Encountering State: A Study of State–Society Interface in the Tea Garden Labour Community of the Brahmaputra Valley, Assam

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Declaration

I, Sumit Kumar Sarma, hereby declare that the matter embodied in this thesis, entitled, **"Encountering State: A Study of State–Society Interface in the Tea Garden Labour Community of the Brahmaputra Valley, Assam"** is the result of investigations carried out by me in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Mithilesh Kumar Jha.

In keeping with the general practice of reporting observations, due acknowledgements have been made wherever the work described in based on findings of other investigators and authors. The sources of secondary data used in this thesis are duly acknowledged. The work has never been submitted either in whole or part to any other university for a research degree.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled, **"Encountering State: A Study of State–Society Interface in the Tea Garden Labour Community of the Brahmaputra Valley, Assam"** submitted by Mr. Sumit Kumar Sarma, Reg. No. 166141004, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, embodies bonafide record of research work carried out under my supervision and guidance.

The present thesis or any part thereof has not been submitted to any other University for the award of any degree or diploma.

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Mithilesh Kumar Jha

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Abstract

This thesis examines the link between society and the state by exploring the everyday lives of communities located at the margins of the Indian state. This study argues that a meaningful way to understanding processes like state-building, democratisation and participation is to examine them at micro-levels. This work attempts to study people's experience and engagement with the state in their everyday lives. To a large extent, we can understand it by looking into the processes associated with governance in the local contexts.

The thesis has three primary research objectives: First, to examine how the state makes itself 'visible' to the marginal population in the context of welfare-oriented policies and laws of the government; second, to explore the impact of the state in the daily lives of most of the people, in this case, the tea garden labourers in Assam, as seen from the working of the everyday state in a tea garden society; third, to analyse the participation of people at margins in the working of the state at the local level by making use of the legislative means (like decentralisation) to rework the state. The study represents the multiple ways in which political actions are deployed by people living at the margins in their interactions with the state by looking into the implementation of welfare provisions in the tea garden areas in the context of the present study.

The tea-garden community, also known as *Adivasis*, forms an essential part of the modern State of Assam, India's largest tea producing province. The tea industry in India has a long history of almost 200 years, with early plantations in upper Assam districts in the early decades of the 19th century. Being a labour-intensive industry, many workers, popularly known as 'Coolies', were brought in from Tribal areas of Central and Eastern India. The colonial planters brought such labours under the legal provisions of 'Workman's Breach of

Contract Act XII, 1859' and the amended form 'Act of 1865'. The present study navigates through laws and attempts to explain the relevance of rules in the making of the community. The post-independent laws like the Plantation Labour Act of 1951, which directly bears the lives of the tea garden workers, have been dealt with in the thesis to understand the community's rights and privileges better. Even today, many studies and reports suggest that the community faces physical isolation, poor mobility within the power hierarchy, limited livelihood and education opportunities resulting in a slow socio-economic development of the community.

The Khumtai Tea Estate, the study site, is home to more than 1500 tea garden workers who work in various capacities in the estate- ranging from a large number of unskilled labours, both male and female, to a handful of clerical staff. The study is based on interviews, household surveys, focus group discussions and non-participant observation of the relation between the 'state' and the 'people'. A total of 5 focus group discussions and a household survey of 150 respondents were carried out to understand the crucial issues that affect the lives of the tea garden communities. A large part of the work is based on personal interviews with workers, political leaders, academicians and individuals who represent the 'state' at the local level. It implies that a significant way to understand processes like state-building, democratisation and participation is to study them at micro-levels.

The study emphasises an intrinsic link between the people's everyday practices at the margins, which is complex, multifaceted, and multi-layered. This recognition came with the view that people placed in different positions have differing ideas of 'state'. They experience it differently. In dissecting the interaction between a democratic state and an individual, the study contributes to understanding the cognitive and attitudinal change essential for

empowering a marginalised community. The work attempts to study people's experience and engagement with the state in their everyday lives.

The FGDs and household survey suggest that when it comes to 'delivery' of services by the state, the state in rural India in general and our site, in particular, has failed to deliver effectively. It is clear from the responses that many workers in the garden are deprived of their rightful benefits, which they are guaranteed by the Plantation Labour Act (PLA), 1951. Even the most basic rights like a decent living quarter to all workers is yet to be achieved as the survey reveals that 28% of respondents are not provided living quarters. When it comes to other needs, a large number of respondents felt that they were not provided adequate facilities- toilet (62%), Healthcare (48%), Educational facilities (15%), Electricity (68%), Bonus (16%). Wages are kept low (Rs. 169/day at present) to prevent the workers from moving out of the plantation. The lack of transparency in case of deductions from wages is notable when it comes to tea gardens. The thesis finds the PLA to be not very helpful in protecting labour rights for the garden workers as many workers are denied the essential benefits like housing, sanitation and other amenities. The study finds a complete absence of opportunities for upward mobility in the production hierarchy, making it nearly impossible for the community to move beyond their present status. The exclusion of small tea garden workers is also a significant limitation of PLA in providing rights to the workers.

Findings suggest that the high level of poverty results in a low level of participation in decision- making process. The survey finds that about 48.5% of workers receive in-hand income between Rs. 3500 to Rs. 4000 followed by 35.5% of workers who receive Rs. 4000 to Rs. 4500. The low income becomes a driving force in pushing the community to the margins of society. Quality education, which is essential for upward mobility for a community and individual, is a rare privilege for the workers. The literacy rate was less than 50%, with

women lagging much behind at only 39%. Most of the workers do not or cannot study beyond the primary level due to factors like lack of infrastructure, the economic conditions of the households, and the social outlook of the community towards education. The dropout rates are much higher in tea gardens all over the state as most children above the age of 14 work in the gardens.

The analysis of data from FGDs and survey reveal that there is a lack of trust for the workers union (14%), garden management (15.5%) and police administration (5.5%) in matters related to dispute resolution; whereas most of them (25% and 32%) place their trust respectively on panchayat and community elders when it comes to resolving disputes. Such findings indicate that the community has yet to adopt 'bureaucratic' habits of living that involve state institutions such as the police. The results of the thesis reveal the high participation of the community at the political level. Data from the survey shows that 78% of men respondents and 81% of women respondents voted in the local level elections of the state. Higher participation indicates high community mobilisation in the political arena. Through the personal interview of leaders, it was revealed that voting also provides a sense of empowerment to a vast majority of people who have little stake in decision-making. The recent surge in the participation of members of the community local -self-government can be understood in two ways. First, there is an increase in scope with the coming of Panchayat Raj Institution (PRI) in garden areas and, secondly, due to the community's numerical strength in local areas, which provides them with an edge over others.

The study suggests that a 'local state' formed out of the interaction between petty officials and agents of the state with people who are mainly their community members. With a large number of respondents (60%) being satisfied by the work of the local representatives, it is natural for the community to be drawn towards a political life. The increasing participation

of the community in the state apparatus has helped the community members to allocate resources. The findings indicate that the everyday experiences of the ward members, panchayat presidents and the health workers highlight that the line between a bureaucratic state and a traditional society is often blurred and transgressed to create a 'vernacular state' which speaks the language of the ordinary people. At the same time, findings reveal how marginalised communities have come to view the role of civil society as a bridge between the community and the state. The institution of civil society played a crucial role in promoting the idea of 'Stateness' by negotiating with the state to reap the benefit of the welfare state. Most recently, as the study suggests, there is a deep concern and desire for rightful recognition of the community's rights and individuals accentuated by identity-based politics.

The thesis is divided into six chapters, along with a conclusion. The first chapter introduces the significance of the topic along with the research objective and questions. The existing literature on the interaction between state and society is dealt with in the second chapter. The following chapter chronicles the history of 'tea tribes in the Assam valley. It examines how diverse ethnolinguistic communities were made into one community. Chapter four of the thesis examines the impact and present relevance of the Plantation Labour Act, 1951. Chapters five and six investigate the myriad ways in which the state interacts with the people at the margins. These chapters examine the state-society relationship from the prism of the different types of agencies-both public and private- as these agencies bring the state to the people.

The findings point to the fact that there is a gap between the rights provided to the tea garden labour community in the form of various statutory rights and the way it is practised. We find that decentralisation has created new opportunities of participation for a large

number of garden workers. Decentralisation has led to a greater sense of empowerment and entitlement towards the state resources. Regular interaction with the state made possible by a host of state and non-state agents is responsible for the vernacularisation of state in our study site. Here, it is essential to identify the context-specific requirements which have to be addressed to expand the adaptive capability of the community. The thesis findings are a primer for building further knowledge to support a formulation of evidence-based plans and policies that can be implemented to reduce the contextual marginality of the tea garden community of Assam.

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List of Abbreviations

AAASA	All Assam Adibasi Students' Association
AATTSA	All Assam Tea Tribe Students' Association
AASU	All Assam Students' Association
ABITA	Assam Branch of Indian Tea Association
ACA	Adibasi Council of Assam
ACMS	Assam Chah Mazdoor Sanga
AGP	Assam Gana Parishad
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
BPL	Below Poverty Line
ASS	Adibasi Sahitya Sabha
BDO	Block Development Office
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
DC	Deputy Commissioner
GP	Gaon Panchayat
INC	Indian National Congress
INTUC	Indian National Trade Union Congress
ILO	International Labour Organization
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MKSS	Mazdoor Kisan Sakti Sangathan
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NHRM	National Rural Health Mission
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
OBC	Other Backward Class
PLA	Plantation Labour Act
PMAY	Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana
SC	Schedule Caste
SSA	Sarva Siksha Abhiyan
ST	Schedule Tribe
TTWD	Tea Tribe Welfare Department

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The idea of the state emerged as a strong contender in understanding the political life of the democratic world. The ever-increasing part of the state in the fight against terrorism or legitimising financial institutions and providing welfare measures to its needy citizens is being felt more than ever before. The globalisation of the economy has transformed the nature of the world economy, but it has undoubtedly not pushed the state into oblivion. Instead, the increasing role of the economic institution has put forth new forms of interaction between the state and their citizens.

The popular way of interacting with the state is via 'democratic means' involving several institutions. Freedom House, in February 2007, reported that democratic expansion had halted even though most nations had attained freedom from colonial rule (Riutta, 2009). The proportion of countries designated as free remained stagnant for the past nine years.

Literature suggests that by 2002 most of the third and second world countries had entered a political grey zone characterised by "low levels of political participation beyond voting" (Carothers 2002, 9). Carothers (2004) speaks of the former Soviet Union as a democratic wasteland, whereas South America was seen as experiencing a "crisis of democracy". Most African countries, seen as 'once-promising democratic openings', are only a weak democracy like society struggling to be a democracy (2004, 412).

Here we may question why the process of democracy did not last long or bear positive results. Several causes can be identified, the most important being the absence of active participation of citizens in the conduct of public affairs. Even in established and 'successful' democracies like India, meaningful involvement of all citizens could not be achieved very quickly. Thus, a pertinent question is how to empower the poor masses and increase the participation of communities at the margins?

Several studies looked into the role and effect of the state's functioning on people, focusing on the programs and policies that target specific sections of the population. However, these approaches and studies do not entirely picture how people understand and interact with the state. The question 'what individuals do?' seems to be the most neglected one when we look into the role of the masses. What role does the individual play at the grass-root level? Or how do they influence and interact with the state and contribute to democratic consolidation and institution? To what extent do the democratic institutions empower the individual citizens in rural areas? Does civic knowledge and awareness elicit a change in the efficacy, interest and trust in politics and political leaders along with the change in political behaviour?

The present study explores these questions at a local community level. By examining the effect of democratisation, decentralisation and local level participation on the political empowerment of the people, the study contributes to the growing literature on democratisation and the involvement and empowerment of rural masses in the government and state system. However, in a significant difference from earlier works, the present study examines the impact of state and democracy in a population which has remained out of the state's ambit of welfare politics.

In dissecting the questions on interaction between a democratic state and an individual, the study contributes to our understanding of the cognitive and attitudinal change essential for the empowerment of the marginalised population. The working of democracy requires active and alert citizenry who can question the state's working and its representative. The remaining part of the introduction will elaborate on the study's implications for state and democracy and its actors. The section below emphasises why it is essential to understand the effect and impact of participation, particularly by the poor, on the state's functioning. The study proceeds from implications on the research and understanding of the state in recent times to the ways citizens interact with it in a democratic setting.

1.2. State, Margin and the Citizens

The state in modern times appears to be the ultimate authority above society, demanding compliance and obedience. However, the interaction of social groups with the state at various levels and varied forms led to mutual transformations that challenged the claim made by the state as the sole authority commanding obedience. By looking into the state's engagements with various social groups and communities while attempting to understand the mutual transformation of both the state and the citizenry, one can set forth a research agenda wherein emphasis would be given to state-building rather than the structure of institutions. This engagement would entail a focus on the state as a limited state. Such an approach would help provide a different understanding of the state as one which is not just a product of national ideology wherein the state is a bearer of complete sovereignty with minimal scope to the role of society. Such federal idealistic states create master narratives that may suit dealing with issues of power consolidation and expression of collective

identity. At the same time, an approach that focuses on the engagement between the state and society would give a better grasp of the mutual transformation of the modern state- from the 'sovereign' to a 'limited' state.

The state in such an approach ought to involve serious attention to the cultural understanding of the state, which so far has been chiefly the preserve of cultural anthropology rather than political science (Migdal, 2004). The relationship between the state and population is complex as the state's demand for compliance through its laws and rules from its population has increased. The creation of centralised bureaucracies is an effort to ensure allegiance from the people. This image of the state as a coercive and regulating body lies at the centre of the meaning of the state. This image of the state has been made clear by the works of both Marx and Weber and often highlighted by the later theorists. However, modern states are states with large and diverse populations. In modern times state cannot police every individual. Herein lays the importance of understanding and engaging with the question of interaction between state and society. This interaction involves creating alliances and co-options for both sides, incorporating new ideas and values into their constituent meanings.

In this context, the study attempts to understand the complex relationship between a marginalised community and the Indian state and society and state in general. In other words, this study considers the varied forms of the state as encountered by the vast population living at the margins of the Indian Society while also looking into the profound impact that society brings upon the understanding and functioning of the state and its institutions. The task would be undertaken by interrogating the state's optimism in its account of governance and development in creating a conducive environment for the

overall development of its citizens. Whereas the 'citizens' are not just passive 'beneficiaries' of the doles provided by the state, they are active agents who determine the nature of such benefits. It seeks to understand the myriad ways in which the state comes to be viewed in the light of societal underpinnings.

Coleridge et al. (2004) suggest that in parts of eastern India, unlike Scott's concern of the *state seeing everything*, it seems to see too little (Coleridge, Jewitt, and Kumar 2004). Thus, the interior regions of the state suffer from state negligence or a lack of good governance. However, even in areas where government offices are poorly run, some people will be aware that they have been classified as members of Scheduled Communities. They might be also aware of their claims in government jobs. Others are aware of their rights as BPLs (households below the poverty line) and qualify for employment assistance or subsidised food.

Recent works on the anthropology of the everyday state and society in India have raised questions on the 'elite' understandings of government internalised by well-placed public policymakers (Hansen 2001; Fernandes 2006). We need to examine whether lower-level state officials hold 'vernacular' understandings of government that find a little place for ideas of fairness or generalised morality. These officials being simultaneously part of both the state and society signify the level of embeddedness of the state in society. The production of the multiple sites of state–marginal encounters, or of marginality itself, will be the major focus of this work. However, the purpose is not to lump together experiences that should be kept apart.

In most parts of the developing world, the relative absence of the state cannot be treated simply as a matter of local resistance to the state's attempts to put down roots independent of political society. In the Indian subcontinent, as shown by the works of Sudipta Kaviraj and Partha Chatterjee, the workings of the state at the grass-root level are the manifestation of a model of authority that highlights a distinction between elite and vernacular understandings of the state-idea. Kaviraj and Chatterjee suggest that the Indian bourgeoisie at the time of Independence was so weak that it had to undertake the capitalist transformation of the country with the assistance of a rising peasant class and a progressive state led by socialist Nehru (cited in Coleridge, et. at. 2005). The Planning Commission became the vehicle for this model of structural economic transformation, and the design was that citizens should place their prayers at the government's feet.

However, the problem was that most ordinary Indians refused the game or design of being obedient and pleading citizens. Their government experience was not just different – by resenting *sarkar*[1] in spaces where its reach was limited- but also had few expectations that it *should* behave in this 'modern' fashion as embodiment of authority and justice (Corbridge et al. 2004). In India, according to Kaviraj (1984), the higher level of the state-bureaucratic body was entrenched with colonial thinking that separated it from the socio-cultural life of the vast majority and the state's lower-level officials. The disappointing role of the state in securing its stated objectives was not just a matter of resource scarcities but also reflected the fact that the state 'had feet of vernacular clay' (Kaviraj 1984, 227). The English-speaking official elites of the Nehruvian and post-Nehruvian era discovered that ordinary Indians who worked at lower bureaucracy had 'reinterpreted beyond recognition' the state so carefully constructed by the elites (Kaviraj 1991). Kaviraj suggests that many of

[1] A term used for referring to government in most parts of rural India.

these men and women were deeply embedded in the everyday social world around them– a life structured around family, kinship, relation, caste and community. These people saw their seniors as superiors only in a graduating batch or the government gazette but inferior in caste or social hierarchy.

Since the superior and the subaltern life-worlds depart in the manner discussed above, any research on the state-society interface must pay close attention to the language and staging of state-society interactions. The staging of state-society interactions is always complex and take shape against the interactions of individuals, communities and institutions. They also take place over various sites- airwaves and on the internet, newspapers, talks, speeches and other forms of communications. The section below, discusses the key we try to concepts related to the work.

1.3. Explaining margins

This work examines the State- Society interaction by analysing the experiences of the state from the margins. Such an approach opens marginality as a situation within which different populations and individuals are located. Nevertheless, a view from the margins may also expose the fractured and heterogeneous nature of the state. For it is within the margins that the state becomes differentially visible, both in terms of its presence but also absence. In the case of India, the politics of marginality have usually been associated with low castes, Dalits, tribal groups and religious minorities. In their study, Corbridge et al. (2004) have focused on the rural poor and perceive marginality in a broader context. Such an approach allows for the scope to consider the multi-dimensional and layered realities within marginality. The shifting or temporary conditions of marginality and marginal populations and those marginalised within the typical arenas of power form an integral part of such an approach. According to Tsing (1993), the concept of marginality points to a relational

position that refers to disadvantageous social and spatial experiences within standard fields of knowledge and power.

As a social category, marginalisation might refer to demography, religion, culture, social structure (such as caste, hierarchy, class, ethnicity, gender, age), economics, and the politics of resource access between different people and groups as processes of displacement. These dimensions inform the methods of exclusion, inequality, social injustice and spatial segregation. The spatial extent of marginality concerns physical location, distance from centres of development and degrees of connectivity and integration. As a spatial experience, marginalised groups may live in out of the way places, on or near territorial boundaries, outside homelands and in inhospitable and inaccessible areas. Marginality can also be the product of being an outsider or other to the ideological centre or heartland, which can adversely impact the integrity and unity of the nation. It might include social exclusion due to ethnicity, language, race, religion, gender, or, in the Indian case, caste, all of which occur in particular locations. We often find that spatial and social dimensions of marginality interlock and overlap to reproduce and reinforce experiences of marginalisation.

However, marginality represents a process rather than a fixed social or spatial location. The varied patterns of marginality are restructured and reinvented through temporal and spatial lenses, in the same way as they are lived and experienced from within shifting individual and collective positionalities. As a process, marginality is not uniformly shared. It represents a rough terrain of multiple and overlapping spatial and temporal influences that present restrictions and potentialities for marginalised individuals.

Understanding experiences of the state from the margins demands recognition of the contradictory position of the state that it takes while looking at the margins. The power of the state, to an extent, depends upon the reproduction of its margins defined in terms of territorial boundaries or through processes of labelling and categorisation that demarcate differences in religious, linguistic, cultural or ethnic terms, amongst others. However, the state is not necessarily the only site where marginality begins. The codification processes are also essential means through which the state actively works to address inequalities and at other times to create or reinforce patterns of uneven development (Williams et al. 2O11). It is interesting to note that those communities and individuals tagged as "marginal" are very often those who encounter and experience the state frequently and very intimately.

Production and reproduction of margins are infused with questions of difference that the state makes in treating margin; the difference in matters from the mainstream or those in power and hold power to determine whom to be recognised as marginal and subaltern. Marginalisation, therefore, occurs where the possibility of belonging to the broader society exists but is denied or unrealised, resulting in experiences of partial belonging or incomplete citizenship (ibid).

When conceptualised as dynamic sites, the margins force attention to the subalterns and the individuals and populations that make up marginal space. Both social and spatial circumstances of marginality inform the subaltern agency; however, at the same time, the subaltern may also possess the capacity to shape these conditions of marginality. Hence, experience is essential here as it is through experience that subjectivity is constructed, and

one's place within social reality is realised relationally (William et al., 2005). The individuals or groups may act in a certain way to reproduce the status quo in some spatial and temporal contexts. At the same time, at other times, action may be taken to challenge, contest or subvert the structures of power that work to reproduce their marginal position. Works on the subaltern agency have usually romanticised the acts of resistance as radical challenges that undermine state and societal power structures but often overlooked the state's underlying role in such resistances.

Subaltern agencies represent acts of contestation and resistance to power structures and involve strategies to secure a daily existence or seek justice in everyday living (Das and Poole, 2004). Those living on the boundaries of the state and society do not passively constitute these margins; they react to reconstructing its meaning. As shown in the work of Gupta and Corbridge et al., in the Indian setting, where some marginal groups come to possess an intimate knowledge of "the state." Individuals learn from their experiences of the state while interacting with the developmental policies and schemes. Such acts help them acquire the skills or knowledge necessary for negotiating and engaging with the condition to access development benefits and even transform state initiatives in their image. Recent work by Leela Fernandes (2006) on the lower middle classes has demonstrated that some subaltern actors are better placed than others to negotiate with the state. This phenomenon gives rise to several questions- Which are the actors that rework the state? To what extent do gender, class, caste, political affiliation and spatial location intersect their political potential? Through what channels and mechanisms do they access the state? For instance, recent research by John Harriss (2007) in Delhi and Chennai

has demonstrated that the urban poor must mobilise political parties to provide goods and services from the state.

Such work raises questions about the contrasts and continuities between urban and rural experiences of marginality and potential political opportunities. Focusing on subaltern actors forces our attention away from the state and experiences of the form to the "in-between" sizes, in and through which absence of the state and presence becomes embodied (William et al. 2O11). The porous nature of the state is exposed through bodies as people occupy roles in which they differentially constitute the state and society.

The existence and interaction of material and imaginative spaces provide the required space for 'working the state' in any given context. Foucauldian analysis of power as a field of plural forces has informed a shift from conceptualising the state as a sole centre of power to appreciating the multiple and contradictory articulations of power that emanate from no fixed axis (Corbridge. et al. 2005). Concepts of governmentality and biopower take a nuanced understanding of the state as a manifestation of contradictory practices and processes that work coherently to produce an overall "structural effect" (Mithchell 1994). This approach advocates a "decentering of our power geometries" (Li 2005 cited in Williams 2O11) and views power as relational and deterritorialised. We need to examine how the local and global politics inform and are informed by development has been increasingly recognised and demonstrated by academicians and policy-makers. Recent works have shown that this development contains the potential, if not sometimes, imperative to depoliticise practice and that development itself is inherently political (Leftwich, 1994). By recognising local struggles over power and seeking to uncover whose voices are heard and

whose are not, this work highlights the different degrees of politics and politicking that make and shape and are also produced through state-led development. To differing degrees, this work reveals how India's marginal populations can be the subjects rather than the objects of action in these contemporary contexts.

1.4. Defining State and Society

It is often difficult to define what a state is and what it is not, as numerous symbols and signs separate 'state' from 'society'. There is a renewed debate in the social sciences, particularly in sociology, political science and social anthropology, over studying the state. It is equally essential to understand people's perceptions, practices, and strategies in negotiating with the state. The state employs various mechanisms to keep the people in order and legitimise its presence through various social welfare schemes, but they receive and respond to these schemes in their ways. We also need to understand the different techniques that people employ to settle scores and bargains. For instance, at the time of elections, even vulnerable people can prove their importance by using their democratic right to vote. Similarly, local intermediaries who are mostly affiliated with different political parties also try to mediate with the agencies of the state for various socio-economic benefits for local communities.

Further, the agenda of the state is perceived and used differently by different communities. They attach multiple meanings to similar things. A significant cause of the failure of governance is a communication gap between the state and the people. Often, the middle-level political parties mediate between the state and the people and try to explain various aspects of governance to the people. One can argue that people find it challenging

to understand the language of government, and that is when they see the role of intermediaries as valuable and crucial.

Governmentality is another notion important in understanding state-society relations in contemporary times. Governmentality is defined as how we 'think about governing others and ourselves in a wide variety of contexts' (Dean 1999, 209), wherein government is seen and understood as 'the conduct of conduct. Governmentality involves the internalisation of norms as propagated by the state institutions. It is a fact that in the writings of Foucault, there is minimal mention of the non-western world. However, James Scott's account of *Seeing Like a State* is well informed by arguments put forward by Foucault. The modern state engages in simplifications that have negative, if not intended, effects on the citizenry. What makes the high modernist state different is not just an administrative ordering of nature and society or an ideology that sees a muscle-bound faith in the quest for reason, progress and industry but also its 'universal' ability to envisage a better future for all 'the people' (Scott, 1985). This future may take varied forms like forming collective farms, returning to villages, the urban visions of modern cities, or socialism itself. In its temporal and spatial dimensions, this coming together of sight announces the high modernist era and paves the way for being 'potentially lethal' (Scott 1998, 5).

The most significant importance of Scott's work is its ability to link the twentieth century's viciousness to a few schemes that intended to improve the human condition but failed. Scott's account of intentionality can also be seen in James Ferguson's more confirmed Foucauldian description of state failures and successes in the southern African state of Lesotho (Ferguson 1994). However, Scott is undoubtedly right to point out that the

utopian visions that turned into dystopian realities caused much violence in the twentieth century (William et al., 2011). When forcibly imposed over urban dwellers and peasants in place of practical knowledge, state simplifications facilitated unachievable and sometimes frightening results. For instance, the tragedy unleased at the time of the Great Leap Forward[2] in China.

These languages of governance, always underpinned by knowledge-generating techniques, have historically been disseminated, exchanged, and transplanted globally, including in the non-Western world. There has been a highly unequal exchange of technology, flowing mainly from the colonial powers to the colonies, later from the so-called developed world capitalist and socialist-to so-called underdeveloped countries. Today, NGOs and international aid agencies have emerged as powerful transmitters of new administrative technologies in the field of development. As James Scott (1998) casts doubt over state-planned programmes in his work *Seeing Like A State*, this thesis seeks to understand these programmes as the citizens see them, i.e. people's perceptions and ideas of the state, government and governance.

1.5. Defining participation

A well-defined set of activities like voting, political campaigning, rallying, contacting officials, submitting memorandums along with protest activities are all considered as political participation (Milbrath and Goel, 1977). All such activities form a part of the present work's definition of political participation. Most importantly, it is concerned with the participation of citizens at the local level political affairs, which consist of participation and involvement in

[2] A 5-years economic plan initiated by Mao in China in the year 1958. However, it was abandoned in 1961. It resulted in the estimated death of 30-55 million people (Yang Jisheng, 2012)

local community activities, meetings, raising developmental issues, contacting ward councilors (the local elected representative). Thus, participation refers to both the acts of 'communing' and 'contacting', which are used extensively in the literature.

However, merely voting, as political participation, does not reflect the interest of citizens in politics (Dalton, 1996). Such participation is more about the organisational capacity of political agents and parties who convince people to come and vote. As findings by Goel and Milbrath (1997) suggest, voting is an activity carried out by most citizens, and data on voting would provide slight variance to explain. Studies indicate that voting has been usually high (Bratton. et al. 2005). Thus, it makes little sense to consider the high rate of voting as a high level of participation, making our study an erroneous one.

Herein, we need to understand how this study treats interest in politics and political discussion. While some scholars like Milbrath and Goel (1977) do consider political discussion as political participation as a means where citizens actively engage in giving opinions; many others like Verba et al. (1978) and Bratton et al. (2005) do not consider discussion to be a form of participation. Verba et al. described it as 'psychological involvement, while for Bratton et al., such participation can be treated as 'cognitive engagement'. In line with Verba and Bratton's, the present study does not consider interest in politics and political discussion a measure of participation. A more detailed explanation of participation will be provided in the preceding chapters when we describe the findings of the field.

1.6. Understanding Decentralisation

The need for decentralisation has been a worldwide phenomenon in recent decades, and India is not the only nation that has enacted constitutional provisions for the same. As per the World Bank report of 1998, 12 countries out of the then 75 developing nations with

more than a million population had taken the path of political decentralisation (cited in Crook and Manor, 1998, 1). Many factors have paved the way for a push towards the devaluation of power globally. First, there has been an ideological shift in favour of more localised and decentralised forms of governance. The centre-led development has been challenged as undermining the spirit of democracy (Johnson and Start, 2001). Second, there is a feeling that transforming power to local bodies and agencies will bring the state closer to the people. Third, political devaluation is understood as a tool or strategy of the political elite to maintain the patron-client relation and avoid disintegration in the face of any conflict (Johnson, 2003). It suggests that the power of the national state and the political elite has weakened due to economic and political liberalisation, which has produced powerful regional sub-national elites and created a condition wherein these identities could challenge the national state (Giddens, 1998).

However, it is noted that mere decentralisation or devaluation of power cannot improve the performance or bring about accountability in the local self-government. Many scholars have observed that decentralisation has merely enhanced the ability and positions of local elites by helping them to hold more share of public resources (Johnson, 2001a). Considering the problems of decentralisation, an essential strand of scholarship in the decentralisation literature has argued that the underlying power of distribution of assets and entitlements will have an important bearing on the power of the poor and marginalised population to get access to the opportunities made available by decentralisation. It also argues that devaluation of political power would improve their ability to benefit from the welfare state's resources.

1.7. Research Objectives

From the study of existing literature, it is clear that analysing the process of state formation forces us to rethink the mechanics of rule and workings of power. It is carried out via apparently mundane state activities like providing health services, tax collection, subsidised food distribution to the poor, or the issuance of voter identity cards. Following this everyday interplay of rules and processes, we can study the operation of power in a disaggregated manner and de-emphasise the state as the ultimate seat of power (Sharma and Gupta, 2012). It enables us to examine the dispersed institutional and social networks through which rule is coordinated and consolidated. It also empowers us to look into the roles those “non-state” institutions, communities, and individuals play in mundane governance processes (Trouillot 2003). For Foucault (1991), it can be described as "*etatisation* of society" (p.103; emphasis in original) and for Nikolas Rose is the "de-statization of government" (1996:56).

It is also clear from the discussion on the state that structural and functional notions view it as a set of institutions that perform specific functions related to governance and security. This view is evident in Weber's idea of the state possessing a monopoly over force. Simple categorisation of the regimes into 'democratic', 'authoritarian' or 'totalitarian' takes the meaning of these words to be self-evident and suggests the core nature of the state. Such an understanding does not consider the 'cultural' aspect of the state's working. Many comparative and classificatory analyses of states, such as those that rank states as "weak" or "strong," effectively strip the unit of analysis, i.e., the state- from its cultural roots when it comes to the working of the everyday state. Such an understanding takes for granted the Western liberal democratic states to be fully developed and ideal. Thus, we see western states often being employed as the norm against which other states are judged. In other

words, the criteria for a "strong" state are almost always those that apply to a specific subset of Western nation-states.

A look into how citizens interact with the state by following an anthropological perspective focuses on the state's cultural construction. It forces one to look into how people perceive the state, how their understanding is affected by their location, and how their interactions with the state officials shape their notion of state. Understanding the everyday practices and cultural moorings through which the state is experienced enables us to see the illusion of cohesion and unitariness created by the state. It also shows how a state's authority is fragile and contested when it comes to the working of the relaxed state.

Studies of the everyday state in India (Gupta, 1995; William et al., 2011; Hansen et al., 2001) suggest that the structure of bureaucratic authority, via which the state carries out its functions, depends on the repetitive re-enactment of everyday bureaucratic practices. These repetitive practises are performative (Butler, 1990) in that 'rather than being an outward reflection of a coherent and bounded state core, they constitute that very core'. Thus, we find that the coherence and continuity of state institutions are constituted and sometimes destabilised through these re-enactments of everyday practices. Using the model of performativity to understand the state's rules and political spectacles is helpful in another sense. Performances assume an interface between actors and spectators; they constitute and are constituted by an audience (Taylor, 1997). The repetitive performance of state procedures, for a variety of audiences located at different levels (such as rural peasants, local and national bureaucrats, activists, international development or human rights experts, and officials of other nation-states), shapes audiences' ideas about the trans-local nature of the state and their relationship to "it." (ibid).

However, we also find that the reproduction of the state as an institution through bureaucratic practices is not as smooth and inevitable a process as it sometimes appears to be. When it comes to the trust in the written words of the officials, at times, people tend to be suspicious or critical of what is being promised and resist the hierarchicalism and proceduralism inherent in bureaucratic practices (Scott, 1998). There is always a possibility of subversion looming large. Resistance to very routine activities of recording the population's demographics in the form of census gives us a sense of how people avoid being 'written' up in the state registers and records (Appadurai, 1993).

The everyday practices of the state bureaucracies help establish state limits to produce what Timothy Mitchell (1999) calls the "effect of the state". His work suggests that the line between state and non-state realms is partly drawn by bureaucrats' everyday work practices and encounters with citizens. Through contested cultural practices of bureaucracies and the people's encounters with them, the boundary between the state and the non-state is drawn and redrawn. Such methods also decide the ways and means via which people at the margins interact with the state. Such everyday interactions with the state shape the people's imagination of what the state is and how it is restricted. It also enables people to devise various means and strategies to resist the state. The beneficiaries of government programs also learn to use interaction techniques, like the lower-level state agents, to sabotage the 'official' state and its mandates. Studies in rural India (William et al., 2011) find that people learn about paper-pushing, leaving paper trails, and adopting official mannerisms. People use the practices mentioned above and a host of strategies in their everyday interactions with officials to gain institutional access or subvert official scrutiny. They also use them when interacting with non-officials to establish their authority over others.

The study's primary objective is to uncover such practices and strategies that are deployed by the people at the margins while interacting with the state. Understanding everyday practices is essential because they are signifying practices. It brings us into the complex relationship of such approaches with the sphere of circulation of representations of the state. Hence, it is in the realm of representation that the explicit discourse of the state is produced (Sharma and Gupta, 2012). The representation of public culture and the performance of statehood is crucial in shaping people's perception of the state's nature. Through the symbolic sphere of the state, those working with it come to understand their position (ibid.). Symbols like official noticeboards, letter-heads, stamps, visits by officials all present an image of the 'state' for both its functionaries and beneficiaries. People learn about the state boundaries and their position in the state machinery through the circulation and dissemination of images. Understanding' representation' helps us examine how people at the margins view their relationship with the institutions of the state. The existing literature exists that people's experience of bureaucratic institutions is shaped by the representation of the state, which in turn is mediated by daily encounters with the bureaucratic institutions. What needs to be analysed is how the practices and representation of 'the state' fit within the imagination of those who work within it (the representative) and those who seek to gain from it (the represented).

From the above discussion and analysis, two intertwined themes or objectives of the study stand out. First, this study highlights state-society relations in terms of offerings made by the state and the steps and strategies (prizes, welfare schemes, reservations) that shape citizens' encounters with the state. This work also examines how diverse positions of marginality decide how the state is experienced by the margins and how the differential exercises of agency shapes this experience. Second, another essential aspect of this work is

to identify and discuss how the agency is articulated and practised, which has implications for the realisation of citizenship to different degrees. The study represents the multiple ways in which political actions are deployed by people living in the margins in their interactions with the state by looking into the implementation of welfare provisions in the tea garden areas in the context of the present study. This kind of politicking takes the form of acts of compliance and staking of claims in some cases. At the same time, in other instances, the strategies employed involve defiance, self-provisioning, and improvisations are amongst the methods that the marginalised employ. In viewing the state-society relationship from the margins, people and communities define and remake themselves as citizens. In this way, the work points to the continual reconfiguration of the relationship between the state and society and exemplifies citizenship's workings as lived experience.

1.8. Research Questions

The study seeks to understand how citizens at the margins of the state, forming a distinct society, respond to various forms of governance. Also, we examine how these forms mutate as they interact with the target populations. It is a well-established fact that even though the state formulates all the rules and policies of governance, many factors influence the grassroots implementation of these rules and procedures. Inter-linkages and inter-dependence among the state, society, community and market unfold its permutations and combinations on the ground. This study attempts to understand how this happens and how it shapes and facilitates interaction between the state and society.

The work is an attempt to study people's experience and engagement with the state in everyday life. To a large extent, it can be understood by looking into the processes associated with governance in the local context. Here, we need to comprehend the idea of

the state, the government, and governance as perceived by marginal communities. It can be possible to analyse how the local social structures influence governance at the local level and attempt to understand the relationship between the state, community, and political actors who act to connect communities with the state.

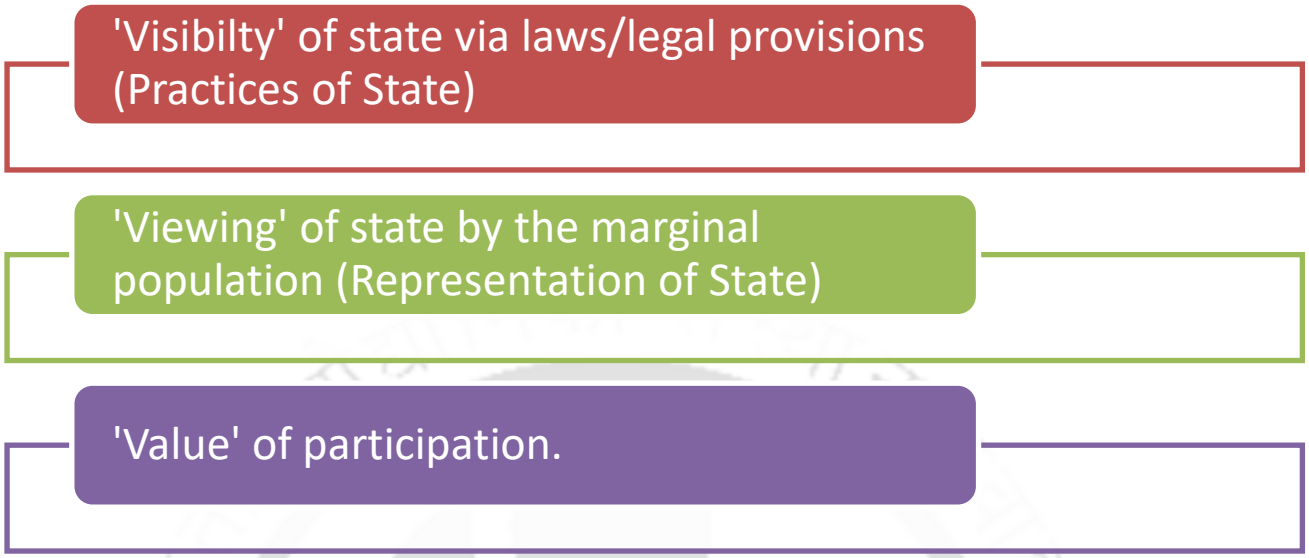
A suitable lens to examine state-society relationships would be the welfare provisions aimed at the citizens. In the presence or absence of welfare schemes, the marginalised employ political action to define and shape their relationship with the state. Through these distinct processes of asserting or reformulating their identities and engaging in forms of resistance, the politics of citizenship is played out. This study attempts to show the multiple facets of the state as experienced through welfare-oriented schemes and how marginalised groups encounter these schemes. While the state is made visible to marginalised by the presence and absence of schemes, the marginalised become visible and invisible to the state by its response towards such welfare schemes. In highlighting how politics is played out from the margins, this study also analyses how the marginalised shape themselves as citizens by being active agents in shaping and reshaping state-society relations.

The following research questions inform this study-

1. How does the state make itself 'visible' to the marginal population in the context of welfare-oriented policies and laws of the government?

2. What impact does the state make in most people's daily lives at the margin of the society, as seen from the micro-operation of the everyday state in a tea garden society? Also, what are the ways through which these functioning of the state are understood, reshaped and contested by the marginalised groups and communities?

3. How do people at margins 'participate' in the functioning of the state at the local level by using legislative means like decentralisation?



1.9. Background of the Study Area

Assam, the gateway to North-East India, is the largest state in the North East. It borders seven states- Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Mizoram, and West Bengal. It also shares a border with two countries viz. Bangladesh and Bhutan. The state is spread over 78,438 sq. km. The share of Assam is only about 2.4 % of the country's total geographical area. At the same time, it is home to 2.6 % of the country's population. The state is divided into three major geographical divisions- the Brahmaputra Valley in the north, Hill Districts of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao in Centre, and the Barak Valley in the south,

For a very long time, Assam has been the largest producer of tea leaves in India. The tea industry in India is about 190 years old. Tea was discovered by Robert Bruce as growing wild in the upper Brahmaputra Valley in 1823, and Indian tea from Assam was sent to the UK for sale for the first time in 1838. Owing to specific soil and climatic advantages, tea is traditionally grown mainly in four states in India, namely, Assam and West Bengal in the East

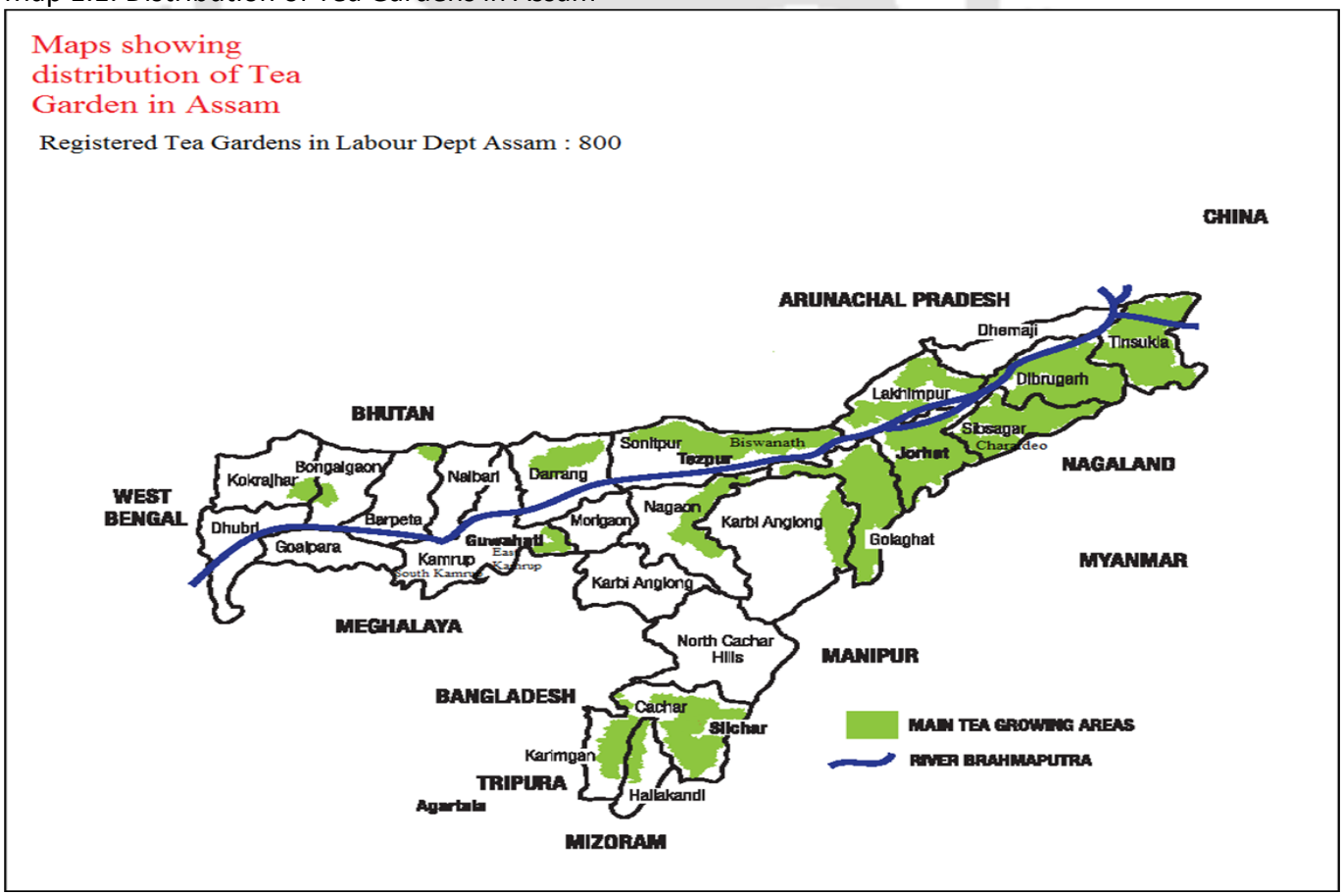
and Northeast India and Kerala and Tamil Nadu in South India. The tea industry employs around 1.2 million permanent workers, thereby being the largest employer in the formal private sector. As per the records of the Tea Board of India, Assam produced about 51 % of total tea in India, followed by West Bengal at 17% (Tea Board of India Report, 2018). The table below presents the volume of tea production in the state of Assam (2018).

Table: 1.1: Volume of Tea production in Assam.

Type of Garden (Based on Size)	No. of Gardens	Area under Cultivation (in Hectares)	Total Production (in '000 Kgs)
Big	767	2,26,197	642180
Small	84577	78, 203	

Source: Website of the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Assam (2018)

Map 1.1: Distribution of Tea Gardens in Assam



Source: Website of the Department of Labour, Government of Assam (2018)

1.9.1. Site Selection and Sampling Method

This section discusses the methods used to select the study district, the field, and the sample population used in the study. The study on marginal populational necessitated the researcher to adopt the purposive sampling method for the analysis. Therefore, the purposive sampling method was used to select the district, the tea plantation, and the community members.

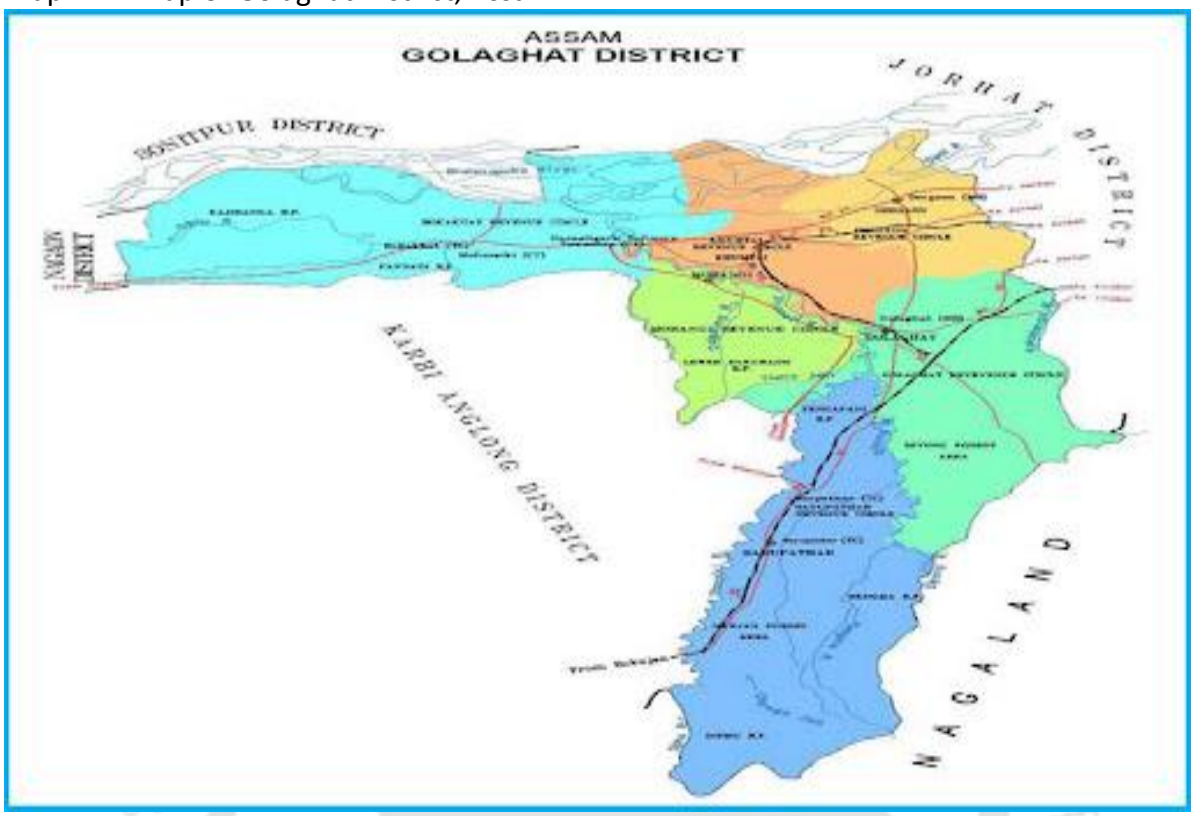
1.9.1.1. Site Selection- The District

The district of Golaghat in upper Assam was selected for the study mainly due to the following reasons:

a. It is a significant tea producing district in Upper Assam with 764 registered extensive tea gardens.
b. The district has a large number of Tea-Tribe/Adivasi population, a good number of whom are pretty active in the social and political life of the state.
c. The accessibility of the researcher to the field site was also an essential factor.
d. Another critical factor is the presence of local government offices, like the panchayat office, near the field sites.
e. There is a sizeable presence of NGOs, SHGs and other cooperative societies in the tea gardens of the district.

A brief profile of the district is provided here.

Map: 1.2: Map of Golaghat District, Assam



Source: rearchgate.net

Table 1.2- Administrative Setup of Golaghat District

Nos. of Sub Division	4 Nos.
Name of Sub-Divisions	Golaghat, Bokakhat, Dhansiri, Merapani
No. of Revenue Circle	6 Nos.
Name of Revenue Circles	Golaghat, Bokakhat, Dergaon, Sarupathar, Morongi, Khumtai
No of Development Blocks	8 Nos.
Nos. of Town	5 Nos.
Name of Towns	Golaghat (MB), Dergaon (MB), Sarupathar (TC),

	Bokakhat (TC), Borpathar (TC)
Nos. of Villages	1125
Nos. Police Stations	12 Nos.

Source: Website of the Golaghat District Deputy Commissioner Office.

1.10. The Research Site- Khumtai Tea Estate

The Khumtai Tea Estate, where the fieldwork took place, is in the Khumtai block of the Golaghat district. It is about 25 km from the town of Golaghat, the district headquarters. The tea estate is home to around 1500 people, including around 900 workers who live within the garden premises. The region consists of many tea gardens, which is the primary source of occupation for the people in the area. The garden population consists primarily of the 'Adivasis' or the tea-garden labourers who are colonial migrants from various parts of central and eastern India. There is a large amount of variation within the community, which is presented in the table below. A few locals who work in the clerical and managerial posts too stay within the garden. Within a garden, there is a small bazaar that caters to the need of the inhabitants. Also, a weekly market is held every Friday wherein local traders bring their products.

Table 1.3. Brief profile of the field

Worker's Profile			
	Female	Male	Total
Total Population	950	1100	2050
Working Population	564	419	983
Clerical Staff	02	17	19

Garden Area		
Total Estate Area	859.54 Hectares	
Total Plantation Area	27.80 hectares	
Total Production	8 Lakh Kilogram	
The total area under building and establishment	10.09 hectares	
Facilities within the Garden		
Health Centre	01	
Water Supply Tanks	02	
School	01 (Primary)	01 (Middle)
Creche	01	
Quarters for workers	418 (approx.)	
Caste/ Community Breakup		
Oriya	154 Families	
Kurukh	67	
Bhumij	24	
Kharia	13	
Gond	02	
Bariak	17	
Religion		
Hindu	85%	
Christians	10%	

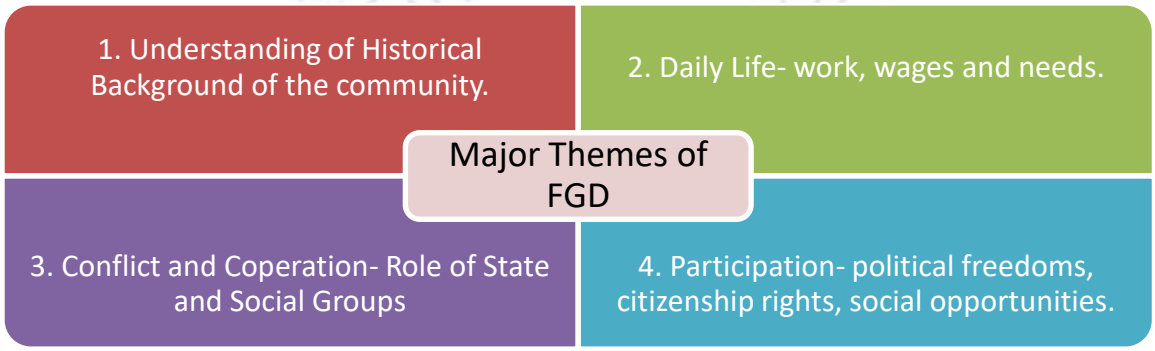
Islam	2%	
Others (Saranism)	3%	

Source: Based on inputs from estate management and local leaders.

1.11. **Data collection method and tools**

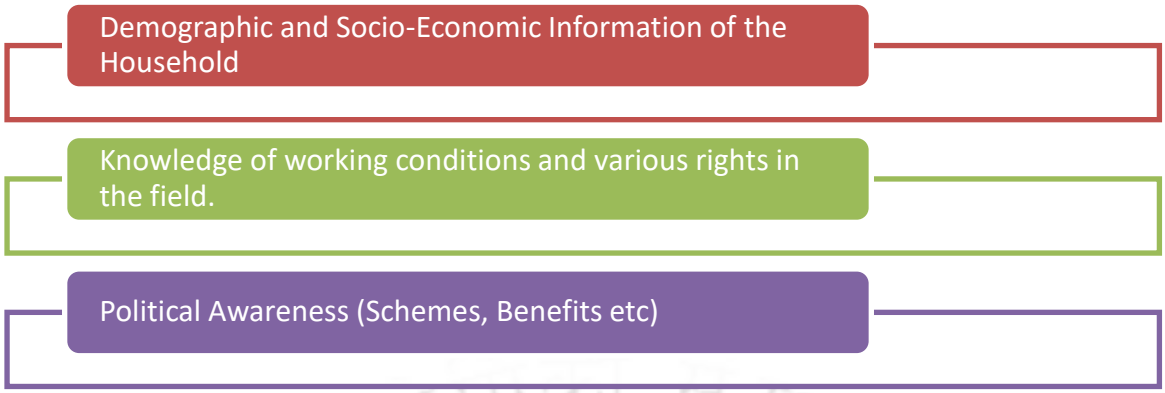
The qualitative data was collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and individual interviews, while the quantitative data was collected through a household survey.

Figure 1.1: Major themes of FGDs



An interview schedule was also prepared to conduct a household survey to understand the population's socio-economic profile and awareness of various socio-economic and political issues. The interview was carried out with the assistance of volunteers from Janani Barta, an organisation that publishes a monthly newsletter from the Khumtai Tea Estate. A total of 150 respondents were interviewed for the same. The purposive sampling method was used to identify respondents across gender, age, educational qualification, political activism and nature of employment in the garden.

Figure 1.2. Basic information in the household survey



1.12. Plan and Parameters of the Study

The present study is located at the intersection of multiple disciplines, even though the study of state and society is inherently political with equal importance in sociology and anthropology. The impact of developmental policies on overpopulation is also a subject matter of economics. At the same time, attitudinal change towards the government forms a part of behavioural studies. Thus, we see several intersectionalities in the study of state and society.

The thesis is organised in the following way:

Chapter one introduces the basic ideas and notions of state, society, marginalisation, participation and decentralisation. It places the context of the study at the intersection of the various elements of changing social and political conditions. The chapter brings out the objective and the research questions that informs and guides the present work. These questions pertain to uncover the myriad ways in which the state interacts with the citizens. The inquiry explores the various means available to the marginal population while interacting with the state and its agency. It is essential to understand how people at

the margins' view' and understand the daily state, which is made visible via interactions at the local level

Chapter two presents the findings from the existing literature on the interaction between state and society. It also summarises significant results on decentralisation, people's participation and how they have (have not) affected the lives of the citizens, especially in developing countries. It demonstrates the lack of scholarly agreement on the importance of the state on people's lives, and it has come to be challenged. The chapter also discusses the existing limitations of devaluation of power as a means to empower people. Besides, the chapter reviews distinct literature highlighting the explanation of democratic participation.

Chapter three chronicles the making of 'tea-tribe' in the Assam valley wherein people from diverse ethnolinguistic communities were made into one community. The chapter deals critically with the historical evaluation of the 'Tea-Tribe' community as shaped by governmental actions in colonial and post-colonial periods. The chapter's primary focus will be on state and government actions that played a significant role in shaping the identity of heterogeneous groups into one community.

Chapter four discusses the Plantation Labour Act (PLA) of 1951. We examine how the law has been received by various stakeholders- government, management and the workers. The chapter also analyses the limitations of the law in light of the thesis findings.

Chapter five examines the complex nature of state-society relations seen from the perspective of marginality. It attempts to see how the notion of state is 'reworked' in the margins of the society by looking into the everyday experience of 'state encounter'. The chapter examines the state-society relationship from the prism of the different types of agencies-both public and private- as these agencies bring the state to the people.

Chapter six explains how people at the margins 'participate' in the daily functioning of state. The participation of citizens in our research site has been accelerated with the implementation of the decentralising policies in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The devaluation of power is seen as an essential medium for 'talking' with the state. Findings suggest that participation does empower the citizens, though there are limitations to it.

1.13. Scope of the work

If we ask which "universe of cases" (Geddes 2003, 97), are the research questions applicable? The only universe to which it is relevant is in a developing democratic country where there is a large proportion of the population is living in poverty and is illiterate to a large extent. It can also apply to a state where the state's role is essential in bringing about socio-economic changes in the lives of the citizens. This particular study is more concerned about a specific set of population-the marginalised members of the society, in this case, the tea-garden worker's community. The study does not apply to entire populations in developing countries. The elites (the better-off citizens) are excluded from it. However, the findings will be crucial in helping development practitioners and governments understand how and why poor people view the state and participate in the state's activities. People do participate even when their socio-economic circumstances would predict otherwise. Thus, the research questions are the most fruitful means to empowering the masses as participants of democracy in developing countries.

Picture 1.1: Tea Landscape

The southern bank of the river Brahmaputra is dotted with numerous tea gardens. Most of these plantations and companies were established in the colonial period in the 'wastelands' a term used by colonial administration to refer to vacant stretches of vast land in both sides of the river. Today, Assam is the largest producer of tea leaves in India. (Source: Fieldwork by Author).

Picture 1.2: The Plantation and the Workers

Workers busy in plucking fresh leaves (Source: Fieldwork by Author)

CHAPTER – 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: THEORIZING STATE-SOCIETY INTERACTION

In a study to understand the changing nature of state-society relations in recent times, we need to deal with two distinct kinds of literature reviews- that of state-society interaction and the political participation of citizens in a democratic society. Therefore, this chapter asks, what have scholars noted about the changing nature of the relationship between state and society? We also look into how the participation of citizens has affected state-society relations.

2.1. State- Society Interaction

Most state-centric academic scholarship has recognised the state in terms of Weberian constructions as a well-defined, autonomous political entity. Thus, it cannot account for the increasingly fluid boundaries between states, society and the economy. At the same time, abandoning the state as an analytical construct in favour of more systemic approaches may not be very useful as a challenge to the state-centric approach or its rigid reification are both unsatisfactory responses to this challenge (Mitchell 1991). According to Mitchell (1991), the state-society boundary is elusive and difficult to fix, but it remains conceptually significant. For him, it is crucial to understand the detailed political processes that produce the "uncertain yet powerful distinction" between state and society. In his perspective, modern politics produces and reproduces the contingent lines of difference that separate the state from society. In the same way, Painter argues that the "porous boundary" between state and society exhibits an essential feature of the state machinery, thereby

ought not to be a problem when trying to understand the state (Painter 2006). The scholar's focus on everyday or common practices tempts for an account that is sensitive to the "openness, porosity, heterogeneity, fallibility, unevenness and creativity of state practices" (770).

Mitchell (1991), in his study on the limits of the state, suggests that the boundaries of the state are uncertain. However, societal elements have penetrated the state, making a distinction between the boundary of state and society proves to be complicated. Likewise, the state has also penetrated various socio-cultural spheres (Das and Poole 2004). The shady character of the state needs to be dealt with carefully. Another scholar Philip Abrams (1988), suggests that the state idea – state system relation should be more carefully examined. The state is vital for Mitchell (1991) because of its political symbolisation as a mythic or ideological construct. The state, for Mitchell, should be understood as a structural effect and not just a structure or institution. The existence of practices makes the structure exist.

The multiple meanings attached to 'state' and 'society' pose a significant risk of confusion when discussing "state-society relations". Suppose one looks at the genealogy of the word "Society". In that case, it originates from the Latin word *societas*, which means a partnership, fellowship, or alliance, which comes from *socius*, meaning sharing, comrade, or companion. It made its appearance in Old French in the 12thth century, and its first recorded uses in English were in the 16th century when it came to standing for companionship. Thus, 'society' in its earliest manifestation refers to the condition of living in association. Words like "individual," "living in isolation," or even "loneliness" may be the counter terms for 'society' but not "state."

2.2. Understanding 'Society.'

In the 17th century, "society" began to take on the additional meanings of an aggregate of persons living together in an ordered community and as "a collection of individuals composing a community or living under the same organisation or government." (Painter, 2011, p. 23).

Society has come to be understood in different ways in different periods of civilisation. At times society is treated as a synonym for the state, a larger whole of which is one part or something distinct from the state. In the contemporary use of the term 'society,' two senses can be derived. The first is more functional and refers to a specific set of individuals, groups, and institutions, as in the phrase "Indian society comprises many caste groups." This usage is determinate, particularistic, and reifying in that it typically identifies one specific society and treats it as an entity— "this society," "our society," "Indian society," and so on. The second, which reflects the earlier meaning of "society" as the condition of living in association, is indeterminate and universalistic and invokes cohesion, integration, and unity (Painter, 2011, p 12).

Within Western political thought, we can also distinguish between two primary meanings of the word "state." One, associated mainly with classical political theory, defines the state as an ordered or organised human community. The other, characteristic of much modern political theory, defines the state as an apparatus of rule or government. In the first case, the idea of "state" comes close to that of "society" in *The Oxford English Dictionary*'s sense of an "aggregate of persons living together in an ordered community."

To summarise the nature of state-society relations, we need first to recognise the complexity of the term's "state" and "society." There are two relevant definitions of "state" ("an organised community" and "the apparatus of government") and three of

"society" ("the condition of living in association," "an ordered community," and "an aggregate of individuals living under the same government").

2.3. Theorizing State-Society relation

Among state theorists, most attention has been devoted to Weber's suggestion that the state is an organisation that claims a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. The implications of seeing the state as an organisation in the first place have been given less attention. The German term that Weber uses is "*ein Verband*" (which translates as "organisation" in the sense of a group or association) rather than, for example, "*eine Einteilung*" (which translates as "organisation" in the sense of an arrangement or an ordering). At the same time, Weber's reference to the citizens as "members of the state" shows that he did not conceptualise the state as separate from society.

Another significant theorist who contributed to the study of state-society relations is Joel. S. Migdal. Migdal, in his work, looks at a kind of politics that does not occur within the sovereign state's framework. Various groups in society (e.g., ethnic, cultural, local) and state institutions are the primary actors in Migdal's state. This kind of state-society interaction lies at the root of the little-understood issue of stateness. The failed states can be considered an extreme form of stateness with little control over their territory and people. However, such countries are very far and few in numbers. In other states too, who do not qualify to be failed states, it can be seen that the state exercise partial control over many social institutions. These powerful states with a large military fail to collect taxes regularly, conduct census or implement basic policies at the grassroots level. Overall, these states cannot govern their rural areas, border regions and hinterlands to any substantial degree.

The boundary between "state" and "non-state" is thus blurred. Numerous institutions and practices cross what is conventionally understood as the boundary of the state. Some are explicitly designed to do so: the ostensible purpose of elected legislatures is to translate attitudes, norms, preferences, wishes, needs, and desires from "the general public" into state decision making. In some areas of state activity, there is profound— and perhaps necessary—ambiguity about whether an individual's actions constitute action by the state or not.

A 'State in Society' approach has been put forward by Migdal and similar authors to help address the notion of state-society interaction (Migdal, 1998, 2001). These scholars rejected Marxist and structuralist claims that the state's actions were nothing more than a reflection of social patterns of power, nor did they subscribe to overly statist claims of the state dominating society. For Migdal, the state is a distinct part of society, which plays a unique role that sets it apart from other social groups. It is important to note that neither state nor society can claim a priori precedence over the other. Migdal tries to establish that States may help mould, but they are also continually moulded by the societies within which they are embedded (Migdal and Kohli, 1994). Thus, the State and Society are partly dependent and partly independent aspects of our socio-cultural life.

In the present-day world, the state is seen as the sole accepted model of political order (Mitchel, 1991). This notion, however, represents a normative demand rather than a factual reality. The normative demand requires that the state, as a central political organisation exercising power within a given territory, should be the sole agency to set rules for its citizens (Lambach, 2004). In the last few centuries, the idea of a powerful state has gained much force within Western countries to be almost absolute. Such a proposition was quickly taken up in the newly decolonised nations of Latin America in the 19th century, followed by

Asian and African countries in the 20th century. These countries quickly adopted the state as a tool to achieve economic development and social modernisation (Migdal, 1988).

Both the institution being significant, the individual must decide, considering the incentives and sanctions, whether to submit to the authority of a social organisation or the political body. Usually, everyone being a member of many social organisations are confronted with many rules of such organisations. To accomplish their psychological and ordinary needs, people make up, in Migdal terms, "strategies of survival – blueprints for action and belief" (Migdal, 1988, p. 28). Such a strategy where no organisation can establish an apparent hegemony of rulemaking can be problematic. Thus, Migdal (1988) believes that while making survival strategies, individuals must choose among competing components, which are difficult choices when people also face the possibility of competing sanctions (Migdal, 1988, p. 29).

The state is a social organisation that plays by the same rules but only on a larger scale. Like other social associations, the state seeks social control by making people incorporate its rules into their survival strategies. It at times may seek obedience by monopolising individual strategies of survival. Thus, such a social control involves the successful delegation of people's predispositions of social behaviour or behaviour sought by other social organisations in favour of the behaviour prescribed by state rulers. It forms the crucial argument of his idea of state-society interaction: the social organisations and the state continually compete for social control over the individual. By its very nature, the state claims to be the sole authority that regulates social relations within its territory, thus pitting it against all social organisations that might resist this authority.

2.4. The Practice of the State

The everyday practices of the state come to affect the daily lives of the citizens. Writing about the cultural practices which constitute the state, Aradhana Sharma and Akil Gupta, in their edited work *The Anthropology of the State* (2012), note that people learn about the practices of the state by being a part of its everyday practices. According to Sharma and Gupta (2012), such practices range from struggles to obtain monthly rations to getting an income certificate or paying taxes or even a court hearing. The meaning of the state to people inside the bureaucracy and those outsides, such as the clients of government programs and other citizens, may differ depending on interaction experiences.

Such activities may sound very ordinary and too common to be studied, as Ferguson (1994) noted. He finds such bureaucratic proceduralism to be apolitical and meant to carry out the technical work of the state. However, another line of thinking points to the fact that these mundane looking technical works and practices carry out the political task of state formation and governance and are responsible for exerting power over the individual citizens. The work of James C. Scott (1998) work on urban planning gives us a sense of how practices like surveying and mapping are essential elements in the legality and control exercised by the state. The works in the volume suggest that 'mundane bureaucratic procedures provide important clues to understanding the micropolitics of state work, how state authority and government operate in people's daily lives, and how the state is imagined, encountered, and reimagined by the population' (p. 12).

A significant finding of Sharma and Gupta (2012) is that the structure of bureaucratic authority depends on the repetitive reenactment of everyday practices. Through this mundane, repetitive reenactment of the daily practices, 'the primacy of the state is reproduced, and its superiority over other social institutions established. Moreover,

through the daily routines of proceduralism and precedent-setting, social inequalities, such as class and gender, are produced and maintained. (p.14).

2.5. The Representation of the State

A key element through which states are culturally constituted is via representation. It is also essential in enacting the power of the state. People learn about particular state agencies and officers at local and national levels through newspapers (Gupta 1995) in which they read government reports about topics such as population control. Also, as Anagnost (1995 cited in Sharma and Gupta, 2012) demonstrates in her work on China, people discuss their experiences of particular bureaucracies and officials in different forums. They watch election-related propaganda on television or listen to speeches by elected officials at public rallies; they observe military parades, activities, and violence (ibid). People also participate in other ceremonial rituals staged by state officials, such as the inauguration of a dam or rural housing scheme or celebrating national independence. It is in the realm of representation that explicit discourse of the state is produced. Public cultural representations and performance of statehood crucially shape people's perceptions about the nature of the state.

The value of representation, even to government officials, can be understood by looking into the observation made by Sharma and Gupta (2012), who writes:

'Employees of various bureaucratic institutions also understand the entity they work for and their place in it through the representational sphere. For instance, banal techniques of representation such as official letterheads, seals, memos, photographs of official buildings, special uniforms, spatial arrangements of offices, monitoring and surveillance visits by senior officials, cars with government license plates and official motorcades, personnel files and procedures for promotion, and organisational charts, play a key role in presenting "the state" and its organisational hierarchy to its functionaries. The public circulation and dissemination of such images of "the state" and of state leaders and their actions enable people at different levels of the bureaucracy, as well as those outside

these institutions, to imagine what the state is, what it is supposed to do, where its boundaries lie, and what their place is in relation to state institutions.' (p. 16).

However, we need to ask, 'How does one study the "represented" state? Textual analysis is one critical method. We might also look into statistical reports and examining other kinds of public cultural narratives. Here we think of public cultural texts such as newspapers, radio, television, and cinematic representations of the state, and reports and leaflets produced by government and non-government agencies. Analyses of how states are represented intertextually, that is, across different media (for example, television and print media) and in documents produced by diverse agencies (for example, country reports published by the World Bank or national plans produced by governments), and the circulation of representations transnationally, nationally, and regionally become very important. Such analyses permit us to tease out shifts, overlaps, and disjunctures in the (re)production of the state in a spatial frame that transcends the nation. Besides examining the production and circulation of discourses about the state, ethnographies of the state also involve analysing how messages about the state are interpreted and mobilised by people according to particular contexts and social locations.

2.6. Re-reading Weberian state

Max Weber views interpersonal relations within society as relations of power and dominance or authority upon the institutionalisation of power (Weber 1972, cited in Lambach, 2004, p. 10). The primary objective of these organisations is to construct and enforce an order which would structure their member's social relations by suggesting or forbidding kinds of behaviour or forms of interaction among their members or towards outsiders. If relations of dominance form the basis of the said associations, then they are considered *Herrschaftsverbände.* One particular case of these associations of dominance is

the political association (politischer Verband). Such political association relies on the use of power to implement its order within a limited territory. Finally, the state is a distinct political association characterised by the legitimacy of its "monopoly of physical violence" (Weber, 1972, p. 28) and the resulting sovereignty within its territory.

Migdal has criticised Weber's definition of the state as conveying the misleading image of the state as an omnipotent structure. Migdal is undoubtedly aware that Weber was talking about an ideal type definition of the state. However, he still claims that Weber's definition inhibits critical thinking about "real-life states that do not meet this ideal." (Migdal, 2001, 14). The problem for Migdal is that, "with Weber's definition as the starting point; variation can be conceptualised and measured only as of the distance from the ideal type." (Migdal, 2001, 15). However, a closer look reveals that Migdal misreads Weber in two respects. First, Weber does not suggest that the state is the only association able to create rules. Like Migdal's own position, Weber posits the state as a particular case of the *Herrschaftsverband*: a social organisation structured by relations of dominance and authority. Second, it is a mistake to read Weber as providing his ideal type definition with a normative outlook that the state ought to be the predominant authority within society. Migdal's allegation of a faulty reception of Weber's work cannot be inferred from an orthodox reading of Weber's original work.

We can infer from the writings of both the scholars that they share a similar theory of the state that is constructivist. The common ground between Migdal and Weber is the central role they assign to social organisations. These associations, for Migdal, recommend specific manners of behaviour that people ought to assimilate in their approaches to existence. In the model propounded by Weber, a different kind of social order is represented by associations. These associations embody sets of rules that are

enforced among their members through relationships of authority. The basis for both the Weberian kind of authority and Migdal's concept of social control is the attitudes towards rule that range from rational compliance to emotional support and affirmation (Lambach, 2004, 11). So, where Migdal has characterised society as a blend of social organisations, Weber has presented it as a set of overlying and crosscutting orders of a higher authority. Furthermore, both Weber and Migdal do not view the state as a structure that exists somehow outside or above society. Instead, the state is assumed to have a distinct entity as only one among a multitude of associations within society, even though it exhibits specific unique characteristics that no other associations share (Lambach, 2004)

If one considers these two approaches together, what comes out is a model society that is a collection of associations that strive to maximise the reach of their respective orders. The state, a significant association, attempts to expand its social control over all of society, both geographically and socially. The state enters a struggle of opposing orders with social associations who fight its attempts to sway its members. Finally, it is all about who gets to make the rules and whose rules are obeyed. This model has a resemblance to Thomas Callaghy's theory of state formation. Callaghy (1984, cited in Lambach, 2004) notes that state making requires formulating a new definition of authority that opposes the existing ones. The struggle for dominance occurs with internal social groups and external groups, organisations, and forces for compliance, resources, and the fulfilment of social and political interests. Thus, it becomes a struggle for internal control, political unification, and external security.

European state-building history in the late Middle Ages and early modern times resembles this state model. During this period, centralised political authorities replaced the old feudal structures. This centralisation process had little in common with

'state of nature' assumptions. In this process, there was the absence of any acts of association or social contract. The general population had a minor role to play and did not figure much into the equation. While, early modern rulers were confronted with alternative power centres like local lords, the rising city bourgeoisie, and the clergy, resisting their attempts to increase the state's reach. The 'state authority, which is essential for a dominant organisation, had to be managed through conflict and accommodation with other organisations. According to Charles Tilly (1985), the route it took was primarily defined by legitimacy over the use of strength. He notes that legitimacy is how other authorities can be made to confirm the decisions of a given authority. He adds that other authorities are more likely to confirm an authority's decisions that control considerable force. According to Tilly, it is made possible by fear of retaliation and a desire to maintain a stable environment.

Thus, the state usually features a prominent position when one thinks about politics from the above discussion. The dominance of the state in the politics of Western countries and the daily lives of their citizens is so overwhelming that it is hardly questioned. The study and works of Joel Migdal remind us that the state is a kind of social organisation. It is an institution of society that is highly specific to the current historical context. Another important observation in his study is that the state does not exist outside or above society but is a part of society. Besides, these two institutions regularly influence and reshape one another. Migdal's argument points to the fact that most states do not conform to the ideal type of the strong state that is prevalent in our thinking. Sometimes states find it difficult to implement their policies due to the strong influence exerted on the outcome of state policies by strongmen and social authorities. The state is then left with the option of either accommodating these forces or breaking their social control.

Englebart (1988), in his study of Sub-Saharan Africa, has shown that efficiency from state institutions is ensured when they work in congruence with informal institutions and norms. Efficiency, according to Englebart, is also ensured when they are more endogenous to their societies and are historically embedded in domestic social relations. It is true even in developed nations. Such thinking can also be employed while looking at state-society relations and the policy process in developed countries. An example can be cited of the Corporatist theories of politics, which highlights the role of interest groups in the policy process. Similarly, the veto player models have already incorporated selected non-state actors into their analysis.

In conclusion, we can claim that it would be wrong to restrict political concepts beyond the nation-state as mere speculations about the future. In many parts of the world, politics has become an activity often conducted outside the domain of the state. When thinking about the world's various regions, we need to be careful not to generalise the experience of the Western state and apply the same to analyse other states. Social forces in every nation have interacted and moulded the state authority in their exercise of power. Therefore, it is essential not to restrict one's view only on the state while trying to locate the original seat of power but also to consider society's varied associations to understand the power and scope of any authority truly.

2.7. Understanding the Indian context

In the context of the Indian subcontinent, Bardhan (1984) argues that the state is controlled by wealthy farmers, industrial capitalists and bureaucrats. Kaviraj and Chatterjee argue that the Indian bourgeoisie could not dominate the masses because culture could not control the community. Chatterjee argues that the postcolonial nation-state, embedded within the

universal narrative of capital, refuses to recognise any form of the community except the nation itself. Culturally distinctive expressions of community identity are therefore antithetical to the modern Indian state, which generally seeks to subjugate them (Chatterjee 1986; Kaviraj 1984). The boundary between the state and the society is porous and permeable could be inferred from ethnographic experiences. However, people practice certain rituals in everyday life where they feel that state is different from them.

The idea that the state attempts to quantify and exercise control over its citizens through welfare provisioning was highlighted by Scott (1998). Turning the lens on the state, Corbridge et al. (2005) examined how India's marginalised rural poor came to see different faces of the 'developmental' state in their everyday lives. This work, along with other studies in anthropology, human geography and development studies, elucidates and reinforces the complex and overlapping boundaries that exist between the state and society (Gupta 1995). More recent work has built on this scholarship by examining differential experiences of the state from the margins and the forms of politics and power that constitute/make and remake these spaces (Williams et al., 2011).

Gupta (1995) suggests that the Indian state places a high value on everyday proceduralism, primarily written form. Thus, we find an emphasis on 'written' applications, complaints, or any governmental order and activity. He observes that

'Given the high levels of rural illiteracy, especially given the gendered inequalities of rural schooling, the state's emphasis on the written word immediately places poor, uneducated people, particularly low-caste, non-literate women, in a position of disadvantage. Many state-implemented development and empowerment programs are purportedly intended to reduce economic and social inequality, yet, ironically, the same procedures of state institutions perpetuate, rather than reduce, those inequalities. Upper-class and higher-caste men are often better situated to take advantage of state programs than poorer and lower-caste women' (p. 12).

Most people do not see the state as a Weberian aggregate, but this is not to say it does not happen. We will have cause in this book to report understandings of the state that come close to this. Among the Musahar communities of north Bihar, for example, where females suffer from exceptionally high rates of social exclusion, and where there is little in the way of the political representation that one finds among Paswans. Understandably, the state should be defined only in hazy terms and based on a limited number of direct contacts. The state appears to function here as much as an absence as a presence. In specific Adivasi communities in Ranchi District, Jharkhand, a long history of direct rule through Mankis, Mundas, and now Mukhiyas has reinforced an experience of sovereignty that reaches back to Agency rule under the British and which is carried forward under the Scheduled Areas legislation. For the most part, however, the different experiences of different groups of poor people with different state agencies should caution us against a reductionist understanding of 'state–poor' encounters. By its very nature, the state claims authority to regulate and control social relations within its borders. Such a claim pits the state against all social organisations that would resist this authority.

2.8. Literature on Tea-Garden

Since the present study is set in the Tea Garden/Labourers society, a brief survey of the existing literature on the Tea Garden Society has been mentioned here. Important information on the history of tea plantations in India, especially in Assam, is available in Griffiths, Antrobus, Bose, Buchanan, Siddique, Guha, Bhowmik, and Barua Borpujari (Behal 2006).

A guidebook for planters issued by a labour recruiting agency in the early nineteen-twenties presents a detailed account· of the castes and tribes employed on tea

plantations in North-eastern India, describing their customs, traditions, and group characteristics, including their suitability as plantation labour (Crawford 1924). Written in the heyday of British rule in India, it provides the key to understanding the colonial planters' mindset. The article by Piya Chatterjee's brings into light the considerations of race and gender in labour recruitment for Colonial Indian tea plantations, dominated by colonial stereotypes attributing 'labouring' qualities to 'primitive' subject peoples. Articles by Ranajit Das Gupta on the structure of the labour market in colonial India and on the working of colonial capitalism leading to the transformation of peasants and tribals to plantation workers, by Virginius Xaxa on tribal migration to plantation estates in North Eastern India, and by Kaushik Ghosh in *Subaltern Studies* on primitivism and race classification in the indentured labour market of colonial India illustrate the historical processes involved in the formation of the plantation labour population in Assam (Behal 2O14).

Behal and Mahapatra examine the working of the indenture system. Thousands of tea workers were recruited between 1840 and 1908, exposing their inhumanity and scant regard for human life. The article highlights the migrant workers as bonded labourers with no freedom at all. The notion of a free labour market where labourers could bargain over their labour price was non-existent in the case of tea workers in Assam. The article by Keya Dasgupta (1986) examines the wastelands colonisation policy of the colonial government, the planters' response to this policy and the settlement of surplus or time expired labourers on land in the vicinity of gardens leading to the emergence of ex-tea garden labourers.

During the last few decades, different ethnic groups of Assam have pressed for a homeland of their own, while some have asked for constitutional safeguards of their identities. A few studies have been carried which addresses the question of identity

assertation and the internal dynamics of the tea garden community of Assam. Kar (1991) highlights the socio-cultural dynamics and assimilation of different tea garden labourers in the plantations. Mazumder (1984) describes the inter-relationship between tea-garden labourers and the greater Assamese society. Myron Weiner (1978) briefly analyses the political postures of tea workers in the context of language politics in Assam. Kar and Sharma (1985) deal with social stratification and ethnic identity among the tea and ex-tea garden community. Kurmi (2011) 's book is an ethnographic work on the numerous groups that constitute the Tea-Tribe community in Assam. The author provides a comprehensive description of the title or surname of the tea garden labourers of Assam- their origin and social stratification. This work is of great help in understanding the diversity within a supposedly single community. The papers included in collections edited by Karotemprel and Dutta Ray and Pullopillil provide a good deal of information on various aspects of the life of tea and ex-tea garden workers in Assam. Phukan's work on the ex-tea garden labour population in Assam remains an authoritative account of this marginalised community's economic and social conditions.

Many works on the socio-economic and cultural aspects of tea workers' lives have been published in vernacular languages, most notably in Assamese due to the endeavour made by Assam Sahitya Sabha. One of the earliest publications is Nakul Chandra Bhuyan's work on the history and culture of tea workers in Assam, published in 1960 by the Asam Sahitya Sabha. Ganesh Chandra Kurmi's 1983 book written in the backdrop of the Assam Agitation in the early 1980s reflects the socio-political views of a significant section of the younger generation of the 'tea community'. A large part of it is accounts of tea workers' culture and way of life, aimed at bringing about a better awareness among Assamese readers about this community which had long remained deprived and segregated from the

mainstream Assamese people (Hazarika 2018). Other works written in the same vein include Karmakar, Ghatwar, Amarjyoti Tanti, SamirTanti, Barua, articles in journals, magazines, and souvenirs about the tea tribes *Chah Mazdoor, Jingani, Juhar* and *Jawa.* Ganesh Chandra Kurmi's book on the 'Kurmi Kshatriya' caste is of sociological interest. It forwards the claim of tea workers in Assam belonging to the Kurmi caste for Kshatriya status. It is in contrast to the present-day situation where attempts at Sanskritization[3] have been overtaken by the demand –for Scheduled Tribe status for all tea workers.

A few works provide valuable data on the socio-political situation in the Brahmaputra valley that sets the contextual background of political dynamics among the tea worker population, including those by Dev and Lahiri, Chaube, Bhadra, Barthakur, and some of the papers in Bhadra & Mondal, Misra, Hazarika & Baishya and Deka & Phukan (Hazarika, 2001). S.K. Chaube's book reveals facets of the political behaviour of different sections of people in Assam, including the tea workers, as manifested during the 1977 general elections (Chaube 1999 cited in Das 2016).

A seminal work on the history of Tea plantations and Laborers in Assam is Jayata Sharma's 'Empire's Garden: Assam and the Making of Modern India' (2011). In this work, Sharma traces the history of colonial tea plantations in Assam and the profound impact of Tea plantations in the politics, culture and society of Assam. The book highlights the history of Assam as an integral part of the mainstream south Asian historiography that has often been treated as a periphery to Indian history. The introduction of tea cultivation in British-owned and operated plantations in the nineteenth century forms the backdrop of Sharma's work. The introduction of tea required a redefinition of the region and its people. Plantation led to the large-scale migration of many other groups to Assam from distant

[3] A process of being identified with 'Upper Caste' Hindus by imitating their rituals, food habits etc.

places. These factors, along with administrative changes brought about by the Colonial administration, shaped the emergence of Assam's middle classes and their interventions in creating different forms of regional, linguistic, ethnic and nationalist politics. By tracing the history of many of these transformations, Sharma engages with a range of scholarly debates. Her works capture the policies of the colonial economy; labour, servitude and migration; the creation of linguistic, racial and ethnic identities; the creation of a middle-class-dominated public sphere; and the challenges faced by this imagination of Assam.

2.9. Conclusion

The survey of the literature suggests that the idea of the state is dynamic and fluid. Conventionally, the state has been understood as a powerful institution that exercises profound control over the population within its territory. It is considered by many as the sole authority with the legitimate right to exercise force. The state makes rules which bind upon the population. However, another set of scholars give equal primacy to the society, which affects the state, even of the most powerful ones. The state authority, which is essential for a dominant organisation, had to be managed through conflict and accommodation with other organisations in the society. We find in the literature that the boundary between "state" and "non-state" is thus blurred. Numerous institutions and practices cross what is conventionally understood as the boundary of the state. Some are explicitly designed to do so. We find that the purpose of elected legislatures is to translate attitudes, norms, preferences, wishes, needs, and desires from the general public into state decision making. In some areas of state activity, there exists a profound ambiguity about whether an individual's actions constitute action by the state or not. We find that the primary objective of the social organisations is to construct and enforce an order which

would structure their member's social relations. It is done by suggesting or forbidding behaviour or forms of interaction among their members or towards outsiders. The literature on state representation suggests that the routine bureaucratic procedures provide essential hints to understand the micropolitics of state work. It provides clues to understand how state authority and government operate in people's daily lives and how the state is imagined, encountered, and reframed by the population.

The literature on the tea-garden society throws light on the community's historical, social, and political lives. Since the colonial days, the community has been a topic of serious debate amongst the administrators and academicians. Thus, we find many works on the historical account of the community's migration to the tea plantations in Assam valley, labour unrest and the response of the planters and administrators. In recent times there has been a growing interest in the socio-economic and political life of the community. The increasing importance of identity-based politics in Assam has led to a rise in the political mobilisation of various communities. The tea tribe community, being one of the largest ethnolinguistic communities of the state, is witnessing a rise in political participation and mobilisation. The present work examines how the community interacts with the state in the local setting and 'creates' an image of the state.

CHAPTER 3

MANY TONGUES, ONE PEOPLE: CONSTRUCTING THE 'TEA – TRIBE'

Tea forms a vital component of the human lifestyle, with every morning beginning with a sip of tea. Tea as a cash crop has a significant commercial value. The Indian state of Assam has traditionally been the largest producer of Tea leaves since the colonial period. The tea industry is a labour-intensive industry. Hence, the tea industry of Assam requires and employs a significantly large number of workers- both permanent and temporary. The Tea industry has been the largest employer since the colonial period. The plantation workers, popularly known as 'Tea- Tribes', is a complex community made up of numerous groups of tribes, non-tribes and caste communities drawn from almost all parts of the country. The story of the 'Tea-Tribe' construction illustrates the making and unmaking of a community from above. The 'Coolies' of the Empire's Garden later became 'Tea-Tribe' of the Indian administration. Subsequently, there is an attempt to 'revive' themselves as 'Adivasi' in the contemporary period. The present chapter chronicles this community's complex, tumultuous history from the colonial period to today. It highlights the politics of 'community-making both by the State authority and the individual self.

3.1. The Collies of the Sarkar: A tale of Exploitation and Expectations

In 1823, Robert Bruce, a Scottish adventurer, discovered tea leaves growing 'wildly' while carrying out trade activities in the region. The Singpho[4] chiefs have been growing and brewing this unique leaf for a long. It was used as a medicinal plant. The year 1834 was significant in the history of Tea plantations in Assam. This year, the Company administration formally announced the discovery of an Indian variety of tea and planned to go ahead with

[4] A tribal community found in the Upper northern bank of Brahmaputra.

large-scale plantations in the province (Sharma, 2006). Large scale commercial tea plantation was expected to provide ample job opportunities to the local population. However, to the great dismay of the company officials, it was found that the local natives were too 'lazy' to work in the plantations. By the 1850s, the plantation was in the midst of a severe labour crisis. Their attempt to find a solution by first employing Chinese workers and then local Kachari tribe members was short-lived and unproductive.

Even though the British visualised the Jungles of Assam as the new 'El Dorada', the attitude of the locals towards the new industry was negative, as most of them, barring a few enterprising individuals like Maniram Dewan, stayed away from it. However, during the 1840s and 50s, the company tried its best to encourage local groups in upper Assam and Chinese and Naga workers. Records suggest that a crunch of cash supply and absence of wage work attracted as many hundred labours per month to the Garden in the 1840s (Sharma, 2006a). These local workers were paid much less than their Chinese counterparts. However, the most challenging part of the job was retaining this local worker for a considerable period.

In 1839, the provisional committee of a newly formed Assam Tea Association met for the first time in London in February. Its prime agenda was to gather information about tea production and decide the future of tea in Assam Valley. Subsequently, due to the various meetings held in London, the 'Assam Tea Company', a joint-stock enterprise, was formed. This new enterprise began its operation in Upper Assam in the year 1840. The Wasteland Rules passed in the year 1838 authorised the East India Company to sell or lease 'wasteland' to European capitalists at throwaway prices.

Initially, despite the high dissertation rate of local workers, the company managers continued to recruit local groups due to the absence of any other viable options.

The Chinese workers, by 1860, had disappeared from the scene. There was no further recruitment from any South-East Asian nations. Those who stayed back mostly died or deserted the plantations over time. With the failure of the imported labourers and their advocates, the commercial rationale of the newly emerging entrepreneurs took centre stage in terms of labour recruitment. Cheap labour became a pivot in the growth of the industry. By the year 1860, the Assam Tea Company began to look for cheap and industrious labours with the aid of the colonial administration. This quest would soon begin an exodus of thousands of workers, mainly from Central and Eastern India.

If we look at the history of South Asian labourers, their recruitment to Sugar plantations of various nations in the Indian Ocean began soon after the British Empire Slave Emancipation in the 1830s. The British conquest of the Bengal's hinterland, i.e. the Chotanagpur- Santhal hill territory, had a tremendous effect on its inhabitants and paved the way for their further dislocation to distant lands (Ghosh, 1999). In this hill, de-peasantization began and converted the inhabitants into labourers- hardworking and disciplined. The British colonial race theorist quickly identified them as groups belonging to the 'Kolarian' race (Campbell, 1865 cited in Sharma, 2006). These 'Kolarian'[5] groups were praised for their hardworking and simple nature, unlike the *'lazy*' and '*indisciplined*' locals. They were to be employed not just in Tea plantations but also in rail and road construction in the valley. These labourers were a prized possession due to their cheapness, easy availability, and absence of caste and food prejudices. However, the most attractive element was their non-attachment to the soil/country, unlike the local aboriginals who had

[5] A term used by Campbell in his work 'Ethnology of India' (1866) to refer to the tribes of Central India and Bengal.

the option to return to their native villages at the slightest provocation. The Colonial racist thinkers completely neglected this social reality[6].

In 1865, the Government of India passed Act VI, which was meant to benefit the workers who were ensured for 'protection' via contract with the employer (Verma, 2011). However, in case of breach of contract, it had strict provisions, including imprisonment and loss of pay. Assam Labour Enquiry Committees of 1906 and 1922 talk about labour protection. Eventually, laws were tuned to ensure the uninterrupted labour supply from as far away as Madras Presidency. The workers' misery was accentuated by the Workmen's Breach of Contract Act and the 1865 Act.

Punishment for the breach of contract by the labourers formed a significant component of the Act. The planters were given powers to arrest labourers who 'absconded' without a warrant, and imprisonment was the penalty for refusal to work. However, the Act applied only to newly recruited labour, and not to time expired labourers or locally recruited labourers, who were now increasingly contracted under the Workman's Breach of Contract Act XIII of 1859[7] (extended to Assam in 1864) [GOI, 1906:136 cited in Behal, 1992]. Later, the term Act Labour was used for all labour contracted under the Labour Immigration Acts. In contrast, the rest of the labour force, including those contracted under the 1859 Act, was termed non-Act labour in official reports. The application of the 1882 Act further framed the policies and practices through the coolies were further exploited. These acts ensured the coercion and allowed the planters a free hand in matters related to the workers' welfare

[6] Assam was depicted in the English Press of Calcutta as a more attractive destination for the potential migrant boarding 'steamers and having a comfortable trip up their own native rivers'. This was portrayed in stark contrast to the uncertainties of ship passages to the overseas colonies where they had to venture the dreaded Kala Paanee. 'Our Tea gardens in Assam and Cachar', The Calcutta Review 35 (September 1860) pp.59-60 cited in Verma (2011).

[7] The act was initially passed at the instance of the Master Wardens and Members of the Calcutta trades association.

(Singh et. al 2006, 47). The fact remains that in the initial decades from the 1850s until around the 1920s, the working conditions were akin to slavery, with flogging, rape, torture and even the throwing of dead workers in rivers (Toppo 1999).

Table: 3.1: Tea production at the end of the 1850s

Districts	Tea Factories	Land Acquired (acres)	Land Cleared (acres)	Production 1858-59 (in pounds)
Sibsagar	31	13,796	5,227	8,46,249
Lakhimpur	10	14,038	1,700	2,82,000
Kamrup	10	12,207	297	6,160
Nowgong	14	11,034	NA	48,000
Darrang	03	3,783	375	23,280
Total	68(48 proprietors)	54,859	7,599	12,05,689

Source: Verma (2011)

The planters engaged private recruiters known as *arkattis*[8] and *sardars* in engaging and recruiting the labour force in the districts of eastern India. These agents gave no fair sense of recruitment to the recruits as making money was the primary motive. The recruits were kept in the dark about life and condition of work and remuneration in prospective dreamland. The local folks often mistook the recruiters as Government agents, and thus the Garden work was presumed to be 'Sarkari' job. The inquiry commission of 1868 found that most of the 'absconders' and 'deserters' from the tea gardens were not treated fairly. Some had been induced to come under false persuasions and who had not had their agreement explained to them orally (Verma, 2011). It was found that most of these

[8] These were locals from the same region where the labourers came from. They formed the link between the planters and the labourers.

resentful individuals were assured easy work and high pay with earnings of about ten to twelve rupees, whereas, in reality, they hardly managed to make two or three rupees.

In the plantations, the prevalence of various laws and a combination of work conditions induced an atmosphere of unsettlement for the workers who had little idea of their new habitation. The planters criticised the government policies towards the workers as an attempt to malign their goal to achieve a "disciplined" and "settled" plantation working force. The planters found the scope of the contractual agreement, which was the 1863 Act introduced, was ultimately "inadequate" by maintaining a law-and-order situation in the Garden. For the planters, prosecution under civil law was the only positive aspect of this Act. However, any imprisonment meant a loss of labour for the planter. Summing up the sentiment of the Planters, A. Browlow, a planter from Cachar district, writes in an English daily as follows:

How is that daily, almost hourly, Act of insubordination now occurs amongst the imported coolies in the district? Seemingly with no other object in view, but to tempt the planter to strike his cooly, to present a valid excuse for the coolies appearing before Government officials...part of the law (imprisonment) it is, needless to say, is a dead-letter; for it hardly need be tried to prove its unproductive results, the consequences is that the liberated black sheep goes about the district infecting others, and this is going on, and on, and on—and where it is to stop no one can say. (The Englishman, 1862, cited in Verma, 2011, p. 61*).*

The planters successfully mobilised and involved the local communities in policing the Coolies by paying them a sum for bringing back the runaway deserters. They were awarded a sum of Rs. 5 for each 'catch'[9]. This amount was later to be deducted from the earnings of the deserter. Several managers and superintendents of the tea companies confirmed the existence of such practices throughout Assam. In correspondence with a tea district commissioner, the superintendent of the Assam Tea Company revealed that the

[9] Such increments to local communities led to worsening of relationship between the two communities. The labourers were shown as sub-humans in the Assamese magazine of the period 'Mau'.

company managers had maintained an organised establishment of chupprasises and burkundazes for the apprehension of runaway coolies and that it was effectively recognised by the Government officials of the day. There were instances of these employees not confining themselves to catching their runaway coolies, but seize any person they liked (Verma, 2011).

In the tea industry, production costs depended on the steady supply of labour. Thus, the Indian Tea Districts Association (ITDA), the apex body of planters, submitted a memorandum to the Government of India in 1880 which stated that the future of the tea industry was contingent upon an adequate supply of coolie labour at a cost calculated to leave a fair margin of profit on the capital invested. Another important argument of the Association was that the stringent labour laws and high cost of recruitment. According to the planters, the three-year contract period was too short of recovering the cost of recruitment. Besides the outlays on health care and other facilities, they also complained that time-expired coolies were not subject to penal sanctions had become 'complete masters of the situation due to competition for their labour-power and went in search of the highest remuneration. The planters concluded by demanding the abolition of all governmental regulations on recruitment, the extension of the term of the penal contract from three to five years, and greater control over time-expired labourers (Behal and Mohapatra, 1992).

"My grandfather came to Assam in 1920s from Chotanagpur, he was very young then. He was lured by the cash payment that he would receive in the Garden. He could never go back"
"Our ancestors were cheated and bought to work in the gardens. The arkatis and sardars promised them good life, but eventually treated like animals"

"Our ancestors had no scope of going back to their land as there was nothing left for them. Many of them had borrowed money from local money lenders who took away their land. Thus, we became landless and homeless."

"99 percent of our community members stayed back as there was no option of going back. So, there developed a large community of garden workers who came from different parts."

-Perceptions on History of the Community from FGDs (Translated from Assamese)

The emergence of a labour market and competition amongst planters for time-expired labourers led the planters to demand more penal powers over time-expired labourers. By 1880 a bonus system had developed, such workers being paid between Rs 12 and Rs 24 to reengage. Once free of any legal contract, these time expired coolies could seek employment in favourably situated and healthy gardens rather than in small and unhealthy gardens of upper Assam. Moreover, according to the planters, the absence of proper control over expired coolies would make them indolent, leading to a rise in mass protests and desertations.

It was only in 1868-69 that the first batch of legally recognised time expired labourers was produced, a few years after the passing of the Act of 1863. However, the planters provided the time–expired coolies with advances to bind them under the Act of 1859. Over time, many such time-expired labourers had settled in the villages outside the gardens in 'Bastis'. They were termed as Ex-tea garden labourers. Their size kept on increasing as newer and newer batches of labourers turned into time-expired coolies.

In the year 1881, the report of the Commission of Enquiry, which looked into the functioning of the Tea District Emigration Act of 1873, was placed before the Central legislature. The report of the Enquiry Commission favoured free recruitment by employers to accelerate the importation of labourers. This encouraged the Government to pass the

Inland Emigration Act (No.1) of 1882. This new Act of 1882 provided the local agents with official recognition in the recruiting districts and the power to execute contracts in the tea districts. With this implementation, the labourers could move freely around the tea gardens in Assam, then see the working conditions for themselves and enter into contracts after that. However, a caveat in the successful implementation of this Act was that the district of Goalpara was declared a labour district. It was the district up to where labour was expected to move freely. In reality, the district of Goalpara was far away from the actual districts where labourers were likely to be employed. The contractors sent the recruited labourers to Dhubri in Goalpara District, and contracts were made there. It gave way to the birth of a new recruitment system known as the Dhubri System of recruitment. Under this system, the contractors and the Arkatiyas continued to operate in their usual manner[10].

Meanwhile, an amendment was made to the Inland Emigration Act of 1882 was amended and the new Act came to be known as the Assam Labour Emigration Act of 1893. A positive aspect of this Act was that it had provisions under which contracts could be cancelled if any illegal recruitment was detected. Besides, the workers, along with their families, were to be deported. The supervising power in such matters rested with the local Government. However, even after attempts to bring changes via legislation, defects remained, and the interest of planters superseded the interest of the labourers. The system of recruitment continued up to the year 1901. In 1885 another commission of Enquiry was appointed, which strongly criticised the recruitment system and pointed out the abuses. Thus, in 1901, the Government passed the Assam Labour Emigration Act, which was treated as important legislation.

[10] Though the managers in this valley preferred the Sardari coolie against the depot coolie of the arkattis, but they were unable to meet the requirements completely.

The Assam labour Enquiry Committee was appointed in the year 1906. This committee recommended few legislative changes. In the 1908 amendment to the 1901 act, the system of enforcing penal contracts was abolished, and the power of garden managers to arrest absconding labourers were withdrawn. The system of indentured labour was abolished by the amendment made to the Act in 1915. This amendment established the *Sarderi* System of recruitment. The Act also dispensed off with all other contractors and *Arkatiyas* except the Sardars. It may be considered as an early attempt to remove many of the evils of the penal contracts. Nevertheless, the Garden Sarderi System did not accelerate the supply of labour.

Later, in the year 1920-21, an Enquiry Committee was formed to look into the working of the 1915 amendments. This committee found that the amendments had been ignored in many gardens. The planters were found to have paid substantial advances to labourers to held them successfully to gardens for a more extended period. The rationale of retaining the Workmen's Breach of Contract Act of 1859 was deliberated upon by this committee. After proper examination, the committee voted for its complete repeal. Finally, in order to completely repeal the Act of 1859, a bill was passed in 1924. Any traces of the indenture system were abolished by the Bill of 1924. The Bill became effective in 1926, bringing significant changes in the system of recruitment. The system of entering into legal contracts by the labourers with the planters for employment ended with this Bill. By this time, a significant portion of Garden born generation had also entered the labour force. Still, the Garden faced a labour shortage and required imported labour. Many time-expired coolies had opted to leave the Garden and settle outside the gardens carrying out agricultural activities.

The above discussion clarifies that several committees had been appointed to study and recommend changes and improvements in labour recruitment. These committees provided various suggestions and recommendations throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries to reform the labour recruitment system. Here, it needs to be mentioned that from amongst the various suggestions and recommendations, the Royal Commission on Labour (1931) recommended 'freer movement of labour', 'greater security for them' and 'better administration of law'. The commission's report led to the passing of the Tea Districts Emigrant Labour Act of 1932, which provided statutory rights for the first time. Under the provision of this Act, all immigrant labourers were to be repatriated from Assam with their families at the employer's expense. Although the contract labour system had been abolished and there were no contracted terms, the labourers enjoyed the right to be repatriated only after a term of 3 years.

Tea District Labour Association with its headquarters in Calcutta was formed as a result of the Act of 1932 for labour recruitment. The Association for the propose of labour recruitment established 19 labour recruiting depots known as Local Forwarding Agencies. Along with forwarding agencies, three sub-agencies and 28 rest houses connected the Local Forwarding Agencies and the recruiting areas. In addition to the facilities, as mentioned earlier, there were also 14 Forwarding Agencies between the local Forwarding Agencies and the tea districts. This Act created three categories of recruiters – (a) Garden Sardars, (b) Resident Sardars (c) Local Recruiters. The Association recruited labour from six recruiting provinces of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Central Provinces., United Provinces and Madras Province. The Government appointed a new agency with the Controller of Emigration as the head to supervise labour recruitment. The local authorities were also empowered to supervise labourers' recruitment, forwarding, and employment in the tea

gardens. Thus, the labour recruitment process witnessed vital improvement after about 80 years which was full of chaos and exploitation.

After that, due to considerable improvement in the recruitment process of labourers, the tea garden labourers adopted a positive attitude towards settling permanently in the tea garden as permanent labour. This slowed down the process of labourers going out to settle as ex-tea garden labourers[11] and taking up other jobs. However, labour immigration in the tea plantation continued up to 1960. In August 1960, the Industrial Committee on Plantations decided that recruitment from outside would be stopped. Stringent penalties were to be imposed for any illegal recruitment. In the same year, the Tea District Labour Association was liquidated. By then, the tea gardens of Assam showed signs of excess labour supply. It drew the attention of the Assam Government.

Meanwhile, the excess labour supply in the Garden gave rise to a new set of unemployment problems. This problem was created as a result of the continued large-scale recruitment of labourers from outside Assam. Lack of a scientific method of labour recruitment and the absence of favourable work conditions in the tea gardens in the initial years of labour recruitment paved the way for the creation of ex-tea garden labourers.

Thus, the above discussion clarifies that a significant number of labourers were imported from outside to sustain the tea industry of Assam. The history of labour recruitment into the tea gardens of Assam is long and eventful. The flawed labour recruitment system and the abuses faced by the labourers had made a deep impression in the minds of tea garden and ex-tea garden labourers.

The entire labour force in the tea industry of Assam was secured from outside the state. In 1901 the total number of labourers in the tea gardens (including Sylhet district)

[11] There are around 6-7 lakh ex-tea tribe population in the state. Their ancestors were workers in the garden who settled outside the estates once the contract was over.

was 6,54,000, which was about one-tenth of the population of Assam (with Sylhet district)[12]. Out of the total number of foreigners registered in Assam in 1901, nearly 85 per cent belonged to the tea garden labour class. There was a significant expansion of the tea industry after 1911 and consequent importation of labour during 1911-1920. About 7,69,000 labourers were imported during this decade into the state. However, in 1921, there was severe rioting in tea gardens, which led to a considerable exodus of labourers to their homes. After two or three years, the situation improved, and about 1,69,000 labourers were imported to Assam from other parts of India during 1921-30 (Goswami 1994).

3.2. Situating the 'Tea- Tribe': Constructing Ethnic boundaries

It is often observed that the caste system flourished with vigour when it came to the migration of diverse groups even after they faced displacement and dislocation across the seas. These groups kept their ties linked with the native land owing to relative economic success overseas. However, when it comes to the migration of labourers to Assam, extreme poverty and conditions of slavery and bondedness to the plantation system left the minimal scope of holding any ties to the native land. Most garden workers today have little idea about their origin and would only make conjectures about their possible ancestors and their native land. Regarding the origin of tea-tribe communities, Jain notes,

> *Problems related to their differences in origin made it difficult for them to achieve some kind of consensus for a new social order in terms of their traditional social relationships—the web of caste relationships as existing. In the typical setting of an Indian village or town never came into being. The reconstitution of a new community took place in terms of the paternalistic relationships between the higher and lower participants in the plantation social system itself.* (Jain, 1991, p. 37).

[12] Proceedings of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee (1906).

Three essential cultural attributes that play a significant role in maintaining ethnic boundaries in the social context of a tea garden society are commensality, connubium and language (Behal, 1994). Such a highly heterogeneous ethnic environment makes any other social parameters either dysfunctional or redundant. Interestingly, in the tea plantations, no particular ethnic group enjoys an absolute numerical majority. However, one or more groups may have a more significant presence in a garden's labour force. Such a condition of co-existence leads to mutual accommodation rather than ethnic exclusivism and thus hampers the growth of rigid ethnic boundaries. Hence ethnic boundaries are not found to lead to exclusivism; instead, there is a process of mutual accommodation between members of diverse ethnic groups within a garden and especially within the labour line[13]. Social occasions in the Garden reflect ethnic solidarity. It is observed that line residents address each other with kinship terms, reflecting the cordial relations.

Caste ranking and prejudices have been significantly diluted due to the long duration of living in labour lines with people from various ethnic groups[14]. Due to the absence of any 'high caste' among tea workers, they can freely define their status according to their perceptions. Food habits and customs related to marriage usually differ from community to community. It is found that adopting a caste after coming to the Garden was a common practice during colonial times. This has led to a condition where the actual meaning of caste and tribe has undergone a drastic change in the plantation setting.

Relations amongst the workers inside and outside the estate are not regulated by their caste or tribe affiliation. No account of caste is taken while providing the task to the workers on the plantation. While outside the estate, a different system of castes and sects exist in Assamese society. Outside the plantation estate, tea workers are treated

[13] Labour lines are usually dominated by one or two groups but there is no single group in any line.
[14] In official records there are around 108 caste and tribes within the Tea-Tribe/Ex-Tea Tribe community.

and identified as an undifferentiated group of 'labour'. Whether one's ancestor came from Odisa or Andhra Pradesh, they are termed as 'Deswali' (name of a Bihari dialect and its speakers) or 'Baganiya' by Assamese villagers[15].

Having lived with the Hindu castes for quite some time wherein there is a built-in hierarchy system, the tea workers have ingrained some notion, if not all, of the same. The caste principles are absent on most occasions of social interaction except in the realm of commensality. The present generation is seen to have little interest in caste and other tribal rituals. Also, it is seen that married men are found to be more particular about it than bachelors. Some resemblance is found with the Hindu pattern when it comes to the notion of pollution and purity. Rules on commensality usually operate on social occasions like marriages and feasts, where communities are involved and less for the individual.

Within the Tea-Tribe labour society, there is an ambiguity about the exact hierarchy, and the position of different castes/tribes as migrants from distant land got together; a distinct society developed in the plantation where hierarchy was more about occupational distinction than birth. However, based on the occupations of the tribes in their places of origin, some consensus exists among them in assigning caste positions to different groups. Broadly one can find two occupational groups in the plantations: agriculturists and non-agriculturist artisans. It is observed that the traditionally cultivating groups assume superior status over the non-agricultural community. Agriculturist communities like the Oraon, Munda, and Kharia consider themselves socially superior to the non-cultivating artisan groups. A majority of the non-cultivating groups are engaged in weaving, basketry, pottery and ironwork. Among the latter, Lohars were ironsmiths; Baraiks wove clothes, and

[15] A generic term used to define everyone who works in a tea garden.

Ghasis made musical instruments on which Mahalis performed on social occasions; Mahal wove baskets like the Turis.

"Tea-Tribe is not one single community. There are not less than 100 caste and tribes. Most people see us as one single community, which is wrong."

"There is actually no tribe called Tea-Tribe. There are Santhals, Oraons, Tatis, etc., but no tea-tribe. This name was given by the Colonial rulers to all the workers who worked in the tea estate".

"Each community has a distinct language, culture and traditions. However, in Assam, these markers have become less important, and we all became tea-tribes."

"We have our caste and tribe distinctions. Each tribe celebrate their festivals. Even inter-marriage is not very easy between these tribes."

"Because of living together for so many years, we tend to present ourselves as one community."

"The name 'Tea-Tribe/ Ex- Tea Tribe' is a political one. It helps show the large presence of the community".

-Perceptions on the construction of Tea- Tribe identity from FGDs (Translated from Assamese)

There also exists some form of division within the same group based on religion, food habits. For the Hindu segment, the concept of ritual purity and pollution seems to be an essential factor. For example, communities like the non-converted Oraon, Munda and Kharia ·as a whole consider themselves higher than their Christian counterparts. Most of them avoid cooked food in Christian households. For many of them, conversion to Christianity is an act of ritual pollution. Social intercourse between the Christians and their non-Christian counterparts appears limited in day-to-day life, though things are changing amongst the younger generation.

An excellent example of social stratification is the presence of sub-groups among the Munda tea workers. Two distinct endogamous sub-groups are found among

Mundas residing in Assam-the Nagpuria Munda and the Sonpuria Munda. The Nagpuria Mundas consider themselves higher in social status and consider the latter as ritually impure. It is because they do not take beef like the Sonpurias, who also practice bull sacrifice as part of the rituals in their Borpahari Puja. A Nagpuria Munda maintains purity by not accepting cooked food from the members of the other sub-group. The differential status of the sub-groups is also reflected in their ceremonial dress patterns.

An essential role in determining the status of a group/sub-group in· the social hierarchy is determined by beef and pork intake. For instance, the Oraon, Kharia, Savara and the Sonpuria Munda are considered lower status by groups such as the Kamar, Patir, Kurmi and a section of Savaras do not take pork. They do not inter-dine and avoid inter-marriage. The Borpahari Puja is prevalent also among the Oraon and Kharia. An essential part of the ritual is the sacrifice of a bull. However, under the influence of the neighbouring Hindu population, many have given up this practice and instead sacrificed an effigy made of dough. Those who have adopted Christianity take homemade beer and pork and are somewhat segregated from their non-Christian brethren.

Marriage usually takes place within the ethnic group. Caste labels are significant in the context of marriage. In an arranged marriage, known as '*bandobast*', caste as an endogamous group becomes relevant, and caste-fellows are in one's own and other tea gardens and ex-tea worker settlements. In the '*rajikhusi*' (based on spouses' mutual consent) marriages, however, caste may not be relevant. In the colonial times, when the main concern was to retain workers in the Garden, marriages were often arranged at the manager's behest. Even though caste was not a determining factor, managers avoided the

violation of caste sentiments[16]. While inter-ethnic marriages occur and are tolerated, they are not the norm, and their frequency is less in the numerically viable groups.

Marriage between the Christians and non-Christians is not rare, particularly among the Oraons, Munda and Kharia, as their status seems the same. The boy may have to pay a token fine to the girl's parents in such a case. One of the offences in marriage is marriage between tribes with unequal status. Earlier, such couples were out-casted. However, nowadays, the panchayat takes over the issue and settles the dispute imposing a fine on the boy. Sometimes trade union takes responsibility for amicable settlement. The incidence of inter-tribal marriage is higher in large plantations where various tribal communities live together. Residential quarters are allotted to the workers without considering their ethnic background, and thus different ethnic groups live side by side. It leads to intimate social interaction between members of two or more tribes, which opens the opportunity for inter-tribal marriages. Inter-tribal marriages are found more in plantations that are close to urban centres and those that have tribal groups with small populations.

3.3. Religious identity

The tea garden labourers belong to almost all major religious denomination that prevails in India. However, religious diversity has never been a cause of social divisions, and religious polarisation is nearly non-existent in the plantation setting. The vast majority of the tea workers are drawn from tribal communities and the low caste Hindus. Most members of Hindu castes have retained their caste traditions and, in many cases, adopted some of the local higher caste traditions. A section of the Panikas who follow the teachings of Kabir are strict vegetarians and do not drink liquor (Saikia, 1994). Some Muslim Tea labourers belong

[16] Personal Communication, 27 February, 2018.

to the Julaha (weaver) caste in some of the erstwhile Brahmaputra Tea Company gardens (presently owned ·by the Assam Tea Corporation), such as Negheriting and Rungamatty, in the Golaghat district. These labourers had migrated from Bihar and UP.

Since colonial times a good number of the tribals among the tea workers has adopted Christianity, and the rest are primarily Hinduized tribals who have retained many elements of their animistic faith:

> *The people of the tea labour community follow mainly two religions: Hinduism and Christianity. Hinduism is professed by more than four-fifths of the total population and Christianity by Jess than one-fifth. But basically, the people of this community are animist* (Saikai, 1994, p. 223).

It is mainly the tribals belonging to Chotanagpur who have adopted Christianity, while others are very few. The missionaries made a profound impact on the religious as well as socio-economic life of the labourers. An analysis of the role of Christianity and Christian missionaries among sections of tea workers helps us understand many aspects of life at the plantation.

Except for a few who had been converted to Christianity under the impact of missionaries in their native villages' animism was the prevalent form of belief amongst the Chotonagpur tribals who migrated to the tea plantations. The initial conversions amongst these tribes were carried out under the aegis of the Gessner Evangelical mission of Berlin and the Belgian Jesuits in Bihar, while a large majority of them converted after migration to the Assam plantations. The first pioneer among the Catholic missionaries in the gardens was the Salvatorian, Rev. Rudolf Fontaine (Beker, 1980 cited in Sharma 2011). In the erstwhile Sibsagar district of Assam, the American Baptist missionaries had established a mission for evangelising the Assamese. However, they found work among the labourers much more promising than among the local people. One of the early Acts of baptism by this missionary

took place in 1871 by Rev. E.W. Clerk, who baptised four tea labourers. With this began the active participation of the American Baptist missionary activities in the tea areas (Downs, 1993). Following these, hundreds of tea garden labourers were baptised in Assam every year. Initially, the planters viewed the activities of the missionaries in the Garden with suspicion. However, after some initial hiccups, the planters extended co-operation to the missions. They would often make use of the missionaries' influence to solve the labour problems. When the Government made it obligatory for the management of the tea gardens to provide elementary education to the labourers' children, the planters sought the help of the missionaries to establish schools (Muthumana, 1992).

It is not possible to give an exact number of tea workers following Christianity; about 10% of the tea and ex-tea labour population is believed to be Christian, 9 of whom around 60% belong to three Protestant churches, namely, Baptist; Lutheran and Anglican, the rest being Catholics (ibid.). Most Christian converts have given up their traditional beliefs and superstitious practices. They no longer participate in practices such as ancestor worship and worship of supernatural spirits for curing disease. They are inclined towards modern ideas including medical treatment, education and gender equality after their conversion and have imbibed desirable habits of health and personal hygiene, sanitation and cleanliness. The trend towards drinking has declined among them. The Christian labourers with a higher level of education have better representation in non-plantation jobs and professions and are economically sounder than their non-Christian counterparts. The Christian converts give high value to education and maintain regular savings. The Christian converts have been found to maintain an independent identity cutting across ethnic groups. There is very minimal social interaction between the Hindu and the Christian tea workers have been found. Among the Santals, Troisi observed that "the

Christian method of evangelisation often tended to draw the Santals out of their milieu" (Troisi, 1978, p. 26). He further maintains, "*A cleavage between the converts and their community also arises as a result of the substantial changes in the rites and ceremonies which surround a Santal's life cycle*" (ibid., p. 268). It might have contributed to the cleavage observed between Hindu and Christian labourers. In matrimonial negotiations, however, it is observed that the Christians too prefer mates from the same ethnic groups, though inter-religious marriages are rare.

"We are a very misunderstood community. People here called us Coolie, Bongalee, and now we are called Tea-Tribe and Adibasi but our real identity is something else".
"We have become used to this 'Tea-Tribe' term now. It has become our identity now. Our leaders use this name to take benefits."
"We have different cultures, traditions, and religions, but we are the same in the garden, and even outside the garden, you see."
"Many of our people have converted to other religions, but they still follow the old traditions and culture."
"Change in 'country' (region) has bought in many changes in our food habits, religion and other customs. We have got mixed up with the local culture".

-Perceptions on Culture and Identity from FGDs (translated from Assamese)

3.4. Linguistic Identity

What it comes to linguistic diversity, among tea garden tribes, there are three linguistic elements. They are namely (i) Kolarian speaking groups like the Munda, Ho, Santhal and the Kharia, (ii) Dravidian speaking groups, like the Oraon, Kondh, Gond and the Malpahariya and (iii) groups speaking Oriya, Bengali and Hindi or dialects of these languages. Only a few of the tea workers have retained their native dialects, prominent among them being Oraons who speak Kurukh, and Mundas, Kharias, Turi and Mahali speak various dialects of Mundari (Hazarika, 2001).

Though in a debased form, the powerful tribes and castes can still retain their respective languages and speak in their languages. Mundari, Santhali, Oriya, Bhumij, Kharia, Kurukh-Oraon, Savara and Parji are still prevalent among the tea plantation labourers. While members of an ethnic group may speak in their mother tongue, communication with others is carried out in Hindi, known as Sadri or *Bagan-baat* (Garden's Speech), which resembles the inter-tribal lingua franca of Chotanagpur. Usually, children learn both their mother tongue and Sadri from an early age.

Assamese words are prominently used in the gardens of upper Assam. Assamese has become the language of communication within the home and outside.

Because of mass illiteracy and exclusive tea labour settlements away from settlements of the host population, the process of linguistic adaptation has been relatively slow. However, the tea labour immigrants, in their way, have adopted the language of the host population for communication and social contact. Sample surveys reveal that all adult persons, including women, can express themselves in Assamese to a significant degree. They have developed this faculty because of their contact with the tea garden ministerial staff consisting of the host population and other host populations from whom they procure commodities in the weekly market (Bhuyan, 1977, cited in Hazarika, 2018)

Some of the educated sections of the tea tribes lament the loss of their original mother tongues in the plantation setting and resent the insensitive attitude of the state government on the issue of recognising the tea tribe languages as media of education:

The tribal immigrants have lost their languages or their linguistic identity partly because they were uprooted from their places of origin and came into contact with other languages and partly because their tribal languages are not official languages nor written languages in the state where they found themselves. As such, their languages do not have any educational value, i.e. they have no role to play in the educational system, administration or In mass communication. Constitutionally every child has the right to have instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education. However, there is no chance for the tribal child to have the instruction in its mother tongue. Nevertheless, language is the soul of one's culture. It gives life and animation to one's culture. It has a definite cultural value. Moreover, as such the preservation and maintenance of the language

is absolutely necessary for the preservation and maintenance of one's culture ... (Kerketta, 1990).

As things stand today, there is little chance of the state government recognising any of the Adivasi languages like Kurukh or Santhali as a medium of education in primary schools of the state (Das, 2016). The central bodies representing the tea tribes have not demanded such action; instead, they are keen on making the tea tribe people proficient in Assamese to avail employment opportunities in the state.

The tea labour community members have minimal 'scope to educate their children because of lack of schooling facilities in tea gardens. However, wherever such opportunities in nearby areas exist, they have availed of this by sending their wards to schools where instruction is imparted through Assamese. This shows the process of linguistic and educational adaptation by the Assam born generation of the community ... In addition to schooling with children of the host population and picking up the language through learning and conversation, the younger generation of the community has developed an interest for the Assamese language and literature ... The school-educated generation tends to converse in Assamese with parents and relatives at home (Saikia, 1994, p. 216).

Student organisations like the ATTSA have demanded that the Assamese language be made compulsory in the tea garden offices so that the educated workers can read and understand official communications. The knowledge of the Assamese language is seen to carry some social prestige. The young use it in their day-to-day interaction with the world outside. However, the Christian missionaries and the Adivasi organisations like the ACA and the AASAA have stressed the revival and preservation of Adivasi languages and other elements of Adivasi culture.

3.5. Caste/Tribal Identity

At times the ethnic identities of the workers tend to reaffirm themselves on various occasions even though social life engineered by the plantation tends to be uniform. The

numerically dominant group within a plantation generally dominates the socio-cultural life of the labourers and controls the trade union activities (Kar, 1984). Factors such as the degree of cohesiveness among the members of an ethnic group and inter-group affinities based on place of origin or other Commonalities may also influence the relative social power of groups (ibid.). The Chotanagpur migrants are often seen as a single 'Bihari' community by other sub-groups of workers.

Since they form the largest sub-group among tea workers, many aspects of their cultural life have come to be identified as symbolising the tea worker community as a whole. For example, Bagan baat, the lingua franca among the workers, resembles Sadri, the dialect commonly spoken in Chotanagpur. Drinking *haria* (Rice-Beer) is a feature of Chotanagpur tribal life but is practiced universally by all tea workers. Their belief in witchcraft also appears to be a similar borrowed trait.

One of the parameters of identification within a tribe/caste is the membership of an exogamous clan. It is seen that most of the tea workers, if not all, happen to know their clan names. Many use the clan's name as a surname, while others use the tribe's name as a surname. The clan's name, in their native places, would have served as an important marker of identity. It would be used as a surname because, in the context of tribal life, intra-group differentiation is clan-based. The tribe/caste name carries more significance in the current setting, where heterogeneous groups are placed close and used as a surname to assert the group identity. Kar observes that some of the ex-tea garden labourers again started using clan names: *Thus Khalkho, Barla, Bagh, Kujur, Minz, Toppo, etc., appear as a surname for the members of the Oraon community. These are, in fact, various clan groups within the Oraons* (Kar, 1990, p. 127).

The elders among the tribe oppose Intra-clan marriages, and marriages are generally held outside the clan. Beyond this, the clan does not usually serve as a basis of affinity, and tribe affiliation carries far more critical as a marker of identity. Regarding the extent to which different communities constituting the tea tribes have lost or retained their original cultural identity and its attributes, one author has remarked:

They did not totally lose their identity, especially those communities which lived by themselves though a bit isolated. Some lost everything, but they preserved their names, which helped them trace back to their origins or original culture, language, dances, etc. For example, the people still remembered their 'Karam' dance though it was anything but 'Karam'. They still called themselves 'Samra Oraon' or 'Mangra Munda', which reminded them of their original tribe to which they belonged. Similarly, many still preserved their tribal surnames, which would enable them to identify their tribe (Kerketta, 1994, p. 127).

Long years of shared living have bought these diverse groups together. This phenomenon has led to homogenising made possible by the impact of the plantation life process amongst the groups. On the question of moving closer of the tea workers from diverse ethnic backgrounds towards a common ethnic identity, various opinions have been expressed:

Does it mean that the tea tribes and castes have become one ethnic group? The answer seems to be no. According to some authors, tea labour and ex-tea labour form a multi-ethnic group. The identity that has emerged through a common food, dress and a common lingua franca (Sadri) and festivals like Karam and Sarhul seems to be a very relative one. The authors point out the emergence of various organisations to safeguard the culture and language in order to establish group identity and heritage in a multi-ethnic setting (Pullopillil, 1990, p. 7)

In the five decades, revival and preservation of cultural identity with the aim of various caste and tribe associations have sprung up among the tea workers. The Oraons tribe, who constitute the most prominent community amongst the plantation workers in Brahmaputra valley, have a state-level Oraon association known as Akhil Assam Pradesh Kurukh (Oraon) Sangh. Its annual conference is held every year in different parts of the

state. Preservation of Oraon culture and Kurukh language are its main objectives (Sharma, 1987, p. 250). Similarly, the Santhals organise state-level and district-level meetings where the emphasis is laid on revitalising and popularising Santhal traditional values and norms through the Ad Santhal Samaj and the All Assam Santhali Sahitya Sabha. The Assam Munda Mahasabha performs a similar role among the Mundas. The Adivasi Council of Assam (ACA) serves as an association for different tribal communities like the Oraons, Santhals, and Mundas at a more comprehensive level. It was founded at Grahampur in Gossaigaon (western Assam) in 1957 as the "All Assam Munda, Oraon and Santhal Sanmelan" by the local MLA Mathias Tudu. The ACA acquired its present nomenclature in 1959 at a session held in Gorubhasa village. Francis Hanse and Mathias Marandi were prominent among their original leaders. Among the Oriyas, the Utkal Samaj is an important organisation that brings the Oriya tea workers in contact with other Oriyas staying in Assam. Other such organisations among the tea tribes include the All Assam Kurmi Sanmelan and the All Assam Mirdha-Turi Sanmelan (Saikia, 1994).

These organisations serve as platforms for forging unity among their respective ethnic groups and forums for cultural and literary activities. At the same time, they also perform the role of interest and pressure groups on various occasions. They often invite influential personalities and cultural troupes from their native places, e.g., from Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, or Orissa, and tea gardens in other places, e.g., the Dooars region of North Bengal, to take part in their annual gatherings. Their activities are mostly confined to organising community festivals and cultural meetings, where group demands are also highlighted. They usually refrain from agitational activities in their articulation of group interests. Among them, the ACA is politically active at election time, helping to consolidate the Adivasi votes both within and outside the plantations based on shared identity and

interests. However, it is the tea tribe identity rather than that of Adivasi identity that plays the decisive role in shaping the voting preferences of tea workers, and the proponents of Adivasi consciousness would rarely engage in malicious activities towards a non-Adivasi tea tribe candidate.

3.6. Coolie Labour in Local Landscape: Tea Tribe and the local population

The 'Coolies' were sent to Assam wearing red jackets, a symbol of degrading prison life, coolie labourers often regarded Assam as the end of the world. Forced by the conditions of their home regions, they had little choice but to migrate. The crisis of landlessness and indebtedness accentuated by the forced commercialisation of India's countryside was responsible for the flight of most of the migratory population.

While in Assam, the image of the migrant coolie as bonded labour aroused complicated responses by the locals. By the late nineteenth century, there was a feeling amongst the Assamese peasantry that their perilous hold on respectability might be threatened by any association with 'coolie' status[17]. Due to which they kept aloof from any kind of paid manual work for white employers. Villagers had minimal direct encounters with coolies due to the harsh restrictions imposed by planters on labourers' interactions with local populations. No unauthorised locals were permitted on the plantation grounds, and guards ensured that gates were closed for the locals. However, some interaction would occur in the weekly (haat) market where Upper Assam villagers were permitted to sell produce and other papers to plantation labourers.

In the manner of plantation societies elsewhere, this tea regime catalysed a process whereby 'coolie' became a racial as much as an economical category (Sharma, 2008,

[17] The migrated labourers, in the local landscape, were seen as 'inferior' humans. Such distaste would be understood from Bolinarayan Bora's essay *Sah Bagisar Coolie* (The Tea Garden Coolie) which was published in the Calcutta based Asomiya language periodical *Mau* published in 1880s.

p. 1312). Assamese and Kachari peasants, despite being disliked by the colonial planters, they continued to be engaged for specific, temporary tasks on tea plantations, even at the height of indentured labour (Ramsden, 1944 cited in Sharma, 2008). Such work was helpful for the local peasantry in meeting urgent cash demand. However, such an interaction hardened social prejudice against tea work and that migrant population which depended on it for a living.

It was the caste Hindu Assamese and Bengali Mohurirs (clerks) who for a long time were the only locals who had sustained face-to-face interactions with these migrant labourers. In the neighbourhood school, teachers lamented that pupils left for plantation appointments once they had reached the higher classes. While a plantation clerkship provided a valuable income to the rural gentry even though it was less prestigious and paid less than an equivalent government position. Jobs for the local population ranged from the hurra mohurir (head clerk) who wrote letters and kept accounts, the hazrah mohurir (paymaster clerk) who oversaw coolies at work and in the evening, gave them their hazrahs (pay), to the godown mohurir (storeroom clerk) who allotted new materials and tools, and weighed picked leaves. There were also 'Doctor Babus' who were to treat large numbers of labourers with little equipment. They were native medical licentiates who treated the labourers and formed another segment of this supervisory class.

New planters were made aware that differences in social standing exist between these Assamese and Bengali caste Hindu employees and their subordinate coolies. On their arrival on the plantations, any new employee was warned that these 'Garden Babus' formed the middle classes of local society.

In the contemporary period, some basic inferences can be made on the social relations between the tea garden workers and the surrounding peasant population. The

social composition of the population around the gardens is varied and differs from zone to zone within the valley. In the Upper Assam areas on the south bank extending from Nagaon to Tinsukia districts, most of the gardens are surrounded by the Assamese population, including tribals and ex-tea garden workers who identify themselves as Assamese. Castes like Ahom, Motok and Moran constitute a majority of the Assamese population in the easternmost districts of the valley. The Mishing tribe predominates in Dhemaji and Lakhimpur districts, and the Bodo tribe in the northern areas of undivided Darrang, Kamrup and Goalpara districts, where many gardens are located. On the North Bank, a sizeable Nepali population is found in the tea areas of the undivided Lakhimpur and Darrang districts. In all the tea areas, substantial Bengalis and Hindi speaking people, including Marwaris and Biharis, are found, many of whom are linked by trade or profession to the gardens (Das, 2011). In Assam, the names of tribes such as Santhal, Oraon, Munda or Kharia are understood in local parlance to the tea worker community.

The growth of the ex-tea garden worker society in the vicinity of the tea gardens has made the process of integration of the tea workers into the local society easier. The settlements were initially homogeneous in composition, consisting of ex-tea labourers only. Interaction between them and the local people has developed very slowly. It is confined mainly to the economic and political spheres: "*The socio-cultural interactions of this segment of the population with the local Assamese population were restricted in the initial period. Nevertheless, it has gradually developed, and the overall relationship is cordial. However, some degree of aloofness from the Assamese society is apparent*" (Goswami, 1984, p. 6).

"Our community has always maintained a distance from the outside world. That is how we were kept. There was very little interaction with the local population".

"Most people outside the Garden very much misunderstand us. We are seen as a very backward and uncivilised community."
"Many of our people these days work as domestic help in nearby villages. This has improved the relationship, but we are still looked down".
"Our people are mostly uneducated, which hampers the relationship with the outside world. Due to occurrence of incidents like witch-hunting and attack on staffs have all bought a bad name to us."
"Most of our people nowadays work outside the garden, but we are still seen as 'baganiya' made to work at the Garden only."
-Perception on Communal Relations from FGDs (translated from Assamese)

The ex-tea worker community occupies a position in the lower rung in the social ladder of the local people. The prolonged isolation of the group, initially maintained by the British planters and subsequently perpetuated by the local people, has contributed substantially to the tea labourers' observed minimum cultural borrowings. Phukan considers the tea garden labour society as a sister society of the ex-tea garden labour population:

The present population in the ex-tea garden labour villages had their origin in the tea estates, most usually in the neighbouring tea estates. The existing wage-earning society in the tea estates and the newly developed society in the ex-tea garden labour villages have essential characteristics (Phukan, 1984, p. 115).

There is little scope for conflict of interest between the tea and the ex- tea garden labour. However, there is competition between the two groups mainly for two scarce resources, land and employment. These areas of conflict are likely to grow in future. While permanent employment in the gardens has become quite restricted, opportunities for temporary work during the plucking season are plentiful. The gardens prefer to employ surplus labour from their resident population and hire ex-tea workers for any additional labour requirements. The poorer sections of ex-tea workers are found to envy the tea workers whose economic position has enhanced a lot since the old days[18]. The garden

[18] Personal interview with Ramji Lohar, 30 March 2019.

workers are· also allotted cultivable land, and inside the Garden, they can raise paddy. So far as ownership or hiring of land outside the gardens is concerned, the ex-tea workers are in a better position than the tea workers. The Government has allotted some ceiling-surplus lands to the ex-tea labour population. However, such land has become very scarce, resulting in high landlessness and unemployment among the ex-tea garden worker population.

There is an unequal relationship between the tea worker population and the Assamese society. It is observed that the average Assamese peasant traditionally considered the tea garden worker population as a single social group (or caste) of the lowest order. The relatively affluent local peasants, owing to land ownership, looked down upon the plantation labourers who lived under slave-like conditions. The local peasantry believed them to be of an inferior race. The ex- tea garden workers, too, carried the same stigma, even though they no longer lived within the confines of the plantation system. The segregation between them and the Assamese population has been accentuated by the economic and educational backwardness of the tea worker population. It has widened the social distance between the two communities. The divide has also been enforced as a result of caste notions inhibiting social interaction. Relations between tea workers and non-Assamese residents of the tea areas are primarily based on economic ties, and social interaction is limited and personalised.

Various individuals and organisations have been making conscious efforts to assimilate the tea labour population and their culture into the mainstream Assamese society. The apex organisation for the promotion of Assamese language, literature and culture, the Assam Sahitya Sabha, has recognised the culture of the tea workers as part of Assamese culture:

It is implicit that the tea garden labour population is not yet integrated into the socio-cultural life of Assam. Integrating them into the greater society means recognition of the culture of the tea garden labour class as part of the Assamese culture (Phukan, 1987, p. 121).

In recent years, the tea workers are seen to have picked up the cultural traits of Assamese culture. However, the transmission process has been very slow and somewhat confined to the central and eastern parts of the valley. The cultural assimilation of the plantation workers has also been facilitated by the flexible and accommodative attitude shown by the dominant section of the Assamese population. Commenting on the scope of social relationships between the plantation workers and the local population, Bhuyan states that:

Socio-cultural assimilation as it appears today may be prolonged because matrimonial relations between members of the indigenous community and those of the tea labour immigrants have not yet been established. This is partly because their social status regarding caste and creed is yet to be considered at par with that of the indigenous society. Last but not least, there are visible physical differences born out of their different racial background, preventing usual matrimonial alliances between the two communities (Bhuyan, 1994, p. 219).

In art and literature, members of the tea worker community have contributed numerous Assamese literary works, including prose, poetry, song and drama. The mouthpiece of the Asam Chah-Mazdoor Janajati Chatra Santha (now ATTSA) entitled Seujipaat, ACMS's Chah-Mazdoor, the All Assam Chah-Shramik Sangh's Smaronika (souvenir), and the monthly journal Madol (now defunct) edited by Ganesh Kurmi have made valuable contributions towards popularising Assamese language and literature among the tea workers and gave rise to a new genre of Assamese litterateurs among them (Das, 2011). Special issues and supplements have been published in many Assamese journals and newspapers. Such write-ups have highlighted the literary and cultural aspects of the tea

worker community. Saptahik Nilachal, the well-known weekly magazine of the seventies, published special issues focussed on tea- tribes on 26 August 1970 and 2 July 1980, about various aspects of the community. Another popular Assamese weekly, Xonor Asam (Golden Assam), brought out a unique tea tribes' issue in 1975 (Das, 2011). Special programmes for tea workers are relayed by the Dibrugarh and Guwahati centres of All India Radio (AIR) and Guwahati Doordarshan. Assamese films like *Chameli Memsahab*, directed by Dr Bhupen Hazarika, is woven around life at the plantation. Besides, movies like Kachghar Rangdhali, Kecha Son, and Ratanlal (the ACMS produced the last two) have faithfully portrayed tea garden life and brought many hidden artists from the tea community.

An exciting aspect amongst the Tea-Tribe/caste is their propensity to identify with an influential group within the community. For instance, among the tea workers, those with the title Tanti occupy positions of influence and high offices, such as Minister in the State and member of Legislative Assembly and art and literature. Tanti is the title of the weaver caste in parts of eastern India (mostly Odisa). The Tanti of the ex-tea worker community has been able to mix in the Assamese society through inter-ethnic marriages. By adopting this title, many tea workers identify with this group which is well-known outside the gardens. The practice of adopting the Tanti title and then Assamese ethnic identity marks a process of upward mobility among the tea and ex-tea worker community. Jain observes that through the medium of their Tanti caste title, the tea workers have tried to break the barriers between them and their Assamese neighbours:

> *Having ·gained access to the trade union and labour movement in Assam. Thus, getting a Tanti minister for labour in the state government of Assam, the tea garden workers have been able to assert an image of respectability* (Jain, 1992, p. 36).

Such desire for upward mobility can also be observed in the case of some other sections of workers, such as the Kurmis. The Kurmis for long have identified

themselves as Rajputs (a warrior caste of North India) and claimed higher status in the caste hierarchy (Kurmi, 1969). Although, such an attempt found little footing in the community as it lacked any long-drawn effort to implement the idea of belonging to a higher caste. Regarding the notion of upward mobility amongst the tea tribe community, Phukan notes,

The Sanskritization process has not much relevance to the tea worker society as it meant only certain positional changes within their castes and tribal situations, and they could not enter the social structure of the local Assamese population' (Phukan, 1987, p. 109).

While in their areas of origin, most of these workers would have been considered Scheduled Tribes or Scheduled Castes. In Assam, they are considered as Other Backward Castes, along with indigenous castes like Ahom and Koch-Rajbonshi. However, it is observed that socially the members of the OBC communities in the Assamese society tend to look down upon the tea garden worker population, considering them as belonging to lower castes.

3.7. Adibasi Nomenclature and the Politics of Schedule Tribe

Presently, the tea-tribe communities of Assam have been categorised as 'tea garden Labourers', 'tea garden tribes' and 'ex-tea garden labourers' and 'ex-tea garden tribes' as per the official central register of Other Backward Classes (OBC), Assam (http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease). At the same time, the community members argue that their current status as Backward Classes is faulty, and they claim that their identity as 'tribes' is at par with any other tribe of Assam. According to official statistics, the tea tribes comprising tea garden workers and ex-garden workers are scattered in 793 registered tea gardens across the Brahmaputra and Barak Valleys. The 190-years old Assam tea industry employs about six lakh permanent workers and about six lakh temporary workers. Under both categories, about 50 per cent are women. 97 Tea Tribes in Assam have struggled to secure ST status to protect their identity and ensure special measures to improve their condition.

During the British regime, the tea-labourers of Assam were categorised under 'depressed classes'. In the Provincial Council of Assam, four seats were reserved, and in 1934-1947, they had four elected members. However, in the year 1950, they were de-scheduled (Das, 2014). The Adivasi nomenclature was strategically adopted to mobilise the various tea–tribes and bring them under one standard roof and fight for their rights unitedly. The genesis of Adivasi for the Tea-Tribes of Assam can be traced to the formation of the Adivasi Council of Assam (ACA) in the year 1955 as a result of Jaipal Singh's visit to Assam in 1955. The ACA can be regarded as the first Adivasi organisation in Assam, which started the movement for ST demand in an organised way. The members of ACA submitted memoranda to the Government and met the then Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, to press for the ST demand. As a result of their intense lobbying, nine Adivasi tribes were enlisted in ST List in 1987. However, there was demand from other quarters that the entire 'tea tribes' should be recognised as ST and not just the nine tribes; this created confusion and the process was halted.

Years later, in 2004, the Assam Assembly had passed a resolution to grant ST status to the tea tribes and the six other communities. The recommendations were accordingly forwarded to the Centre. According to Das (2016) this recommendation of granting ST status, the Registrar General of India (RGI) raised following questions:

a) *The recommendations failed to present the Adivasis as 'tribes'. (It was mandatory to link the five major characteristics of tribes such as Primitive traits, Distinctive culture, Shyness of contact with the community at large, Geographical isolation, and backwardness.*
b) *The recommendations were that 'Tea & Ex-Tea Tribes' be included in the ST list. The RGI rejected the term "Tea tribe", being unconstitutional.*
c) *The list of 97 communities was very confusing and misleading. Recommendations to include some SCs as STs were constitutionally unacceptable.*

d) *Recommendations were to include Adivasis and Tea tribes in the same plane as the communities like Ahom, Koch Rajbanshis, Moran, Motok etc. which was unacceptable to the RGI (Das, 2016, p. 11).*

In the year 1978 itself, the Ministry of Home Affairs recommended 14 tribes of the Tea-garden labour community (the major Adivasi tribes), but the Assam Government had disagreed and said that the migrant labour was better off than the local.

All Assam Tea Tribes Students Association (AATTSA) evolved from Chotanagpur Students' Union (formed in 1974), put forth a 20 points Charter of Demands in 1988-89, the demand of ST was one. All Adivasi Students Association of Assam (AASAA) was formed on 2 July 1996. ST demand has been its topmost priority in its many memoranda. Many mass rallies were organised to demand ST status for the community. Altogether, 16 AASAA leaders and members sacrificed their lives.

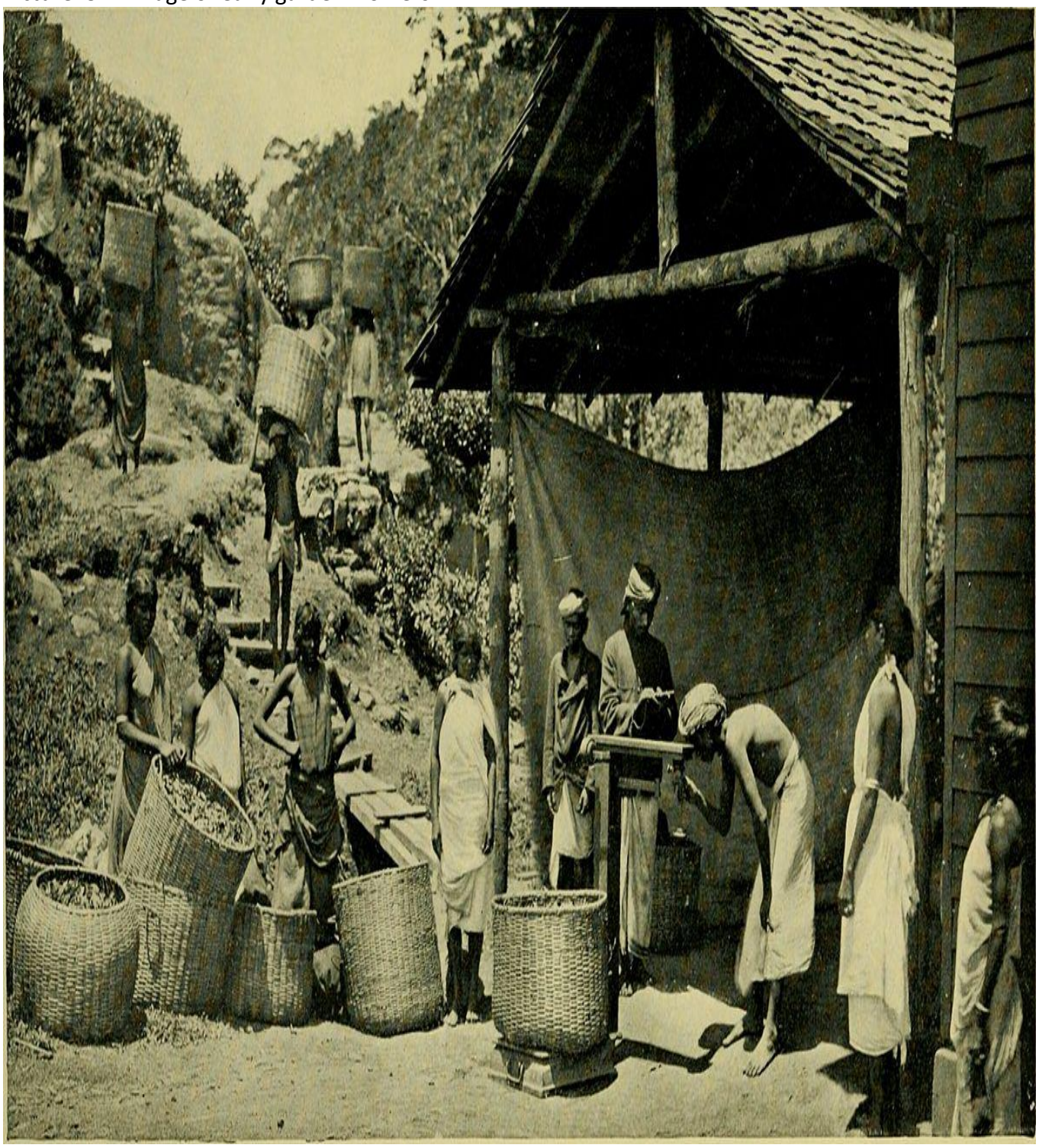
In July 2003, some leaders were shot dead, and many others were injured and crippled for life. On 24 November 2007, during the Mass rally for ST demand which ended up as Beltola Tragedy, hundreds of helpless AASAA members (boys and girls) were brutally beaten, Laxmi Uraon was stripped naked and chased in public. Hundreds of AASAA members were put behind bars while carrying out democratic protests in support of ST demand. This incident was reported in media due to the age-old enmity between the local Assamese community and the tea garden labourers. It was also seen as an ultimate expression of the inbuilt prejudice and class hatred, which characterised the attitude of a sizable section of the Assamese middle class towards the tea garden labourers (Gohain 2007).

3.8. Conclusion

The above discussion clearly shows how the colonial policy created a 'Tea-Tribe' community out of land-owning peasants. The transportation of 'coolies' resulted in the loss of their identity and dignity. Even after independence, the community was at the margins of the state's polity and economy. It had to bear the brunt of nativist movements and the discriminatory attitude of the society outside the Garden, which paved the way for a sense of revivalism of culture and identity. At present, there is a high political consciousness about rights. However, we will find in the following chapters whether the consciousness has reached the masses or is confined to an elite class only.

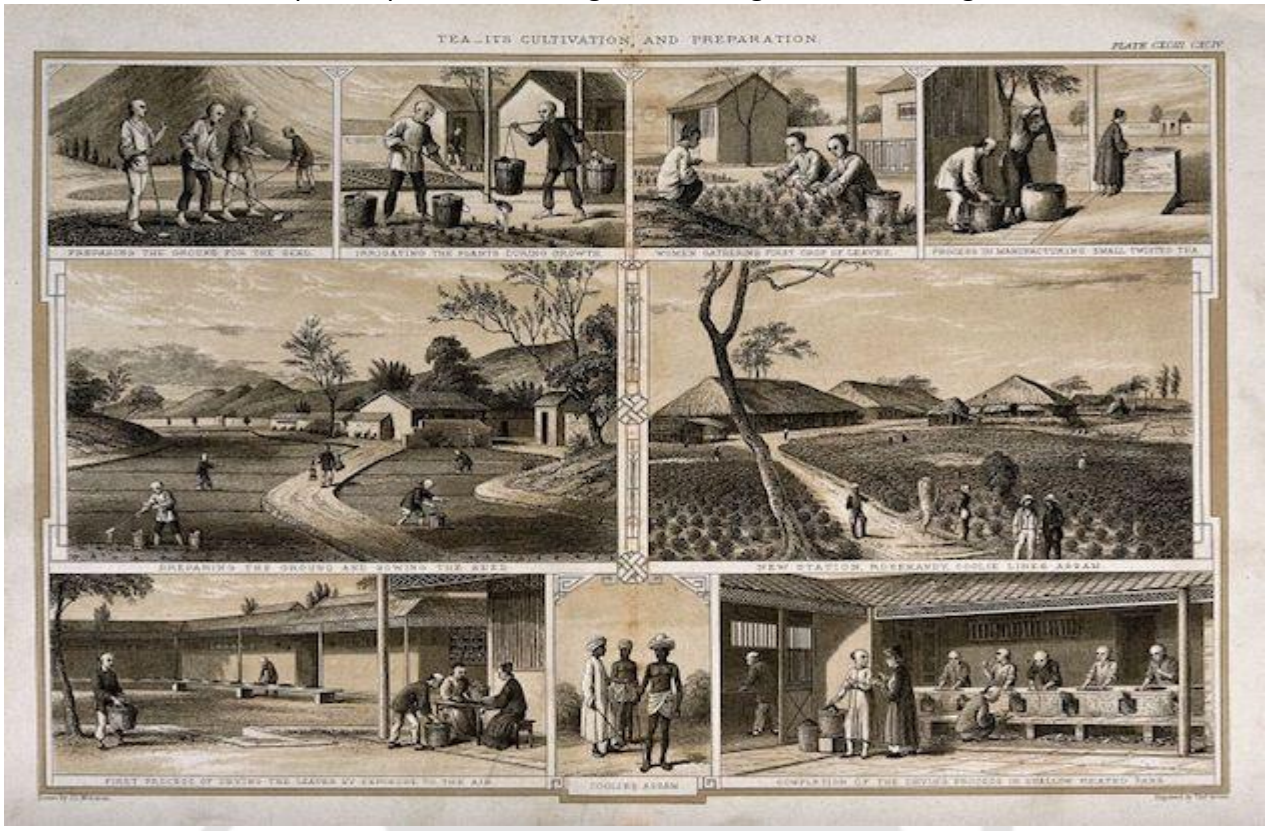
In the last one and a half-century, many socio-economic and political changes have taken place in the state. There have been several anti-immigrants' campaigns too. These agitations have in recent times fuelled ethnic separatist movement in the state. In recent years, the 'Tea-Tribe' community has become politically active and relied on them to identify as 'Adivasi.

Picture: 3.1: Image of early garden workers



A picture depicting early plantation labourers with their leaves at the company's collection centre. (Photo Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons)

Picture 3.2: A colonial period portrait showing various stages of work in a garden



A colonial painting showing life in early plantations. The different stages of work involved in tea leave cultivation is depicted here. It is a part of the manual provided to tea planters. (Photo source: https://www.thenewsminute.com).

Picture 3.3: Tea-making cauldron

A large cauldron used for making salt-tea for the workers. Providing salt-tea is a colonial practise in tea gardens. Such an unhealthy practise still continues in many tea gardens. (Photo Source: Fieldwork by Author)

Picture 3.4: Adivasi women performing the '*Jhumur Nritya'*

Young adibasi girls performing '*Jhumur Nritya'* during the 'Karam' festival of the tea garden community. It is one of the most important festival celebrated by the tea-tribe community of Assam. Various tribes come together to celebrate this agricultural festival which usually falls in mid-August. (Photo Source: Fieldwork by author).

Picture: 3.5: Young Adivasi Girls' singing a traditional song

A choir of young Adibasi girls during an event in the garden. The various components of the community- Mundari, Kharia, Panch, Kurukh, Korba, Nagpur, Santhali, Kurmali, Oraon, Ho and a few more have a distinct language and culture of their own. (Photo Source: Fieldwork by author)

CHAPTER 4

THE COST OF 'LABOUR': PLANTATION LABOUR ACT (1951) AND THE SOCIAL COST OF PRODUCTION

The tea industry is one of the largest as well as earliest industrial establishments of India. From being a colonial enterprise to becoming a domestic industry, the tea industry has seen many changes. At the same time, the conditions of labourers have undergone very little change since the colonial period. After the Independence in 1947, several laws and provisions were enacted and adapted to safeguard labourers' rights. One of the significant acts related to plantation labour is the Plantation Labour Act (PLA) passed in 1951. The Act was a unique innovation of independent India as it provided for statutory rights to the labourers.

Unskilled/manual workers in plantations are empowered to a great extent by the provisions of PLA[19]. These workers of plantations are primarily descendants of millions of indentured workers transported to these plantation areas from far off places. The Plantation Labour Act, popularly known as PLA, gave the employers the onus of delivering many social, economic, and cultural rights. In recent years there has been intense debate on the 'Social cost' of tea production. The present chapter examines the source and rationale of the argument that laws envisioned to deal with the welfare needs of workers leads to increased cost of production and reduced competitiveness. The chapter further examines the PLA as a means to the empowerment of tea workers and its inclusivity. The law's social

[19] The PLA 1951 describes itself as an 'Act to provide welfare of labour, and to regulate the conditions of work, in plantations'.

and economic impact is understood differently by the planters and workers. The former interprets it as empowering and the latter as cost enhancing (John and Mansingh, 2013). This chapter examines the reasons for this differential interpretation by inquiring into the conditions that gave birth to PLA and its practice by various actors. The chapter examines three issues – whether PLA is cost enhancing, whether it is labour empowering and whether it is exclusionary. It seeks to answer in the context of the history of the tea plantation industry in India. The evolution of PLA, its implementation, reach, and assimilation in the daily life of workers is discussed in the chapter.

4.1. Introduction

The issue of the social cost of production has attracted scholarly attention in recent times. It has been quite apparent in the tea industry. The industry employs many unskilled and semiskilled workers. The plantation sector has been a significant source of livelihood and employment for the population of the regional economies (Joseph, 2010). Most plantations are located in the backward and rural regions of a few states in the country. The industry is highly labour-intensive, with a high presence of women workers who make up 54 per cent in tea and coffee plantations while 42 per cent in rubber plantations (Occupational Wage Survey, 2006). The tea industry is a highly labour-intensive sector. The tea workers are among the poorest and most deprived sections of organised labour in India. A sizeable number of them belong to the scheduled tribe communities of Central and Eastern India.

The tea plantations have a long history of over 190 years compared to other plantation crops. Thus, several historical studies focus on the condition of labour as existed during the pre-independence era. These studies focus on labour exploitation by the colonial masters, which excluded them from the mainstream economy and society (Behal and

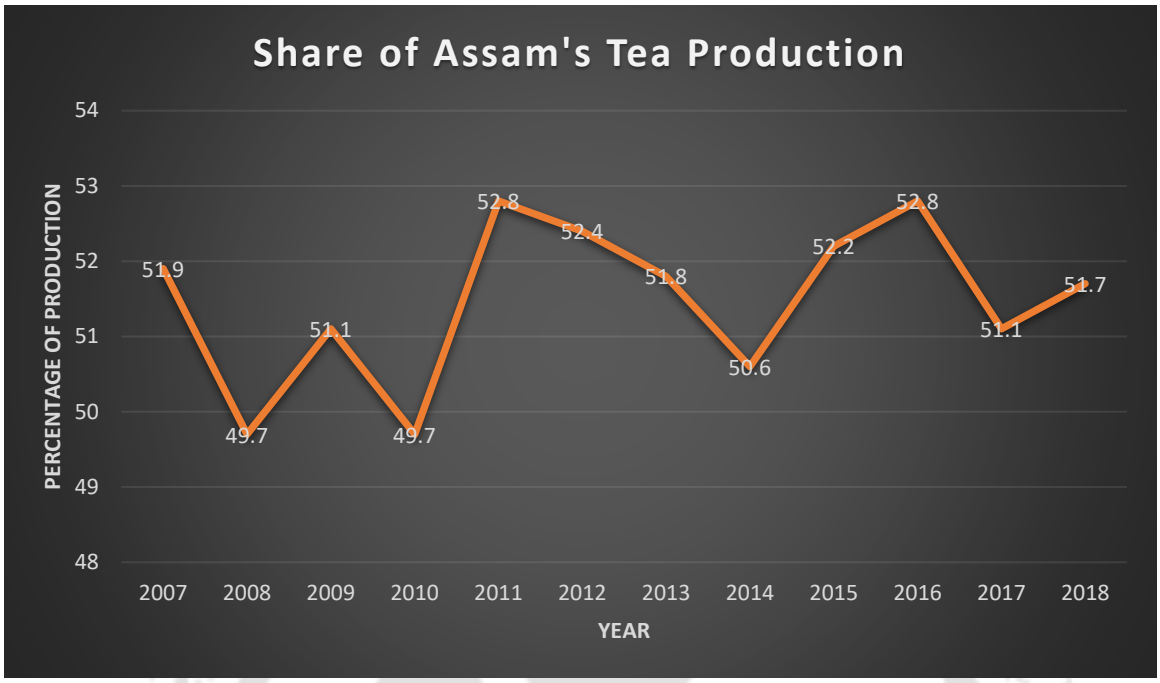
Mohapatra, 1992). Another set of studies examines the socio-economic development of the tea garden workers in the post-colonial period (Sarkar and Bhowmik, 1988; Ramachandran and Shanmugam, 1995; Chaudhury and Tayal, 2010 cited in John and Mansingh 2012). The emphasis of these studies was solely the labour employed in the estate sector; the small grower sector was kept out of the preview as it is a recent phenomenon.

The tea industry, the earliest commercial enterprise established by private British capital in the Assam Valley from the 1840s onwards, has been the major employer of wage labour in Assam Valley during British rule. It grew stunningly during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. During the period, tea production increased from 6,000,000 lbs[20] in 1872 to 75,000,000 lbs in 1900, while the area under tea cultivation increased from 27,000 acres to 204,000 acres (Behal, 1994). In the Assam Valley, tea plantations employment of labours increased from 107,847 in 1885 to 247,760 in 1900 (ibid.). The industry continued to grow steadily during the first half of the twentieth century.

At the end of colonial rule, the Assam Valley tea plantations employed nearly half a million labour out of a labour population of more than three-quarters of a million and more than 300,00 acres under tea cultivation out of a total area of a million acres under the control of the tea companies (Behal, 1984). This impressive expansion and the growth of the tea industry in the Assam Valley took place within a monopolistic control of British capital in Assam. An analysis of the list of companies shows that in 1942, 84 per cent of tea estates with 89 per cent of the acreage in the Assam Valley were controlled by European managing agency houses (Behal, 2011). At the all-India level, 13 leading agency houses of Calcutta held over 75 per cent of the total tea area (Ibid.). Today, Assam tea contributes to more than 51% of total tea production in India (Tea Board, 2018).

[20] Plural abbreviation for pound unit of mass. An international term used to define weight or mass of an object.

Figure 4.1: Share of Assam tea of the total tea production in India



Source: Tea Board of India (2018)

The PLA provides welfare provisions to the tea garden labour community by providing a host of medical and educational facilities. The social cost perspective of these provisions is that the PLA requires the employer to provide these welfare measures. As pointed at the beginning of the chapter, the issues will be discussed by asking three questions: Is PLA cost enhancing, labour empowering, and *exclusionary?.* The work seeks to answer within the context of the history of the tea plantation industry in India. The evolution and growth of the PLA, its implementation, reach and assimilation, and understanding by the workers will be discussed.

4.2. Plantations and the law: The Beginning

Robert Bruce, a Scottish adventurer, discovered tea leaves growing 'wildly' while carrying out trade activities in the region in 1823. The Singpho chiefs have been growing and brewing this unique leaf for a long. Initially, they used it as a medicinal plant. The year 1834 was significant in the history of Tea plantations in Assam. This year, the Company administration

formally announced the discovery of an Indian variety of tea and planned to go ahead with large-scale plantations in the province (Sharma, 2006). Large scale commercial tea plantation was expected to provide ample job opportunities to the local population. However, to the great dismay of the company officials, it was found that the local natives were too 'lazy' to work in the plantations. By the 1850s, the plantation was in the midst of a severe labour crisis. Their attempt to find a solution by first employing Chinese workers and then local Kachari tribe members was short-lived and unproductive.

In the year 1840, the Assam Company received around two-thirds of the experimental tea establishment. It was provided on rent-free terms for ten years and permission to settle on other lands (Thapa, 2012). The East India Company was granted long-term lease withholdings on vast grounds for European enterprises by the Charter Act of 1833. The table below depicts the number of plantations and area under plantation grew in the last part of the 19th century.

Table 4.1: Number and size of plantations (in the early 1900s).

Name of Province	No. of Plantations	Average size (in acres) per plantations
Assam	900	964 acres
Bengal	372	488 acres
Travancore	106	460 acres
Madras	NA	218 acres

Source: Behal, 2012

Cheap labour was a crucial requirement for the planters to establish plantations in vast tracts of land. Initially, the Chinese workers were employed for a short period. However, they were too expensive for the nascent industry. The local labour force comprising mainly of Kachari and Naga were considered lazy and docile by the colonialists. During this period, labour was in short supply, around 10000 total workforces in 1859, whereas the requirement was 16000-20000 (Sharma, 2009). A solution was crafted by the planters that had the support of the administration. Thousands of people were brought in

as workers from other parts of the empire to the Assam Valley. It was conducted through the 'arkatis' and 'sardars' – a network of people who would recruit labours for the plantation in their native places. Most of the workers during the period came from areas that were famine and misery stricken. A factory-like disciple was the feature of the plantations wherein the labourers were separated from production. Many scholarly have pointed out the pathetic condition of workers brought into the plantations (Rana and Behal, 1984; Behal, 1994; Verma, 2011). Hundreds of workers died during transportation from faraway places and getting exposed to inhospitable conditions at work.

Table 4.2: Number of deaths in tea plantations

Time - Period	Labours landed in tea districts	No. of Desertions	No. of Deaths
1st May, 1863- 1st May 1865	84, 915	NA	30,000
1st July 1865- 30th June 1866	NA	8,187	9,147

Source: Sharma, 2012

These newfound migrant labourers came to be known as 'Coolies'. The word 'coolie' has a close affinity with the Tamil word 'Kuli', which means wage (Sharma, 2009). This word has become a synonym with workers of the lowest rung working in plantations and railway stations. Many see it as a word loaded with racial overtones and hence derogatory. Since the 1860s, the Assam planters closely aided by the British administration worked to create a system of indenture contracts aided by harsh penal laws. In order to facilitate the transportation of workers from their native land to Assam Valley, the administration enacted the Transport of Native Labourers Act 1863. This Act required that licence be issued to all recruiters, compulsory medical examination of every emigrant, and recruiters were supposed to make satisfactory sanitary arrangements for the transportation of labour. After that, Act VI of the Bengal Council in 1865 introduced the penal contract

system in the plantation, which fixed the minimum monthly wages at Rs5 for men and Rs 4 for women. The Act also stipulated a three-year contract with a nine-hour workday, along with a government inspector of labour empowered to cancel the contract of labourers on complaints of ill-treatment (Behal et al., 1992).

A key mechanism, in making the low wage 'Coolie', was the indenture/contract system, which used various indenturing strategies and practices to convert these hardworking people into perpetual labours for generations. The labour cost and unhindered supply became a crucial variable in the production of the 'Coolie' class- a class produced by plantation capitalism. The labour crisis in the history of the Tea industry in Assam was responded with the Acts of 1863 and 1865. These acts left a legacy in the form of a "system" through which the imported workers were recruited, transported and settled on the plantations in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Behal and Mohaparta, 1992). The necessity of "*protection*" of contract in an assumed "*exceptional*" context in which Assam recruitment and plantation operation was conducted—remained the raison d'être for its retention (Verma, 2011).

Here, a particular mention needs to be made of the legislation of Act VI of 1865. This Act was primarily driven by the necessity of regulating the conditions on the Assam plantations to restrain and curb the growing incidence of desertions and unsettlement by the 'Coolies'. It also emphasised the welfare of the workers being imported into the province. At the same time, this Act highlights the paternalistic approach of the state towards labourers with a display of logic of protection. This approach displayed contract premises and the necessity of the Act, which required the establishment of the post of "Protector" of coolies. These 'Protector' were supposed to act as the state's representative and ensure that the contracted worker made a blind deal in a potentially

dangerous and detrimental situation for them. The Protectors acted like an 'eye' of the state with regular inspection of the plantations. They had the authority to terminate the contracts on the grounds of the failing health of the labourer and valid complaints of ill-treatment meted out by the management.

The planters constantly criticised such a protective mechanism for the imported workers, which was necessary and desirable, as unwarranted and unnecessary state intervention. This approach is best captured in a statement made by a planter 'once the coolies land on the garden, all Government interference should cease' (Baildon, 1882 cited in Verma 1992, p. 74). The planters' core argument was that they had made heavy investments in the transportation and recruitment of workers. It would be futile if they could not safeguard their economic interest. Any state intervention was deemed to have negative consequences regarding the question of discipline and authority on the plantations. Planters seemed anxious that law-making and supervision during transit, arrival, and Garden during work would make the Coolies with the idea that they are more critical than the masters. Also, the planters alleged that magistrate would be seen as a defender of the Coolies. Thus, the administration was supposed to be kept at the bay if the plantation industry succeeded.

Any complaints by the coolies, as per Section 26 of the 1865 Act, were to be channelised through the manager. The planters criticised this right as being frivolous with the intention to insult the employers. The planters felt that the workers would have the ultimate pleasure of confronting their employers as equal men to men and challenge him in the court of justice. There were instances where the planters confined the workers by constructing cordons of chowkidars around the gardens. The roads connecting the gardens were usually closed and policed to prevent coolies from leaving to complain. These planters,

unhampered the state's intervention and humanitarian logic, used semi-feudal techniques to subject free labourers to a new kind of slavery. This workforce was subjected to constant supervision with the planter manual recommending two guards for Coolie line, where houses were built in straight lines to facilitate the watchman's movement (Sharma, 2009).

The table below highlights some of the significant acts formulated by the colonial state to 'control' and 'regulate' the flow of labour into Assam.

Table 4. 3: Major Acts for Migrant Labours of Tea Garden.

Major Acts	Year of Passing	Important Provisions
Workmen's Breach of Contract Act (Act XVIII)	1859	a. The signing of a 'contract' between planter and labour for a specific period (for three years). b. A bonus amount on the signing of the contract.
The Bengal Native Labour Act (Act III)	1863	To institute a tentative "sanitary." infrastructure, supervision and control for labour migration to Assam.
Assam Contract Act	1865	a. The new contract explicitly empowered the plantation manager (under certain circumstances) to privately arrest the "deserting" coolies. b. Fixed a "minimum" monthly wage (Rs 5 for men and Rs 4 for women). c. Contract of time-expired coolies.
Contract Act II	1870	a. It extended the planter's right to private arrest and made it mandatory to produce the apprehended "deserters" to the nearest police station. b. Set standards of health and mortality on the gardens. c. Legal status to Sardars
Act I of 1882	1882	a. Deregulation of the labour market through the removal of restrictions on recruitment. b. Strict enforcement of contracts and a more comprehensive scope for penalisation. c. Increase in contract period from 3 to 5 years. d. Regulation of Sardari system.
Act VI of 1901	1901	a. Control over recruitment of women. b. The local Government was empowered to close any area to recruitment following the law.

Source: Compiled from Verma (2012); Rana and Behal (1994).

The above table indicates that 'state' was always present in the tea industry right from its inception. Such acts and the responses of the planters highlight the rising cost of recruiting and maintaining a large labour force (Verma, 2012). Improvement in modes of communication and transportation or the deregulation of laws did little to bring down the expenditure on recruitment.

The rapid expansion in the industry during the early 1860s led to the colonial state intervention and establishing a penal contract system. It was observed that the planters employed fraudulent means of recruitment. Besides, the insanitary transportation led to high mortality rates and large-scale desertions from the plantations. Behal, in his study, finds that of the 85,000 labourers imported into Assam between 1863 and 1866, no less than 35,000 were reported to have died or deserted (GOB, 1868 cited in Behal, 1992). Later, recruitment by licensed garden sirdars was introduced only in the year 1873 by The Bengal Act VII. The Act also had provision for recruitment outside the Act on short term one-year civil contracts. The planters, however, favoured recruitment under the penal contracts, which turned the provision of short-term contracts outside the Act useless. All recruitment between 1865 and 1882 continued to be under the supervision of the Government while the industry grew steadily. The official inquiries in this period (1868 and 1873) highlighted the issues related to non-payment of minimum statutory wage, the prevalence of labour abuse and pathetic condition of transportation, and inhuman living and working conditions leading to high mortality rates in the Garden. Later commissions (1900 and 1929) recounted the same story of inhuman treatment and exploitation of the highest level. It is essential here to understand the quality of life and work practices at the nature of tea plantations if one has to understand the semi-feudal and quasi-judicial powers of the plantation authority. The rush for green gold had released an intense trend of land acquisition, jungle clearing

and opening of tea gardens. These expansions had developed without any necessary consideration of workers' rights. Nor was there sufficient investment in establishing a suitable and sustainable infrastructure for the thousands of labourers being assembled to live and work there. The labour responded to this grim circumstance of life and work by organising protests and mass desertions from these plantations (Verma, 2011).

In the next section, we will see how the planters tried to bring down the cost incurred in the plantation industry.

4.3. Monopoly over Land and Labour

In his study, Bhowmik (2010) notes that the only way planters could get cheap labour were by preventing a labour market from developing in the plantations. Lack of a labour market or the absence of prospects for work of choice can be understood with three other related factors—first, the exercise of monopoly over the land by the joint-stock companies of the planters. Second, the land was not provided to millions of people migrating to tea plantations as labourers due to the monopoly. These workers were left entirely at the compassion of the planters.

Assam Labour Enquiry Committee (1906) report gives an interesting observation of how planters' government policies and practices intentionally prohibited access to land to workers. It states,

"*The Settlement Rules empower the Local Government to issue leases on favourable terms to encourage persons to take up wasteland for ordinary cultivation, in tracts not likely to be opened out within a reasonable period. In practice, however, this provision has remained almost a dead letter, as it has been feared that the grant of special concessions to new settlers would have the effect of tempting time-expired labourers to leave the tea estates and take to cultivation on their account. And the view that nothing should be done which might tend to encourage the settlement on Government land of labourers whom the Tea Industry had imported at a high cost has always governed the land*

settlement policy of the Assam Administration." (Assam Labour Enquiry Committee, 1906 cited in Thapa, 2012).

To retain workers in the Garden, the planters, with the endorsement of the Government, were willing to offer certain 'facilities' to migrant labourers. It included one room for a family in the worker line as accommodation, supply of drinking water, garden hospitals, firewood, rice, and at times, a small plot of land within the Garden. With this, the colonial Government claimed that a great deal of attention is paid to the health of the labour force and that there is generally a good supply of pure water, and tea or boiled water, i. e. often provided for the labourers when at work. The garden hospitals were supposedly well equipped, and the native doctors were under the Superintendence of a European Medical officer. The administration maintained that the coolie lines occupy well-drained sites, and the houses are kept in good repair and are spacious. Though, it is essential to emphasise that none of these was rights of the workers but *was tools of temptation* the planters offered to preserve workers in the plantations.

4.4. Subsistence Wages as a Means of Control

Interestingly, years before the origin of the concept of 'minimum wages', it was in the plantations of India that the idea was introduced. The minimum wage under Section 4 of Act VI of 1865 was kept at Rs.5 for a man, Rs.4 for a woman and Rs.3 for a child. There were deductions for absence or indolence by a magistrate. The contract period lasted for three years. In 1901 the provisions of Act VI fixed the minimum rate of wages for men at Rs. 5 and Rs.4.00 respectively in the first year. In the second and third years, it was Rs. 5.50 for men and Rs.4.50 for women. While in the fourth year of contract it was Rs.6.00 and Rs. 5.00 for men and women workers, respectively (Assam Labour Enquiry Committee 1906 cited in John and Mansingh, 2013). Initially, many gardens in Sylhet paid their labourers daily.

Besides wages, there were few 'attractions' or 'concessions' offered to retain the workers in the gardens, provisions of which were left to the discretion of individual planters. In few plantations, the planters granted ‘Kitchen gardens’ to the workers within the plantation. These plots were small in size and not cultivable in most cases (John and Mansingh. 2013). These benefits tied workers to the plantations and increased their indebtedness even though it constituted a part of their wages (Behal 2012). In his study, Behal analyses the wages and movement of prices of essential items in the early 19th century and concludes that reduction in real wages kept the Assam tea workers in a shallow standard of living. Even after Independence, the situation of subsistence existence of tea workers did not change much, as shown in the findings of our study.

4.5. PLA and the Rights

During the colonial administration, there existed no concept of worker rights. The workers were never allowed to gain significant awareness or learn about the power of the collectives. The existing laws were mainly there to aid labour recruitment from distant places, their safe journey, and their assimilation as resident plantation labour and ensure continued accessibility.

The enactment of PLA by independent India's Parliament in the year 1951 changed the situation drastically. Most importantly, it regulated employment. It also provided legal status to those benefits which were provided to workers by the planters as incentives. The new Act mandated the employers to ensure provisions to maintain the workers' health by providing clean drinking water, separate urinals for men and women, and medical facilities for workers and their families. Some of the essential provisions of the laws were:

Table 4.4: PLA and major provisions

Section	Items	Major Provisions
Section 8	Drinking Water	In every plantation, the employer shall make a practical arrangement to provide and maintain at convenient places in the plantation.
Section 9	Conservancy	a. A sufficient number of toilets-latrines for both males and females. b. Shall be maintained and kept clean.
Section 10	Medical Facilities	a. Availability of medical facilities for workers and families. b. If such a facility is not available, the cost is to be recovered from the employer.
Section 11	Canteens	a. For every plantation employing more than 150 workers, one or more canteens are to be maintained.
Section 12	Creches	a. Where 50 or more women are employed, provision of creche to be made available. Or b. Where the number of children of women employed is more than 20. c. Rules prescribing location and standard of the rooms.
Section 13	Recreational Facilities	Employer to make provision of recreation in their plantation for such for the workers and children of the plantation.
Section 14	Educational Facilities	Where the children between the ages of six and twelve of workers employed in any plantation exceed twenty-five in number, the State Government may make rules, requiring every employer to provide educational facilities for the children in such manner and of such standard as may be prescribed.
Section 15	Housing Facilities	It shall be the duty of every employer to provide and maintain necessary housing accommodation- a. For every worker (including his family) residing in the plantation; b. Every worker (including his family) residing outside the plantation has put in six months of continuous service in such a plantation and has expressed a desire to live in the plantation in writing.

Source: Compiled from PLA, 1951

The PLA was a marked shift from restrictive benefits to rights at work and places of residence of immigrant plantation workers. The new Act was passed immediately after

adopting the Constitution of India (1950), which committed to economic, political and social justice and egalitarian national development.

4.6. Components of Wage

Among the planters, there is a firm conviction that providing statutory benefits under PLA will increase the cost of tea production (John and Mansingh, 2013). The growers also demanded that the Government partially, if not entirely, bear the burden of this social cost. Colonial planters did not consider these additional 'attractions' to workers as the right of workers. PLA has declared these provisions as legal rights of the worker.

Even today, the wage provided is not uniform across the tea estates. Depending on the nature of work, payments are either monthly salary or daily salary. This dual mode of payment, comprising monthly and daily wage, constructs the estate's power relation and a source of dignity. In the words of a salaried employee (Sardar), "Working as a salaried employee has given me a higher status within my community. I am paid a fixed amount at the end of the month, which provides me a mental satisfaction". Most of the workers as engaged as daily wage labourers. It includes both permanent and temporary workers of the Garden. In Assam, the daily wage varies from estate to estate and is between Rs. 137 to Rs. 167 per day. Most estates under big companies and amalgamated gardens give Rs. 167 per day following the current minimum wage structure. Whereas the Public Sector Undertaking under the Government of Assam provides a cash wage of Rs. 137 only. One of the respondents, an activist from Cha Shramik Mukti Sangram Samiti, mentioned that trade unions like ACMS (Assam Cha Mazdoor Sangathan) should come forward and discuss pay parity.

During the study, most workers are not aware of the exact amount of their pay. The only fact that they are aware of is that they receive a fixed wage at the end of the

week (seventh day). Though, it is to be noted that the amount they receive is based on six days of work; there is no pay for the weekly off day (i.e. Sunday). It was found that there is no paid weekly off, which is the worker's right as per PLA.

The tea industry's method of wage calculation is complex. Table 4.5 shows how the wage is calculated. We can say that the wage component can be divided into four broad categories- Wage, Non- statutory benefits, PLA benefits, Statutory benefits. Broadly, we see that the wage has two major components- Cash and Kind. In the table below, the wage calculation is shown better to understand the cash and non-cash details of the wage.

Table 4.5: Calculation of Daily Wage

Sl. No.	Particulars	% of share in total	Total %
1.	Wage		
a.	Cash Wage	47.31	
b.	Additional incentives/ compensation	2.59	49.90
2.	Non-Statutory		
a.	Food Grains	7.33	
b.	Firewood	2.84	11.43
c.	Dry Liquid tea	1.26	
3.	Benefits Under PLA		
a.	Medical Facilities	5.44	
b.	Housing Facilities	4.97	20. 71
c.	Educational Facilities	1.64	
d.	Welfare Facilities	1.93	
e.	Leave with wages & Festival Holidays	6.73	
4.	Statutory Benefits		
a.	Bonus (@8.33%)	4.72	
b.	Provident Fund	8.05	17.96
c.	Gratuity	5.19	
	Total Wage	100	100

Source: Compiled from TISS report "Decent work for Tea Plantation Workers in Assam". (2019)

A major non-cash 'entitlement' the workers receive is the ration provided by the estate. However, the amount and the variety of items received varies from estate to estate. Most estates usually follow one of the two systems- on per head basis or based on household size. Rice, wheat and tea are the three most regular items received by permanent labours. On the other hand, temporary workers are provided rations only during their work, i.e. around six months in a year. In the Khumtai Tea Estate, the workers are provided with 1.5 kg of rice and 1.5 kg of wheat per member at an interval of 7 days. Most of the respondents complained that the quantity was insufficient and had to arrange for extra rations. Many workers had ration cards (BPL cards), making them eligible to buy food grains from government ration shops at subsidised rates.

A 25-year-old permanent worker, Rubi Murmu (name changed), stated that the quality of rice provided by the estate is deficient and not sufficient. "The management tells us that the Government provides it, and we can do very little. However, they are saving their money by not providing enough ration. We have to eat three times a day since we work very hard. The amount of ration is not sufficient". It is to be noted that not all estates provide ration to the workers. Many tea estates in our district of study (Golaghat) relies on the government PDS system to give rations to their workers.

4.7. **PLA and Labour Empowerment**

(a) Empowerment and Union

Indeed, plantation labour unions did not have much role in the enactment of the PLA. Trade unions are essential in increasing the capacity of collective bargaining. There are a good number of trade unions in the tea estates of Assam. The major ones are- Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS), affiliated to INTUC, Akhil Bharatiya Chah Mazdoor Sangha

(ABCMS) which is under CITU, and the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangha (BMS) affiliated to BJP. The trade unions provide a common platform for workers to raise their voices and negotiate with their employers for better facilities and rights. In the tea estates of Assam, the trade unions are all linked to political parties. Thus, it is apparent that they have a plan to work for the workers' rights. Participation in the trade union is low due to a lack of trust in its efficiency and intentions. Most of the workers see the unions on the side of the management. Also, there is a lack of knowledge about membership in trade unions. Our study found that most workers are not aware of the selection process of critical members and officials of the union. A matter of concern is the presence of more than one union in a single estate. It leads to the duplicity of demands.

"The trade unions are just for name-sake. They do nothing for common workers. All of them have some political agenda".
"They (trade unions) are seen raising voice only when the matter is important to them. Else they are hard to be seen".
"The trade unions work according to the dictates of the management. I think the management pays them to control the workers".
"If all the trade unions would have worked for the workers, then things would have been very different. We even pay a fee, but we do not know what they do with this money".

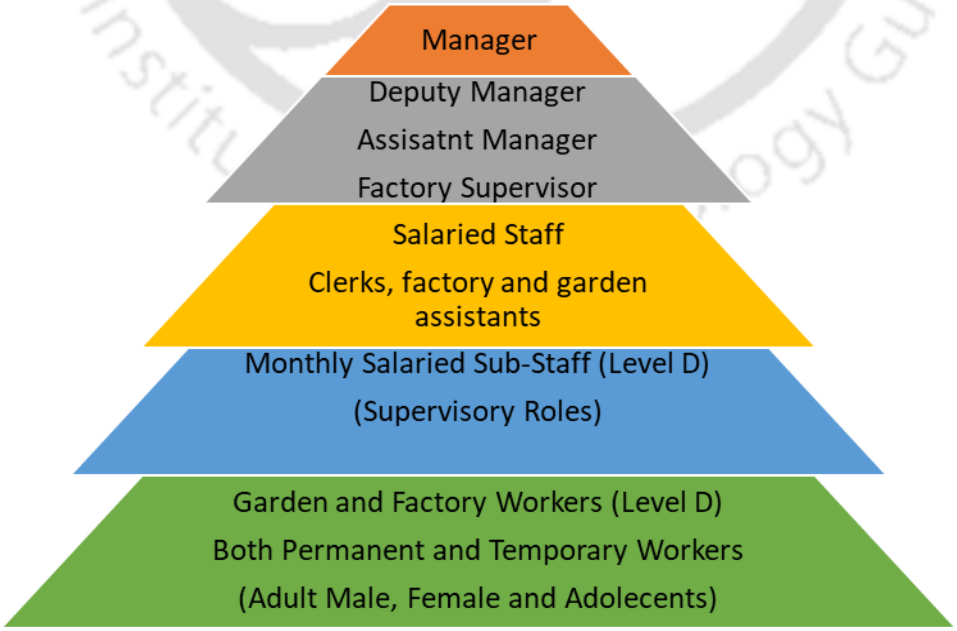
- Excerpts from FGD (translated from Assamese).

Thus, it is apparent from the comments that no fundamental structural change has taken place in plantations despite the presence of unions. Even today, most workers continue to receive a subsistence wage, live in unhealthy and appalling conditions, are denied vertical mobility, and are made to live a degrading life. Regular wage negotiations take place between groups of trade unions and organisations of planters. Despite that, there has been little change in the 'subsistence wage' of the tea workers.

(b) **Hierarchy and Absence of Mobility**

Tea plantations are characterised by virtual immobility - both vertical well as horizontal. The PLA seems to have failed in breaking the rigid hierarchy in the plantations. The workers in a plantation are deployed in the strict hierarchical order. For a worker, it is not possible to move up the hierarchy. When it comes to horizontal integration, workers who constitute more than 90 per cent of the workforce and are classified as unskilled cannot change plantations. Exercise of free choice is nearly impossible for the workers regarding whom they should work and what conditions. Besides, even after Independence, the banning of the indentured labour system failed to bring complete integration of the immigrant labour in the plantation with the local society. The community today, in Assam, is known as 'Tea Tribe', a positive development from the degrading word of 'coolie'. Still, it is far away from full social and economic integration.

Figure 4.2: Hierarchy in Garden



The structure depicts the fact that power is centralised in the Garden and follows a top-down approach. The figure indicates that all others have a specified task except for workers at lower rung of the structure. The workers are made to carry out a variety of works- plucking, pruning, digging, cleaning mud and waste, cutting trees, clearing plots, and repairing canals. At times, they have to work as domestic help at the manager bungalows. There is little scope to find a work based on skill or even to develop one particular skill. Amongst the worker, there is a distinction between the permanent and the temporary worker. The difference is seen in the employment period of both the categories of workers. Also, the permanent workers have the upper hand regarding various facilities and benefits given to garden workers. Almost 25 per cent of workers in our site are working as casual labour. The significant presence of casual labourers indicates the absence of a job market for the community. The involvement of the young generation also speaks about their inability to find job opportunities outside the Garden. Besides, it is observed that the increasing pattern towards work in the Garden is rooted in the generational dependency on tea work, geographical isolation and exclusion from other forms of work.

Regarding the relationship between ordinary workers and higher officials, our study respondents reported that it is challenging to approach the garden manager. The workers usually came the welfare officer or official from low-level management whenever they required any assistance or grievance. In the words of Punam Karmakar (name changed), "The *Bara Babu* (estate manager) is rarely seen. He talks to us on extraordinary occasions. His bungalow is guarded, and we are not allowed to go there. The only person, the workers, have access to is the welfare officer if they have to make any complaint" (personal interview, 18 January 2019). Our study also noted that management targeted those who complained frequently or raised their voices and transferred to more complex

tasks. One such case was of Bikash (name changed), who worked as an electrician was transferred to an estate factory as he frequently complained about old equipment and asked for new gadgets and materials. Later, he was given work that required little skill. Thus, it is clear that garden management still holds a colonial outlook regarding hierarchy and mobility. In the words of Raman Oraon, who was born and brought up in the Garden just like his parents, "Once a worker, always a worker. You cannot think of anything else. There is nothing to think of but just work. This is our present and future".

(c) Effectiveness of Implementation

As per the provisions of PLA, the Government must provide institutional systems to monitor and implement the requirements of the Act. In a recent survey on working conditions at the tea garden by Tata Institute of Social Science, Guwahati (2019), the estates do not provide several provisions as demanded by the PLA. In a survey of 50 tea estates all over the state, it was found that only 70 per cent of health centres can provide minimum services, including a staff, bed, and medicines for cold and fever. Besides, the survey reported that 52 per cent of workers do not receive any payslip, and 75 per cent suffer from a wage gap between what they are supposed to get and what they receive. The survey reported that around 38 per cent of workers' household expenses exceed their income when it comes to expenditure. The survey indicated a gap between what is promised and delivered in the ground, among other indicators.

In our study, too, many provisions of the PLA were not implemented in letter and spirit. The table below shows the various facilities made available in the Garden along with the workers' responses.

Table: 4.6: Facilities available in the Garden (N=150)

Provisions	Availability (%)	Remarks (Responses)
Housing	Yes- 66	Quarters are provided to only permanent workers. Maintenance is rarely done. Most workers do repair work on their own.
	No- 28	
	Not sure- 06	
Toilet	Yes- 38	Workers mostly construct Semi-Pukka toilets. Recently, few toilets were built under the Swach Bharat Abhiyan.
	No- 62	
	Not Sure-0	
Proper Health Care	Yes- 42	All respondents noted a lack of proper medication and the absence of staff. Also, the behaviour of the medical staff was inappropriate as per the respondents.
	No- 48	
	Not Sure- 10	
Educational Facilities	Yes- 85	Government School was in the close vicinity of the Garden. Bur most respondents reported a lack of full-time teachers. Primary School run by NGO available for workers.
	No- 15	
	Not Sure-0	
Provision of Electricity	Free- 20	Workers were charged for electricity, for permanent workers bill was deducted from their salary.
	Subsidised- 12	
	Full Charge- 68	
Provision of Bonus	Yes- 56	Only permanent workers received a bonus before the 'Durga Puja' festival. Temporary workers did not receive any such bonus.
	No- 16	
	Not Sure- 08	
Ration Provided by Estate	Yes- 76	Many workers had ration cards and received ration directly from government ration shops instead of garden shops.
	No-24	
Provision of Drinking Water	Yes- 80	Water supply was provided with the help of the state government. Many households had hand-pumps of their own.
	No-20	
Creche Facilities	Yes- 100	Creche facility was available for women.
	No- 0	
Canteen Facility	Yes- 80	The canteen lay within the factory premises, making it difficult for pluckers to use it.
	No-20	
Provident Fund	Yes-74	Deduction for the provident fund is made from the wages from permanent workers and not for temporary workers.
	No- 26	

Source: Fieldwork by author

4.8. PLA and Exclusion

For scholars like Joseph (2012) PLA is a fine example of 'Illusive inclusion'[21]. However, earlier, he regarded the PLA as an 'institutional innovation' at the policy level (Joseph, 2010). His writings suggest that PLA is like a double-edged sword- followed in letter but not in spirit. The implementation of the policy, on the one hand, increases the cost of production, and on the other such investment (on medical, education, welfare) do not ensure future stock of labour. As we have seen, most of the provisions were to ensure the stay of the labour within Garden, and there was little effort to improve the workers' lives. Here it is essential to ask whether it is only 'illusive inclusion' that the PLA offers or contributes to 'instrumental exclusion'.

Table 4.7. Number of Tea Plantations covered and Submitting Returns under PLA

Sl. No	State	Plantations covered under PLA	Plantations submitting returns
1	Assam	803	544
2	Himachal Pradesh	16	14
3	Karnataka	9	7
4	Kerala	86	68
5	Tamil Nadu	285	219
6	Tripura	51	27
7	Uttarakhand	9	9
8	West Bengal	267	198

Source: Table 4 in John and Mansingh, 2013

[21] Joseph (2012) uses Amartya Sen's framework of 'social exclusion' in understanding 'inclusiveness' of 'innovations' in plantation economy.

4.8.1. Exclusion of Small Tea Garden Labourers

Section 1 (4) of PLA states that any land that measures more than 5 hectares and employees 15 or more persons qualifies to come under the ambit of the Act. When the Act was implemented, the entire tea production was under the large tea estates. However, by 2011, we find that small tea growers produce 26 per cent of tea. Thus, the provisions of PLA do not apply to a large number of workers who work in these small tea gardens. It forms a severe exclusion of a section of workers who are equally deprived.

In the words of the district president of small tea-growers association Mr Dibyajyoti Saikia (name changed), *"Many workers are engaged in small tea gardens and cannot avail the benefits of PLA. We, small tea growers, are not in a position to give them extra benefits. A good number of growers own less than one acre of land. They work in the Garden and their family, so there is minimal distinction between the employers and the workers. So, there is no question of any extra facilities to the workers*". (Personal Interview, 10 December 2020).

Mr Debeswar Bora (name changed), a small tea grower who owns a tea garden of 4 acres, believes that wages of the workers who work in small tea gardens cannot be fixed as it will be a burden to small tea growers. "*We do not get enough money for our produce. We cannot afford to pay a fixed wage if it is fixed by the government. Small tea growers are not in a position to provide many benefits to the workers".*

4.8.2. Exclusion of Temporary and Casual Workers

As per the provision of PLA, a "worker" is a person who is employed in a plantation for hire or reward, whether directly or through any agency, to do any work skilled, unskilled, manual or clerical (Thapa, 2012). However, an additional clause (2k) within the exclusionary

provisions considers that a person drawing monthly wages below rupees seven hundred and fifty will be a worker. Further, by an amendment in 2010, the wage ceiling was increased to rupees ten thousand. However, this did not include all workers of the Garden. Tea workers are generally classified into two major categories- permanent and temporary/casual. A critical instrumental exclusion is that temporary or casual workers, both resident and non-resident, who make up for more than 40 per cent of the workers in the tea plantations and are not covered under the PLA, 1951 (TISS Report, 2019).

The temporary workers find employment mainly during the peak season, i.e. mid-April to mid-October every year. In the study, it was noted that temporary workers were denied primary healthcare, which is against the provisions of PLA[22]. The casual worker must find a permanent worker as a guarantor to get any medical attention. It was required because the cost was deducted from the permanent labour's pay. The temporary worker has very little say when it comes to their rights. Ruma (name changed) is a temporary worker at Khumtai Tea Estate. Her husband is a permanent worker in the same Garden. In her words, "I have been working in the Garden as a leaf plucker for since the last 5-6 years. The management says that we will be made permanent workers, but this has not yet happened. As a temporary worker, we cannot demand anything". Most of the temporary workers felt that they had no right to speak and might be terminated if they did so.

Table 4.8. Number of Permanent and Temporary Workers in Plantations

Sl. No	Year	Permanent Worker	Temporary Worker	Total
1.	1964	698749	501285	1200034
2.	1972	788662	77621	121786
3.	1980	766567	106175	150375

[22] As per PLA every worker who has worked for more than 60 days in a year is eligible for PLA benefits.

4.	1992	900419	145228	213135
5.	2000	922064	227368	373496
6.	2004	1030242	227368	313860

Source: Thapa (2012)

4.8.3. Exclusion in Wage Determination

In the case of wage determination, there is the severe instrumental exclusion of the workers. The workers hardly have any knowledge about wage calculation. The majority of them are not adequately aware of the deductions made out of their wages. Most workers can fulfil only the bare minimum needs, and there is little scope for savings. There exists a difference between the actual wage and the wage received by the worker. The workers were not provided pay slips in our study site, making it difficult to find their real wages. There is a common perception that people are poor because of their fate. Also, many women respondents complained of being paid less than men workers. Most of the women were hired as temporary workers during the plucking season.

4.9. Conclusion

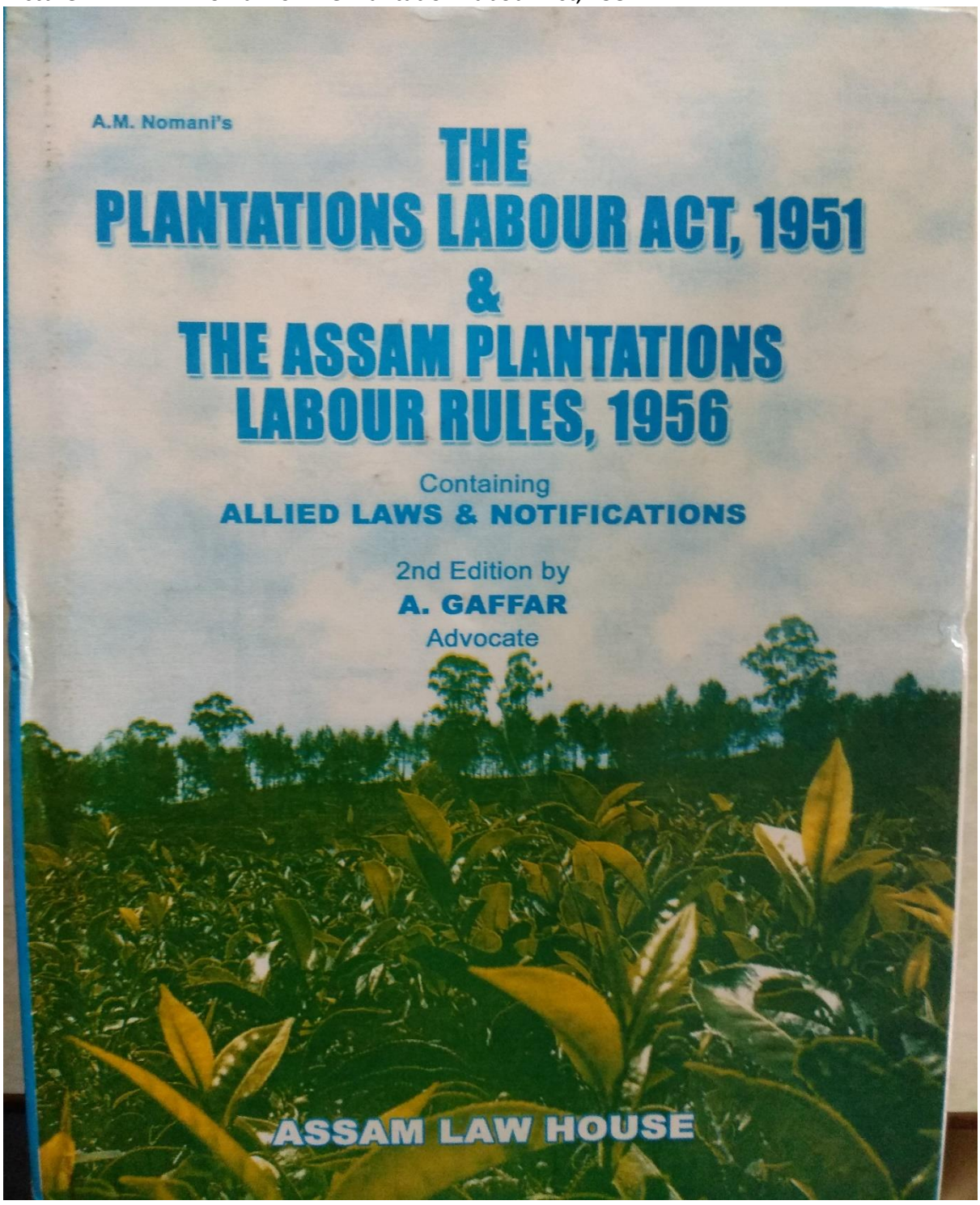
The PLA, 1951 was designed to provide statutory rights to workers of those agricultural activities that were labour-extensive and cultivated over large areas and owned by private individuals, firms, enterprises, or even the state. The PLA provided a few entitlements to labourers in the gardens who are descendants of the millions of workers uprooted from their native land and transported to distant lands. Provisions of entitlements are not new; the colonial planters provided it to retain the workers in the estates. The benefits under PLA

were, however statutory rights and not just meant to retain them as workers. The new Act put the responsibility of the rights on the employers.

The enactment and implementation of PLA must be understood in the backdrop of the adaptation of the Constitution in 1950. The citizens were for the first time provided with a host of rights and privileges to ensure equity and justice. However, in the enactment of the Act, the labour and trade unions were not consulted, which raises questions on the democratic nature of decision making.

As suggested by a number of findings, the implementation of the Act shows that it has not led to empowerment of workers. The structural hierarchy remains the same like the colonial era. The Act has loopholes when it comes to the empowerment of the labours or wage determination by the management and the state. Findings show that it is exclusionary as it excludes many workers of the small tea gardens and the temporary workers of the estate. While it is true that the proper implementation of the PLA will increase the cost of production, requiring the employee to invest more, it cannot be a justification for maintaining minimum wages. However, in recent years with the advent of state welfare schemes into the domain of plantations there has been a swift in the availability of welfare provisions in the Garden. In the following chapters, we will see how the labour community negotiates the state mechanism and garden management to avail the benefits of such schemes. In this process, the community comes in direct contact with the various agencies of the state. In this interaction and confrontation, a vernacular state is born, which is different from the state of the elite.

Picture 4.1: A. M. Nomani's 'The Plantation Labour Act, 1951'



The Plantation Labour Act, 1951 regulates the way of life in tea plantaions. With a host of welfare provisions, the act is crucial in providing statutory rights to the workers. The implementation of the act was crucial to give equal rights to the garden labourers in par with other citizens of the nation.

Picture 4.2: A view of the Garden school

A view of the garden school. PLA provides for schools in every garden. Most of these schools have come under the *Sarba Siksha Abhijan*, an initiative of the Government of India to achieve universalization of elementary education. (Source: Fieldwork by author)

Picture 4.3: A view of the workers' quarter

View of a staff quarter constructed three decades back. A family of six members lives in the house with only 3 rooms. (Photo Source: Fieldwork by author)

Picture 4.4: Garden Hospital

The garden hospital is understaffed with a single employee engaged in different types of work. (Photo Source: Fieldwork by author)

Picture 4.5: A toilet in workers' quarter

Hygiene is a matter of concern in the plantations. Very few quarters have attached toilets. Most of them are constructed by the workers themselves. (Photo Source: Fieldwork by author)

Picture 4.6: Tea-Factory in the Plantation

Workers are seen working with heavy machines in the garden factory. Though the PLA has provisions for safety measures at factory sites, it is rarely followed by the management. The workers in the picture are not trained staff. Such working environment is prone to accidents. (Photo source: Fieldwork by author)

Picture 4.7: Garden Creche

A Crèche for the children of women workers. Even though the management provides for creche there is no permanent trained staff to look after the children. The ordinary workers are at times given the duty to look after the children. (Photo source: Fieldwork by author)

Photo 4.8: A factory staff

A factory staff with a local volunteer. For the community it is a matter of pride to be engaged as a staff in the garden. The person (in the picture) whose parents were unskilled workers studied till 12 standard and managed to get a job in the factory. (Photo source: Fieldwork by author)

Photo 4.9: Workers working in a garden factory

Workers are seen working with heavy machines in the garden factory. Though the PLA has provisions for safety measures at factory sites, it is rarely followed by the management. The workers in the picture are not trained staff. (Photo Source: Fieldwork by author)

CHAPTER 5

MEETING THE STATE: REFRAMING THE STATE FROM 'MARGINS'

This chapter discusses how the state comes to be understood by people due to their encounters with the state. The meetings that the present study considers need not always occur in a formal institutional setting where the patron and 'client' are invariably present to influence each other. Mundane encounters with the state occur daily- at a marketplace, schools, colleges, local government offices and police stations. Such meetings are neither controlled nor driven by any central authority. The language of such encounters is informal and vernacularised. The state in such encounters is embedded with the society. It needs to be a part of a larger framework that operates to make the state more 'visible' in the context of the present development-oriented state.

The chapter aims to see how people at the margin of the society, in this case, it refers to the individuals from the Tea-Garden Labour community, know the state in India. Some of these individuals are government employees; some are lower-level political leaders and activists. While others are NGOs and community-based groups, they are all 'Adivasis who form an indispensable part of the Tea-Gardens of Assam. The underlying concern is to see how the state makes itself 'visible' to this group of people. Studies have found that the state invariably seems to be more absent in large parts of rural India than present (Corbridge et al., 2005). It shows that for a very long period after independence, the state machinery has suffered from 'state failure' or, in other words, 'lack of governance'.

Nevertheless, however fragile the state presence be, people are aware that they enjoy certain rights- some are members of scheduled caste and tribes or backward communities, which provide them with a certain amount of entitlement. Many others are

aware that they belong to BPL (Below Poverty Line) family, which entitles them to subsidised food. In recent times, almost everyone, even in the remotest part of India, knows that the government should provide schools, build roads, provide free housing. These people have imbibed the state's biopolitical discourse, which attempts to gain legitimacy via its war on poverty and backwardness.

In the following section, with ethnographic information from the field, we attempt to examine the 'how' the state works and how 'it' is seen in an enclosed setting like a tea garden. The chapter has three primary objectives. Firstly, we understand how different groups of marginalised people see or interact with the state daily. Secondly, we look deeper into how the state has changed its nature to 'enclose' the poor along with its plan to seek their development, empowerment and, at times, their erasure. Thirdly, it is essential to understand how the marginalised communities in India form their view regarding the nature of the state through their interaction with local government officials and their encounter with various state policies that bring the state closer to them.

Several recent studies (Fuller and Benei, 2001; Coleridge et al., 2005; Hansen and Steputtat, 2001) have pointed out the well-established 'elite' understanding of state, which policymakers have long considered, has been challenged. It has been vernacularised to suit the need of local and lower-level bureaucracy. Local officials' understanding of the state seems to have little respect for notions of 'fairness' and 'justice' or state obligation towards people.

In this chapter, we focus on poor people's livelihood and social networks in our study area. The primary objective is to examine how a 'micro' state operates and how this operation is understood, moulded, and challenged by ordinary people. In this part, the works draw on the fieldwork conducted between November 2018 and March 2020.

5.1. Experiencing Poverty: Livelihoods, inequality, and social networks

Most inhabitants of rural India describe their living conditions in the language of categories provided by the state- as belonging to SC or ST, or BPL family. However, their description of their 'life-worlds cannot just be limited to government categories, nor are their experience of hardships and sufferings a product of state alone. The changing patterns of structural inequalities shape the life-world of most people in rural India regarding access to land or fluidity in caste structure and mobility in terms of livelihood opportunities. The patterns of inequality vary from place to place and are accentuated by the social network of accumulation-caste, gender, religion and ethnicity.

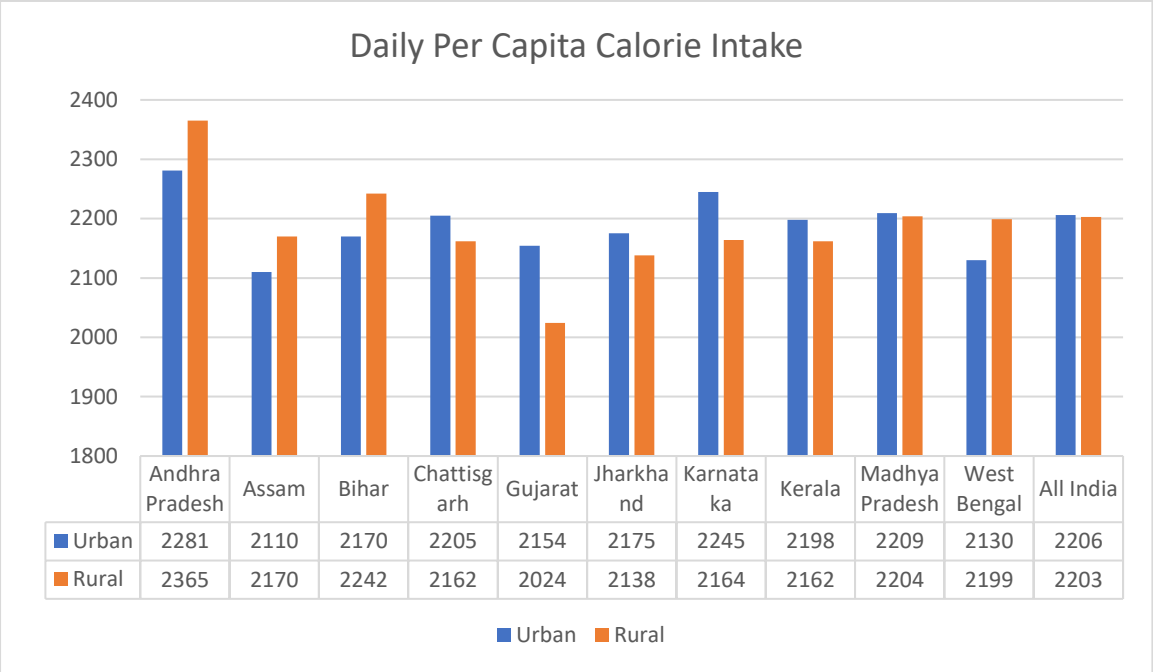
5.1.1 Income, Poverty and Livelihood

The consumption expenditure has been used to calculate the poverty line in India. Income levels have not been considered due to difficulties in assessing incomes of self-employed people and daily wage labourers because of significant fluctuations in income due to seasonal factors. Also, a data collection difficulty in India's largely rural and informal economy makes it nearly impossible to estimate poverty in terms of income. The Planning Commission estimates the incidence of poverty based on the extensive sample surveys conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) on household consumer expenditure on a quinquennial basis. The NSSO regularly conducts surveys on household consumer expenditure, in which households are asked about their consumption for the last 30 days and is taken as the representative of general consumption. It was considered better data to estimate the incidence of poverty at national and sub-national levels by adjusting for inter-state and inter-region differences in price changes over time. In July 2013, based on the estimation of the Tendulkar poverty line, Planning Commission released poverty data

for 2011-12. The number of poor in the country was pegged at 269.8 million, or 21.9% of the population. After this, no official poverty estimates in India have been released.

The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), in its 'Nutrition intake in India' report of the 68th round, 2011-12, has provided a list of prevailing calorie intake for rural and urban dwellers of the different Indian states. The figure below presents the per capita calorie intake of 10 Indian states.

Figure 5.1. Daily Per Capita Calorie Intake (in Kcal)



	Andhra Pradesh	Assam	Bihar	Chattisgarh	Gujarat	Jharkhand	Karnataka	Kerala	Madhya Pradesh	West Bengal	All India
Urban	2281	2110	2170	2205	2154	2175	2245	2198	2209	2130	2206
Rural	2365	2170	2242	2162	2024	2138	2164	2162	2204	2199	2203

Source: NSSO 68th Round (2011-12).

Poverty is a recurrent feature of the tea garden labourers all over the state. Instead of relying on the official definition of poverty, the present study emphasises the people's description of their circumstances, i.e. an attempt has been made to follow the subjective understanding of poverty as a 'life condition'. However, a working definition of poverty is worked out, which considers a household with unskilled labour as its only source of income, full employment, and a favourable ratio of earners to dependents (Coleridge et al.). Poverty cannot be truly measured by taking into account only the consumption values. Poverty has a multi-dimensional character. It ought to include several factors like health,

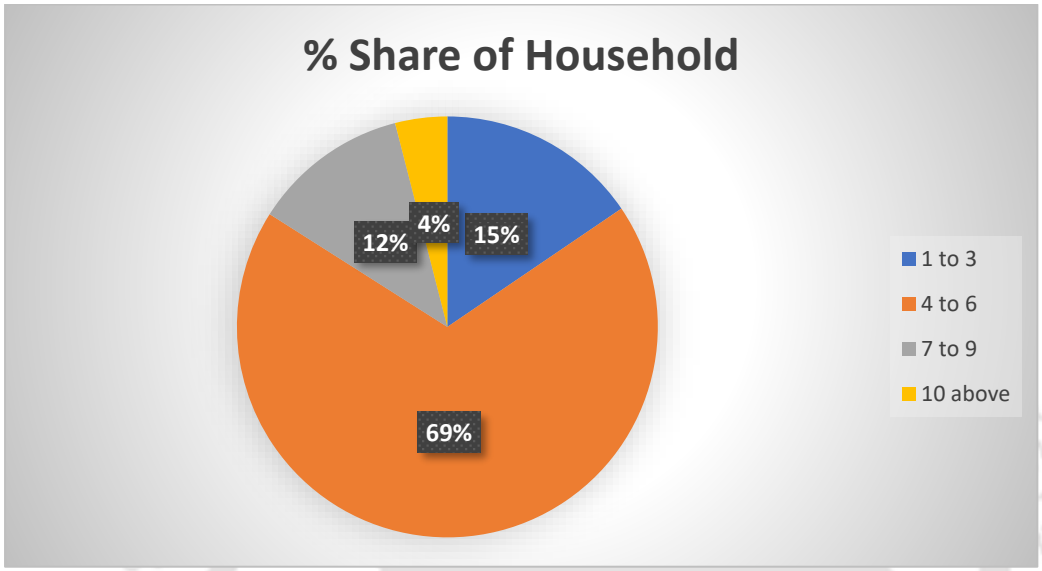
education, shelter, recreation. These factors are not considered while deciding the Below Poverty Line status of a household. Given the low wage of the unskilled workers (Rs. 169 per day), almost all families can be considered poor.

Poverty, to a large extent, is responsible for giving a sense of powerlessness. Wealth or richness is often associated with a sense of security and entitlement. The low wage that prevails in the garden and seasonal employment variations push more people into distress. Often, poverty for the garden workers is not just a question of filling the stomach and the pocket but also an important marker of social distinction. It is apparent in their interaction with the world outside the garden where they are treated as 'outcastes'. Even within the garden, the management shares a demeaning attitude towards the workers. The markers of poverty are pretty visible- their shabby dress, the smell of sweat, their depilating dwellings all indicates their inability to live a decent life. These divisions are not just indications of economic disparity but also deep and entrenched social divisions.

Another vital aspect is gender relations which is highly unequal. For women, poverty is more severe as they are subjected to marginalisation both within and outside. Naturally, we find in the study that in the majority of female-headed households' occurrence of poverty is higher. Women of the household are often the ones whose basic needs like food intake would be reduced at times of scarcity. The interesting point is that in the 'Adivasi communities, women, unlike most women of upper-caste communities, are at liberty and face no restriction to work in the garden. However, they are often subject to harassment and abuse, both within and outside the family, which again pushes them into a life of distress.

Consumption pattern and calorie intake, to a large extent, depends on the size of the household. To understand the prevalence of poverty, we need to look into the family size and earning member's number.

Figure 5.2: Household size (Khumtai Tea Estate)

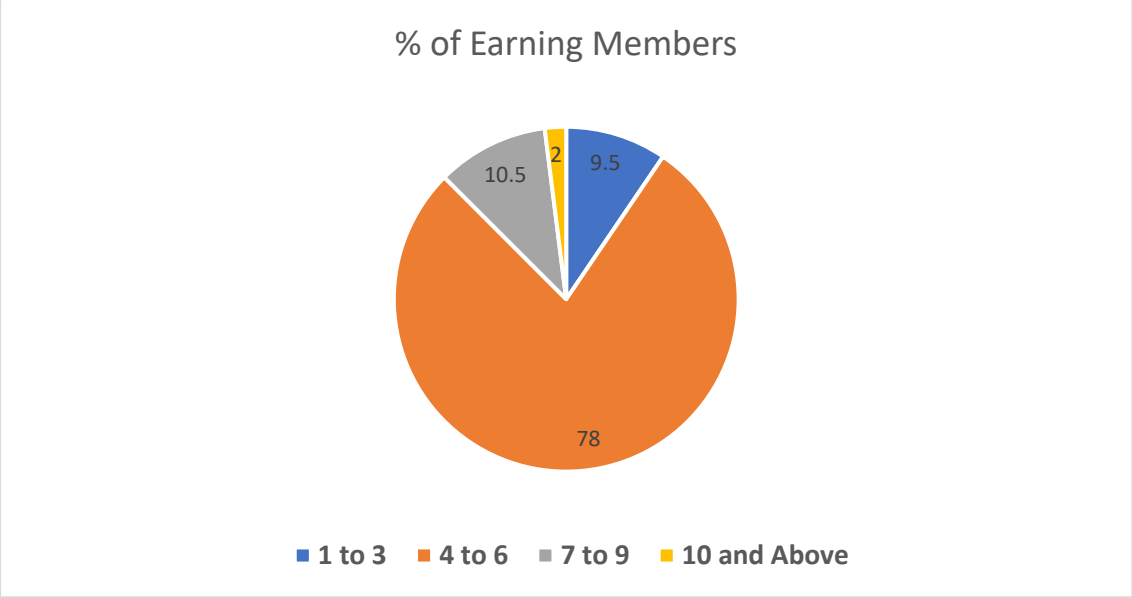


Source: Fieldwork and Office of Garden Welfare Officer.

The above figure indicates the large size of households in the gardens. A large number of households (67%) have 3 to 6 members in their family. It is followed by 15% of the household where we find 1 to 3 members. The share of households with 7 to 9 members is 12%. We observe that the percentage of households declines as the household size increases. However, merely looking into the household size is not enough to understand the prevalence of poverty in the garden. We also need to look into the number of employed members as earning members of the family.

Figure 5.3 below shows that a majority of the household (78%) have 4 to 6 members as working members. However, not all of them are permanent workers. In most joint families, all adult populations are engaged in some or other work.

Figure 5.3: Number (%) of earning members in each household. (N=150).



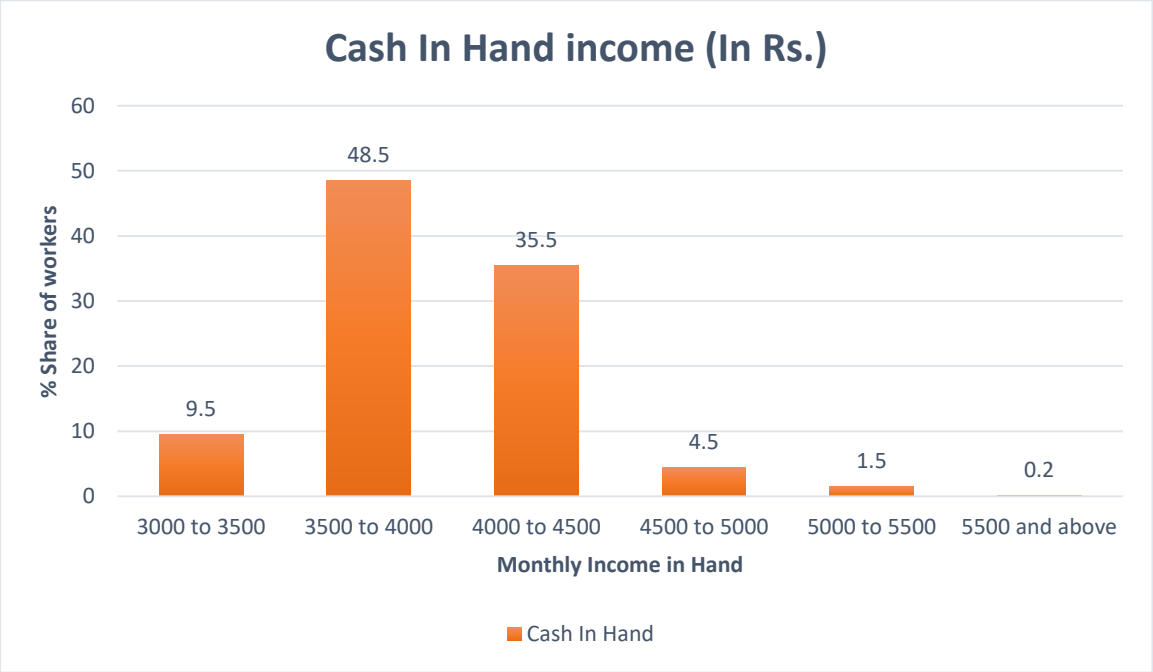
Source: Fieldwork

From the table given above, which is a crude estimation of the working population of the field, we can state that almost all adult members of a family are engaged in garden work. A new trend of few individuals working outside the gardens was not uncommon. However, at least one member was required to work in the garden to benefit the company quarter and the right to stay within the garden: the meagre wage and minimal scope of any increment force young adolescent family members to work.

Another essential aspect analysed by the study to better understand poverty is to look into the income (cash in hand of the workers). The share of workers having in-hand cash income is presented in fig. 5.5. We see that about 48.5% of workers receive in-hand payment between Rs. 3500 to Rs. 4000. It is closely followed by 35.5% of workers who receive Rs. 4000 to Rs. 4500. Looking at the income distribution across gender (fig. 5.6), we find that 42.5% of women workers, as against 38.5% of male workers, receive Rs. 4000 to 4500 as cash in hand. However, the share of women workers (46.5) receiving Rs. 3500 to 4000 as cash in hand is less than male workers (50.5). The percentage of female workers

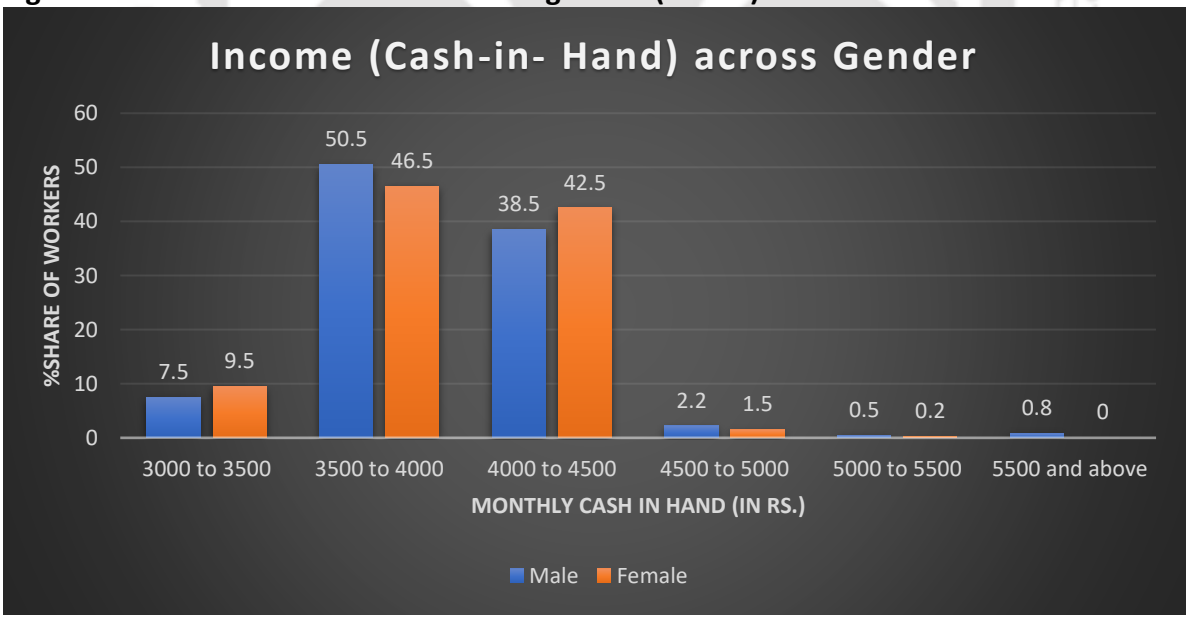
receiving Rs. 4500 to Rs. 5000 is only 1.5% while 2.2% of male workers fall in the same category.

Figure 5.4: Distribution of Income/ cash-in-hand. (N=150).



Source: Fieldwork

Figure 5.5: Distribution of income across gender. (N=150).



Source: Fieldwork

Case 1: The Markers of Poverty

Seema Oraon (name changed) is just 25 years old but looks much older than her age. She is mother of 3 children, 1 son and two daughters. Her husband left the garden 2 years back and has been working as labour in the tea garden of Kerala. Unfortunately, he hasn't sent any money since last 6 months. Her elder daughter who is 10 years old works in the manager's house. Her younger daughter 7 years old stays at home and looks after the son who is about 3 years old. Seema is a casual labour in the garden. When her husband left the garden, she applied for a permanent post but has been denied by the management. Only permanent workers get the benefit of labour quarters, Seema not being a permanent employee has been asked to vacate the quarter. She approached the local panchayat office to apply for a house under Pradhan Manthri Awas Yojana, but her application was rejected as she owned no land of her own and the management has not provided her NOC to apply for the same.

Inside her colonial era quarter, there are just two rooms and an attached kaccha kitchen which they had constructed on their own. In the name of home essentials there is just one old bed and a table with two chairs. It was all purchased by her husband. The wears a deserted look with a very few utensils. One would be surprised to find that there was no any storage item. It suggested that there was nothing to store for her. Her earning could provide the family with mere items to remain alive. Her children, like many other children in the garden looked malnourished. They did not go to school even though there was a primary school within the garden. The story of Seema is a story of numerous such families within the garden across the state since last 200 years. A little has changed for them.

The case depicts the pathetic state of existence in a tea garden. It has continued for many generations. Even after independence and promulgation of the Constitution, which provided a host of rights and benefits to citizens, could not reach the garden society. Such cases highlight the myriad economic, socio-cultural and political vulnerabilities for the tea garden community.

Case 2: In quest of better life

Elaina Kujar (name changed) is 18 years old now. When she was 12, she was taken to Guwahati city by a person known to her family in the pretext of giving a job as a domestic help. She was promised a life of excitement and glamour in the city. Elaina wanted to be a nurse. Instead, she was about to lose four years of her life as a child slave. She recalled a horrific tale of child slavery. She used to be physically assaulted many times. But Elaina chose to stay was in that house for one reason: her parents, who picked the world-famous Assam tea, were paid so little they could not afford to keep her. They had 4 more mouths to feed. After 4 years of suffering, she managed to run away and was lucky to find people who helped her reach her parents' home. Elaina was lucky enough to make it back to her home, while many others never make it. The vicious cycle of poverty and dream of a better life tempts one to go out of the garden. However, they end up in a life of perpetual slavery.

5.2. Education and Life-Chances

Several factors-caste, gender, class affect access to education in the field. The official literacy rate of the state of Assam for adults (7 years and above) stands at 72.29% (Census Report, 2011). However, the average rate of literacy, which seems to be comparatively better, hides the male and female division of 77.85% and 66.27%, respectively. It again does not reflect the status of education in the tea gardens, which even today lack basic educational facilities and rely on the provisions of the Plantation Labour Act. The literacy rate of the field was less than 50%, with women lacking much behind at only 39%. Most of the workers do not or cannot study beyond the primary level due to several factors, more so due to lack of infrastructure and economic condition of the household. The Dropout rates are much higher in tea gardens all over the state as most children above the age of 14 work

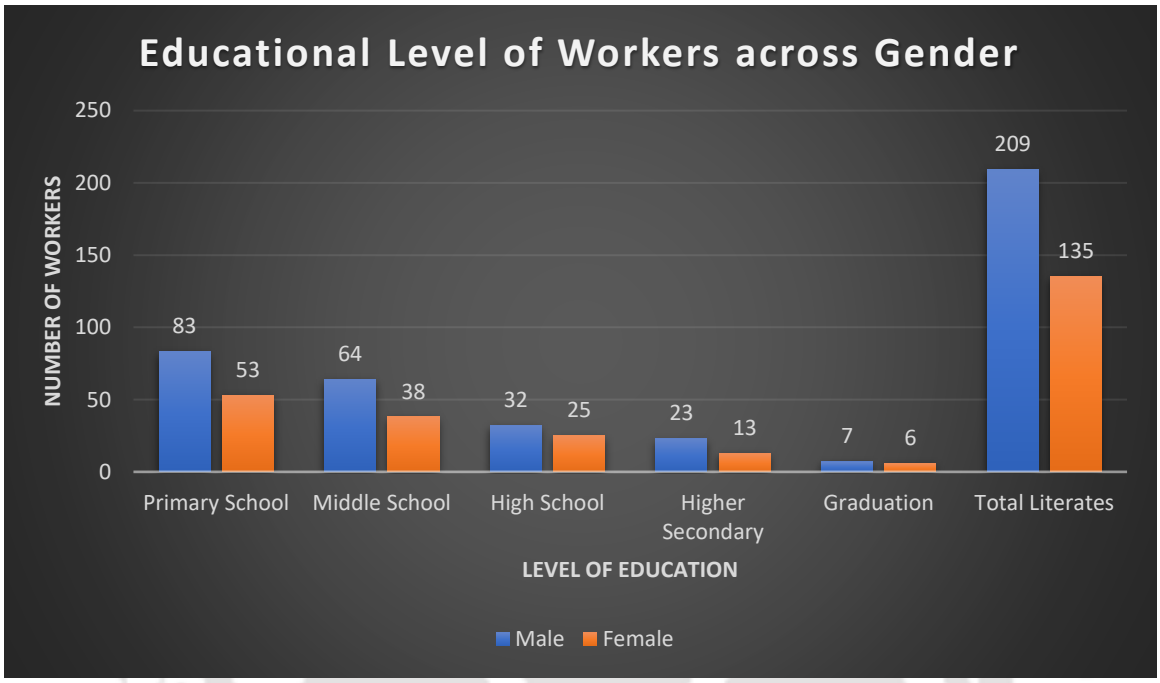
in the gardens. Here too, gender disparity is seen to be higher than in other parts of the state.

The study also tried to look into attendance to seek an accurate picture of education in the field. It is a difficult task as most parents claim that their wards regularly attend schools, but field observation has a very different story. We found that a large number of children do not attend class. Most of them do odd works within the garden and in the nearby hat bazaar. Here we need to keep in mind that parents do not solely decide all matters related to schooling and education. A large majority of parents (73%) interviewed wanted their children to be educated to class 10 or higher. Preference was given to boys' education when it comes to higher education. Most parents did not want to send their daughters to high schools and colleges located far from the garden. It has had economic reasons, as most parents find investment in boys more viable, which would secure their future.

The fig. 5.6 below shows the number of literate as well as illiterate people in the field. The data presented is of the workers engaged in the field and no longer attend any educational institute. They have completed their formal education and are presently involved as permanent and casual labour within the garden. Many male and female workers (136 No.) could complete only primary level of education, i.e. till class five only. At the same time, only 38 female workers, as against 64 males, could complete their middle school (class 8). When it comes to enrollment (class 10), an essential stage in the educational system, 57 workers (32 male and 25 female) have completed it. Only a handful of workers, 23 males and 13 females, have completed higher secondary (class 12). When it comes to higher education (Graduation and above), we find that just seven male workers and six female workers were graduates. The low level of education is directly related to the financial

condition of the workers. Most of the respondents viewed higher education as unnecessary for garden work.

Figure 5.6: Level of Education amongst Garden Workers across Gender.



Source: Fieldwork and ACMS Office.

The table above makes it clear that tea-garden society is lagging when it comes to education. Only very recently, a handful of students have been able to reach university-level education. It is the economy, the fight to survive, which has prevailed over education in the gardens.

Table 5.1: School Attendance Record

Standard/Class	Male	Female	Total
Class 1	20	24	44
Class 2	22	18	39
Class 3	19	25	44
Class 4	21	16	37
Class 5	23	21	44

Class 6	25	19	44
Class 7	22	15	37
Class 8	17	11	28

Source: Field study (School Records)

The above table indicates that garden children attend school, even though the numbers are not very high. However, it is not clear is whether the children regularly come to school or not. It was observed that a few students attended only to have the mid-day meal, free lunch provided by the government, and would leave after that. The school lacked a boundary wall making it easier for the children to leave the campus as and when they wished to. The presence of only two teachers in the school too made the matter worse.

Most parents do not want their children to follow their steps, but the lack of an alternative forces them to work with their parents. Higher education is lacking because there is no college nearby, and most workers cannot afford to send their wards to distant places. Sujata Gorh (name changed), who is among the very few girls who could complete her graduation, says, "It was difficult for me to complete my graduation. The college is almost 20 km away from the garden. Daily I had to spend Rs. 60 as bus fare, which is a big amount for us. Somehow, due to the efforts of my parents, I managed to complete my graduation last year". Today she is engaged as a contractual employee in the labour office under the Government of Assam. Thus, we see few examples of individuals who have come struggled and tried to make some change. Below, we present one such example.

Case 5: A dream waiting to be true

Mr. Tanti sits sipping tea in a small office of his NGO, Balya Bikash Bhawan. He had founded this organisation way back in 1983 to work for the education of tea garden labourers' children. Today he runs a middle and primary school within the garden. His school was recently provincialised by the Govt. of Assam. It is a dream that has been realised for him and his organisation. However, he laments the fact that a large number of children are still

out of school. Most of the parents are unaware of the value of education. Mr Tanti observes that it is a colonial legacy. The management is not interested in education as educated workers will be more aware of their rights, posing a problem to the administration. According to Mr Tanti, even the union bodies find little interest in improving the education level of the workers.

"We lack sufficient infrastructure and manpower in the garden schools", comments Mr Tanti. He has been teaching in the school despite his busy schedule in many socio-cultural affairs of the community. Lack of permanent teachers hampers the quality of teaching in the school. "Most children attend our school to have the mid-day meals and give little interest to what is being taught", observes the man who has given his life to the education of gardens' children.

"I am just a graduate, but I want our children to be doctors, engineers, scientists and whatnot. We have potential here, but it needs to be polished". There is a sense in his mission to change the age-old traditions and power relations in the garden.

5.3. The Poor and the Non-state Network

The shark contrast between the natural world and the paper world for the workers points to the fact that the state is usually not a part of their social imagination. The poor state is also not at the heart of their livelihood strategies. Thus, with significant penetration of the developmental state into the countryside, most poor people in India do not see the state as their first line of help whenever they seek help. For them, 'Sarkar' is a distant personality who cannot be approached without a mediator. The social network of the poor provides an intuitive platform for them to interact with the state, which is far more regular than formal interaction with agencies of the state. These networks overlap and at times eclipse a large number of development agencies of the state. We will provide more details in the next section on the participatory politics of the poor.

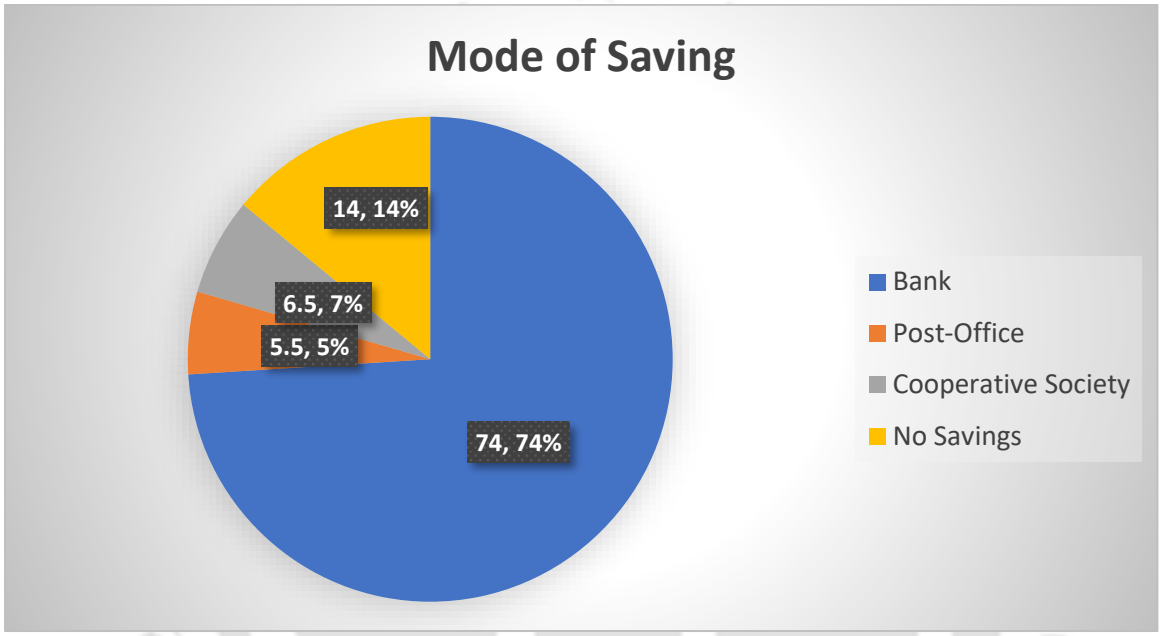
Given the high occurrence of poverty in the field, it is evident for people to seek employment and look for credit creation. Opportunities for the workers are minimal outside the gardens. The support of local leaders and patrons is crucial in getting a permanent job within the estate. Thus, a good relationship with the local patron provides an added advantage to the worker who desperately needs work throughout the year. Many times, the local leaders are also helpful in getting provisions of PLA to the garden workers. However, many times this adversely affects their bargaining capacity with the management.

Another essential feature of the relationship between the poor and the local powerful is the requirement of credit needs of the poor. The high demand for loans by rural poor and workers is met usually by the local employers and agents within the garden. The rate is interest is naturally more elevated than the interest rates of formal credit institutions. In few cases, the workers relied on loans from co-workers and relatives, but this was rare since most of them lacked cash credit. There are well-known moneylenders in the close vicinity of few gardens, traditionally the Marwari traders and Kabuliwallas. They have been a continuous source of credit to the rural poor since the colonial period. A significant reason most people avoided formal credit institutions is their lack of knowledge and inability to carry out the 'paperwork' associated with the credit. Besides, the local agents and employers provide for 'ready money which is easily accessible.

To understand the nature and tendency of the workers towards saving, our survey looked into the types of savings in the garden. Fig. 5.7 shows the different modes of savings practised by the workers. It is found that almost all permanent workers have a bank account since their salary is routed through a bank account. However, it needs to be noted that having a bank account is not enough to prove that workers can save their money. Opening a bank account is required for salary purposes only. The majority of temporary

workers relied on Cooperative Societies and Self-Help Groups for credit requirements. A large number of workers are dependent on non-institutional sources of credit during times of crisis.

Figure: 5.7: Modes of Saving in Tea Garden



Source: Fieldwork and Office of Garden Welfare Officer.

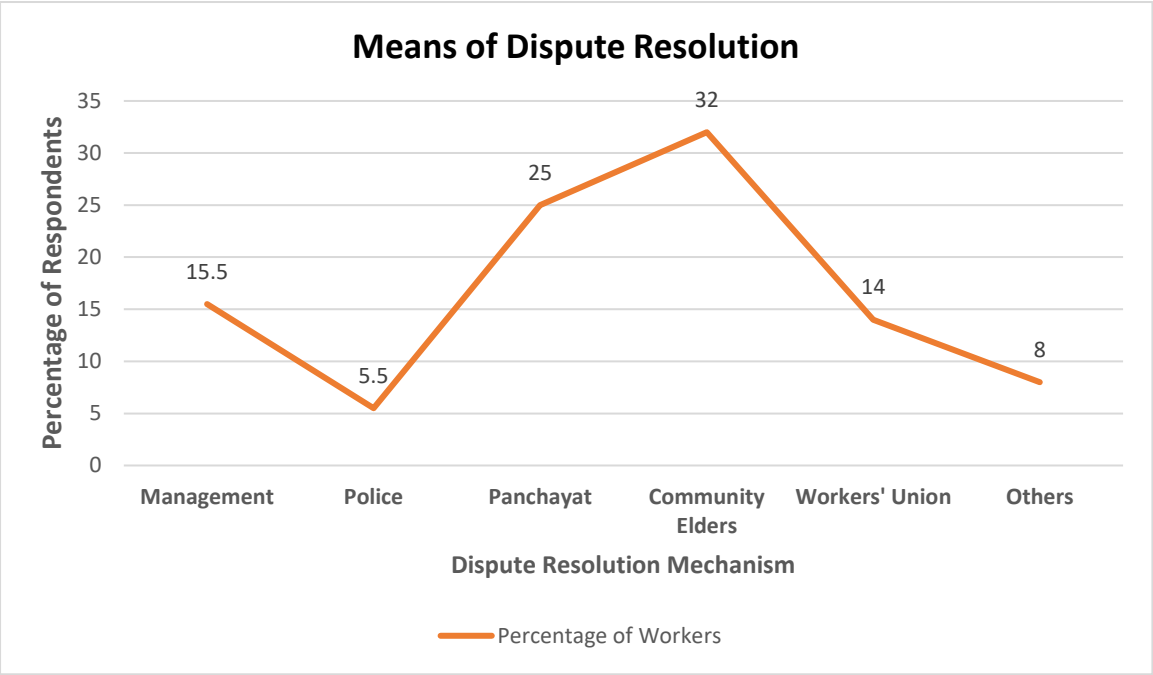
The relationship between the employers, workers, local brokers, and agents can be best described as a private-market-based relationship reflected in the mode of production in the gardens. The workers have no say in the decision over the product or value generated by their labour. The labourers exercise very little bargaining power within the garden. It was seen that few labourers with considerable experience and could gain the employer's trust are regarded as valuable and treated with respect by the authority.

Another vital aspect to be looked into while considering the role of local leaders is their role in negotiating disputes. Mediation of disputes by local elders and community leaders is an age-old tradition amongst the garden community. However, with

the penetration of the developmental state and its agencies, the power of the traditional institutions has significantly diminished. When accessing developmental projects and policies, most people rely on connecting with political agents and activists like union leaders and local ward members. The grassroots activist becomes a pivotal figure to establish a link with the politically powerful of the region. During the field observation, it was seen that the local level activist and workers were patronised by the workers who paid them for getting their work done. They had to pay petty sums to get benefits like homes, pensions, BPL cards and subsidised rations. The contact with government officials was very minimum in the field. In recent times a few individuals have been elected in local panchayat bodies.

In fig. 5.8, we see the various platforms used by workers when it comes to dispute resolution. The figure clearly shows that most respondents prefer to solve the dispute with the help of community elders and leaders (32%). When it comes to helping from the Police administration, only 5.5% of respondents preferred it. It shows that most workers do not feel comfortable going to the police station. A good number of respondents (25%) take help from the local panchayat members regarding dispute resolution. Around 15.5% of respondents trust the management, while only 14% approach the workers' union. It shows that the workers do not much prefer both the administration and the collaboration.

Figure 5.8: Means of dispute resolution in the garden. (N=150).



Source: Fieldwork

Romen Tanti (name changed) is a community elder from the Oriya community who are in large number in our study site. According to him, most workers solve marriage disputes, family disputes, quarrels between neighbours and other petty issues within the garden itself. "They approach me since I am an aged person and respected in the community. Most quarrels are solved within the community, and there is little need to go to the police or the management. Only severe matters that we cannot solve go to them" (personal communication, 27 December 2019). Pintu Bariak (name changed), a graduate associated with an NGO, believes that workers are afraid of approaching the police or authority outside the garden or the community. "Our people suffer from several obstacles which deter them from taking help from anyone outside the park. They face problems in expressing their issues to the authority. Many times, they are threatened by police and management. So naturally, they prefer local leaders (personal communication, 27 December 2019).

Table 5.2: Types of Social Network in the field

Nature of Organization/Association	Number	Name
Political Party	02	BJP and INC
Students' Union	02	AATTSA & AAASA
Labour Union	01	ACMS
Civil Society Body	02	Balya Bikash Bhawan & Satiya Sabha

Source: Fieldwork

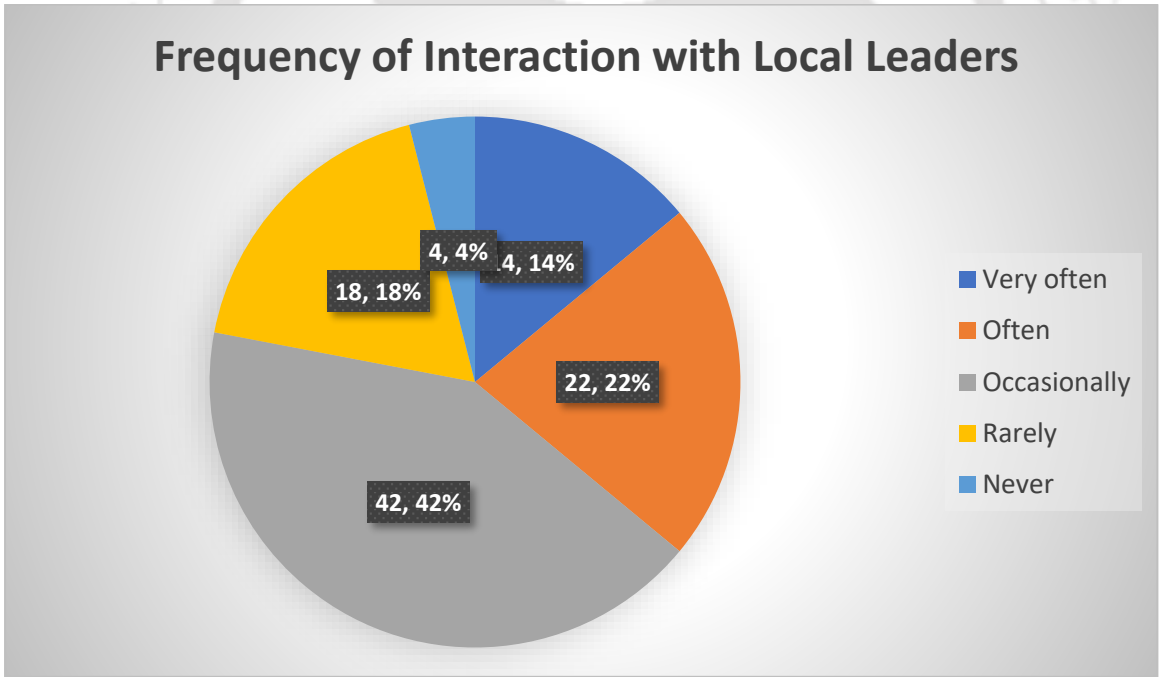
In the field, a plethora of party workers provided the bridge between the workers and the different agencies of the developmental state. The lowest level official is often a member of the same locality. Most of these were panchayat members who have gradually replaced the traditional power holders. However, indigenous institutions like caste councils still mattered when it came to religious and personal issues.

For the workers, the 'locally powerful' individuals with economic and social resources mattered a lot as they formed an essential source of support for the poor. Few observations can be drawn from the relationship between the workers and the rich in the field. Firstly, a crucial factor is the resources under the employers, and moneylenders are a vital factor for the survival strategies of the poor. The Government agencies, even though they provide for work and other social assistance, the impact of the economically powerful persist. Secondly, whenever the people seek help from the state, the lowest level of bureaucracy or official directly contact the people. These workers face more difficulty assessing the states they confront more 'gatekeepers' than those with higher resources. Thus, they are inclined to side with the politically and socially powerful individual to extract maximum benefit from the government. Thirdly, the relationship between the poor and the

powerful is shaped by economic and social status, how political mobilisation has taken place in the region, and how ethnic and linguistic identity has shaped politics in recent years. It is the localised leadership pattern that is mainly responsible for shaping the design of relationships.

The figure below indicates the frequency of interaction between the workers and the local level leaders and politicians. Here, local leaders include workers, union leaders, student body activists, panchayat members, and political parties.

Fig. 5.9: Percentage of respondents who interact with local leaders (N=150).



Source: Fieldwork

From the above figure, it is apparent that people do not always approach people of positions. However, such leaders are found to be more accessible than government officials and local bureaucrats.

5.4. Viewing the State from a 'Coolie Line.'

Recent studies have highlighted the fact that whenever a person enters a circle office, or police station or even a government school; they are entering the domain of the state whose markers are visible in the construction of the building with notice-boards outside which reads out the purpose of its existence (Fuller and Harris, 2001). However, these markers or structures do not easily separate the state from the society, nor do they make the study of everyday state easier. Besides, when the poor interact with the state officials, they are more inclined to use their non-state social network. Thus, for the poor, most of the 'practices' of the state are brought to life and negotiated by networks of political brokers, gatekeepers and fixers. Many encounters of the poor with the local level bureaucracy blurs the boundary between the state and the 'outside'. In his study of rural India, Akhil Gupta argues that the local bureaucracy in their daily dealings makes frequent use of 'unofficial' practices and represents a pattern of clientelism. Gupta observed these dealings occur both within the office space and outside- tea stalls and social gatherings. Another interesting observation in the study is the 'performance' carried out by the poor in their interaction with the officials- touching feet, praying-which further blur the boundary between the state and society. The relationship is not based on a constitutional pattern of citizens and government but a paternalistic outlook towards the poor.

While detailing how the marginalised community views the state, we need to pay careful attention to these encounters and their consequences. In the section below, we will see that people in rural India are not mere 'beneficiaries' of the doles rolled out by the state. They are also active participants in the state machinery, and their contacts with the everyday state inform their ideas about the working of the 'sarkar' in their life. It has been witnessed that the state employs various rule technologies to reach out to its citizens. The

citizens, too, make use of such technologies to take advantage of the state. Let us now enter into the 'geography' of the field to get an account of the local 'Sarkari institutions and see how the poor come to know the state.

5.5. The Spatial State- Measuring the 'Geography' of State

We refer to as 'geography' it includes many government institutions, ranging from the well-established district administration in a district headquarter to a humble panchayat office in a remote location. The figure below outlines the basic setup of administration and local government in a state in India. Administration set up in India includes both elected representatives and government officials- from the elected member of the State Assembly and District Magistrate/Deputy Commissioner down to a Pradhan/Sarpanch of a Gaon Panchayat power. For most poor people in rural India, the state that runs from the commanding heights of the state capital is not visible in their daily affairs. For them, the local political agents and representatives' matter when it comes to interaction with the state. It is the visibility of the local leaders with an 'office' attached to them that gives an impression of the state

Table 5.5: The Administrative setup of local government

Administrative Setup	Administrative Staff	Political Representative	Panchayat Bodies
District Level	District Commissioner/ Magistrate DDOs/ADCs/ ADMs, ACs District Level Staff	MPs, MLAs Zilla Parishad Chairperson Ordinary ZP Members	Zilla Parishad
Block Level	Block Development Officer Assisting Staff	MPs, MLAs and Members of Panchayat Samitis	Panchayat Samiti
Anchal Level	Panchayat Secretary	Pradhan	Gram Panchayat
Ward Level		Ward Member(s)	

Case 6

Ruma and Bobita are two Adivasi tea garden workers. The only 'sarkar' or 'state' they are aware of is the local ward member of their panchayat and the pradhan. They have never visited, nor are they aware of any block or district level officer. Both the women knew the names of ward members and Pradhan (Gaon Bura). The ward member was a lady who lived within the garden and was easily accessible to them. They would approach her if they required any government benefit or even to solve their quarrels and disputes. For them, she was the 'authority. The Pradhan too was known to them and would regularly visit the garden with Panchayat Secretary to attend meetings in the neighbourhood. The former Panchayat member, too, is a person familiar to them. He is pretty active and would often raise workers' problems with the government officials and even management. Both the women have visited the local panchayat office a couple of times and know a bit about making applications even though they are illiterate. The ward members and the Pradhan are not the only government agents who would visit the garden, but there were occasionally other visitors. However, the women knew little about who they were or the purpose of their visit. They blamed themselves for being illiterate and ignorant about the world around them. Both of them said they are aware of being a BPL family and as tea garden workers entitled to certain benefits but have a blurred understanding of what they are supposed to get and how to get them.

These are socially and economically active women within and beyond their neighbourhood and village. However, the Block or the district offices do not form a part of their life-worlds. Their experience of the state is straightforward and local, and not occasional too. Engagement with the state system at the higher level is limited. In contrast,

these women's ideas of government or authority are often hazy, from individual holders of an office to the office itself.

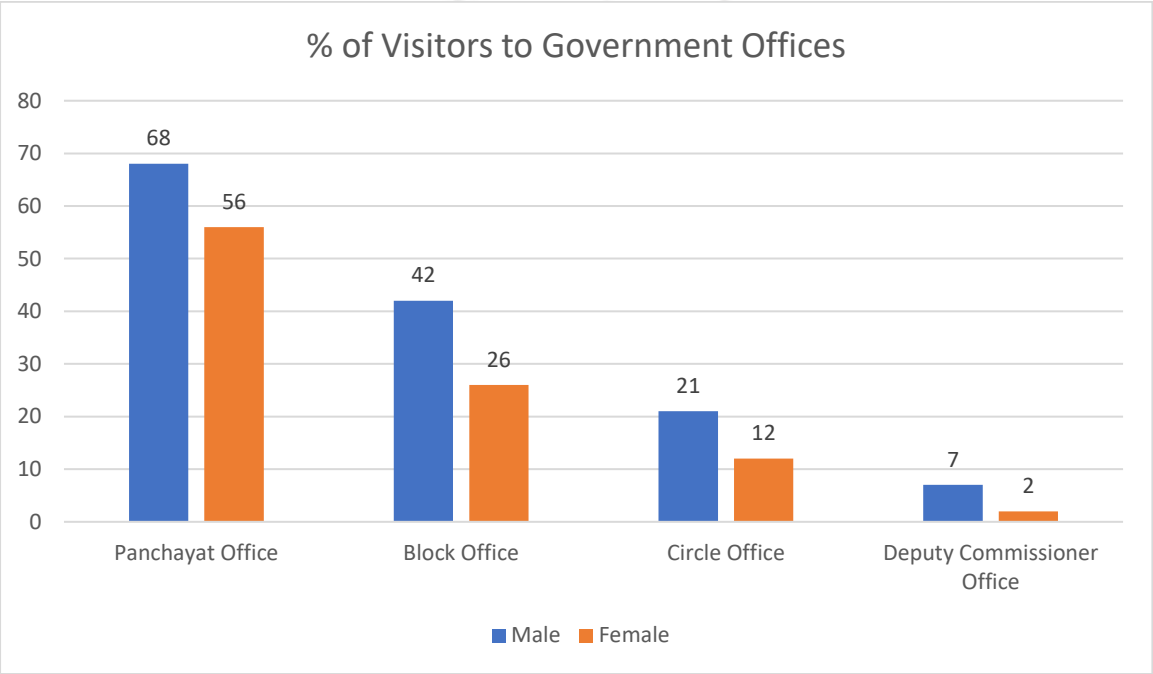
However, we need to understand that these insights are not just seen as a lack of consciousness or as leftovers of a 'pre-modern consciousness. Instead, these insights are actively produced through current patterns of social and political exclusion. Although Ruma and Bobita may blame their lack of education, their state views reflect broader aspects of their (dis)empowerment.

The above case indicates that most poor people encounter the state are very localised and limited to neighbourhood institutions. However, not everyone in the field suffers from isolation. A good number of people were making careers as a political party as well as social workers. Many others act as informal brokers who link the workers with the government officials and services. Whatever may be the case, the few government services and centres visible beyond the panchayat office is the school and Anganwadi centres. Sometimes, the police station too made itself visible in case there were disputes in the neighbourhood. For those who could reach beyond the limits of the neighbourhood, the Block is also an important site of encounter for the poor, and the Block Development Officer (BDO) is the highest public official known to them. The BDO acts as the planner, executor, legal magistrate and supervisor to other officials. The district office was at a distance, and very few workers ever made the trip to visit government representatives or to participate in a court case. For the garden workers of our field, it was a sporadic visit. They would sometimes take part in rallies where they would visit the offices but from a distance. The district offices are striking and possibly impermeable for them. Access to officials at this level cannot occur without a mediator. However, it is wrong to assume that the proximity of the villagers and workers to the local level state officials led to greater participation giving

way to a sense of citizenship. The structures of decentralisation do not automatically ensure participation on the ground.

In the figure below (fig. 5.10), we see the various levels of governmental offices visited by the respondents of the plantation. It would help us understand how often do people at the margin 'approach' the state.

Fig. 5.11: % Visitors to local government offices across gender (N=150).



Source: fieldwork

From the figure, it is clear that most respondents, both men and women, have not visited government offices. The local panchayat office is the most visited one as it is the site for multiple functions, ranging from birth registration to distribution of schemes. It is the most frequented government office in rural India and forms the lowest rung of administrative authority. Mr Manoj Nag (name changed) sits in the local Khumtai Panchayat Office and helps people who come to the office by drafting applications and filling forms for them as most of them are illiterate. "As you can see, most of our people know nothing about rules of government offices. Before I began this work, they were not even heard by the staff here. Of course, now things are changing. Many of the workers have received

benefits from the office. I even write applications for those who have any work in the BDO and DC office. I have to accompany them to these offices because they have no idea how to deal with the staff there. Also, at times they have to bribe the officials to get their work done," comments Mr Nag. From his comments and observation of the site, it is apparent that the garden workers are yet to come out of the colonial understanding of bureaucracy.

5.6. Encountering the 'Developmental State.'

An understanding of the 'geographies' of the state cannot be just limited to the study of state institutions alone. It does not give an overall picture of the poor people viewing the state. We need to analyse how the people see the government personnel or agents of the 'sarkar'. The range of people's interaction with the state extends much beyond the scope of institutions discussed above. The poor will also have regular interactions with schools, health services and a host of the state's apparatus. All such encounters will contribute to their sense of how and for whom, government operates. The examples below show how villagers interact with block officials with a 'local' government agent- panchayat members. The cases also highlight the proactive role played by some individuals in a heterogeneous society of poor people. It points the fact that not all individuals have equal access to the state machinery.

5.7.1. One People, Many 'encounters'

Working 'with' the state

Rimjhim Karmakar (name changed) is a young ward member (26 years old) of ward no. Three lie within the Khumtai Tea Estate in Golaghat District. She was elected as ward member on a BJP ticket in the recently held Panchayat elections. Rima originally hails from the Dibrugarh district of upper Assam and is married to Mr Binoy Karmakar (name changed),

permanent labour of the Khumtai Tea Estate. The couple lives in a quarter provided by the management. She has passed her matriculation but left her education while she was studying in higher secondary. They live in a 'Colliee line' within the estate.

On my first visit, I found Rimjhim sitting in her quarter along with her husband. After a brief introduction, I was let in and asked to sit. It was a fully pukka quarter and looked relatively new. When I inquired if it was constructed under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Rimjhim smiled and replied that they had not taken, so far, any benefit government scheme. She further added that if she starts taking benefit of the government schemes, people will start talking 'bad' about her, so they have not even bought any new furniture for fear of being labelled a corrupt ward member.

Being Sunday, Rimjhim had some visitors who had come to meet her and request her to forward their application to the president of the panchayat to avail benefits of various schemes. It is essential to note here that it is for the first time that Government schemes are being granted and implemented in the tea estates, which so far, resisted any government attempt to deal with the labourers directly. However, an exciting aspect of the interaction between Rimjhim and the visitors was submitting their application to Mr Binoy and not Rimjhim. The young lady, by then, was asked to prepare tea for the guest and entered the kitchen. The husband took the application and asked the visitors to provide passport size photographs. This shows the gender becomes a factor when dealing with the state and how women are doubly marginalised in the tea-garden labour community.

After some time, the visitors began to leave, and one of the visitors asked Mr Binoy Tanti (name changed) to come out for a while. My presence in the room seemed to have made them a little uncomfortable talking freely. Meanwhile, tea was served to me, and I took this opportunity to speak to Rimjhim. I asked her to make things comfortable if

she was interested in continuing with her education. She replied in affirmative but lamented on the lack of proper time to study. She said that there are things that she does not understand much about politics. Therefore, her husband 'helps' her. Her use to organise meetings of Self-Help Groups and finding her active party members asked her to stand in the election, which she did with the help of her family.

On being asked what the significant works she had accomplished as a ward member so far are, she replied that she got sanction four houses under PMAY and few toilets after getting elected. She also reported that LED bulbs were distributed in her ward. When asked if there were any criteria based on which benefits were granted, she replied negative and said that her job was just to forward the application to the president, even though she could press for the demands to be fulfilled soon.

By then, another visitor Mr Tanti accompanied by her husband came and discussed something important with Rimjhim. It was about the grant of an LPG cylinder under the Ujjawal scheme. Mr Tanti was a staff member in the garden and was well-connected to the higher officials. From what I could make out from their discussion, the cylinder should go to a member of their community (Oriya) since the last time it had gone to someone else. It is noted here that the Oriya community formed a dominant community in that particular garden. Rimjhim and her husband assured him that they would do their best in this regard. Mr Tanti, after a brief introduction, insisted that I should visit his house in the staff line. After knowing my background, Mr Tanti began to converse in English. Then, I left Rimjhim's place and went out with Mr Tanti to visit the collie lines and the garden factory. Before leaving, I had asked Mrs Karmakar to organise a Swach Bharat Campaign in the garden. She was happy and asked me to be part of it and encourage the labourers in the lines to maintain proper cleanliness in the surrounding.

The incident and interaction at the ward member's house exhibit the working of the 'vernacular' state.

Close, yet too far

Priyanka Barwah (Oraon) is among the very few Khumati Tea Estate girls who go to college. She has been an intelligent and intelligent student since her childhood. Priyanka's parents are permanent daily wage labourers in the garden. She managed to study so far only due to the help from the local church and the Sacred Heart Missionary. She goes to a Girls's College, which is around 20 km from her residence. Priyanka aspires to become an educator and help the womenfolk of her community.

This year she had completed her two years in the college and was supposed to take admission in the third year. The Government of Assam provides free admission to girl students of families who earn less than two lakhs annually. Thus, Priyanka qualifies for free admission. However, the condition for admission was that one had to produce an income certificate duly signed by the Block Officer. Until last year, a certificate of income from the Mauzadar was sufficient for getting free admission. There were many instances of bribing the Mauzadar to make a fake certificate, and it was discontinued this year. Many of the students were not fully aware of this change and had no income certificate. Since the admission and payment of fees are made online, they were left with very little time. Priyanka being my student, asked me if I could help her in getting the certificate. I consented to help her as this was an opportunity for me to see the working of the 'state' from a close quarter.

Losing no time, we immediately left for the Circle Office that is located in the Golaghat town. The place was crowded with students and parents waiting desperately for the sign of the Circle Officers in income certificate. The clerks and petty officials were having

a good time charging 'fees' which ranged from Rs. Twenty to Rs. 200 depending on the ability to bargain a 'good deal. Things also depended on 'network' and 'good relationship' (*bhal sinaki*) with the officials in the office. However, neither my student nor I was blessed with such 'impunity', a common feature of lower bureaucracy in India.

I wanted Priyanka to try and do the work herself as much as possible without taking my help. Accordingly, she enquired about the process of getting an income certificate from the circle office. After moving around many tables, one clerk told her that she would have to produce some 'documents' like the electricity bill of her parents, bank passbook, or any other document which can prove that they are a permanent resident of the state and earn less than 2 lakh annually. He also added that it was the discretion of the Circle Officer to give the income certificate to anyone, and he could do some 'help' in this regard. The girl had no money to offer him and was left with very little time to produce any of the said documents since her parents had left for work in the garden.

Left with no other option, I asked Priyanka to meet the Block Officer and tell him about her situation. Again, there was a long queue outside his room with a peon controlling and deciding who would enter first. The biased attitude of the peon was visible in his treatment of people. Priyanka had to wait too long, and only after I asked the peon why it was taking too long was she allowed to enter. I waited outside the chamber. The Circle Officer told her that he would not be able to issue her any certificate without documentary proof. By the time I had made some phone calls, I had come to know that belonging to the TGL (Tea- Garden Labour) community was sufficient to get an income certificate.

Meanwhile, Priyanka had come out of the chamber disappointed, and tears were rolling down her eyes. Then, I decided to talk to the circle officer myself and explain

the situation. Once again, I had to wait for my 'turn' to enter the room. This time, along with Priyanka, I entered the room and introduced myself to the Circle Officer. I explained to him the entire situation and emphasised that she belonged to the TGL community who could not be denied an income certificate. Hesitantly, he agreed to issue the certificate but asked her to produce the employment card (Garden ID card with employee number) later.

This incident portrays how the 'state' acts upon the people who are at the margins of everyday life. The state agents, here the local bureaucracy, create both inclusion and exclusion depending on factors like caste, community, religion, language, etc. This also shows that 'state' though theoretically neutral for all, does not appear to be so in its functioning. It is closer to some than others.

The' Enlightened' one

Every community has a hero, some dead, some alive. These heroes do something against the odds and become an inspiration for others to follow. The present story is also about a local hero from the Tea- Garden labour community of the Khumtai Sub-division in the Golaghat district. His name is Mr Suresh Barhoi (name changed), a retired Headmaster of the local Highschool in the Khumtai Tea Estate. Mr Barhoi struggle and ultimate success in bringing about change in the community is commendable and deserves mention and appreciation. His consistent effort has brought about many positive changes in the locality.

After hearing his story, I decided to meet him and fixed a date for the same. He had asked me to come to his school; even though it was a Sunday and school was closed, there was a meeting of women Self- Help groups of the locality that Mr Barhoi was to preside. When I reached the school, Mr Barhoi was already there. I found that the school was established some 30 years back (Primary section) due to the effort made by Barhoi and some of his friends. His father was permanent labour in the Khumtai Tea Estate, and he was

the only boy from the region to have attended high school. Throughout his tenure as Headmaster, he struggled with the garden management and state authorities for proper facilities in the school. The school today has been upgraded to high school along with Anganwadi and provision for a mid-day meal.

Mr Barhoi's son was well educated and employed in a high post in the garden. He, too, like his father, was socially active and was involved in several NGO's that worked in the garden. He had organised the meeting of various SHG's working in the locality. Soon the meeting began, and I too was asked to attend it and speak a few words. I spoke about the importance of education, especially for womenfolk of the community. After that, the meeting began, where several women talked about the various issues they were facing in running the SHG's.

Coming back to Mr Barhoi's story, he has written several articles, poems, and stories for children and adults. He is among the founding members of Chah Janagosthi Sahitya Sabha, a literary platform of the tea garden community. He took me to visit the coolie lines of his garden. The difference with other gardens was visible, and this was possible due to the effort of Mr Barhoi and his team.

Being a respected community individual, Mr Barhoi had easy access to District offices and high officers. He would often invite them as speakers on different occasions. However, at the start of his career, as a social activist, things were very different. He was mocked for trying to be a 'Neta' (leader) of his community. The officers were indifferent to him and his demands. They taunted him and often asked him to leave his *netagiri* (leadership) and work in the garden.

Nevertheless, he did not give up his effort and pursued his goal with complete sincerity. He found some support from the local Congress leaders who helped him get

schemes from the district office. Later on, Mr Barhoi found much support from the Deputy Commissioner, who happened to be a benevolent person with a zeal to bring some change in the life of poor people. For a few among the poor with zeal and insight, accidental meetings with influential people can be a first step in targeting and reaching the state.

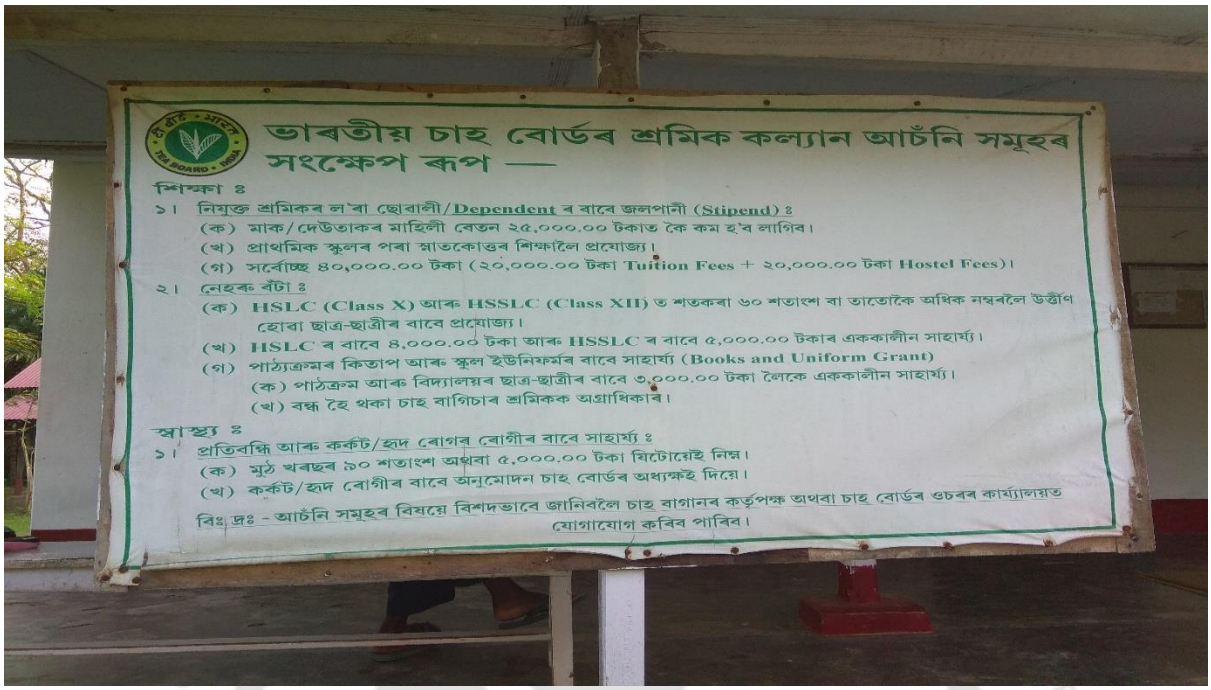
The three stories above clearly point out that individual encounters with the state differ even within the same society. The encounters are driven by several factors- proximity to local officials, education and knowledge of the state's working, the assistance of powerful outsiders etc. We see in the three stories, and many more narratives of state encounter the display of power relations between government officials, local power holders, and the poor.

As poor people in the site discuss their sightings of the state, we see experience in each encounter as a learning lesson for them for the subsequent encounter. It is important to note that the state-poor encounter (with officials who are democratic, discriminatory or corrupt) contributes to the imagination of a state that is much 'richer in its practice than being presented by few individuals representing it.

5.7. Conclusion

The discussion in the chapter clearly points to the fact that understanding of the state cannot be just limited to the study of state institutions alone. Such a limited approach does not give an overall picture of how the poor people view the state. There is a need to analyse how the people see the government personnel or agents of the 'sarkar'. The range of people's interaction with the state extends much beyond the scope of institutions. The poor will also have regular interactions with a host of the state's agencies. All such encounters will contribute to their sense of how and for whom, government operates.

Picture 5.1: A notice board with schemes for Tea-Garden students



A notice board which reads out few welfare schemes provided by the Indian Tea Board. (Photo Source: Fieldwork by author)

Picture 5.2: Water Supply scheme inside a plantation

Drinking water facility set-up by the state government within the garden premises. Such schemes are additional benefits to the residents of the plantation. Earlier the garden management avoided all kinds of governmental schemes within the garden premises. (Photo Source: Fieldwork by author)

Picture 5.3: Members of Women Self-Help Groups.

Interaction with women workers of the garden. Women form a major component of the tea industry since its inception. The women in the picture are members of local cooperative society. Such societies have gained popularity in the garden as it has empowered the women to think of new ways of earning. (Photo Source: Fieldwork by author)

Picture 5.4: Tocklai Tea Research Institute

The Tocklai Tea Research Institute was established in the year 1911 to promote research in tea industry. It is located near the river Tocklai in Jorhat district of Assam. At present, research on all aspects related to tea cultivation and production is carried out in the institute. However, there is hardly any research in the institute on the human aspect of the industry. It is funded by planters along with the state government and ministry of commerce. (Photo Source: Fieldwork by author)

Picture 5.5: An awareness drive in the plantation.

An awareness camp held by the assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha in association with 'Janani Barta' (NGO) to educate the workers on issues health and hygiene. The Sangha held such awareness camps in and around the tea gardens to make the workers aware of the precautions to be taken during the pandemic period. (Photo Source: Fieldwork by author)

Picture 5.6: A quiz competition at the garden

Students of the garden participate in a quiz competition held by the AIR Station, Dibrugarh. (Photo Source: Fieldwork by author)

CHAPTER 6

MAKING OF THE 'VERNACULAR' STATE

In the previous chapter, we discussed the spaces of empowerment where the poor population would interact with the state and its agencies and institutions. The interaction is mediated by several factors-education, poverty, gender, and 'local' leaders and gatekeepers. The spaces of interaction in our field are porous and unstable, where the agencies of the state are far and few. The political society here is developing, as suggested by people's low participation in administration and decision-making. In this chapter, the works extend into more comprehensive ranges of encounters of people with the state. We find a resemblance in Scott's Weapons of the Weak (1985), where people employ diverse strategies to counter the depredations imposed on them by state agencies and landlords, traders, and merchants. The works give an impression that peasants movements against the state and landlords impact the way the state makes its policies. This work also focuses on certain kinds of generic resistance that people at the margin employ to talk back to the state. We suggest that the forms of resistance or cooperation are usually determined by how people see the state based on their socio-economic positions. The sightings also differ for government officials and members of other non-government developmental agencies.

We begin by looking into the issue of accountability and inspect how people at the margin demand the right to be informed. We also look into the recent trend towards decentralisation with the coming of Panchayati Raj Institutions into the tea gardens. It has provided people with increased scope to be a part of the state's institution and provide them with a sense of citizenship with a direct dealing with the state. The chapter will also

look into the notion of 'honour' or 'izzat' with the coming of the new trend in the state's politics where new age leaders from the community have begun to radicalise their demands. Finally, we will try to see and understand how viewing the state may differ along with class and from the perspective of people who act as reformers both within the government and international organisations. It is not easy to describe every sighting of the state by the workers of the garden. However, some interactions profoundly influence how the people view the state and how the state looks at them.

6.1. Accountability and Information Circulation

People get to 'know' the state by looking into its activities and its institutions. However, it is crucial to have an informed view of the state, which is not easy for people in our field. As discussed in an earlier chapter, our area has remained out of 'sight' of the state for a long time due to several social and political constraints. Thus, there is an acute lack of information on the part of the various aspects of the state's working. An important way for the developmental state to make itself visible to the people is via its welfare policies. A significant issue in the field is the lack of information about these welfare provisions. The people in the field had little idea about the various kinds of welfare schemes; it will be apparent in the multiple testimonials of the workers in the garden. It is not to say that the people did not understand or know about such schemes, but the lack of information about how to get them bothered them.

Here we can look into the works of Mazdoor Kissan Shakti Sanghatan (MKSS), which began in the state of Rajasthan under the aegis of Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey. The organisation that was formed in 1990 was at the forefront of the struggle for the Right to Information, which later became an act in the year 2005 after a prolonged battle. The

organisation was initially concerned with increasing the wages of daily labourers in Rajasthan (Roy and Dey, 2001). This struggle for minimum wages threw light on the importance of transparency of information about government schemes and funding. In the fight for wages, it was imperative to have access to a record to prevent lower-level officials' corruption. The workers were often denied information about their wages under the pretext of some secret colonial acts (ibid.). The workers of MKSS felt very rightly that without access to accurate information, their struggle for minimum wages would be futile.

The strategies adopted by MKSS to demand the 'right' to information as a modern civil-political right had similarities with an understanding of a welfare state which is supposed to provide specific space for transparency of its working. This idea had its genesis in the pre-colonial days as suggested by Christopher Bayly (1988) when he writes 'the particularities of Indian nationalism have to be understood in the context of Indian forms of social organisation and ideologies of good governance that pre-date the full western impact even if they, in turn, had been modified by colonial rule' (cited in Corbridge et al., 2005, 221). Bayly believes that an over-dependence on colonial literature is to deny the Indians a history of their own.

The same kind of argument can also be seen in Scott's idea of 'the moral economy of the peasantry' (Scott 1977). When it comes to India, too, the same notion has often been invoked in different parts of the country to check uncalled-for behaviour on the part of kings and their retainers or officials. Historian Ramachandra Guha reminds us that what became known as the Chipko Andolan in the 1970s was anticipated in Uttaranchal in essential respects by the institution of the 'dhandak': a form of 'rebellion as custom' which combined 'individual and collective resistance to tyranny by officials with a simultaneous call to the

monarch to restore justice' (Guha 1989: 67). What was challenged here was not the idea of the state but its corruption by individuals who had 'gone wrong, or who failed to obey the tenets of natural justice.

If we closely look into the working of MKSS, we will find that it too did not challenge the existence or working of the state; instead, it aimed to improve the lives of the poor by pointing out the 'wrong ways in which its corrupt officials present the state. The organisation, at its initial stage, made use of the state-sponsored public hearings or Jan Sunwais. Such public hearings provided the people, who otherwise could not approach the state officials, to voice their complaints and concerns about the state's working. However, it was not an easy task to make the local bureaucracy accountable, who were in hand in gloves with the local strong men and politicians. The MKSS, too, faced a threat from such elements but went ahead with larger and regular public gatherings (Roy and Dey, 2001). In such meetings, as Roy and Dey observe, many people would turn up to such gatherings and complain about their name being wrongly entered and wages improperly recorded as being paid when they were not present (Roy and Dey, 2001, 5). In such public gatherings, a large number of developmental funds never actually reached the people and was instead diverted to local politicians and small level bureaucrats. It is interesting also to note that such diversification of funds occurred essentially in poorer districts where 'poverty and its measures of alleviation had become a big business-like affair (Roy and Dey, 2001).

It becomes vital to understand the observations made by MKSS to understand how people demand more transparency when it comes to sightings of the state. The organisation provided these sightings by its efforts at obtaining and copying government records. Emphasis was given to records at the panchayat level, where the quest for accountability

found its expression via means of rural juries armed with little more than microphones and perhaps a video recorder. The use of hunger strikes, dharnas (sit-ins), and such innovations as the Rath Yatra (a play performed in a dharna tent) were not uncommon. The declaration of *pakhand divas* (hypocrisy day) and *Kala divas* (black day) led up to 'victory day when the Panchayat Raj rules were finally amended, were other innovative tools made use by the organisation. The state was sighted by low-level technologies that produced a version of that same state in highly visual local spaces – theatres, in effect, that involved an audience in a partly scripted deconstruction of the state's descriptions of itself.

For a long time, the tea gardens had little to do with the outside world as they were under complete control of the garden management. However, in recent years things have changed to some extent. A vital issue that has always plagued the garden is the low wages in almost all state gardens. The wages range between Rs. 167-172, which makes the tea-garden labourers the least paid workers in any sector of the formal economy. The management and owners of the garden treat the provisions provided under PLA as a part of the real wages for which they have to bear the cost. However, this has been a contentious issue as the quality of the facilities provided under the act is questionable. Also, the 'benefits' of the act, in a way, makes the worker dependent on the garden and is caught up in a vicious cycle of poverty generation after generation. Even if they get full benefits under the act, the workers would never be able to own land to build their shelter or have any savings with which to leave the garden.

The demand for an increase in wages has been a long a continuous one in the Khumtai tea estate. Leading the movement has been the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangh (ACMS), the largest union of tea garden workers in the state. However, ordinary labourers

are kept out of the purview of the negotiations on wages, which involves the employers' association, the state government and few unions close to the government. The study points to the fact that the workers have very little or no actual involvement in wages. It also indicates their failure to assert their control over their agency of labour.

Where is my money?

Ratul Oraon has been a permanent employee in the garden for the last 14 years. When he began to work in the garden with his parents, he was about 14 years old. "I was paid only Rs. 25 then so were other child labours in the garden", remembers Ratul. Back then, he would work for more than 6 hours with his parents and contend with whatever he would receive from the management. Neither Ratul nor his parents would ask for more as the employment of child labour were illegal, but poverty drove a lot of them into work. Without meaningful education, Ratul had no option but to stay on the plantation and work as unskilled labour in the same garden as he grew up. "The garden is the only place we know, and we have no other option to go and work. We have been for how long I do not know," laments Ratul, as he holds his baby while his wife makes tea for us. He lived with his old and ailing parents along with his wife Bina and three kids. The family lived in a company quarter in the coolie lines since the 1970s when this house was provided. In due course of time, with the extension of family size, the house had seen an extension which the family and not management constructed. It is valid for almost all houses of the coolie lines. There was hardly any new construction in the garden in the last 15years or so, and noted by the family. "We complain about the pathetic condition of our dwellings to the management and welfare officers, but no one has ever visited our houses", complains Ratul's wife. Her

complaint was natural as our observation noted that in few households, as many as nine people lived in just three rooms.

Ratul had for a long time complaining of a cut in his wages for reasons which he was not aware of, nor was he given any proper explanation by the management. The garden management makes several deductions from the money wage that is provided to them. It ranges from electricity bills, a medical bill to any other allowance provided to the family over and above the provisions of PLA. Over the gardens across the region, access to electricity, for example, is an expensive affair for the workers. Ratul, along with many other estate workers, complained of heavy deductions from their wages, which at times amounted to almost a third of it. However, even after such beliefs, the electricity supply in the coolie lines was not regular and suffered from frequent and prolonged cuts. They complained that the company controlled the supply and would thereby switch it off for most of the day. Ratul told us that the deduction for electricity was identical for all households irrespective of the variety and number of devices used by them. Whether you use a TV set or just a bulb, the amount is the same. We can never know the exact amount as we are never provided with individual bills for each household", laments a neighbour who had joined the conversation.

In the case of Ratul, the deductions seemed to be heavy and biased as we noted that determinations were made from his pay and his wife, who lived in the same household. This phenomenon, we were told, was common for a good number of families in the garden. From our calculation, we found that an amount of Rs. 195 was deducted from each of their salary irrespective of the fact that they shared the same household with just three bulbs and one TV set.

Electricity is something that the government provides to families below the poverty line at a subsidised rate. It would include almost all households of the garden who are, however, deprived of this benefit. Ratul pointed to the fact that a few families who lived in the close vicinity of the garden received a bill much lower than the garden bills. On our inquiry, we came across electricity bills of workers households outside the garden who had their electricity bills. It ranged from Rs. 150-350, irrespective of the fact that they used more electrical devices than their counterparts inside the gardens and enjoyed almost continuous service. A worker told us that the reason for the high bill was that the garden received industrial supply, which was expensive, and the cost of this was passed on to the workers without any consideration. “The management bothered little about this issue, as the company paid their bill, they never face any problems”, complains the worker.

Another problem that hunted families like Ratul was the denial of proper care and treatment of the aged population of workers. His parents had worked almost 40 years in the garden; however, they were not provided elderly care and treatment to which a retired worker is entitled. Ratul’s father, who was barely able to stand, told that he would not undergo any treatment since he was afraid that the cost of any such treatment would be deducted from his son’s pay. The financial burden of ailing parents medical care was a matter of concern for many workers as a good chunk of their pay was deducted. From our conversation, we discovered that it was not always like that and the deductions reflected a change in the garden policy. “It was not like this always; I do not remember deductions made for the treatment of my grandparents from my father’s pay”, told another worker. They said that such deductions had begun around a decade back when the company started to report losses.

Another vital matter where the management lacked transparency and accountability was the denial of benefits to older children of the plantations. In recent years, workers reported that the administration had capped the eligibility of the limits for benefits at age six. It needs to be stated here that as per the provisions of PLA, the children till the age of 18 should be provided with all benefits to members of a family. The PLA section 2 (ee) definition of family includes children up to the age of 18. However, now things have changed. Our interview with the management officials shows that even they are not well aware of the provisions to children provided in the law and readily confirmed that coverage was available only up to the age of 6 in the case of children. Thus, Ratul's elder children were not provided free medical care at the garden's health centre when he suffered pneumonia last year.

From the above instances, it is quite clear that the workers live in complete denial of valuable and accurate information about their affairs. Even though we have highlighted the case of just one family, it is the same for most households who lived in the colonial setup.

6.2. Decentralisation: Coming closer to the people.

In 1993, after a prolonged debate, the government of India passed a series of constitutional amendments intended to decentralise the central authority in an attempt to democratise the age-old tradition of rural India- the Panchayats. The 73rd amendment to the constitution created local self-government at the sub-state level. The Panchayati Raj Institutions were devised as the third tier of government aimed at creating local self-government. This amendment, in a way, provided for the much needed political, fiscal and administrative reforms and defined the relations between the relation between the various levels of government.

The need for decentralisation has been a worldwide phenomenon in recent decades, and India is not the only nation that has enacted constitutional provisions for the same. As per the World Bank report of 1998, 12 countries out of the then 75 developing nations with more than a million had taken the path of political decentralisation (cited in Crook and Manor, 1998, 1). Many factors have paved the way for a push towards the devaluation of power globally. Firstly, there has been an ideological shift in favour of more localised and decentralised forms of governance. The centre-led development has been challenged as undermining the spirit of democracy (Johnson & Start 2001). Secondly, there is a feeling that transforming power to local bodies and agencies will bring the state closer to people. Thirdly, political devaluation has been understood as a tool or strategy of the political elite to maintain the patron-client relation and avoid disintegration in the face of any dissent (ibid.). It suggests that the power of the national state and the political elite has weakened due to economic and political liberalisation, which has produced powerful regional sub-national elites and created a condition wherein these identities could challenge the national state (Gerring, 2001).

However, it has been noted that mere decentralisation or devaluation of power cannot improve the performance or bring about accountability in the local self-government. Many scholars have observed that decentralisation has merely enhanced the ability and positions of local elites by helping them to hold more share of public resources (Johnson, 2003). Considering the problems of decentralisation, an essential strand of scholarship in the decentralisation literature has argued that the underlying distribution of assets and entitlements will have an essential bearing on the power of the poor and marginalised population to get access to the opportunities made available by decentralisation. It also

argues that devaluation of political power would improve their ability to get benefits from the resources provided by the welfare state.

In this section, we examine the tension between the formal terms of decentralisation- where the state lays down a set criterion of rules and lays down the principles of conduct about allocation and distribution of power- and the informal and often messy behaviour of formal constraints on the ground. This informality is often a result of the interplay of caste, class, and gender power that not just drives the distribution of resources in society but also determines the functioning of political institutions at local levels. A large number of assessments about the process of decentralisation have argued that formal legal-institutional processes like decentralisation or devaluation of power have minimal practical effect and impact on rural societies who are more inclined towards the traditional institutions (Harriss, 2001; James et al., 2001; Slater, 1989 cited in Johnson, 2003). It can be said that when it comes to the local economy and polity, it is the informal processes and institutions that matter the most.

The idea of decentralisation can be understood as a 'political process' by which administrative authority and resource allocation are transmitted to a lower-level government/public organ by a central authority. Sometimes, the lower authority may be non-government organisations like community-based organisations (CBOs) or even private sector organisations (World Bank 2000a, 3). Scholars have identified four different ways the decentralisation process takes place- de-concentration, devolution, delegation and privatisation (Johnson, 2003). As in the case of the 73rd amendment of the Indian constitution, the provisions of the act envisage political, administrative, and fiscal decentralisation.

A significant case for promoting decentralisation in developing countries like India is the belief that it would increase the political participation of citizens in the affairs of the government. It would, in turn, lead to more accountability and improvement in the quality of government services. Such an approach would improve the standard of living, especially of the rural poor, who, to a great extent, depend on services provided by the welfare state. The proponents of decentralisation are concerned with the drafting of 'institutions' that would be able to provide maximum opportunities to citizens to participate in the nation's public life.

In recent times, even though there might be variations, people in the rural areas predominantly see the government in the following terms (Johnson, 2003, p. 6):

- As a provider of public goods and services like education and healthcare.
- As a provider of divisible goods like credit, irrigation and agriculture.
- Maintenance of law and order with institutions like police, judiciary.
- As a provider of rights and recognition.

However, the state's primary task is to ensure the proper and efficient delivery of the services mentioned above and products. The process of decentralisation can be seen as an attempt to enhance the participation of the local population in the governance by empowering the local authority in several ways. Firstly, this improves the use of local resources effectively by the local people by making them a part of the delegation process (Baland and Platteau, 1996 cited in Johnson 2003). Secondly, it brings about a healthy collaboration between the users of public resources and the agencies that provide them (Evans 1996a). In this process, the public and the state agents come together and cooperate in the distribution of public goods, which might not have been possible if they were to act

alone. Thirdly, central to the argument we try to make here is the idea that decentralisation has paved the way for the democratisation of local administrative bodies and empowered the traditionally marginalised communities by ensuring their participation in the same (Blair, 2000; Crook and Manor, 1998). A large number of studies (Blair, 2000; Crook and Manor, 1998; Crook and Sverrisson, 2001; Drèze and Sen, 1996; Manor, 1999) suggest that in countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, with the introduction of democracy, elections accompanied by a grant of rights and privileges of citizenship, have been successful in ensuring greater participation of masses in the political process.

However, before we can conclude that decentralisation necessarily leads to greater participation and well-being of the mass, we need to look at a host of literature that suggests otherwise. Kinds of literature indicate that there is a weak correlation between decentralisation and poverty reduction (e.g. Blair, 2000; Crook and Manor, 1998; Crook and Sverrisson, 2001; Golooba-Mutebi, 2000; Manor, 1999; Moore and Putzel, 1999; Rahman, 2001; World Bank, 2000a cited in Johnson 2003). Studies on decentralisation and its effect on poverty reduction in countries like Colombia, the Philippines and Brazil have been far from the desired result (Crook and Sverrisson, 2001). Experiences in Bangladesh, Karnataka and Bolivia (Manor 1999) suggest the same- decentralisation has achieved little in terms of ensuring political participation and poverty reduction.

The above study indicates the difficulty of establishing the link between decentralisation and poverty reduction. It also noted in such studies that even most democratic forms of decentralisation have not overcome the economic and political disparities that exist in societies. Decentralisation, as noted in some studies (Ghatak and Ghatak, 2002), gives rise to coordination and planning problems. In the Kerala experience,

as suggested by the findings of Ghatak and Ghatak (2002), over devolution was responsible for duplication of work and creating a gap between different government agencies. At the same time, the study pointed out that the local bodies are over-burdened with work due to the lack of sufficient support and training. Most of them lack adequate knowledge about the complex terms of allocation to be made in terms of resources and funds (see above study on Kerala by Ghatak and Ghatak, 2002). Also, another significant drawback in political decentralisation is the capture of power by the local elites. A large number of studies (e.g. Blair, 2000; Crook and Sverrisson, 2001; Drèze and Sen, 1996; Manor, 1999; Moore and Putzel, 1999: 15 cited in Johnson, 2003) have pointed the fact that devolution and decentralisation of authority have led to the empowerment of local elites. At the same time, it has perpetuated the existing gap in resources and power. Thus, scholars have noted that the mere introduction of democratic institutions may not be sufficient to bring in the ideals of freedom and equality to end the historical and cultural inequality in society (Moore and Putzel, 1999). This phenomenon highlights the challenges of introducing democracy in a community where many people are dependent on a small number of powerful elites. Such studies also highlight the challenges of empowering local institutions without changing the rights and entitlements inherited in the traditional institutions of caste and class.

From the above observations, we can summarise that an effective decentralisation can be realised by a substantial transfer of power from central to regional level and then further to more local levels of governance. Devolution of violence due to decentralisation has been responsible for empowering new types of actors at the local and regional levels. Besides, decentralisation has been accountable for creating new opportunities for participation for a large mass of people. Nevertheless, we cannot, from the existing findings, declare that decentralisation necessarily leads to poverty reduction. Besides, there is also

very scarce evidence that supports the idea that decentralisation leads to more effective and accountable forms of governance at the local level.

In our field site, which has a population of about 2000, the process of decentralisation is visible to some extent in the form of a few Panchayati Raj Institutions. We need to keep in mind that even though the institutions of local self-government came into existence after the 73rd amendment in most parts of the country as well as the state via Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, they were almost non-existent in the garden areas. It might be due to the government's negligence and the opposition of the garden management to allow the state's entry into the gardens. In the words of a garden leader, "A few years back, we were not encouraged to take any benefits from the government. It was only the company that dealt with the government officials. We had no idea of government schemes like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. It is only in the last 7-8 years that things have changed". However, as the statement suggests, there has been considerable expansion of PRIs in the garden areas in the last few years. This expansion felicitated the participation of the members of the tea garden community in working on the local self-governance. In the table below, a brief profile of the Panchayati Raj Institutions that exist in our field site is shown.

Table 6.1. The political structure of the district and the study block

Position	No. of Seats	Constituency	Dominant Party	Remarks
MP	1	Entire District	INC	
MLA	4	Closely aligned with the 4 Sub-Divisions	BJP & AGP	
Zilla Parishad	1	Made up of 8 Aps	BJP	
Anchalik Panchayat	08	2-3 members from each of the GP	BJP	

		within AP.		
Goan Panchayat	102	12-15 wards in each GP	BJP	
Khumtai GP (Study block)	12 wards	Within Khumtai LAC	BJP	

Source: Inputs from local panchayat office

As is the norm, the candidates in the panchayat elections are not officially nominated by the party; it is not a party-based election. However, party affiliation to one or the other party is visible in the candidate's campaign.

Table. 6.2. Office-Bearers of the Khumtai Gaon Panchayat

Name of the President	Name of the Secretary	Total Wards	Ward Members of Tea-Garden Community
Ms Puspa Rani Gogoi	Mr Gautam Kr. Bora	12	Moneswari Kurmi (Ward No. 07) Kalpana Kurmi (Ward No. 3)

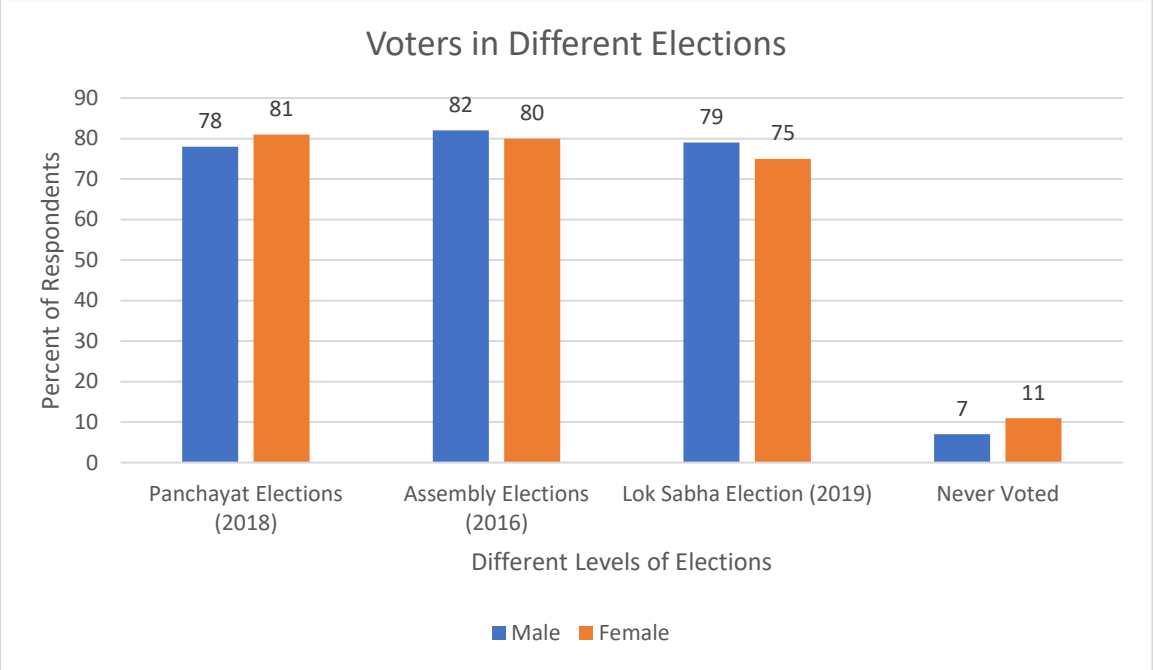
Source: Field work

As the above table suggests, there is some form of representation in the garden community's local self-government. However, it is interesting to note that their representation seems to be very limited despite being the dominant community in the region. "Most of our people do not get time to involve in political activities outside the garden. We face many kinds of discrimination," asserted one garden elder. According to the President of GP, the majority of the people from the garden are not interested in politics but are more concerned about benefits/ assistance from the government in the form of schemes. Also, lack of literacy and awareness creates a hurdle in popular participation. The two ward members from the garden community belong to families who are dominant

within the garden politics, and their male counterparts are senior members of labour unions.

In comparison to ordinary labours, they seem to be in a well-off position. It suggests that there exists elite capture of power in the devolution of power in the garden areas. In the words of one voter from the garden, “there are the same people everywhere within and outside the garden”.

Fig. 6.1: Percentage of voters in different elections across gender (N=150).



Source: Fieldwork.

From the above figure, it is clear that the majority of the workers, both male and female, participate in elections at all levels. It also indicates the high level of political mobilisation in the tea estate. Since Independence, the Tea Garden community has been a vote bank for the Indian National Congress (Das, 2016).

Nevertheless, the garden population have consistently voted in large number in any kinds of election. “We vote because it gives a sense of empowerment, also only then we can demand benefits from the local representative”, claimed a young political activist. The BJP

and its allies support the present President and eight other ward members. The party of affiliation matters here because it determines the local representatives' chances of receiving grants and aids from the higher level of authority. "It is helpful for us if we have support from a major party. We need support to win elections. Also, if you do not have support, it is difficult to get funds from higher authorities," states the GP President. It is clear from her statement that there is the existence of clientelism even within the political structure. Thus, this suggests that though decentralisation has increased the participation of people in the administration, it has not entirely done away with the patron-client relationship that forms the hallmark of a traditional non-democratic society.

The ward members of the garden in the field site came from a relatively higher status from within the tea-garden community. They had a comparatively high level of social capital, which helped them participate in the election and win it. However, the claim might be too simplistic as our study and observation suggest that they were much closer to the people of the garden than the management or the welfare officer who came from communities that had little in common with the working class. In the words of a women voter, "The new ward member is like our daughter; we can approach her without any fear. She understands our language too. Earlier, we were afraid to go to the Panchayat office. The people there were rude to us. Now it is effortless for us". Her words reflect the psychological satisfaction she and many community members received when they had a representative from their own 'tribe'. It also highlights that the state comes 'closer' to people when the representative is seen as someone who can understand the represented world or belong to that 'world'.

A sense of 'belongingness' with the state and its institutions is necessary to make decentralisation successful. In a setting like a tea garden, where the relation between the outside world is weak and characterised by a lack of trust in a state institution, there is a higher tendency to remain aloof from active politics by most stakeholders. "It is challenging for us to get any chance in the leadership of any organisations outside our community organisations. We are being holed up inside the garden for generations. I feel very little has changed in terms of the attitude of civil society towards our community," voiced a young Adibasi student activist.

The above statements also highlight a sense of inferiority regarding participation in public life for community members. "We have been kept as workers for generations; how can our people have leadership qualities. The very few who have made a place in politics and public life have been co-opted into the 'others' society. They feel shy to identify themselves as members of the tea-garden labour community", lamented Manoj Nag, a school teacher from the community.

The recent surge in the participation of members of the community local -self-government can be understood in two ways- increase in scope with the coming of Panchayat Raj Institution (PRI) in garden areas and also due to numerical strength of the community in local areas which provides them with an edge over others.

When highlighting the impact of decentralisation on the community, we need to understand how it has made its presence felt in their daily lives. In other words, we need to ask if the process of decentralisation has brought any change in the standard and way of living. Based on the information provided by the ward members and the GP President, we identified a few schemes beneficiaries identified by the local panchayat office.

Table 6.4- Schemes in the Garden

Scheme	No. of Beneficiaries	Nature of work	Remarks
Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana	07	Building of House	Five houses were seen to have been constructed
Pradhan Mantri Ujjawala Yojana	17	Cooking Gas to BPL Families	All 17 families received it
Indira Miri Widow Welfare Scheme	01	Financial assistance to widow below 45 years of age	Recently introduced by the Govt. of Assam.
Wage compensation scheme for the pregnant woman in the tea garden	02	Cash assistance to Pregnant women in the garden (Rs. 12000)	A Govt. of Assam initiative for Tea-Garden labours
Post and Pre- Metric Scholarship to students	14	One-time financial assistance to students (Rs. 10000 p.a.)	All BPL families qualify for the scheme, including students from tea-garden areas
Shahid Kushal Konwar universal old-age pension scheme	12	A monthly pension of Rs. 300 to senior citizens	
Other related works			Construction of tiled roads in coolie line. New water supply tank inside the garden.

Source: Interview with President GP Khumtai (13 February 2020 and 4 April 2021)

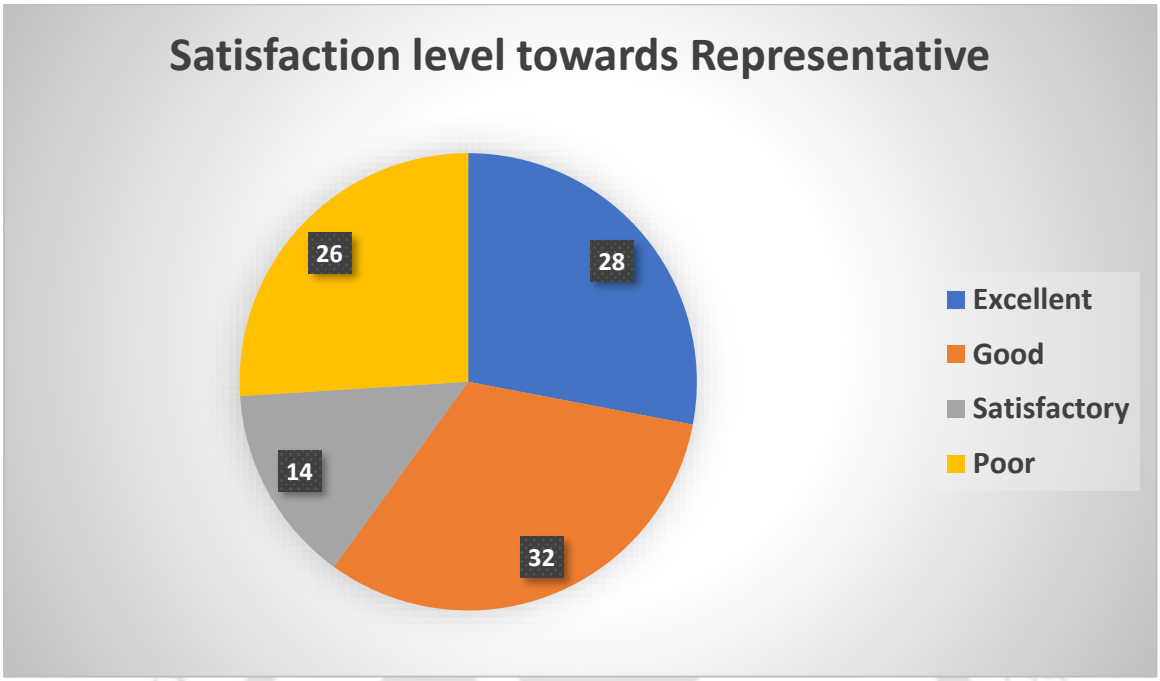
The above table indicates that the members of local self-government/Gram Panchayat have been able to carry out their responsibilities to an extent. During the study, a survey of 150 households was conducted, including 52 beneficiaries, to verify claims made by the panchayat representatives and find the satisfaction level towards the working of the local self-government.

There are two sets of schemes for tea-garden labourers' development and progress. One set of plans are specific and focused undertaken by the Tea Tribe Welfare Directorate (TTWD). The other set of schemes are those undertaken by the State and Central

Governments. The geographical and socio-cultural distinctiveness of the community which lives in segregated geographical locations demands a unique approach to the development and empowerment of the community. The TTWD was set up specially to cater to the community's needs by the Government of Assam in 1983. Its mandate is spread across several priorities- accelerating the community's socio-economic development, enhancing the employability of tea garden workers, developing educational levels, and coordinating among the various product-related work in the garden. This points there is no shortage of schemes and policies when it comes to the welfare of the community. However, our aim is not to count on the number of projects but to understand how it is seen by the targeted beneficiaries, in this case, the tea-garden workers.

In figure 6.2 below, we try to assess the workers' response towards the work done by the local level representative. Such representatives are the face of the state when it comes to most of rural India. Their interaction with the marginalised population defines the meaning of 'state' to the people.

Fig: 6.2: Satisfaction level towards local representative (Panchayat).



Source: Fieldwork

The above figure suggests that many respondents (60%) have a favourable opinion about the work done by the local representatives and seem to have faith in the working of the system. "We have received few benefits; we do not deny it. The wards members visit us regularly, and we can go to her whenever we want to. She lives close by in the next coolie line," replies Rima Munda, a widow who received a benefit under the widow welfare scheme. An important point to be noted is the easy accessibility of the representative in this case. It has had a positive impact on the mind of the citizens. Even though all of them have not received tangible benefits, however, they seem to have benefitted from the psychological pleasure of having the 'state' closer to them. Another cause for satisfaction stems from the fact that both the ward members and the President of GP were women, making them quite approachable for the same sex. A look at the schemes and the beneficiaries indicates that most of them are, by default, women (most targeted beneficiaries of the schemes are women).

Another critical element observed in the working of local self-government and its agents is the notion 'izzat' (self-respect) that the workers feel when they have someone of their own to allocate resources. "Didi (referring to ward member) has helped me to continue with my studies. She got me a scholarship from the local MLA along with few other students of our garden. We are happy to see that she can bring some change to our life. We are proud of her. Now many of us attend political rallies and would like to get involved in it," voiced 18 years old Gauri Karmakar, a student pursuing graduation (personal interview, 08 January 2020). As suggested by the respondent, they were not required to beg local leaders to get government benefits, which often resulted in racial slurs against the community.

Ms Kurmi, the ward member of ward No. 12, comes from a family of tea garden labourers who has been active in union politics. She is in her late 30s but looks older, as do most people in the garden. Ms Kurmi is just 12th pass but has been vocal since early days as she witnessed regular political gatherings in our house. Her husband is a staff in the garden factory and earns a comparatively higher wage than the labourers. She seems very passionate about the welfare of 'her' people. "It is the right time for us", she suggests, "the present government-both at the state and centre-has the support of 'our' people. You can see that in the last 5-6 years things have changed a lot in our garden areas. Now we have good roads, schools, regular teachers, Anganwadi centres. Many people are getting houses under government schemes". Pointing to a file, she says, "Every day I get 10 to 15 applications asking for help. I cannot help them all. We have minimal resources. A ward member is a very small level leader, and there are many papers involved. We do not know many things, so we depend on officials" (personal interview, 21 January 2020). Her words reflect the limitations of the working of the institution of decentralisation on the ground.

A major issue faced in successfully implementing the devaluation of power is the 'agency' that exercise this power. In a developing society like India, characterised by a high level of socio-economic backwardnesses like poverty and illiteracy, the 'agents' too are limited by the socio-economic environment. In the study, Ms Kurmi was defined by her knowledge to understand and deal with the bureaucracy. Her limited education and financial condition proved to be a barrier in reaching the state even though she enjoyed recognition as people's representative. It would ultimately affect the quality and quantity of the benefits that her community would receive.

Another important finding is the relation between the lower 'agent' (the ward Member and Panchayat President) and the upper political agents like the local Member of State Assembly (MLAs), who exercises considerable influence over the distribution of resources. "On most occasions, we take help from our MLA. He is a person who helps us getting our demands easily from the local officials. He also decides on who gets the benefits of the schemes. Of course, he takes advice from us on many occasions since we know people better," asserted Ms Kurmi, who wanted to impress upon the researcher about her 'reach' with the politician. It suggests the underlying assumption that democracy can re-enact the existing social inequalities despite a commitment to socio-political equality. The relation between the ward member- a figure showing decentralisation of power- and the government's representative is not guided by legal-constitutional means but by politico-personal links.

Such relation can be read as a result of the institution of economic and social domination overlapping with the power structure and those who control them. This can be related to the idea of 'democratic deficits', as suggested by Smith (1985), who argued that

the concept of decentralisation might be counter-productive as the local elite is likely to adopt a hostile attitude towards the empowerment of subordinate groups as it would make them less dependent on the elites. Our findings also suggest that it is difficult for local self-government representatives meant to exercise their power without influence and interference from the local political elite.

In the section below, we will look into the working of local institutions in our field and outline the conditions which make them more accountable. Accountability is understood as a relationship where citizens can exercise considerable control over the public official (Agarwal and Ribbot, 1999). A strong norm of communication and consultation between the citizen and the public official is the underlying base of accountability (Moncrieffe, 2001 cited in Johnson, 2003).

6.3. Making local institutions accountable- The role of Civil Society

An essential aspect of governance and accountability is the centrality of civil society, which is responsible for keeping the government effective and in control (Putnam, 1993). Robert Putnam (1993) suggest that a higher level of social capital owned by society results in better communication and effective management of the government. A robust underlying assumption in Putnam's work is that civic engagement or participation in a range of political and non-political activities correlates strongly with a practical and responsive government.

Civil society is understood as a space of voluntary action that situates itself between the family and the state (Harris, 2001 cited in Johnson 2003). It includes a range of organisations- national and international NGOs, trade unions, farmer associations, political parties, religious congregations. Their nature of work defines the relation of these groups with the state.

Studies on decentralisation suggest two critical links between civil society organisations and local accountability (Johnson, 2003). The first link connects civil society with the mobilisation of the citizens. Studies on Nigeria and China (Meenakshisundaram, 1999) suggest that local mass participation ensured a high level of accountability. The study also suggests that accountability is ensured when people outside the state compel the public officials to act according to the formal and informal performance norms. The second link is the connection between civil society organisations and the empowerment of poor and marginal groups of society (Crook and Manor, 1998). Studies suggest that NGOs empower marginalised people by bringing them closer to state agencies and help them lobby with the state (Bratton, 1990).

Local forms of political action initiated by civil society groups are often undermined by state institutions that have authority over the distribution of resources (Johnson, 2003). Rural communities are often marked by scarcity of social networks, and thus an individual gets access to material resources by improving their position within traditional institutions like family or religious and lineage groups (Berry, 1989; Bebbington, 1999; Johnson, 2001b cited in Larson and Ribbot, 2004). The close attachment of such groups with individuals give rise to a restricted form of membership. This phenomenon can be illustrated by looking into the relationship between literacy and poverty. Studies in rural India (Dreze and Sen 1996) have shown an association between literacy and poverty-the higher the literacy, the higher the chances of getting closer to the state agencies. This relationship, in turn, highlights how poor people are represented in democratic institutions (e.g. through political parties, bloc voting, lobbying) and the extent to which they have the 'political tools' (e.g. money, power, information, literacy) to influence the democratic process. When voters are ill-informed about government policies, party platforms, government and the rights they are entitled to,

their ability to control the democratic process can be limited (Johnson and Start, 2001). Likewise, when politicians and parties campaign based on (relatively) short-term pay-offs instead of programmatic policies, the relationship between compromises of this nature and democratic accountability can be fragile indeed (Moore and Putzel, 1999).

Harris (2001) argued that the idea that high social capital and civil society will give good governance is a faulty and doubtful notion. Such assertion implies that local collective action is sufficient for robust mechanisms of accountability. Harris argues that local level actions and organisations cannot make changes without external civil society organisations' help and active support. For Harris, collective action will only bear better results when connected to a broader network of social and collective action in a political environment that views securing the socio-economic rights of the poor as an objective. It is to say that any local action orientated towards the state requires the support of higher authorities or institutions; such consent is seen as legitimising the local movement. Legal and constitutional action on the state, such as the reservation system in India, ensures the inclusion of the marginalised population in mainstream politics, more so at the local level (Crook and Manor, 1998). Scholarship on successful cases of decentralisation and local self-governance (West Bengal, Philippines and Colombia) suggest that higher participation and more significant mobilisation of citizens results in increased efficiency and responsiveness of public officials ((Blair, 2000; Crook and Sverrisson, 2001; Crook and Manor, 1998; Manor, 1999 cited in Johnson, 2003).

There is also the question of the cost that the people have to bear if they engage in direct political action. In their study, Moore and Putzel (1999) have argued that rural institutions are structured to prevent poor citizens from confronting the state through direct

political action. The study suggests that several activities involved in political action- the cost of travel and communication to the protest sites, legal fee, police action-all deter poor people from actively engaging in political action for a long time. The study also concludes that many cross-cutting identities of class, caste, religion and political ideology amongst the poor population undermine the loyalty towards a united political action.

When it comes to bringing the state closer to the people and making them accountable to the people, the role of civil society institutions held great significance. Thus, we see in our field that several civil society institutions like- trade unions, students associations, INGOs and NGOs, Self-Help Groups, Micro-finance societies exist as a mediator between the individual and the state.

A significant role in the life of the workers since the late colonial period is played by the labour unions. The workers have come under the influence of several politically affiliated trade unions like the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), which is affiliated with the Communist Party of India, and the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), which has a close link with Indian National Congress. Lately, the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS) affiliated with INTUC has become the most popular workers union in the garden. The union was founded in 1958 under the aegis of state Congress leadership. It sought to maintain a cordial relationship with the garden management and thus was provided free access to gardens. It helped the union reach over to the vast tea-garden population of the state, resulting in a virtual monopoly over labour unions.

The close relationship between the ruling regime and the civil society institution ensured that the community followed the norms set by the ruling class. It is also important to note that the initial leadership of ACMS came from individuals belonging to the upper

class and caste from outside the garden (Sharma, 2011). Gradually, there have been leadership changes, even at the top, belongs to an individual from the garden community.

"Our main agenda is the overall development of the tea-garden society", comments Mr Ghanshyam Barhoi, President of the Golaghat district branch of ACMS. "We are the oldest running labour union in the tea garden and have done many developmental works in garden areas. We have constantly negotiated for wage increase with both the government and the management. Our association have been in constant touch with the workers, and they place a great trust on us". It is reflective in his words that for a very long time, ACMS was a strong voice, if not the sole voice, of the community. As a civil society institution with a political affiliation, the ACMS had a dual role and objective- firstly, ensuring the development and progress of the community by voicing their collective concern and secondly, creating a stable vote bank for the Indian National Congress (INC). "We are affiliated to INTUC, which is the workers union wing of Indian National Congress. It has benefited our people as the party was in power for almost 50 years giving us the much-required political training and scope to participate and make ourselves heard in mainstream politics. This also helped us to negotiate with the management on a host of issues as we were the only recognised workers union in the garden," adds Mr Barhoi, sitting in the office of the one-storey building of the district branch which stands on a land gifted by the erstwhile Congress government (personal interview, 20 November 2020).

The close association between the political establishment and the civil society institution, as in the case of ACMS, highlights the fact state and its agents play a pivotal role in making and unmaking an institution. The success of ACMS can be attributed to the fact that it had close links with the establishment, which helped the organisation with moral and

material benefits. It provided the organisation with a solid political capital that could affect the distribution of resources, making it a sub-state- a body with substantial socio-political power with a capacity to bring change in the life of people. The sole negotiating rights of the organisation with the management gave it an additional ability to represent itself as the 'rightful' representative of the people.

The role of ACMS as a civil society organisation in bringing the idea of self-rule closer to people is notable. Even though the organisation did not enjoy legal-constitutional recognition, it provided the common labourers with a collective sense of action. In the words of Mr Budhiram Tanti (name changed), a retired worker in his late 70s, "At those time, the only party we knew was the 'Hand' (referring to Indian National Congress), and the Mazdoor Sangh was its agent in the garden. If we had any complaints against the management, we would approach them and talk with the manager. The leaders of ACMS were 'big men' in our community and were respected by all. They used to tell us where and how to cast our votes. They used to tell us that if our 'sarkar' comes to power, it will increase wages in the garden" (personal interview, 24 November 2020). His voice echoes the feeling of most workers who viewed the organisation as a powerful entity whose relationship with the state was sure to bring a change in their life. It also highlights how the body successfully mobilised the labour population in favour of a particular political dispensation. In other words, it provided the poor people with a sense of involvement in the government.

However, the mobilisation lead by civil society organisations has its limitations too. As in the case of ACMS, we see that only a handful of people gained from it. "A close link with a political party which remained in power for a very long time did provide it with

material benefits, but it failed to provide a long-term benefit to the people in the garden", alleges Mr Pintu Barhoi (name changed), a school teacher and social activist. "If you see closely, the ACMS remained an elite group. It did include people from the garden, but it operated under the command and control of the Congress party. Its primary agenda was just limited to an increase in wages. They did nothing substantial to raise the standard of living in the garden areas", he adds.

On 12 and 13th February 2021, a protest gathering of tea garden labourers under the banner of ACMS was held at the Golaghat General Field. It was named 'Shramik Garjan' (Worker's Roar) and was targeted to showcase its strength and issues just before the state assembly elections. It was attended by more than 2000 workers from the district as well as adjoining areas. A host of political dignitaries too were present in the meeting. Among the big names was the President of ACMS, Shri. Pawan Singh Ghatowar, former MP of Dibrugarh (Congress Party) and Shri. Rupesh Gowala, General Secretary of ACMS. Later, Mr Gowala switched alliance and joined Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and became MLA from the Doomdooma Constituency in Upper Assam. The significant issues and demands in the gathering pertained to wage hikes, better housing facilities, paid holidays, and stop casualisation (temporary) of jobs in the garden. Even though the leaders did not overtly talk about the upcoming elections, it was evident in their tone that the present government, led by BJP, had failed to deliver, and their false assurances cheated the tea-garden labourers. Civil society, in this case, has a critical approach to the existing political dispensation and desires a large-scale mobilisation against it. The leaders were cheered, sending a sense that the masses understood their message. However, things on the ground were not as smooth as seen in gatherings like this.

On being asked why he was attending this gathering, a young worker had to say this "I just came because our Sardar wanted us to attend it. Also, it provided us with a day without work and a chance to visit the town for free. Our Sarder (chief) has promised us that we would be given a day's salary too. Though I am not sure about it." The worker seemed little concerned about the political agenda of the gathering. On further inquiry, it was found that this was not his first political rally. He and his friends would go to all such rallies. He and his friends seemed to have little interest in the speech delivered from the podium. They were more interested in going around the town. It points to the fact that the relationship between the civil society and the individual member is more about material benefits that they can draw from it and less about political empowerment.

"Even though ACMS as a civil society institution has brought the state closer to the people, it has reached a stagnation point, and today it is more like a political wing of the Indian National Congress in the tea-garden areas. Today, ordinary workers feel cheated by the former leaders who lead a life of luxury" (personal communication, 1 December 2020), observes Mr Debobrat Sarma (name changed), a well-known academician in the field. He also points to the fact that ACMS could work as an effective organisation when Congress was in power in the state, providing some material incentives. Now that the power being in the hands of the Bharatiya Janata Party, it has very little to deliver, and this has given rise to its members and leaders switching over to BJP from ACMS. To prove the point, Mr Sarma gives the example of the General Secretary of ACMS, Mr Rupesh Gowala, who went over to join BJP and won the Doomdooma Assembly seat.

The ACMS, with its presence in more than 700 tea gardens across the state, is a formidable institution in the garden. However, its effect and impact on the garden

community have been waning in recent years. The cause can be attributed to the declining fortunes of the political force behind it. In the following sections, we will see that a change in the regime's character influences the opportunities for self-rule.

6.4. 'Enabling Regime' and Local Autonomy

A study on governance and primary health workers by Judith Tendler (1997) in North-eastern Brazil highlights the positive relationship between local communities and healthcare workers and officials due to a high level of interaction, which has increased and fostered a culture of accountability between them. A significant notion in Tendler analysis is that effective performance of functions by the healthcare workers was made possible due to external support from higher echelons of the government.

Scholarship on decentralisation from countries with relatively ambitious forms like China and Nigeria (Meenakshisundaram, 1999, p. 66–7) identifies three necessary conditions for effective decentralisation. Firstly, there ought to be a strong political commitment from higher authority or central government. Secondly, the local body ought to enjoy relative autonomy in terms of decision making and implementation of policies. Thirdly, effective decentralisation also depends on the ability to generate resources by the local authority.

Other studies (Crook and Manor, 1998) suggest that accountability of local institutions increases when they enjoy more autonomy in terms of resource distribution and allocation. Tendler (1997), too in his study, found that accountability and good governance are contingent upon the following essential factors: Firstly, the period spent by government officials with the beneficiaries. Secondly, the amount of time decided the level of immersion of the officials with the opinions and sanctions of community elders. Thirdly, a high prestige

within the community and service was ensured by suitable governance activities. Fourthly, the role of the central government was necessary for these activities.

Thus, the above studies indicate a close relationship between the local institutions, government institutions and agents. Due to the devaluation of power, regional regimes have been able to use the local autonomy and have been able to change ordinary citizens' lives.

Recently there has been a surge in the 'presence' of state institutions in the garden- the panchayat officials, the government health worker (popularly known as ASHA), the Anganwadi worker- who can be seen frequently amid the people. These 'officials' with a particular set of duties are the ones who bring the benefits of the state to the citizens. The 'immersion' of these petty state officials is essential in measuring the reach of the state to the people.

Beauty Minj (name changed) is a trained health worker working as ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) in the Khumtai garden. She is one among the 32546 ASHA members dedicated to serving the local community regarding health and hygiene, especially family, women, and children. As an ASHA worker, she is expected and trained to undertake the delivery process of pregnant women right from the onset and complete care by ensuring full and natal care services. She is also likely to facilitate family planning services in the local community.

Her day starts with a morning round up, visiting women who are expected to deliver shortly. Beauty Minj provides them with the necessary tablets along with some health-related advice. "Our girls get married at an early age, so we have a lot of pregnancy-related complications. You see, her body is not yet ready for the baby. I tell them to be careful and practice family planning. Still, it is not always easy in our society, you know", Minj laments

the lack of awareness in her community (personal communication, 12 December 2020). It is to be noted that the tea garden areas have the highest maternal mortality rate in the state and country, too, with 215 deaths per thousand in 2017-18 (Kakoty and Das, 2020). “Most of the death occurs because the woman conceives at a very young age, and there is a lack of care in the family”, adds Minj. She said that last year (2019), four women had lost their lives in the garden during delivery; all of them were below 20 years of age.

The sight of Beauty Minj is a sign of relief for many women in the garden. Since, for a large majority of workers, it is hardly possible to get medical care at hospitals, the presence of ASHA workers is a blessing. “ASHA Baido (Sister) is like our family member. She is just like our mother without whom our life would have been tough,” tells Sabita, a mother of 2 with a smile on her face. “She taught me about family planning and convinced my man (husband) about the need for it. Otherwise, I am afraid I would have had many kids” (personal communication, 12 December 2020).

Health is an essential indicator of the well-being of people in any country. A better health system is associated with a longer and happier life. Thus, it is natural for the citizens to feel more secure when provided with tangible health care. The ASHA worker symbolises a ‘health system’ at the people’s easy reach in the community. “ASHA baido can speak to us in our language; we find it easy to make ourselves clear to her without any hesitation. Earlier, we had great difficulty in explaining our problems to the doctors and nurses who came from outside the garden,” says Mina name changed), who has recently given birth to a baby. The state’s effort to reach the people by engaging the local population into the governance apparatus has positive results. Assam’s Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) has considerably improved over the past decade from 300 in 2011-12 to 215 in 2017-18 (Kakoty and Das,

2020). In the word of Ms Momta Tanti (name changed), who works as a health assistant in the garden health centre, “Most of the time the doctors and other medical staff of our hospital are hesitant to treat the workers. The staff maintains a distance from the workers and, at times, prescribe medicine without any check-up. I have seen pregnant women treated badly and even abused at times. For this reason, many young women feel uncomfortable going to the hospital for treatment. Now, since ASHA baido (sister) in the neighbourhood, they are taken good care of” (personal communication, 12 December 2020).

The ASHA workers are given regular training on health and family-related issues. “Our work is not just related to health issues. We deal with many problems; women come to me complaining about their drunkard and abusive husband. I have to counsel them and help them in all possible ways. Even though we are paid for only health work, we deal with a host of issues,” claims Ms Minj with some despair as she finds her payment too low. As the ASHAs are voluntary workers, they are entitled to different incentives against their particular tasks. At present, there are 70+ categories of activities assigned to them for which they are eligible to claim the incentive provided they complete the training.

Further, there is also a provision for claiming routine 2000/- incentive per month against eight number activities and an additional Rs. 1000/- from State Govt budget against 13 essential activities (National Health Mission Assam Website, 2021). However, these assignments do not include domestic family issues that the ASHA worker like Minj has to take care of. From the response, it is pretty apparent that she has many tasks, most importantly, as a health worker and a local counsellor of the women folk of the garden.

A brief survey of 80 women in the garden who had received assistance from the ASHA worker shows that the institution has been quite effective in bringing people closer to the state. The results are given below.

Table 5.4: Role of ASHA workers (N=80)

Nature of Assistance	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Average	Poor	Total
Regular Health Check-up	13	42	15	8	2	80
Supply of Medicines (Vitamin tablets etc)	09	32	28	10	3	80
Child-Birth Assistance (Taking to hospital etc)	16	41	13	09	1	80
Other issues (Family Counselling etc)	14	38	15	11	2	80
Health Schemes (Janani Suraksha Schemes)	12	33	20	12	03	80

Source: Field Survey (2019-20) and Interview with ASHA worker.

The above table clearly illustrates that the role and work of ASHA workers have received an overall positive response from the garden population. It directly impacts the way people have come to view the state in their daily lives. The presence of the ASHA worker provides a sense of security and wellness as a provider of primary healthcare. She is the 'first line of help' available in the neighbourhood. As a person who can speak their language with a similar socio-economic background, she understands their problems. The state via the ASHA worker has 'vernacularised' the petty bureaucracy that would have been difficult to access at other times. The institution has blurred the thick boundary between the community and the state by empowering the community member to assume the state's role, more so in decisions regarding the community's family and health, which affects every nation's citizen. The ASHA worker plays a dual role- as a state agent and a community member who speaks to the state.

6.5. Elections, parties and competitive politics

A study on decentralisation in South and South-East Asia (Manor, 1998) highlights the significant challenges of ensuring a culture of accountability in the local self-government institutes. Reflecting on the relatively successful working of local self-government in Karnataka, the work suggests that responsibility required existence of certain conditions- competitive political parties, a free press that is widely spread and an active civil service that is willing to develop a constructive relationship with the elected representatives (Manor, 1998: 303). In another study of decentralisation in different nations, Blair (2000) suggest that regular elections work as an effective means to ensure government accountability and responsiveness on issues of socio-economic importance. He also means that elections have a controlling effect on the working of the government since they provide feedback in regular intervals. The study points to the fact that elections may not be a perfect tool to gauge the working of the government, but they are an essential component of democracy necessary to its survival. At the same time, studies like that of Moore and Putzel (1999) suggest that the effectiveness of democracy bring about a responsive government depends on three critical factors- Firstly, the importance given to substantive issues instead of populism by parties and politicians; secondly, amount and quality of information at the disposal of voters; thirdly, existence and strength of civil society. Manor (1999), in his work, argues that a democratic system provides for the existence of opposition which is essential in articulating criticism and concern. This ability of articulation depends on the internal party dynamics too.

Elections in themselves may not lead to a democratic form of government, nor can they democratise party politics which is essential if the marginalised population has to be

adequately represented. However, the existence of a strong and vibrant civil society depends significantly on political opportunities provided by the state, which acts as a tool for the poor and the marginalised people to negotiate with the state (Corbridge and Harris, 2000). It highlights the impact of class, caste, religion, ethnicity, gender and other social markers-based identities on social mobilisation and political voice (Luckham et al., 2000; Harriss, 2000). It also raises whether the political struggles between the various social groupings lead to more vigorous forms of civil society, giving rise to a more equitable form of governance (ibid).

The election is an essential element of empowerment in a democratic society. It has provided a space for the marginalised and subaltern groups to express themselves by being a part of the 'rule'. It provided them with an opportunity to be part of the state from which they were excluded most of the time. These tea gardens of Assam have not remained untouched from the rise of subaltern politics. The state as a unitary centre of power has challenged the marginalised population like the tea garden labourers. For a very long time, though, the workers were kept away from being active citizens with rights and privileges available to other communities (Das, 2016).

In the post-independent period, till the 1970s, when the tea industry was nationalised, very little had changed in the garden's lifestyle (Gohain, 2007). "Back in those days, we had no idea about rights or even elected government; our government was the management headed by the garden manager. Our life was all about work, eat and die. There was nowhere to go," recounts Kalu Murmu (name changed), in his late 70s, the oldest person in the garden. He does not remember when he first voted but recalls that he had heard Indira Gandhi speaking on the radio and asking people to vote. This delayed intrusion

of essential citizens' rights into the community indicates that rights are not equal for all, even in a democratic republic. The large tea-estates, a product of colonial economic enterprise, stood as a legacy of exploitation even after the nation was independent of foreign rule (Das, 2016). However, this is not to suggest that the gardens were untouched by any political activities. There were unrest and rioting in the tea plantations in the first decades of the 20th century itself. Many scholars noted the famous exodus of tea workers from Chargola and Longai valleys of Cachar valleys as a nationalist upsurge in the garden (Behal, 1984, 2006, 2014; Goswami 2000). Such exodus and riots can be seen as influencing the growing national freedom movement outside the plantations. These enclosures were not untouched by the desire for dignity and freedom from foreign exploitation. Nevertheless, the most critical and immediate reason for such riots and strikes were economic. These activities were targeted towards the foreign planters and against the Marwari traders and garden sardars (Verma, 2011).

The trade union began to appear in the late 1920s under the aegis of the All-India Trade Union Congress led by Hari Krishna Sahu. He formed a committee with Kedarnath Goswami as a secretary at Dibrugarh of Upper Assam in 1928 (Guha, 2006). In the following years, several strikes followed, demanding better wages and working conditions. By the late 1930s, the Indian Tea Association was forced to set up a grievance handling procedure and emergency committee to look into the situation and improve the workers' conditions (Griffiths, 1967). During the same period, several labour unions appeared in the scene. Some of the important ones are listed here:

Table 5.5: Formation of Tea Labour Unions in Colonial Assam

Name of the Union	Headquarter	Year of Registration
Upper Assam Tea Co. Union	Dibrugarh	27 April 1939
Rajmai Tea Company Labour Union	-DO-	-DO-
Greenwood Tea Co. Labour Union	-DO-	6 May 1939
Makum (Assam) Tea Co. Labour Union	Margherita	30 May 1939
Sylhet Cachar Cha Bagan Mazdoor Union	Sylhet	27 April 1939

Source: (Griffiths, 1967 cited in Borah, 2014).

Thus, we see that there were political activities on the plantation even before Independence. The numerical strength of the garden population provided the community with an edge in a democracy where numbers are a deciding factor. For almost five decades, the 'labourers' were a steady vote bank for Congress (Das, 2016). "Initially, the leadership of most of the unions came from middle-class caste Assamese. The ACMS leadership, too, was composed of a non-garden community for a very long time. We are not sure of the reasons, but it might be because they were not considered capable of taking a leadership role by the state's immerging intelligentsia. This is quite apparent in most indigenous literature that appeared in the last century (19th century)," observes Mr Sarma. He has worked for the community for almost two decades (personal communication 21 November 2020). It indicates that the challenge to the community was not from colonial exploitation but the indifferent and, at times, the demeaning attitude of the local elites.

"It is not that there were no leaders from our community; there were a few of them. However, we do not find anyone in the role of decision-maker. Their second-rung leaders were just expected to follow the rules of the 'high command'. For the party, this worked very well- it had numbers and petty leaders to mobilise the people. A few of them made

fortunes, so you will find a few individuals who rose to the rank of MLAs and Ministers, but they were exceptions. The rule was that they were a very committed vote bank along with other migrants' communities like the Bengali speaking Muslims, the Nepalis and other communities," notes Mr Saikia. He has closely studied the politics of the plantations (personal interview, 24 November 2020). He further adds that "Things do change, and it did. With the beginning of the Assam Movement in 1979, the community felt more side-lined and alienated. There were instances in few areas where the agitators' attacked members of the community. They were vulnerable to the narrow rhetoric of exclusionary nationalism".

However, it was soon realised that community was too important to be ignored if any political party wanted to be in power. The Assam Gana Parishad, a political organisation, formed on the ideals of the agitation, was quick to realise the importance of the community and co-opt the community members. "During the agitation days, most of the migrant communities became the target of the agitators. As a young teenager, I remember how our classmates avoided us in college. Even our teachers seemed to avoid us. It was a xenophobic environment, you know. Neighbours against neighbours" recalls a retired government servant whose parents were garden workers (personal interview, 26 November 2020). Unlike most children of the plantation who had little scope of pursuing education, he was lucky enough to receive free education in a Christian Missionary School. "A few of my batch-mates from the garden community were able to find government jobs, while many after completing their graduation tried their fate in politics. Some were successful in making a career in it. Nevertheless, the condition of our people has hardly changed," he adds.

The events that followed the Assam agitation proved to be a catalyst in identifying based politics in the state. In this period, we rise the rise of Bodo politics and demands of

autonomy from minor tribal groups. Also, the minority population of the state, who were hardest hit by the anti-foreigner's agitation, formed the United Minority Front (UMF), a political outfit to look into the interest of minority groups. "In the years that followed, we were worried at the development taking place in state politics. The Indian National Congress did little to give us a sense of comfort. We realised that we were being used merely as 'vote-bank rather than as rights-bearing citizens. People (Tea Garden workers) lost their faith in the management recognised unions like the ACMS. I remember members of the union were termed as '*dalals*' (middleman) and denied entry into some gardens. Most of us then had to turn to our own '*community*' based organised where we would freely express ourselves. Several associations sprang up, ranging from literacy society, political associations, and even militant groups in the late 80s," says Mr Barhoi, founder member of the Chah Mazdoor Sahitya Sabha. He also began a newsletter known as 'Janani Barta' in the late 80s. It is the only newsletter to be published from a tea estate. "Most of our people were not aware of our history-where we came from, our culture. We were not always labours; we were peasants in our ancestral land. Through the paper and the organisation, we attempted to revive our lost history as hard-working peasants like any other community in the region. We were frustrated at being called 'Bongali' (Bengali). It was a question of 'izzat' (respect) for us. You see, most people outside the garden hardly know the diversity that exists in this community called Tea Garden and Ex-Tea Garden Labourers," adds Mr Barhoi (personal interview, 3 December. 2020).

The last decade of the 20th century saw another political power making its entry into state politics. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would win ten seats in the Barak valley in the 1991 State assembly elections. Even though BJP would not quickly expand into the garden areas, the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak (RSS), which laid the groundwork for the party, had

made its entry into the garden areas by organising relief works and, most importantly, the 'Ekal Vidhalayas' (Single Teacher School) in the vicinity of gardens. "By the late 1990s, we had 12 'Sankardev Shisu Niketan' (an RSS run school named after the great 15th-century Assamese social reformer Srimanta Sankardev) in the district. Most of these schools were in rural areas and catered to the needs of poor children. We did our best to attract children from garden areas. Not just children, we recruited educated youths from gardens in our organisation. The response was very positive and overwhelming," comments Mr Bhaskar Sharma (name changed), an official of the Golaghat district RSS. He also makes an interesting observation that reveals the organisation's desire and motive to penetrate the state's 800 plus tea plantations. The Christian Missionary had long been present and working in the garden areas. They had opened up a good number of schools, training institutes along with providing hostel facilities to the children of plantation labourers. The impact of the missionary on the garden population can be understood from the fact that a good number of workers follow Christianity. The RSS is concerned about it and is working hard to stop the expansion of '*foreign*' (sic) religion into the gardens. "The workers are straightforward folks. With little monetary help and facilities like free education, these people can be easily convinced to convert their religion," observes Mr Sharma (personal interview, 5 December 2020).

Since the last two decades, the groundwork of RSS has come to benefit its political wing, the BJP. The party has made a vent in the Congress' vote-bank of garden workers, which saw their fortunes diminishing in the tea-garden dominated constituencies. Beginning from the Lok Sabha elections of 2014, the BJP has made their presence felt in the garden community dominated areas. In all the subsequent elections, the party has performed well in those areas. During the 2021 Assembly election, the party won 23 seats out of 28 in the

upper Assam division, where are tea garden communities are numerically dominant. At present, there are 5 MLAs and 2 MPs from the district. The community's support helped the party form a government in the state with a comfortable majority. It is essential to understand what caused this swift alliance and allegiance towards the new political power.

The central element of the party to reach out to the people-the garden population in particular and people of the state, in general, was by rolling out several 'schemes' involving mostly cash transfer schemes. It included many projects like the 'Orunodoi', the government's most extensive cash transfer program. The essential element of the program was that it was targeted towards women who would receive cash (Rs. 830) directly into their bank accounts. These schemes greatly appealed to the people imagination who saw it as a bonus to their regular income. Other schemes like Indira Miri universal Widow Pension scheme (to widow below 45 years of age), Arundhati Gold Schemes for brides of low-income families (provides one tola or 10 grams of gold), wage compensation scheme for pregnant women of tea garden seems to have caught the imagination of the people. "These schemes have come as a great relief to us. It has provided us with benefits that were earlier denied to us. Many of us got interested in free loans to start a new business. Some of us also received training in new skills in the newly established Skill Training Centres. So, it is natural for us to be inclined to this party. I do not see anything wrong in it," explains Rameswar Dol (name changed), a young worker and secretary of the local branch of All Assam Adivasi Students' Association. Such attraction was natural as it provided the people with a scope to improve their living standards. Benefits, even if minimal in terms of amount of cash, schemes had a psychological impact on the mind of beneficiaries.

The schemes might have attracted people to support the party just before the elections, but this does not explain well the ideological swift of the community towards the right-wing party. “At present, we witness people from all communities supporting our party”, claims Mr Ashok Borthakur, former district president of BJP and presently one of the party’s state coordinators. He states that the reason behind it is that the party gives equal opportunity to all sections of people as there is no nepotism and talent and hard work is respected and duly awarded. Commenting on the support that the party has received from the tea-garden population, he says, “You see, the reason is simple, what would you prefer to become ‘vote-bank or a ‘citizen’? These people were always treated as a safe ‘vote-bank by Congress and their agents in the garden. Look at their condition. Very little has changed in their life since Independence. The management was able to keep the wages low as they had a tacit understanding with the Congress politicians. Why is it that the ACMS affiliated to INTUC is the only recognised labour union in the plantations of Assam? Congress thought that it would be able to fool these people all the time.

Nevertheless, due to hard and untiring efforts by our party workers and leadership, there is a change in the community’s attitude. I am talking about the garden workers and the ex-tea garden community residing and working outside the plantations. Today you will see a majority of the civil society organisations, student unions, labour unions from within the community supporting us. After years of political exploitation, there is self-realisation within the community that what is good for them. We do not force anyone to join us; they come to our organisation on their own,” explains Mr Borthakur (personal interview, 21 January 2021). He has been working for the party for more than three decades and has grown from a few hundred workers to a ruling party.

The attraction towards an alternative centre of power is not a new phenomenon. However, it had happened immediately after the Assam agitation with little success as the new party failed to live up to the community's aspiration. This time the BJP is a national party with a well-set organisation backed with sound financial resources had a clear advantage over others when it comes to the distribution of resources. At the same time, the party has developed a well-thought and planned social engineering in a multi-ethnic state, giving an opportunity to different components of the greater Assamese community. The diverse ethnolinguistic communities, especially those that were the target of the anti-foreigner's agitation, seems to be attracted towards the idea of a more significant Hindu identity rather than all assimilative Assamese identity. In the words of an official of Chah Mazdoor Sahitya Sabha, "We are a distinct community with our own set of language, culture and traditions.

Moreover, we have a right to preserve it. It will happen if schools and educational institutions provide instructions in our dialect. For this, we will require assistance from the government. We also need cultural centres and museums. Demanding our right is not speaking against any community. The former government took little interest in such issues. We repeatedly requested them for more schools in garden areas, but very little was done. However, the present government is taking things seriously. We hope that it will work for the betterment of the community" (personal interview, 22 January 2021). It is clear from various interviews and observations that a community section is becoming assertive and demanding more rights and privileges. Also, there is noticeable cultural revivalism in literary productions like poems, short stories, songs due to the efforts made by organisations like Chah Mazdoor Sahitya Sabha.

A young, educated, and assertive class has developed in this community in the last two decades. It consists of political activists, students and social activists who are engaged in different walks of life. This class of young activists desires more rights and privileges as rightful citizens and not just a few government schemes. “Our earlier generation toiled had in this land; it is our homeland as much as it is of any other indigenous tribe. Still, we are sometimes treated as foreigners and looked down on as a community of mere workers and labourers as ‘Coolies’. It is very derogatory and unacceptable. We are a class of hard-working people. We deserve to be respected. It is a question of the ‘izzat’ of our community. Today, we have much educated but unemployed youth in the garden. We want to contribute to society, but we should be given the opportunity for it,” exclaims Ms Monurama Nag, a young student (personal communication, 24 January 2021). She is the general secretary of the Students’ Union of a local college. Her voice indicates that the present generation will favour the party that provides equal treatment with other communities. “We are not asking for any sympathy, but equal rights and opportunities. No one should be denied their rightful place in society,” she adds with a tone of despair. The voices from the plantation are clear- that they are not just satisfied being mere voters. They desire more, more in terms of rightful place in society. The notion of ‘izzat’ (respect) is crucial to understand. It also highlights the change in the narrative of citizenship rights. People are not satisfied with just a few schemes and dole; they need their ‘rightful place in society.

6.9. Conclusion

The state has employed various means to come closer to people. The most important one is the decentralisation institute popularly known as Panchayati Raj Institute (PRI) in India. A

long battle for accountability and transparency resulted in a more devolved and decentralised form of governance. It provided people with a new form of tools to interact with the state. Such devolution of power was necessary for the success of participatory democracy. Now more and more people were part of the governing structure. It opened up gates of opportunities for marginalised communities that so far had little or no chance to be a part of the ruling structure. However, such a governance structure has several limitations, like the quality of governance accompanied by a lack of funds. However, our study suggests that benefits outweigh drawbacks when it comes to the benefits of such form of governance.

The study has pointed out that more participation of community members ensures a positive outlook towards the state. There is a creation of 'local state' formed out of the interaction of petty officials and agents of the state with people who are mainly their community members. Thus, we see that the everyday experiences of the ward members, panchayat president, and the health worker highlight that the line between a bureaucratic state and a traditional society is often blurred and transgressed to create a 'vernacular state' that speaks the language of the ordinary people. At the same time, we see how marginalised communities have come to view the role of civil society as a bridge between the community and the state. The institution of civil society played a crucial role in promoting the idea of 'stateness' by negotiating with the state to gain welfare state benefits. Most recently, as our study suggests, there is a deep concern and desire for rightful recognition of the community's rights and individual accentuated by a politics based mainly on ethnolinguistic identity. The changing political fortunes of the state also has a profound impact on the community's social behaviour in terms of the 'language' deployed to negotiate this change.

Picture 6.1: A newly constructed road in the Coolie line

A tilled road leading to the coollie line constructed by the local panchayat. Such roads in the coolie lines are rare. In recent times with the coming of local-self government into the garden areas such construction has become possible. (Photo Source: Fieldwork by author)

Picture 6. 2: A recipient of PMMVY

Recipient of the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana in which an amount of Rs. 5000/- is provided to young mothers. Such schemes have reached the garden very recently. (Photo Source: Fieldwork by author).

Picture 6.3: Cycle Distribution Ceremony

Cycle distribution ceremony for Garden Chowkidars (Watchmen) by the district administration. Such initiatives bring the state in close contact with the community. (Photo Source: Janani Barta)

Picture 6.4: Celebration of Nutrition Month at Plantation

Celebration of the 'Pooshan Maah' (Nutrition Month) at the garden. Various activities were conducted under the aegis of state government and local panchayat during the period. (Source: Janani Barta)

CONCLUSION

The chapter is broadly divided into two major sections. The first section revisits the research questions of the thesis, where key outcomes and recommendations are made based on the findings from the discussions so far. The second section highlights the limitations as well as the scope of further research in this area.

7.1 **Revisiting the Research Questions- Key outcomes and Recommendations**

The thesis aimed to examine and understand the myriad ways in which people at the margins of society 'see' the state and 'remake' it on their terms. It is done by looking into the everyday interactions between the state, the local level, and the citizens. A look into how citizens interact with the state allows us to pay careful attention to the cultural construction of the state. The thesis attempts to look into how people perceive the state and how their understanding is affected by their location, and how their interactions with the state officials' shape' notion of state.

7.1.1. Seeing the state through the laws (RQ1)

(How does the state make itself 'visible' to the marginal population in the context of welfare-oriented policies and laws of the government?)

The research builds on the notion that there is an intrinsic link between law and the people. Modern states with a focus on state-building have used a plethora of laws and legislation to govern a diverse set of populations. Almost every aspect of life, ranging from health, education, housing to our food habits- are guided by state laws. Thus, we must understand how laws about plantations affect the people's everyday lives whom it-the labourers

govern. The thesis looks into the effect of the law, in this case, the Plantation Labour Act of 1951, and how the people come to understand 'the state' and institutions through the working of the law.

Understanding the state via law helps us acknowledge the complexity between a state made law, its implementation and reception by the people giving it a multidimensional nature. As our discussion shows, when put to practice, laws do not always bear the results of their intention. They are 'reframed', and 'revised' to suit the need of both the 'who framed it' and 'those for whom it is framed'. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate and understand the causes and impact of 'law' in the community and individual by examining 'who is affected by the law' (the labourers, the garden management and the state), and 'how do they adopt law'?

As mentioned earlier, there is an intrinsic link between law and the people, which is context-specific and complex and multifaceted. The thesis builds on the two inter-related themes. First, the state has expanded to every sphere of life of both the individual and the community. Secondly, the (law-making) state has been dramatically affected by those it governs. Chapter three of the thesis, which deals with the Plantation Labour Act of 1951, suggest that there has been an expansion in understanding the 'law' from a narrow focus on legislation and agency to a more inclusive view encompassing 'the working of the law' and its effect on the life of the people. This recognition comes with a view that to understand better the 'reach' of the state and law; we need to look at 'agency' over which the law is exercised. At the same time, the chapter points out that provisions of laws or acts are not universal and have to be 'reshaped' and 'moulded' to suit local needs.

The findings of the thesis highlight that the enactment of the legislation, the Plantation Labour Act of 1951, happened in the overall context of the assertion of India's Constitutional principles of development with justice and equity. However, if we see people's participation, there was no significant involvement of the trade unions of tea plantations in it, though, after independence, workers became members of unions. However, implementation of the provisions of the Act, as our study suggests, did not lead either to the empowerment of the workers or to the structural transformation of the plantations. The PLA has its limitations in articulating the rights, definition of plantation, definition of worker and its failure to break the logic of division of labour within plantations, the highly restrictive logic of determination of wage, and the limited valuation of women's labour. These point to the fact that PLA contributes to institutional exclusion. A well-established argument has been that following all of the provisions of PLA increases the cost of tea production, making the industry inefficient. It has been acknowledged that the provision of rights will necessarily involve cost. However, it cannot justify maintaining subsistence wages for hundreds of thousands of workers in plantations.

The Plantation Labour Act of 1951 and its various forms like the Assam Plantation Labour Rules, 1956 intends to bring the welfare state closer to the citizens. However, as the law's implementation suggests, it is being evaded by all agents involved in it- the state, the garden management, and the labourers. While investigating the research question, we find that at the root of workers' continuing generational exploitation is the system of dependence and the barriers they face in asserting their rights. Workers are dependent upon their employers for nearly every aspect of their lives, from housing, sanitation, and drinking water, to education and medical care, which their employers must provide under the Plantations Labour Act, 1951 (PLA).

7.1.2. The 'working' state and its 'sightings' (RQ2)

(What impact does the state make in most people's daily lives at the margin of the society, as seen from the micro-operation of the everyday state in a tea garden society. Also, what are the ways these workings of the state are understood, reshaped and contested by the marginal population?)

The thesis is an attempt to study people's experience and engagement with the state in everyday life. To a large extent, it can be understood by looking into the processes associated with governance in the local context. Here, we need to comprehend the idea of the state, the government, and governance as perceived by marginal communities. It can be made possible if we analyse how the local social structures influence governance at the local level and attempt to understand the relationship between the state, community, and political actors who act to connect communities with the state. Chapter four of the thesis examines the 'encounters' of ordinary citizens with the everyday state and its institutions.

In order to understand the above phenomena, the study was conducted amongst the tea garden workers of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. The garden-labour community, popularly known as Tea-Tribes and *Adivasis*, is amongst the region's most backwards communities. The Khumtai Tea Estate, located in the Golaghat district, a prominent tea producing district in the south bank of Brahmaputra, was selected for the study. The selection was made based on the purposive sampling method as the estate was closest to all the variables of tea-estates in the valley. The use of interview and survey method and ethnographic study of the field was employed to understand the state's working in the site. Also, an essential tool to understand the individual 'encounters' with the state was via open-ended interviews of individuals. It was seen as a suitable tool to understand people's

personal experiences when it comes to the ways people interact and understand the' state' in their daily lives.

Chapter five in the thesis reveals the socio-economic conditions of the people in the field site. Findings indicate that the majority of the population lives below the poverty line and has a shallow level of education, which paves the way to a low level of awareness on rights and other privileges to which citizens are entitled. The study finds that poverty, to a large extent, is responsible for giving a sense of powerlessness. Wealth or richness is often associated with a sense of security and entitlement. The low amount of wage (Rs. 167) that prevails in the garden and seasonal employment variations pushes more people into distress. Often, poverty for the garden workers is not just a question of filling the stomach and the pocket but also an important marker of social distinction.

Another important finding of the thesis is that most people at the margins seek help from non-state social networks like labour unions and caste councils. The social network of the poor provides an intuitive platform for them to interact with the state, which is far more regular than formal interaction with agencies of the state. The relationship between the workers, employers, and the local brokers and agents can be best described as a private-market-based relationship reflected in the mode of production in the gardens. The workers have no say in the decision over the product or value generated by their labour. The labourers exercise very little bargaining power within the garden. It was seen that few labourers who have considerable experience and could gain the employer's trust are regarded as valuable and treated with respect by the authority. Thus, for the poor, most of the state's 'practices' are brought to life and negotiated by these networks of political

brokers, gatekeepers, and fixers. Many encounters of the poor with the local level bureaucracy blurs the boundary between the state and the 'outside'.

7.1.3. 'Participating' in the state

How do people at margins 'participate' in the working of the state at the local level by using the legislative means (like decentralisation) to rework the state?

People get to 'know' the state by looking into its activities and its institutions. However, it is essential to have an informed view of the state, which is not easy for people in our field. An important way for the developmental state to make itself visible is via its welfare policies. A significant issue in the field is the lack of information about these welfare provisions. The people in the field had little idea about the various kinds of welfare schemes; it will be apparent in the various testimonials of the workers in the garden. This is not to say that the people did not understand or know about such schemes, but the lack of information about how to get them bothered them.

Chapter 6 of the thesis investigates how people try to make the state more responsible and accountable. In recent years there has been an attempt to empower citizens in developing countries by sharing power. It is made possible by employing the local self-government, popularly known as Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) in India. The idea of decentralisation can be understood as a 'political process' by which administrative authority and resource allocation are transmitted to a lower-level government/public organ by a central authority. The findings indicate that decentralisation has led to greater participation and well-being of the mass, especially in our field site.

At the same time, decentralisation has created new opportunities for participation for a large mass of people. Nevertheless, from the current findings, we cannot declare that decentralisation necessarily leads to poverty reduction. Besides, there is also very scarce evidence that supports the idea that decentralisation leads to more effective and accountable forms of governance at the local level. The chapter indicates that a sense of 'belongingness' with the state and its institutions is necessary to make decentralisation successful. In a setting like a tea garden, where the relation between the outside world is weak and characterised by a lack of trust in a state institution, there is a higher tendency to remain aloof from active politics by most stakeholders.

The thesis findings have pointed out that more participation of community members ensures a positive outlook towards the state. There is a creation of a 'local state' formed out of the interaction of petty officials and agents of the state with the people who are mainly their community members. Thus, we find that the everyday experiences of the ward members, panchayat president, and the health worker highlight that the line between a bureaucratic state and a traditional society is often blurred and transgressed to create a 'vernacular state' that speaks the language of the ordinary people. At the same time, we see how marginalised communities have come to view the role of civil society as a bridge between the community and the state. The institution of civil society played a crucial role in promoting the idea of 'stateness' by negotiating with the state to gain benefits from the welfare state. Most recently, as our study suggests, there is a deep concern and desire for rightful recognition of the community's rights as well individual accentuated by a politics that is primarily based on ethnolinguistic identity. The changing political fortunes of the state also has a profound impact on the community's social behaviour in terms of the 'language' deployed to negotiate this change.

7.2. Limitations

Three essential limitations of the thesis can be summarised in the following points:

1. The study is limited to the study of the Tea-Garden community only. The interaction with the state takes place in a closed environment of the plantations.
2. The study had to be limited to just one plantation. Large scale survey could not be conducted owing to restrictions placed by the Covid 19 pandemic.
3. The study was conducted under the watchful eyes of the management. Some of the responses from the labourers might have been influenced by the fact.

7.3. Further Research

There is ample scope of research when it comes to an understanding of the state's working in recent times. The assertion of citizens has paved the way for making a more accountable and responsible state which is constantly 'negotiated' and 'reshaped' by the governed.

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LIST OF APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: Focus Group Discussion

The Tea-Garden, Labour Community and the State.

Introduction:

I am a research scholar from IIT Guwahati and I am doing a study on how marginalised communities like the tea garden's labour community interact with the state. I thank you all for participating in the discussion and helping in this research.

Focus Group Discussion Questionnaire	
No. of participants	
Gender	Male: Female:
Age Group	18- 25: 26-35: 36-50: 50 and above:
Social Classification (caste/tribe)	
Occupation of participants	Wage Labourer: Salaried Staff:
Venue of FGD	
Date of FGD	
Duration of FGD	

1. Self-defining parameters
   Your perception on

How do you like to address your community as-	"Tea-Tribe", "Tea Garden labour", "Baganiya", "Coolie" or something else.
What do you know about the history of your community?	Community and Family history
Do you like the nature of your occupation?	Satisfaction level towards the social environment
Relations amongst the various caste/tribes in the community	Inter and Intra caste/tribe relationship to understand the unity (or fragmentation) in the identity.
Status of Women in the community	Women empowerment as a means of political awareness and assertion.

2. Fundamental needs, assets, exposure and equality.

Basic Infrastructure and amenities	
Question	Response Types
What is the common housing structure in the Garden?	Permanent (Pucca), Semi-Permanent (Semi Pucca), Kutcha (Temporary)
Who builds the house for the workers?	Garden Management, Government, Community, Self.

Do you feel the house is strong enough?	Yes/No/Maybe (Discussion)
Can people build their house on their own without support from management or government?	
Do people have enough income to be able to build their own houses without support from government/management?	
Is housing facility provided to all workers under the provisions of PLA, 1952?	
Is there a health centre/hospital in the garden with medical staff?	Provision under PLA.
Does the garden provide facilities as required by the PLA, 1952?	Discussion on requirements of PLA and its implementation by the management and government.
Occupational Options	
Do all the adult population of the garden work here in the same garden?	
What are the different categories of workers here?	
Is the job selected by your choice or compulsion?	
Do you get any option for secondary sources of occupation?	
Do you want your future generation to have a different livelihood than yours? If yes, why?	
Do you feel there is a mismatch in the skills and the opportunities provided in the garden?	
What are the major obstacles to livelihood diversification in the garden setting?	Poor access to the outer world, low income and assets, Poor Education, Others……
What are the various governmental employment schemes available to the people?	MGNREGA, SHG etc
Financial Assets/Capital	
What are various financial services available to workers in the garden?	Govt. Banks, Cooperative Societies, Micro-Finance, Private Individual etc.
Which source do people prefer for borrowing?	-DO-
What is the average income of people in the garden?	
Do people have access to agricultural land, livestock or aquaculture? Do people have access to natural resources like forest	

products, water and aquatic resources, etc.	
Education	
What is the distance to the nearest educational institute?	
Educational status of most workers in the garden?	
How many private and government schools are there in the vicinity of the garden?	
What is the average ratio of teacher: students in the schools of the garden?	
Do children go to school regularly	
What are the problems faced by children and their wards in the school education?	
Do you think there are enough teachers in the schools?	
Do you feel there is equality in school among the children of different community?	
Do you feel there is equal access to education for all section of people?	
Welfare Provisions, Schemes and the local representative	
What are the various government schemes available to garden workers?	
Have your family benefitted from any such scheme?	
Who informs you about the schemes and benefits?	
Is there any ward member or any other local government (Panchayat) member in the garden?	
What functions do they perform?	
Have you approached them? Tell something about their attitude towards the community?	
Do you attend meetings at Panchayat Office? What matters are discussed in such meetings?	
Are there any representative from the community? Do you feel adequately represented?	

Appendix 2: Basic Household Survey

1. Basic Household Information

1.1	Name of Household Head		1.6	Marital status	Single/Married/Divorce/Widowed
1.2	Name of Respondent		1.7	Occupation	Permanent/Temporary
1.3	No. of Family Members		1.8	Caste/Tribe	
1.4	Age		1.9	Education	
1.5	Religion				

2. Facilities and Amenities in the Garden

2.1. Who build the house/quarter you are living in?			
a. Management	b. Government	c. Self	d. Community
2.2. Who looks after the maintenance of your house/quarter?			
a. Management	b. Government	c. Self	d. Community
2.3. Do you have sufficient income to build your house on your own?			
a. Yes	b. No	c. Not Sure	
2.4. Is there provision for separate toilets in the colony?			
a. Yes	b. No	c. A few	d. Self Con
2.5. How often do you visit the Health Centre located in the garden?			
a. often	b. Occasionally	c. Sometimes	d. rarely
2.6. Is proper treatment and medication available in the health centre?			
a. Yes	b. No	c. Sometimes	d. Don't Kn
2.7. Does the ASHA worker visit your lines regularly and provides medication?			
a. Yes	b. No	c. Not Sure	
2.8. Do children of your family go to school (if any)?			
a. Yes	b. No	c. Sometimes	
2.9. Are there enough teachers in the school of the garden?			
a. Yes	b. No	c. Don't Know	

2.10. Does the management provide electricity? And how?			
a. No Electricity	b. Subsidised Rates	c. Full Charged	d. Free

3. Government Benefits and Schemes

3.1. Do you avail any governmental schemes in the garden?			
a. Yes	b. No	c. Not Sure	
3.2. Have you or your family have availed any government benefit? If yes			
Name of the Scheme……			
3.3. Who helped you to get the benefit of the scheme?			
a. Ward Member	b. Panchayat Official	c. Community leader	d. Family Member
3.4. Do you need to pay to get benefits of the schemes?			
a. Yes	b. No	c. Sometimes	
3.5. Have the schemes bought changes to your life-style?			
a. Yes	b. No	c. Don't Know	
3.6. Do you feel discriminated in terms of scheme allocation?			
a. Yes	b. No	c. Not Sure	

4. Political Participation

4.1. Do you vote regularly?			
a. Yes	b. No	c. Don't Know	
4.2. Do you participate in political rallies?			
a. Yes	b. No	c. Not Sure	
4.3. Are you a member of any political party?			
a. Yes	b. No	c. Not Sure	
4.4. Are you or any of your family member given leadership role?			
a. Yes	b. No	c. Don't Know	

4.5. Are you a member of any Worker's Union?			
a. Yes	b. No	c. Not Sure	
4.6. Are members of your community given leadership roles?			
a. Yes	b. No	c. Not Sure	
4.7. How often do your community leaders help you?			
a. Very often	b. Often	c. Sometimes	d. Never