by hook or crook, the owners always tried to retain the labourers on the gardens and exploited them.

**(viii) Ideology, rights, identity and self respect**

Integrity grows up from consciousness and anybody can feel it when a threat comes from an antagonist. The tea garden labourers are the weakest section of the society. They could not express their demands and problems in the gardens controlled by the Britishers. The following song explains their consciousness and integrity:

Bhul bhul kariye

Chhare aili hamder deshke

Hamra roibo na ar

parer kathay bhuliye

jage uthar samoy hoyechhe,

jago jago bhaire

Roibo na ar guman kore

hamra roibo na ar

parer kathay bhuliye,

jage uthar samoy hoyechhe,

jago jago bhaire.

**(Source: Gopal Bhumij, age 56, a leader of the CPI (M) and official staff of the Doloo Tea Garden)**

(The labourers were told by the planters and Arkatis to forget their own native land and the planters brought them here. But now they will no more let others (planters) take advantage out of them. They appeal to their fellow-workers/brothers to wake up and not to allow others to play with their sentiments any more.)

Gopal Bhumij, further, narrates the history of the tea garden labour, telling how the Britishers forced them to forget their homeland for better fortunes and made them tea garden labour in Assam. The labourers call upon each and every labourer to realize one's problems and not to allow others to take advantage from them as they are weaker people and their weakness should not be exploited any more.

Thus, there is appeal for unity and awakening. The following song clearly brings out this spirit of the labourers:

Bhul bhul bhular pathe

Bhabchina kono sromik bhai

Hamra ekotar abhabete,  
porechhi sobai hai hai pichhonete  
Jati dharmo nirbisesesh kari  
Chal hamra jege uthi  
Hamra ekotar abhabete,  
porechhi sobai hai hai pichhonete

**(Source: Dayamoy Munda, a retired labour of the Doloo Tea garden)**

(No more can we be fooled; let's unite irrespective of caste and religion. Come let's wake up. Until we are united, we will not be able to develop).

According to him:

*Tea garden labourers are lagging behind on the ground of education, daily wage, medical and housing facilities; labourers always suffer identity crisis as they are not given the Scheduled Tribe status and they ask whether they are the 'sons of the soil of Assam' or of any other state in the country. They are the stateless people in India.*

So he feels that they have to integrate with each other. If they are never united then they will not be able to develop. This sense of unity is composed in to the following song:

Hamra anbo natun din  
Dui bela dui mutho anno jutte  
More achhi bhai ai jibone.  
Jibone laguk surjo alo  
Phuleri gandhe bharuk pran  
Bidhiro bidhane shrame shosone

Uthechhe awaj khane kane

Bejechhe ranadanka

Kaj chay Kaj chay

aath ghanta

Hamra anbo natun din.

**(Source: Dayamoy Munda, age 71, a retired labour of Doloo Tea garden)**

(We will have better days. Just to manage two morsels of rice twice a day we struggle whole life. May our lives be brightened with new rays of sun and filled with fragrance of flowers. As our destiny has ruled, we are in the vicious circle of exploitation and hard work.

Voice has started rising against the system all around and we are uniting for a revolution to change our life drastically. We will work for eight hours a day only.)

The labourers do not struggle collectively against the exploiters then nobody else will bring the good days for us; that their voice has started rising against the system all around and we are uniting for the revolution of change and we never work more than eight hours a day. Sometimes they want to resist using the following kind of riddle:

Jo hota hai achha

O hota hai sour ka bachha

(Those who live well are the piglets)

**(Source: Antapriya Bhumij, age 82, a retired labour of Kalain Tea garden)**

Some of the famous riddles are used by the tea garden labourers in each and every tea garden in Assam. This is the mythical voice of tea garden labourers to resist or protest against the tea garden authority.

The riddle shows how the labourers scorn off the exploiters and refuse to accept their superiority on moral grounds.

Slogans are also used to express a message about the demand as well as service. It reflects the consciousness. A slogan's message can include information about the quality of the life. A slogan can be used for a powerful cause where the impact of the message is essential to the cause. The slogan can be used to raise awareness about a current situation. Slogans when combined with action can provide an influential foundation for a cause to be seen by its intended audience. Sociologically slogan is bearing some voice of the society which has some important aims and objectives. Some slogans made by leaders and tea garden labourers collectively are as follows:

Inqlub jindabad

Sramik aikko jindabad

(Long live labour's unity)

Duniar majdur ek hou

(Appeal for universal unity of labour)

Aamader dabi mante hobe

Naile sangram chachhe chalbe

(Accept our demands, otherwise revolution will continue)

Larai larai larai chai

Ei larai tomar larai aamar larai



Larai kore bachte chai

(We want struggle; this is your struggle, we will struggle for our existence)

Lal jhanda kare pukar

Inqlub jindabad

(Let's unite under the red flag)

Aadha roti pura kam

Nehi chalega

(Half wage for full work will not be acceptable)

Mang hamari pura koro

jaldi karo

Aabhi karo jaldi karo

(Accept what we demand, now and now only)

Shahid swarane apon marone

Rakto rin sodh korun

Shahider rakte ranga lal pataka tule dhorun

**(Source: Gopal Bhumij, age 56, a leader of the CPI (M) and official staff of the Doloo**

**Tea Garden)**

(Come, let's unite and uphold the flag, which soaked in the red colour, i.e., blood. Let us remember our own martyrs, to whom we are indebted)

From the above statement it is made clear that these are the voices of marginal people who are oppressed and exploited in every way for the last 163 years (Doloo garden) and still it is continued by the native tea owners. The tea garden labourers in Assam never received attention of development agencies of the state. So, the tea garden labourers are raising their voice under the flags of various organizations like AASA, INTUC, ABCMS, etc. Another song of integrity was narrated by Mangal Hembram is as follows:

Chand mama, chand mama  
dudu vatu de  
hamar babur ghum parabo  
dudu vatu de.  
babur mai babur mai  
ki kore debo dudu vat?  
ato dure acho tora  
kemone dibo dudu vat?  
sikkha nai dikkha nai  
thak adhokare  
juge juge andharer majhe  
par koro din ar rait.  
tai bolchi  
e babu mai, e babu mai  
sunele hamor kotha  
sona chandi, platinum

aru anek dhatu thasathasi kore ache  
chand mamar buke,  
rasa chaina, koria japan  
varat amerika  
sabar khatir khola ache chand mamar desh  
mamar deshe asbi jodi  
tarao gomer ghor  
uthau babuke deo sikkha  
biggan prajuktir.  
toder deshe srihorikotale  
ure chandra jan  
asbi hole mamar deshe ganer puchhri dhar.

**(Source: Mangal Hembram age, 63 a Leader (Mukhiya),  
Chemgelijan,Jaipur,Naharkatia Dibrugarh)**

From the above songs reveals that tea tribe have been suffering from poverty, illiteracy, health problem etc. It is their daily life. 'Below standard living' is common for all the Adivasis in the tea gardens. But the tea garden labourers have different experiences. Adivasis felt that education is necessary for us. Now it is our dream to educate our children with a subject of technology. Without it they could not survive in the new, technological world. The labourers hope that education may remove our poverty.

(ix) **Consciousness of protest against oppression and for self protection**

Chowdishe aji hahakar  
kone baru koribo protikar  
jiyai thakibar babe,  
sakoloke lage aji adhikar  
amar Assam sonar Assam buli  
chhatra jibonat koy sakolore  
rajnitar patharat name  
dur buddhi ku niti khele  
apon manuhar sathe  
kora annay prabonchana  
nijor sarthor babe  
tumi danar hobo nowra  
nowra bechibo tomar mon magaju  
chini pao ami bhadratar arat  
lukai thoka prakito chehera  
swadhinata biki deowar artho ami bujo  
kintu eko koribo noyabo  
nisar andhokaro bilin hoe jay  
nayor dabi, prappa adhikar  
khudra swarthar sagarat  
kenekoi paharim amar adhikar  
protibador katha

nirbibade herai jay  
pratibadkarir nisfal asa  
binimoyot matho pao ami  
nirasa kebol nirasa.

**(Source: Chunka Hambram, age 67, a Community leader of Santhal, Chemgelijan,  
Jaipur, Naharkatia in Dibrugarh)**

According to Chunka Hembram the labourers have right to protest against corruption in the tea garden and in the government. He says that tea garden manager hides the provident fund money, shoe, hospital medicine, scholarships for poor students of the tea garden schools. On the other hand, govt did not accord the ST status that's why the labourers did not get facilities like education, job etc from the government. Besides, some of the political leaders cleverly exploit the labourers. When elections come to the door, leaders also come to us and so many promises are showered upon us but when the elections are over all the promises are belied. For that reason all the labourers are hopeless both from the tea garden managers or the political leaders.

Till now, the Santhals are practicing mother tongue in their daily life in the tea gardens. They always remember their mother land. They try to forget it but they cannot. That's why they have composed songs in Santhali and have dedicated the song to Siddhu and Kanhu. The Santhal tea garden labourers believe that Siddhu and Kanhu are god fathers or great ideal Sage. Chunka Hambram told that the following these song is a hidden mantra of the Santhal community to inspiring assert about what they deserve and to stand united and to proceed towards a new direction.

(i)

Chadan dadataleme

Chadam dada lagayem

Chadam dada madane malin

(o! brothers, unite your horses

Rush to the battle field

We are with pale faces)

(ii)

Chand banga nehrate marang buru joharem

Chand bhayor sanggete

Chidu kanhu chadam chetan re.

(You pray to the god, Marang buru,

march accompanying the brothers of the Moon Dynasty.

Siddu and Kanhu are on the Horseback)

(iii)

De ja boyha delaja bakayha

Hud hud gud gud damanike

British raja lagayeye bon

(Come all our brothers

Come in groups and gather in the same vanue

As we are to drive away the British)

(iv)

Hulaban hulah kaban

Lagah abon lapadh hai

Abowakah disam daban tahadh dahaya

(We will revolt; we will revolt in large gatherings

and will fight to save our motherland)

(v)

Relgarhi paiya chetan khirh khirh

Dah chetan lauka jahaj khad khad

Cherma- re udah jahaj han hanah kan

(Trais are running over us with the sound khir khir

Ships are running with the sound khad khad on the water

Aeroplanes are moving in our sky)

(v)

Ah dada chap pe

char boyha arag pe

Hara buru dharti daban dul dulau-wa

( come with bows and arrows

Shoot with arrows

Blow the war trumpets

So the we can quiver our dharti ma)

(vi)

Hul boyha lagoyen

Bandhuk hou chadeyen  
Adi adi mayam dahou bohelen  
Sidhu Kanhu karham red char-da parayen-hou boyha  
(Movements have passed over  
Guns have roared  
Rivers of blood have have flowed over us  
Arrows penetrated the chests of Sidu Kanhu)

**(Source: Chunka Hambram, age 67, a Community leader of Santhal, Chemgelijan,  
Jaipur, Naharkatia in Dibrugarh)**

According to him, the Santhals are a Munda tribe, a branch of that aboriginal element which entered India and brought to through North Bengal and the North- East by the British Tea planters. They were basically hunters and jungle dwellers and agriculturalist. The religion is animistic; spirits (bongas) are everywhere around them. The Santhal Parganas is a district, lying about 150 miles north of Calcutta, was formed into a separate administration after the Santhals had risen in rebellion in 1856. Santhali is an agglutinative language of great regularity and complexity but when the Santhals came in contact with the races speaking an Aryan language it is apt to become corrupted with foreign idioms.

The Santhals were scattered in the regions of Jharkhand, Chhotanagpur, Chhatisgarh and other parts of India by the British people. Siddhu and Kanhu, two matyrs of mid nineteenth century, embraced death penalty in the movement against the British policy of land and revenue system and have become a paramount source of inspiration for



the followers of later times. Folksongs were composed after those two freedom fighters and these songs are alive in Assam till now.

Finally, the subaltern nature of the labourers is present in the inactiveness of the labourers i.e., they could not manage their affairs without the help of others (leaders) and predominance of the owners that's why Gramsci used the term *hegemony* to denote the predominance of one social class over others (e.g., *bourgeois hegemony*). This represents not only political and economic control, but also the ability of the dominant class to project its own way of seeing the world so that those who are subordinated accept it as 'common sense' and 'natural' and in relation with the predominant aspect. CPI (M) leader Gopal Bhumij said:

*The labourers assumed to be predominated and conceived it the only way of life. That is, if manager/owner is happy then we are also happy. The labourers accept the domination of the superior. It is the nature of the labourers. On the other hand, manager/owner is the superior of the society like god or god father and we try to make him happier, which is our duty'.*

They thought of being powerless, saying that they do not have any power, it may be economic or political, social and cultural which Gramsci is called hegemony and it is a condition in which subaltern people feel that they do not have the power to carry out their mission. There is a sense of meaninglessness, i.e., a condition in which subaltern labourers find that they cannot foretell the outcomes of their action. They feel social isolation, i.e., the condition of being segregated from normative society at large and live in a state of self-estrangement in the garden setting, i.e., the tendency to act in ways that are opposed to one's self interest.

## **Conclusion**

The lives of the tea garden labourers was uncertain, horrendous and made hopeless by the hardheaded organized strategy of the Britishers as well as the planters. The labourers are still going through traumas of the low cost of work, high price of daily obligatory commodities, insufficiency of rations like rice, wheat, oil, dal, fire wood etc. and illness for lack of nutrition, death, oppression, exploitation, physical torture etc. in the tea garden and they are also expressively oppressed because of the authority's everyday behaviour like scolding and harassing the labour in various way through the managers. The tea labourers did not get any respect from the tea garden authorities. The tea garden labourers were highly underprivileged in all respects of social, cultural, economic, educational and political life. Oppression and exploitation as well as torture by the tea garden authorities have agonised them for all these years of the plantation in Assam. Therefore, the tea garden workers have been sometimes rising to protest against the owners of the tea gardens. They have protested against exploitation by going on strikes, agitating and resisting in their everyday life in the gardens and the same is going on.