one rupee or even less than that for each k g of excess leaves. But it happens rarely, because the *babus* of the tea gardens, who are appointed for this job, instructed by the authority not to make any excess weighing. However, they ignore one or two k g shortage of green leaves of the pluckers while weighting their leaves. Interestingly, both the parties (*babus* and pluckers) are aware of this fact, but they remain silent as they are scared of getting sacked from their jobs. After coming back home from day long duties women are engaged in their household activities and men sit with their fellow friends for drinking liquor. Hence, there is no room left in their life for society related activities.

### TABLE: 3.18

**SOCIAL PARTICIPATION OF THE LABOURERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tea Garden</th>
<th>Regular Participation</th>
<th>Occasional Participation</th>
<th>No Participation</th>
<th>Row total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Koomtai T.E.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.20</td>
<td>12.20</td>
<td>75.60</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoolungooree T.E.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rungajan T.E.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinnamara T.E.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13.30</td>
<td>76.70</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalowjan T.E.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td>83.30</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatoonga T.E.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.70</td>
<td>6.70</td>
<td>86.70</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column Total</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.20</td>
<td>16.</td>
<td>74.70</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Field Survey)

The Table shows that only 9.20 pc of labourers are actively involved in social activities. They have been trying for the development of their society through different activities, such as, working for the unification of tea garden labourers’, irrespective of their communities, working for the development of ‘Sadri’ as their
lingua franca, trying to get constitutional safeguard for the tea garden labourers, engage with the cultural activities of tea garden labourers and trying to unite the people under one culture i.e. Tea Garden Labourers’ Culture.

On the other hand, participation of 16 pc of labourers is occasional. Likewise, 74.70 pc of labourers do not participate in social activities. Due to heavy workloads and poor economic condition they are detached from social activities. Their first preference always goes to economic activities, without which they cannot survive. Search for better economic condition was the main factor, which motivated their ancestors to emigrate to Assam with the agents of colonial rulers.

The hypothesis presumed for the present study that poor economic condition leads to lack of awareness among the tea garden labourers of Assam, can be proved from the following table, which highlights the factors responsible for low rate of social participation of labourers.

**TABLE: 3.19**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Koomtai TE</th>
<th>Hoolungooree TE</th>
<th>Rungajan TE</th>
<th>Cinnamara TE</th>
<th>Dalowjan TE</th>
<th>Gatoonga TE</th>
<th>Row total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Due to poor economic condition</td>
<td>46 63.90</td>
<td>24 32.40</td>
<td>69 78.40</td>
<td>75 55.60</td>
<td>8 20</td>
<td>48 42.90</td>
<td>270/51.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busy with garden’s duty</td>
<td>24 33.30</td>
<td>50 67.60</td>
<td>16 18.20</td>
<td>35 25.90</td>
<td>30 75</td>
<td>60 53.60</td>
<td>215/41.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of leadership</td>
<td>2 2.80</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>3 3.40</td>
<td>10 7.40</td>
<td>1 2.5</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>16/3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>15 11.10</td>
<td>1 2.5</td>
<td>4 3.60</td>
<td>20/3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column total</td>
<td>72 100</td>
<td>74 100</td>
<td>88 100</td>
<td>135 100</td>
<td>40 100</td>
<td>112 100</td>
<td>521/100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table covers only those labourers, who have not participated (fully/occasionally) in social activities)

(Source: field survey)
As indicated in the table above, 51.80 pc of labourers are unable to take up society related activities due to poor economic condition. More than half of the labourers are busy with garden duties. Another 41.30 pc of labourers have to remain busy for occupational as well as household activities, so, they are unable to engage themselves in any other activity. On the other hand, 3.10 pc of labourers are unable to go for such activities, due to lack of guidance. Though they are interested in such activities, lack of leadership prevents them from doing so. Actually they need pushing to go forward. Significantly, 3.80 pc of labourers are not interested in such activities.

3.19 CONCLUSION

During the survey it was observed that the facilities provided by the planters were not sufficient for the workers working in the lower strata of the tea garden society. Majority of the labourers do not have proper health facility, drinking water and sanitation. The ‘labourer line’ in which they live in a house with two rooms, two windows and one door without ventilations, without sanitary facilities or proper sewages or drainages, which cannot be included either in urban or rural pattern. They have to live in a mashing condition with minimum facilities without minimum respect for their individual life. They face the scarcity of drinking water. The system of providing drinking water cannot be appreciated at all. Though, the garden authorities of rich tea gardens provide drinking water, but that is insufficient for them. So, they use pond’s water for their day to day needs. Similarly, no basic norms for the safety of the workers are fulfilled by the authorities. In the rich tea gardens and middle standard tea gardens, certain measures are taken to maintain hygiene in tea manufacturing procedure, but those are not for the safety of the workers working in the factories.
Social awareness, educational and cultural consciousness among the tea garden labourers was found to be appalling. Due to lack of active social and cultural organizations inside the tea gardens, majority of them are not interested in this aspect. They follow their daily routine of going to work in the morning and having lunch in the noon sitting near tea bushes and again going back to work till evening. In the evening, they come back (often they purchase rations from ‘Maruary gola’) home. Most of the males and few females are used to having country liquor (‘laopani’, ‘haria’), which takes them to a different world, they forget their painful past, labourious present and vague future.

They are still passing through an unsophisticated life. Most of the youths (except one or two educated ones) seem to be satisfied with a bicycle and a mobile phone. A ‘pucca’ house, electrification, a T V set, and a mobile phone are their demands or expectations for a better life. They are not aware of the modern techniques and devices, such as, computer technology, internet access, and other electronic devices of day to day use.

Labourers as a whole are the worst victim of alcohol. They spend a major part of their income for purchasing country liquor. Some of them, specially women, prepare ‘laupani’, ‘haria’ and ‘sulai’ in their homes. Though ‘haria’ or ‘sulai’ is not prepared openly, but ‘laupani’ is their common drink, usually available almost in every house, which is prepared from rice and offered to the guests. During their festivals or ritual ceremonies, they offer it to the deities and drink it as the ‘prosad’ (offerings).

Illiteracy and poverty compel the labourers to live within the tea gardens, and even if they have opted for other jobs outside the tea gardens, they have to confront with a tough competition with other advanced people. Naturally it is a futile effort for
them. So, they seem to be satisfied with the facilities provided by the planters, such as, residential accommodation, allotment of small plot of agricultural land, ration, bonus, provident fund, medical leave with pay, possibility to get job by their children in near future, and other fringe benefits.

One of the important features of the tea industry is that the half of the labourers is female. The women workers are forced by the economic compulsion to enter into the plantation works and they considered it as the only way for fulfillment of their economic needs. It has been analyzed from practical and observational angles that women are more satisfied with their jobs than those of their male counterparts. On the other hand, women workers, in the eyes of the managers of the tea gardens are more committed and dedicated than the male workers, and they never grumble or express resentment for discrimination. Therefore, they are engaged along with the male workers for the same activities of the industry. They work together with the male workers with full enthuse and energy, they never hesitate to work with them, never feel that they are biologically weaker than their male counterparts and never take any excuses on this pretext. Similar picture can be seen in their social life. In every step of their life they cooperate with their male counterparts. They share pains and pleasures equally with the male members of their families. They are committed to their male partners for they came to this place (Assam) along with them, in search of better life as alluring by the ‘arkattis’ or the agents of the planters and their partners.

The socio-economic conditions of the tea garden labourers of Assam are very pitiable right from their initial stages in the tea plantations of Assam. They were treated by the British planters as sub-human being under the subjugation of ‘hire and fire’ doctrine. Even after the departure of the British, the labourers in a way have to live with the basic facilities provided by the planters.
Notes and References:


3. ibid


6. ibid, p. 36.

7. ibid, p. 42.


10. ibid


12. ibid, p. 17.

13. ibid, p. 18.


15. *Jati Samaj* or Community Panchayat is the governing body of a community. Inside the tea garden each community has a Panchayat. The activities within the community must follow the command of its respective community panchayat. The matters that the body looks into are: 1) Social intercourse (Eating, drinking or similar practice) with the community with which such relation is restricted. 2) Inter caste or community marriage. 3) Seduction or adultery with married women 4) Rejection to keep promises of marriage 5) Non-payment of debts 6)
Petty assaults 7) Violation of the customs of community regarding feasts or other rites and rituals, during marriage and other ceremonies. The violator of community rule is punished by the body. This takes place in the form of 1) out-casting (temporarily or permanently) 2) impositions of fines 3) feasts to the members of the community 4) Public apologizing to the members of the community.

16. Generally, through marriage bride has to accept the title, race and religion of the groom. In tea garden labourer society endogamy is rigorously prevalent. In case of exogamy, bride’s and groom’s families are punished by the community society. Only after ‘baisee’ bride is accepted by the community panchayat as one of the member of their community. This process is known as ‘jat utha’.


18. ‘Off season’ refers to the non-plucking season, i.e. December to February.

19. ‘Peak season’ refers to the plucking season when crop output is high. In Assam tea is generally harvested twice, i.e. in first flush and second flush. First flush is harvested during late March and second flush harvested in May- June. Tea production runs from the end of February (first flush) all the way through the summer and monsoon (second flush) to the end of November (Autumn flush).


CHAPTER-IV

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF TEA GARDEN LABOURERS

Political participation refers to any activity of a citizen that shapes, affects, or involves the political sphere. It ranges from voting to attending a rally or to sending a letter to a representative. Participation is also associated with political awareness which means knowledge about local, regional and national affairs. There are three types of participation, viz. conventional participation, unconventional participation and illegal participation. Conventional participation refers the activities of good citizen, which includes voting, volunteering for a political campaign, belonging to activist groups and serving in public office. Unconventional participation refers to the activities that are legal but considered inappropriate. Youth and those with grave concern about administrative policies are most likely to engage in unconventional participation. Signing petitions, supporting boycotts, and staging demonstrations and protests etc, can be included in such category of participation. Illegal participation includes the activities that break the law. Illegal participation includes political assassination, terrorism, and sabotaging an opponent’s campaign through theft or vandalism. Generally people resort to illegal approach of participation only when legal means have failed to create any satisfactory political change.

Political participation is a complex phenomenon affected by the psychological, social and political factors. It is influenced by man’s desire for power, achievement, affiliation, aggression, money, prestige, status, recognition, approval, manipulation sympathy and responsibility. Similarly socio-economic condition influences the modes of political participation. Education, occupation, income, age, sex, race, religion, and residence are the socio-economic factors which have a great impact on
political participation. The level of political participation tends to be higher among the educated, higher occupational and income groups, the middle aged, the dominant ethnic groups and settled residents. Education helps to develop the sense of civic duty, political competence, interest and responsibility to the society, articulateness and dominance. So, the rate of participation among educated section is high. Similarly, the participation rate of higher occupational and income groups is higher. Due to educational attainment they are aware of the surrounding, hence they like to involve in the affairs of the state. Of course, some other occupational groups having little leisure or suffering from mental tension in course of work can hardly afford to be interested in political problems. On the other hand, manual workers engaged for long working hours without any security and leisure are not interested in the affairs of the state. Their participation rate is less. Tea garden labourers can be included under this category.

Tea garden labourers are economically, educationally and socially backward sections who live inside the tea gardens under the surveillance of the garden authorities. Planters always consider them as sub-human being and treat them as living machine. At the very beginning of their life in the tea gardens of Assam, they had to fight with economic, social as well as environmental hurdles to survive. They settled by the side of jungle and were employed in cleaning and cutting the forest for planting the tea bushes. While doing these activities many of them were killed by the wild animals of jungle or snakes bite, many of them died of cholera, dysentery and such other deadly diseases. Even then they never ceased to work in the tea plantations. They are hard worker, they work in the tea industry not with an opportunist attitude rather they work in the industry whole heartedly and sincerely and make the industry prosperous and the land (Assam) as ‘Land of Green Gold’.
4.1 RESENTMENTS OF TEA GARDEN LABOURERS AT THE INITIAL STAGE

Tea garden labourers are not only hard workers and sincere but courageous too. There were many incidents that took place in the history of the country where the predecessors of labourers had expressed their resentment against the British to safeguard their interest as well as the interest of the country. With the passage of time they could understand the motive of the white coloured people whom they called ‘sahib’. So they started revolting against the British within and outside the tea-gardens.

Since the dawn of tea industry in Assam till to-day, labourers have been exploiting by the planters and their subordinate managers of the gardens. They were exploited by the colonial planters and managers to fulfil their selfish interest of earning profits from the tea industry. The colonial rulers never interfered in the affairs of the tea gardens administration, but tried to protect the interest of the planters. As a result, planters got enormous power over the administration of the tea-industry. The implementation of the Workmen’s Breach of Contract Act in 1859 is a good example of the protective attitude of colonial Government towards the planters. Though the labourers remained oppressed, even then they had anti colonial or anti British attitude in their mindset. In 1841, Assam Company brought the first batch of labourers from Chotanagpur, with a hope in mind that emigrant labourers would not revolt against them and they could employ them at a very low wage. But the venture of the British planter failed due to the death of the labourers on way to Assam. Therefore, in the absence of indentured labourers till then the local people remained practically the sole source of labourers for the industry along with the Chinese workers, who were brought from China. But the local labourers had a bargaining power and often revolted
against the planters. Guha mentioned that in 1848 the labourer of the Assam Company opposed to work and picketed before the Superintendent’s Office to release three months arrears of their wages. As a result of this revolt, labourers were able to secure assurance for no more default in payment of their wages in future. Again in 1859, the company’s Kachari labourers struck work for a wage increase. But this time, with the help of the district Magistrate, the revolt was dominated. The leaders of the strike were arrested, tried on the spot and punished on the plea that according to the provision of the Workmen’s Breach of Contract Act, 1859, discontinuation of work before the expiry of their contract was illegal. However, their collective efforts to fight against the colonial planters, contributed significantly towards the unification of the tea garden labourers as one community.

In the year 1857, due to insensitivity of British to Indian customs, food shortage, a tax increase, and reduction in the salary of soldiers, the revolt of 1857, which is called Sepoy Mutiny and the first war of Independence, was started. This revolt spread all over the country. In this revolt the role played by the tea garden labourers of Assam was significant. Under the leadership of Modhuram Koch, one of the labourers’ contractors, along with ten thousand tea garden labourers and employees resorted to agitation and stopped to cooperate with the British authority. Madhuram Koch, who was the leader of labourers’ protest, was sentenced to seven years rigorous imprisonment on 30 January 1858. After seven years imprisonment, Madhuram Koch was banished to ‘Kaliapani’ (Present Andaman), where he died.

Many of the followers of Madhuram Koch were put in jail for one to four years.

Again in 1859, another incident of protest of the labourers against the planters took place in Negheriting Tea Estate of undivided Sibsagar District. In this tea garden under the leadership of Binheshwar Chandrakanta Dubey two thousand labourers
came out to demand the garden authority for wage hike. But the protest was suppressed by the planters with the help of the British military and police. Dubey was imprisoned for 3 years and some others for 6 months.

Illiterate, ignorant, unorganized and isolated from their homes as they were, the plantation workers were weak and powerless against the planters. But the planters were well organized and they formed the Indian Tea Association (ITA) in 1881 to protect their interest. Ganesh Chandra Kurmi mentioned in his article that in spite of the exploitations under the strict surveillance of the planters, tea garden labourers had often revolted against them. They had to suffer a lot under the British planters even then they raised their voices against the British planters whenever they got opportunities. Guha, (1977) mentions that the worker fought back at the individual garden level as is evident from the available official statistics on disputes for the years 1884-93, in forms varying from absconding and occasional litigation to strikes and violent mass attacks on the planters. For example, in 1884, the manager of Bowlia Tea Estate in Cachar was ‘Gherao’ed in his house for his defiantly caning a boy in the presence of the assembled coolies. As a consequence of these protest, about a dozen of labourers of the garden were put in jail for various terms of imprisonment from three day to one year. On the other hand the manager could escape by paying a fine of Rs. 200/- only for his fault.

In between 1849 to 1919 there were 141 incident of collide among labourers and planters inside the tea gardens of Assam. According to a report of the government of Assam, before 1891 there were 106 violent incidents occurred inside the tea gardens of Assam. On the other hand, labourers were also arrested on the plea that they had revolted against the colonial rulers and tried to form revolutionary organizations. As a result, in 1902-03, altogether 82 labourers were arrested and put
in jail'. The numbers of tea gardens and their workers involved in strikes as mentioned in Guha’s Planter-Raj to Swaraj are as follows.

### TABLE 4.1

**TEA GARDENS AND THEIR WORKERS INVOLVED IN STRIKES DURING 1930-36**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Gardens Involved</th>
<th>Workers Involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934-35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-36</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Guha, 1977:189)

Regarding the above mentioned workers’ strike inside the tea gardens Guha (1977) mentions that plantation workers strikes were not associated with the rise and ebb of the Civil Disobedience Movement. They were all along clearly spirited, although they had neither a trade union organization of their own nor any contact with politics outside.

The exploitation and oppression suffered by the labourers inside the tea gardens mobilized them and enabled them to acquire courage to resist against the colonial planters. With the emergence of elite and educated section, the initial resentment expressed by the labourers in the tea garden level, took a serious turn. The educated youth tried to mobilize their people in an organized manner and tried to transform the resentment of initial stage into an organized tea garden labourers’ movement for the protection of social, economic, political rights and constitutional safeguards.
4.2 PARTICIPATION IN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

In spite of being barricaded within the tea plantations enclaves, labourers were directly or indirectly involved in the National Movement for Independence of India. In 1921 when Ghandhiji came to Assam, the wave of the movement spread to every corner of Assam. The labourers living inside the tea gardens also joined hands with the people of villages of Assam to fight against the British. They were very much influenced by Gandhiji, because after learning the sufferings of tea garden labourers, Gandhiji began to protest against it. During his visit he came to know about the conditions of the tea garden labourers from Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, when Gandhiji met him in Gauhati. Bordoloi also supplied necessary information about the exploitations of labourers by the planters during the Gandhiji’s visit to Dibrugarh.\(^\text{14}\)

Tea garden labourers of Assam even began to worship Gandhiji and considered him as ‘Avatari Purush’ (Super human being) and ‘Gandhi Maharaj’ was become popular name for them. They believed that Gandhiji would definitely rescue them from their surveillance of the British planters. So, they were influenced by the Gandhian philosophy and joined the freedom movement in every phase. Though the labourers were to live under strict surveillance of the planters, but they got opportunity to come to contact with the congress volunteers at ‘hats’ and ‘bajars’ regularly, which encouraged them to come out in action in their own way against the common enemy (The British).\(^\text{15}\) Labourers living inside the tea gardens started to attend meetings organized by the leaders of the National Movement. In February, three Hindi-speaking emissaries of the Non-Cooperation movement arrived at Srimangal, addressed meetings attended *inter alia* by groups of labour from the surrounding tea gardens.\(^\text{16}\) Tea garden labourers also attended similar meetings held in Longai-Valley in March and April. Guha,(1977) mentions that according to official thinking, these
meetings made a deep impression on labourers which resulted in a prolonged strike in Lungla Tea Estate.

During the first half of 1921, the sensational khoreal shooting case laid bare the racist character of the planter raj. A British manager wanted to keep a tea garden labourer girl as concubine, and the girl refused to do so. The planter shot her father with a revolver and he was acquitted by the lower court. The Culcutta High Court set aside the proceedings and ordered retrial. Accused was again acquitted by the jury on a verdict of eight to one. What was striking in this connection was that out of the nine jurors eight were Europeans. This incident acted as an additional factor contributing to the growing labour unrest in the Surma Valley. As a result, the tea garden labourers of Dholai-Valley, Chargola Valley struck work demanding a pay increase. Meetings were hold by congressman and the theme of those meeting was no doubt Khilafat. Gradually the labourers movement took serious turn, and resulted in the historic labour exodus from Chargola and Longai-valley in Karimganj subdivision, which was started with return of 750 men, women and children from Anipur Tea Estate on 3 May 1921. In the mean time they had heard of the name of Gandhiji and put their faith in myths of Gandhiji’s power of doing well to the oppressed. Their sufferings ultimately goaded them to follow the Gandhian path to go back to their villages and live a simple and plain life.

A total of 4799 labourers of 13 tea gardens decided to return home. On the other hand, considering the exodus to be detrimental to the plantation economy, the government tried to make the labourers return by persuasion and threats, but could not succeed. Denied facilities of free travel on trains, turned destitute in course of several days’ journey and falling prey to epidemics and police atrocities, the helpless workers assembled at Chandpur and other railway heads and began to subsist on relief.
the night of 20 May, they were fiercely chased out of the station by the Gurkha Armed Force. According to C.F. Andrew, “these Gurkhas used the butt ends of the rifles on sick and helpless women and children who were too weak to move rapidly. It was brutal assault and it was entirely unprovoked.” Many of tea garden labourers were wounded and many of them died. It was brutal incident and can be compared to Jaliwanabug Massacre. It was protested by the people of Assam. To protest against the atrocities of the government, the Advocate Association of Guwahati boycotted the court for three days. In Tezpur the leaders of Non Cooperation Movement collected donation to help the victims tea garden labourers of the incident.

The national leader like Jatindra Mohan Sengupta, Cittaranjan Das, Akhil Dutta and Tarunram Phukan had protested against the Assam Company and British Government and demanded justice for the tea garden labourers.

The repercussion of the incident spread to almost all the tea gardens of Assam and labourers living inside the tea-gardens started demanding their due share from the authority. During this period the activists of National Movement and the volunteers of congress got the chance to enter the tea garden areas and spread the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi among the labourers. Labourers were also influenced by these leaders or volunteers and decided to join the national movement.

In 1938 during the second visit of Gandhiji to Assam, several public gatherings were held in Rangapara, Tezpur, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sibsagar, Moran, Khuwang. In these gatherings large number of tea garden labourers participated and they were very much touched to the words of Gandhiji in which he put emphasis on removal of untouchability.

In the meantime trade unions were formed inside the tea gardens of Assam by the leftist leaders. Under the guidance of such organizations tea garden labourers
revolted against the British planters. In between 1937 to 1941, there were 78 incidents of revolt of tea garden labourers occurred under the banner of different Trade Union formed by the leftist leaders.25

It is worth mentioning that at the very beginning of the Indian National Congress (INC), there was no discussion regarding the suffering and conditions of the tea garden labourers of Assam.26 In 1887 in the Madras conference of Indian National Congress, Dwaraknath Ganguli opined that the matter of tea garden labourers was a state problem, so it would not be discussed in the conference. But from 1901 onwards the matter of tea garden labourers got space in the discussion of the conference of Indian National Congress. In 1901, in the Calcutta conference of Indian National Congress, a resolution was adopted in favour of the wage hike of the labourers working in the tea garden of Assam. Similarly in Nagpur conference of Indian National Congress, a discussion about tea garden labourers of Assam was held and resolution was also adopted in this regard.

A few authors who had soft corner to the labourers living inside the tea gardens of Assam, wrote a few articles regularly in the news paper such as ‘Bengali’ and ‘Sanjibani’ and the organizations, Trade Unions formed in the tea gardens tried to bring to the notice of the people about the plight of labourers and the exploitation by the planters by their writings. Such activities of the members of greater Assamese society gave impetus to the labourers to fight against the planters for their due share.

4.3 SIGNIFICANT PARTICIPATION IN THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT:

Though the tea garden labourers living inside the tea gardens of Assam remained oppressed as indentured labourers and neglected by the planters and their subordinate officers, they still had an anti-British attitude in their mindset. So, the
members of the community actively participated in the Indian Independence Movement. In the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1921, Mangri alias Maloti Mem was shot death by the British Military force. She actively participated in the protest against the Colonial Administration and joined in protest movement of boycotting of opium and ganja. She was greatly influenced by Omeo Kumar Das. Mangri was the first woman martyr not only of Assam but of the country. Unfortunately she did not get the national recognition as martyr.  

On 20th September, 1920, while the Assamese villagers rushed to the Dhekiajuli police station to hoist the Indian Flag. Then thousands of tea garden labourers had joined them and Mangal Kurmi (Kaku), Doyal Panika, Ramcharan Guwala were shot dead and many others were injured.

Similarly, in Gohpur, the participations of tea garden labourers in the activities related to the freedom movement were remarkable. The inhabitants of this region Gajadhar, Mahachal Gourh, were put in jail for six months.

In Sibsagar district, the wave of freedom movement was also spread over to the tea gardens as well as to the ‘basti’ areas, where ex-tea garden labourers were inhabited. In Najira the name of Sunu Ghatuwar can be mentioned in this regard. He was an active participator of the National Movement and put in jail for six months in 1921.

In Jorhat district, the activity of Tehlu was remarkable. He acted as middle man between the villagers and tea garden labourers and kept the labourers informed about the activities of freedom movement.

The wave of the freedom movement was very significant in Golaghat district. Beja alias Viju Vaishnav was one of the martyr of freedom movement. He was an inhabitant of Numaligarh Tea Estate of Golaghat District. He actively participated in
the Civil Disobedience Movement and was imprisoned in Jorhat jail, where he died.

The participations of labourers living inside or outside the tea gardens of Golaghat district is shown in the following list.

TABLE 4.2
LIST OF TEA GARDEN LABOURERS’ FREEDOM FIGHTERS OF GOLAGHAT DISTRICT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Place</th>
<th>Name of the freedom fighters</th>
<th>Participation &amp; Punishment</th>
<th>Recognition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Garanga T.E.</td>
<td>Bideshi Komar</td>
<td>4 Months imprisonment</td>
<td>His wife Sukumoni Komar got Political Pension for her husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rungajan T.E.</td>
<td>Ancha Bhuyan</td>
<td>4 months imprisonment</td>
<td>Political Pension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Betiyoni T.E.</td>
<td>1. Radhu Murah 2. Gunia Tanti 3. Dinabandhu Tanti</td>
<td>6 months imprisonment Do Escended</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Chapaguri T.E.</td>
<td>Ramsai Turi</td>
<td>4 months imprisonment</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Numaligarh T.E.</td>
<td>Vedu Baishnav</td>
<td>3 month imprisonment during the period he died in jail</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sensual Gaon</td>
<td>Suku Maji</td>
<td>4 months imprisonment</td>
<td>Political Pensioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kamarbandha</td>
<td>Bogai Bouri</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>Do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Kamarbandha</td>
<td>Babulal Komar</td>
<td>6 months imprisonment</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Melamora Bosti</td>
<td>Abdul Hamid</td>
<td>A fine of Rs. 50.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Hautali T.E.</td>
<td>Mahavir Guwala</td>
<td>3 months imprisonment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Guaranga T.E.</td>
<td>Santara Tanti</td>
<td>3 months imprisonment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Arun Kheria also mentions in an article that the above mentioned list was prepared by Late Dharmeshwar Barua, one of the freedom fighters of Golaghat District (present). The name of the tea garden labourers mentioned in the list, were co-
prisoners of Dharmeshwar Baruah. Moreover, Sanu Kheria and his wife Aroti Kheria, of Golaghat were two other activists who participated actively in the quit India Movement of 1942.28

Since 1835-36, the labourers living inside the tea-gardens environment started making relationship with the local people living inside the villages through the agitators of Swadeshi Movement and cooperated actively in the Quit India Movement along with the Assamese people.29

4.4 ROLE IN THE STATE POLITICS

The Government of Indian Act, 1935 was a milestone in the political history of tea garden labourers of Assam. The Act empowered with constitutional right to the planters and tea garden labourers in Assam to elect representatives to the Assam Legislative Assembly. There was a provision in the Act for reservation of 4 seats in the Legislative Assembly for tea garden labourers of Assam. Accordingly in the election of 1937 four representative of tea garden labourers were elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly. They were Parmeshwar Parida from Silchar Constituency, Bideshi Pant Tanti from Doodooma Constituency, Bhairab Chandra Das from Jorhat Constituency and Binoda Kumar J Sarwan from Thakurbari (Darrang District). However, this arrangement pave the way for the tea garden labourers of Assam to participate in the democratic process of country.

Rudraman Thapa in an article mentions the reasons for the participation in election politics by the tea garden labourers’ community. The numerical strength of tea garden labourers is one of the reasons of their political participation. They are greater in number and democracy is depended on majority support. Due to their numerical strength, the Indian National Congress gave importance to the tea garden
labourers and even helped to form Trade Union only because of their own profit. On the other hand, most of the tea garden labourers are illiterate and poor. So the literate group of tea garden labourers with the guidance of Congress tries to manipulate the feelings of labourers for their political benefits.\(^{30}\)

The politics of Assam during the post-independence era indicated the politics of Congress party, which continued up to the nineties of the twentieth century. The Indian National Congress was mainly formed by the nationalist leaders of freedom movement and the followers of Gandhiji. The tea garden labourers had full faith upon them. They thought that these groups of people would be able to reduce their sufferings and rescue them from the tyranny of the tea planters. So, they gave full support to the Congress party. Since the formation of the independent government in country in general and Assam in particular, they know nothing except the Congress party and its symbols such as ‘pairs of bull with a plough’, then ‘a cow’ and presently an ‘open hand’.

Presently, a good number of representatives of the community are present in the State and Central legislature and are able to hold respectful position in the Government. The following list shows the name of members of Legislative Assembly from tea garden labourers in the Assam Legislative Assembly since 1946 till 2016.

**TABLE 4.3**

**LIST OF TEA GARDEN LABOURERS’ MLA SINCE 1946 TO 2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>NAME OF MEMBER</th>
<th>CONSTITUENCY</th>
<th>PERIOD</th>
<th>PARTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Binode Kumar J Sarwan</td>
<td>Bishwanath</td>
<td>1946-1952</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Constituency</td>
<td>Years</td>
<td>Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Dipak Moormoor</td>
<td>Lahowal</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Naren Tanti</td>
<td>Mariani</td>
<td>1985-1991</td>
<td>IND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Barki Prosad Telenga</td>
<td>Thowra</td>
<td>1985-1991</td>
<td>IND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Dipen Tanti</td>
<td>Lahuwal</td>
<td>1985-1991</td>
<td>IND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Dineshwar Tanti</td>
<td>Doomdooma</td>
<td>1985-1991</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Kushal Tanti</td>
<td>Sotia</td>
<td>1991-1996</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Barnabash Tanti</td>
<td>Behali</td>
<td>1991-1996</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Hiren Bhumij</td>
<td>Lahuwal</td>
<td>1991-1996</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Bhimanada Tanti</td>
<td>Rongapara, Dhekiajuli</td>
<td>2001-2006, 2006-2011</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Joseph Toppo</td>
<td>Dhekiajuli</td>
<td>2001-2006</td>
<td>AGP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Rameshwar Dhanuwar</td>
<td>Duliajan</td>
<td>2001-2006, 2006-2011</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Durga Bhumij</td>
<td>Doomdooma</td>
<td>2011-2016</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Aklias Tirki</td>
<td>Sarupathar</td>
<td>2011-2016</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Etua Munda</td>
<td>Tingkhong</td>
<td>2011-2016</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(SOURCE: Results of the Legislative Assembly Election)

Dineswar Tasha mentions that in the ministry of Gopinath Bordoloi (1947-1950), Bishnuram Medhi (1950-1957), and Bimola Prasad Chaliha (1957-1971) there were members belonging to tea garden labourers’ community, but only those...
representatives were represented, who had entered through the tea garden labourers’ organizations as an associate member.31

During the period 1971-72, under the chief ministership of Mohendra Mohan Choudhuri, for the first time tea garden labourer Chatra Gopal Karmakar took oath as the State Minister. Of course he remained as minister for a short term. However, during his term, Chatra Gopal Karmakar was able to prove that a member of tea garden labourer community can run a ministry efficiently and he paved the way in this direction for the community. He was followed by Gojen Tanti, another personality from the community, who returned as member of Legislative Assembly from Mariani Constituency of Jorhat. He became the Cabinet Minister in the cabinet of Sarat Chandra Singha (1972-1978) and took the charge of the Ministry of Labour Supply and Cooperative department.

During 1970, the political scenario of the country in general and Assam in particular had been changed. After eighteen months of National Emergency (declared on 25 June 1975), the Indian Government decided to hold election in 1977. In this election Congress party, under the leadership of Indira Gandhi, was defeated and Janata Dal came to power. Similarly in Assam under the leadership of Golap Borbora, Janata Dal Government was formed in 1978 and tea garden labourers’ leader Silvius Condpan from Majbat Constituency became a member of the Ministry as Parliamentary Secretary.

Then after the formation of Government by Assam Janata Dal with the support of Congress under the leadership of Jogen Hazarika, Silvius Condpan was upgraded to Minister. In 1980, after the breaking of ‘Janata Dal’ and ‘Assam Janata Dal’, Syeda Anwara Taimoor formed Government (1977-80) and Jay Chandra Nagbanshi took the charge as State Minister of the Taimoor’s Ministry. After six months, Keshab Chandra
Gogoi became the Chief Minister of the newly formed Congress Government. In this Ministry Aklias Tirkey was declared as minister in previous night and unfortunately before taking oath as minister, President Rule was declared for the first time in Assam and the Ministry was dissolved.

During the period of Assam agitation in 1979 on issue of foreign nationalities, a controversy was aroused among the agitators regarding the interpretation of the term ‘outsider’ or ‘bidesi’ or ‘foreigners’. Gradually, it became more and more xenophobic in nature and demanded the ouster of all ‘Ali, Kuli, Bangali, Nak Sepeta Nepali’, where ‘Ali’ stood for the East Bengali (Bangladeshi) Muslim peasant, ‘Kuli’ stood for the tea garden labourers brought into Assam in large numbers by the British from parts of mainland India, ‘Bangali’ for the Hindu Bengalis, and ‘Nak Sepeta Nepali’ for the ‘flatnosed’ Nepalis whose immigration into Assam had also began during the colonial period. As a result, a clash between the agitators and tea garden labourers took place in Dibrugarh and Tinsukia district. Many people were injured and some of them even died. Despite the fact that early migrants from most of these communities had already embraced the Assamese language and identity, and been in turn allowed membership into the Assamee fold, the chauvinism generated by the Assam Movement obliterated all distinction between legal and illegal migrant. However, a special conference was held at the premises of Jaganath Baruah College of Jorhat District among the President, Dineshwar Tasha and Secretary, Barkey Prasad Telenga of Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association and the leaders of All Assam Student Union, in December 1979. After a discussion between both the organizations they were able to reduce the differences among them. The student of Tea garden labourers decided to send two representatives as member of All Assam Student union (AASU). In the conference tea garden labourers were declared as indigenous inhabitant of
Assam, Assam Tea Tribes Students' Association also extended full support to the agitation.

In 1983, in the midst of Assam agitation, the general election to the State Assembly was held in Assam. The election was boycotted by the agitators and the labourers living inside the tea gardens also extended full support to it. With very few voters election was held. Congress party won the election and under the leadership of Hiteshwar Saikia, government was formed (1983-1985), which was considered by the agitators as illegal. In this government three representatives of tea garden labourers were returned to the Assembly. They were Rameshwar Dhanuwar from Digboi, who was included in the cabinet, Dipak Moormoor from Lahuwal constituency and Silvius Condpan from Majbat constituency.

As a consequence of the Assam agitation of 1979-80, Asom Gana Parisad (AGP), party was formed. In the election of 1985 under the leadership of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, Assam Gana Parisad government was formed. The tea garden labourers’ representatives Barkey Prasad Telenga from Thowra constituency and Dipen Tanti from Lahuwal constituency became the State Ministers of the ministry. However, in the election held in 1991, Assam Gana Parisad was defeated and the Congress party won the election. Again Hiteshwar Saikia led the government. In his ministry Dinesh Prasad Gowala from Lakhimpur constituency and Haren Bhumij from Lahuwal Constituency became the Cabinet Minister and Prithibi Majhi from Tingkhong constituency became the Deputy Speaker.

In 1996, again Assam Gana Parisad formed the government in Assam, which was led by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta. In this government, tea garden labourers’ representatives Joseph Toppo from Dhekiajuli constituency became State Minister and
after the extension of the Ministry, Binod Gowala from Sarupathar constituency of Golaghat District, became Cabinet Minister.

Out of 126 Legislative Assembly Constituency, tea garden labourers are the deciding factors in 41 constituencies. Such as, Margherita, Digboi, Tinsukia, Duliajan, Naharkotia, Tingkhong, Lahuwal and Moran altogether 8 constituencies within the Dibrugarh Lok Sabha Constituency. Sonari, Mahmora, Thowra, Najira, Amguri, Tiyok, Mariyani, Titabor and Jorhat, altogether 9 constituencies within the Jorhat Lok Sabha constituency. Similarly Doomdooma, Chabua and Nowboisa 3 constituencies within the Lakhimpur Lok Sabha constituency. 4 constituencies within the Kaliabor Lok Sabha Constituency, such as Dergaon, Khumtai, Bokakhat, and Sarupathar. Likewise, Gohpur, Bihali, Bishwanath, Rangapara, Dhekiajuli and Borhola are the 6 constituencies within the Tezpur Lok Sabha Constituency. Then Majbat and Pangari 2 constituencies within Mongoldoi Lok Sabha Constituency. And Lakhipur,Udarband, Ratabari, Patharkandi, Sonai, Dholai, Katigora, Katlichera, Algapur altogether 9 constituencies within the Karimganj and Silchar Lok Sabha Constituency.

On the other hand, the representation of the tea garden labourers in the Union Legislature is also significant. The following list shows the name of members of parliament from tea garden labourer community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>LOK SABHA</th>
<th>CONSTITUENCY</th>
<th>PARTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bhadrashwar Tanti</td>
<td>8th</td>
<td>Koliabar</td>
<td>A G P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Paban Singh Ghatuar</td>
<td>10th,11th,12th,13th &amp; 15th</td>
<td>Dibrugarh</td>
<td>Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Kamakha Prosad Tasha</td>
<td>16th</td>
<td>Jorhat</td>
<td>B J P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rameshwar Teli</td>
<td>16th</td>
<td>Dibrugarh</td>
<td>BJP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Results of the General election of the Lok sabha)
Since 1984, the representatives of tea garden labourers are able to secure seats in the parliament. Paban Singh Ghatuwar has been elected as Member of Parliament for five times and he was able to secure portfolios in the Ministry. He was the Union Minister of State (independent charge), Development of North Eastern Region and Parliamentary Affairs from 2011 to 2014. During 1991-1993 he was Union Deputy Minister, Labour and during 1993 to 1995 he was Union Deputy Minister, Health and Family Welfare. Then he took the charge of the office of the Union Minister of State, Health and Welfare, during 1995-1996.

4.5 VOTING BEHAVIOUR

Tea garden labourers are socially, economically and politically excluded section of Assam. They are worst victim of circumstances. Colonial planters treated them as sub human being, and maintained social and cultural distances with the labourers, the legacy of which has been maintained till to-day by the planters. The geographical isolation and lack of interaction with different sections of the greater Assamese society have reduced their capacity of ‘imitating’, ‘transmitting’, and ‘cross fertilizing’ ideas and opinion. As such, majority of them not aware of the state politics, political parties, policy and programmes, achievement and failures of the governments and so on. Political parties and candidates and their supporters considered them as ‘vote banks’.

The tea garden labourers are mere voters, while the real beneficiaries of the state politics are the men of powerful sections or groups including the ex-tea garden labourers. As such, they are deprived of the benefits of participatory democracy. Labourers living inside the tea gardens of Assam are always taken as indispensable part of politics by the political leaders contesting the elections. As
mentioned earlier that labourers living inside the tea gardens of Assam are the
deciding factors of 41 Legislative Assembly constituencies. Hence, tea gardens are
always considered as ‘vote banks’.

However, tea garden labourers are directly or indirectly involved in the
political affairs of the state. Attending meetings, campaigning, voting, mobilizing
public opinion and contesting election are the certain criteria of political participation.
They are very much active in attending meetings, whether it is trade union meetings,
Panchayat meetings, political parties meetings and so on. During the election period,
the leaders of political party generally try to mobilise people from the tea garden areas
to attend their meetings and even they hire vehicles to carry the people from tea
garden areas to the assigned places where meetings are held. The casual labourers like
to attend such kind of meetings, as they get free meal with an amount of money for
attending the meetings. Because, they are employed in the garden during the pickk
season and during the off season they become jobless. Majority of the labourers of
Rungajan Tea Estate and Cinnamara Tea Estate are involved in such kind of activities.
Both the tea gardens are poor tea-gardens and most of the labourers remain
unemployed. So, they prefer to attend such meetings. On the other hand, the labourers
of the rich tea gardens like Koomtai Tea Estate and Hoolungooree Tea Estate hardly
get any chance to attend such meetings because garden authorities never allow them to
attend meetings outside the garden during the working hours. In case of Gatoonga and
Dalowjan Tea Estate, the regular workers never attend meetings which are held
outside the garden during working hours, but those who are jobless attend such
meetings.

Likewise, the campaigning activities, which mainly include holding mass
meetings, rallies, protests, distribution of leaflet etc. are very common in the tea-
gardens. In democracy political campaign refers to electoral campaigns which indicates organized course of action to achieve political goals. The main motive of campaign is to share the ideas of the candidates with the voters and try to mobilize more voters on their side.

During elections, strong campaigns are organized inside the labourers lines under the leadership of the trade unions leaders, *sardars* and the leaders of students’ organizations. The ‘last night campaign’ before the day of election is very common and strong. Distribution of money, country beer, food and other materials as bait to take them in confidence is very common scene. It was noticed that the campaigns are basically for Congress, Bharatia Janata Party and Assam Gana Parisad. Some of the labourers of Rungajan Tea Estate of Golaghat district, informed the researcher that they liked to go for election campaign for any party, because as much as they could join the campaigns, they would be able to get much benefits, in kind or cash from any party. They join these campaigning activities not because of political purpose or to support any party, but only for material gain.

However, the labourers like to go for vote. Often they vote ‘en masse’ (in one group or body), results from the deep respect and strong identification with the influencer (*sardar*, trade union leader, students’ leader). To assess their voting behaviour a question was asked by the researcher regarding the basis of their selection of candidate for vote. Following table shows the responses of the labourers to the question asked to them.
TABLE: 4.5
OPINIONS ON CONSIDERATION OF SELECTING CANDIDATE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Tea Gardens</th>
<th>Opinions</th>
<th></th>
<th>Quality of candidate</th>
<th></th>
<th>Row Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On the basis of parties consideration</td>
<td>On the basis of symbol</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koomtai T.E.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>42.70</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>12.20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoolungooree T.E</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rungajan T.E.</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinnamara T.E.</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>33.30</td>
<td>13.30</td>
<td>13.30</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalowjan T.E.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28.60</td>
<td>35.70</td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td>23.80</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatooga T.E.</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45.80</td>
<td>29.20</td>
<td>8.30</td>
<td>16.70</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column Total</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37.30</td>
<td>37.60</td>
<td>10.10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY)

Above table indicates that 37.30 pc of labourers cast their vote on the basis of party consideration. The labourers of this category have knowledge about the parties contesting the elections. They informed the researcher that before casting their vote they always analyze the working or activities of the political parties. They like to cast their vote in favour of the party interested to protect the interest of tea garden labourers. It should be mentioned here that most of them have talked about Congress party. According to them, since independence of the country, Congress party has been playing a positive role in respect of tea garden labourers. But the opinion of the educated section regarding the political party is different. They want a change in the life inside the gardens. According to Bikas Dol, an educated youth of Rungajan Tea Estate that “Our nation has got ‘swaraj’, but labourers inside the tea gardens of Assam are still living under the planter ‘raj’. The legislations, made by the government are
nothing but baits, through which the ruling party wants to deceive the labourers. So, we need a change”.

On the other hand, 37.50 pc of labourers consider the symbol of the political parties contesting the election as the basis for the selection of candidates. The labourers of this category are the blind supporter of the symbol of ‘hand’ i.e. Congress party. A female labourer of Cinnamora Tea Estate told the researcher that “We eat food with our hands, we pluck tea leaves with our hands and we take our ‘tolop’ (salary) with our hands, so without hands we cannot survive.”

Only 10.10 pc of labourers consider the quality of the candidates as the basis of selecting a person for vote. The labourers of this category are educated and have an analytical view regarding the consequences of elections. According to them only wise man can decide wisely and government should be run by wise leaders. So, quality of a person should be the criterion for the assessment of a candidate for casting vote.

15 pc of labourers are guided by the leaders of tea garden labourers, such as, trade union leaders, sardars or any other person of their family. Majority of labourers of this category are women. They generally cast their vote according to the decision of their male counterparts or the heads their families, or as directed by the sardar or the trade union leaders. The voting behaviour of women is not based on ideological commitment to the party or in consideration of the merit and dedication of the candidates for the society.

However, the study reveals that the political vision of the tea garden labourers is very poor. They enjoy the election’s affairs with great pleasure and jubilance. During election labourers (except educated youth) are found discussing about election, but they do not talk about the work and achievement of the parties contesting the election. The money factor cannot be ignored while discussing the political behaviour of the tea
garden labourers. Distribution of wine, cash amount, garments and blankets by the workers of each political party is very common inside the labourers lines. In some cases, planters, managers and their subordinate officers with vested interest try to motivate the innocent labourers against the candidates whom they do not prefer. Before election, the political leaders are found visiting door to door of the labourers’ family and false promises are given to them to work for the development of their society. But after election the attitude of the political leaders towards the tea garden labourers abruptly change and they do not try to keep their promises. Rarely do they visit the tea gardens, which make the people living inside the garden, specially the educated section disappointed.

4.6 CONCLUSION

Tea garden labourers constitute a major portion of the total population of Assam. Due to their demographic strength they always influence the politics of the state. Though they remain oppressed under surveillance of the managers and their subordinate officers, tea garden labourers are directly or indirectly involved in the political activities of the state. There were numbers of incidents that took places in the history of the country where the predecessors of tea garden labourers had played a remarkable role against the British to safeguard their interest as well as the interest of the country. In spite of being barricaded within the tea plantation enclaves, participation of tea garden labourers in the Freedom Movement is significant. Numbers of person from the community actively participated in the freedom movement. The participation of Gajaram Kurmi, Mohachal Gond, Bidesh kamar, Ramsai Turi, Bongai Bauri etc, is worth mentioning. Some of martyrs of freedom movement are Doyal Das Panika, Mongol Kurku, Tehlu Saora, Maloti Mem alias
Mangri Oraon. Unfortunately, these freedom fighters and martyrs never got any importance in the history of national movement.

At the very beginning, Indian National Congress was not interested about the problems of tea garden labourers living inside the tea garden of Assam. However, after the Calcutta conference in 1901, Indian National Congress involved in the matter of labourers living inside the tea gardens. Their numerical strength and spontaneous involvement in the National Movement attracted the attention of the members of Indian National Congress.

During the election period the leaders of the political parties generally try to mobilize the people from the tea garden areas. On the other hand, unemployed labourers are hired by the members of political parties or other organizations, to increase the numbers of members’ presence in any demonstrations, rallies, meetings, and such other activities. Such groups of labourers possess a different attitude towards the collective activities of the political parties or other organizations or even towards tea garden labourers’ organizations. They try to assess their benefits of co-operation in such activities from the economic point of view. This is harmful for the tea garden labourer organizations because for the success of tea garden labourers’ movement, strength and sincerity of the participators are essential criteria.

Due to numerical strength, tea garden labourers have become deciding factors in numbers of parliamentary and legislative constituencies. Dineshwar Tasha mentioned that tea garden labourers have a role in the politics of Assam. It had, it has and it will have, might be in wider and narrower scope. The politics of Assam is impossible devoid of this community.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. ibid.


7. ibid.


10. ibid.


12. ibid.


15. Guha, Amalendu, 1977, op.cit.p-128

16. ibid.

17. Ibid


19. ibid.


24. ibid.
25. ibid, p-253.
26. ibid, p-250.
27. ibid, p-254.
28. ibid, pp-255-256.
29. ibid, P-227.
36. ibid, p-201.
CHAPTER: V

TEA GARDEN LABOURERS’ ORGANIZATIONS AND STATE’S ROLE

Since the last three decades the political situation of Assam has been crowded oppressively by the assertion of identities of many ethnic groups. The ethnic groups who considered themselves as integral parts of the greater Assamese society are now demanding social, political rights for the revival of their culture and tradition. The youths of the ethnic communities have been playing an active role in mobilizing their respective groups on ethnic lines. A series of massive movements have been launched by the students of these ethnic groups of the region on the issues of ethno-cultural identity, economic backwardness and migration. Some of them are even demanding separate states while some others are demanding political autonomy within the present political structure of the state and some others are demanding the inclusion of their communities in the Scheduled Tribes or Scheduled Castes list with a view to obtain the fruit of the reservation policy of the state. Bodoland Accord in 1993 and formation of Bodo land Autonomous Council and recently Bodoland Territorial Council, formation of Mising Autonomous Council and Rabha Autonomous Council in 1995 are the results of the movements of their respective students’ organizations, such as, All Bodo Students’ Union, Mising Students’ Union and Rabha Students’ Union etc. Similarly Karbi Students’ Association has been resorting to a vigorous agitation demanding autonomous state constituting of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills district. On the other hand, Moran-Muttak Students’ Union, All Tai-Ahom Students’ Union, ‘Chutia Yuba Chatra Parisad’ and Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association have been launching movement demanding inclusion of their respective communities in Scheduled Tribes (P) list. In this context, this chapter attempts to examine the role of tea garden
labourers’ organizations in mobilizing their people on ethnic line and the state’s role to resolve the problems of the community.

5.1. TEA GARDEN LABOURERS’ ORGANIZATIONS

The resentments expressed by the labourers at the initial stage against the garden authorities were sudden outbursts for demanding their wages and bonuses without any organized course of action. The labourers of the tea gardens of Assam have been excluded from the mainstream social, political and economic processes of the state. Hence, they gradually started mobilizing themselves through formation of several organizations for articulating their demand and for the development of the community. At the initial stage the cause of their resentment was economic; gradually they shifted their demands towards developmental issues, such as, rights over land, language, health, education and constitutional safeguards and so on. The educated youths and elite section of tea garden labourers have been playing a significant role in mobilizing their people on ethnic line. For this purpose, they formed different organizations to mobilize their people under one umbrella. However the organizational activities of tea garden labourers can be studied in two ways i.e. Trade Union Movement and Student Union Movement.

5.2. TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

During the British period there were no proper organizational activities of tea garden labourers in Assam. They had to work under the strict surveillance of the British planters. Their movement was limited within the garden; no outsider was allowed to enter the garden without the prior permission from the garden authority. The market places were the meeting points where some social activists could talk to
them regarding local, regional, and national issues. They encouraged the workers to unite together and raise their voice against the injustice meted out to them by the managers and their subordinate officers.

Due to the hostile attitude of the British planters and their officials, only a few unions came up in pre independence era in Assam, such as, The Assam Tea Company Labour Union, Dibrugarh (Regd. 27 April 1939), Rajmai Tea Company Labour Union, Dibrugarh (27 April, 1939), Greenwood Tea Company Labour Union, Dibrugarh, (6 May, 1939), Makum Tea Company Labour Union, Margheritta (30 May 1939), Syleth Cachar Chah Bagan Mazdur Union, Silchar (27 April, 1939), The Assam Tea Labourers’ Federation, Sibsagar (1943)”.2

Afterwards, a few grass root level organizations were formed in the tea gardens under the leadership of Barindra Dutta, Dijen Dasgupta of Cachar, Sudhangshu Ghosh of Tripura and Arun Kumar Chandra of Cachar and many others. But the activities of these organizations were not significant.

However, after independence, the attitude of the Government was favourable towards the Trade Unions. Trade Unions were allowed to organize the workers working inside the tea gardens of Assam.

On the eve of independence, Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) was formed, and consequently different Trade Unions were formed to fight against the exploitation of tea garden labourers by the planters. The Trade Unions are ‘Bharatiya Chah Mazdoor Union’, ‘Bharatiya Chah Parisad’, ‘The Cachar District Chah Mazdoor Samity’, ‘Purbanchal Chah Parishad’, Upper Assam Tea Company Labour Union, ‘Assam Janajati Chah Mazdoor Shramik Union’, Assam Tea Workers Union, ‘Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha’ etc.3
Among these Trade Union Organizations, the ‘Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha’ (ACMS) has stronghold in the tea gardens of Assam and spreads its activities throughout the state with direct assistance of planters and patronage of the governments. It was founded in the year 1958 and registered under the Indian Trade Union Act. Its central office is situated in Dibrugarh. It has 22 branches spread throughout Assam (Brahmaputra Valley), which includes 846 registered Tea Gardens with total three lakh and twenty five thousand members. The founders of the organization were from the tea garden labourers’ society. Prominent among them were Simon Sing Horo, Santosh Kr. Topno, Patra Ekka, Gaison Tiru, Dharamdas Hareng and Dalbir Sing Lohar etc.

The prime objectives of ‘Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha’ are - to provide the basic facilities to the workers such as, housing, drinking water, sanitation, medical and health care, crèches for the small children of working parents, establishment of schools inside the tea gardens and working for the welfare of the tea garden labourers etc. Since the beginning, Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha has been successfully working for the benefits of the tea garden labourers and had been able to bring into existence various schemes for the welfare of the labourers’ society, such as, Provident Fund Scheme, gratuity for retired tea garden labourers, maternity benefit, pension scheme, leave for sickness, paid annual holiday, provision for welfare officer, creation of ‘Tea and Ex Tea Directorate’, establishment of Assam Tea Employee Welfare Board, community centres and weaving centres etc. In most of the tea gardens of Assam, the units of ‘Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha’ exist and have been working actively for the protection of the socio-economic interest of tea garden labourers. On the other hand, ‘Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha’ is politically significant. Through it Congress party is able to yield a significant support from the
tea garden labourers in the Lok Sabha constituencies, viz, Kaliabor, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Mangoldoi and Lakhimpur, and encompass nearly 41 Assembly constituencies.

On the other hand, Assam Chah Karmachari Sangha (ACKS) is an association of the workers employed for the official jobs within the tea gardens. It was formed on 9th February, 1947. Though ‘Assam Chah Maazdoor Sangha’ (ACMS) and ‘Assam Chah Karmachri Sangha; (ACKS) are different organizations but in some cases both the organizations work together to protect the socio-economic interest of the workers of the tea gardens of Assam as a whole, such as, in case of bonus, ration, and wage and other allowances or other benefits of the employees employed at office level and the labourers. However, the main objective of ‘Assam Chah Karmachri Sangha’ is to protect the interest of the employees of the tea gardens of Assam.

5.3 STUDENTS’ MOVEMENT

In regard to the students’ movement of the tea garden labourers, the study revealed that presently the youth of the tea garden labourers are united under two different banners, i.e., ‘Tea Tribes’ and ‘Adivasi’. As such, two different organizations were formed in different points of time. It is already mentioned in the previous chapter that the tea garden labourers were brought by the British from different ethnic roots and origins. They were mostly of Adivasi origin. However, in the twentieth century some Non-Adivasi groups of people were also emigrated to Assam to work in the tea plantations and were settled by the planters inside the tea gardens. Among them a good number of lower castes and a few upper caste Hindu people also emigrated to Assam and were settled by the tea planters inside the tea
gardens along with the Adivasi people in a common habitat. At the initial stage of their life inside the tea gardens, they liked to maintain their own customs and traditions separately with their own people. British planters never interfered in their self concerning activities; so they got freedom in this respect. It is worth mentioning here that the activities of tea garden labourers, which are related to their communities or religions are their self related activities. In no way these activities are concerned with the functioning of tea industry; only because of this the British planters and their subordinate officials had never interfered in this matter or had been concerned with this aspect of tea garden labourers. On the other hand, they were as a whole recognized by the British as depressed class, irrespective of their communities and religions. But, after independence they were de-scheduled by the newly formed government of Assam, which was headed by Gopi Nath Bordoloi. However, during that period, tea garden labourers were not aware of their community related status, as no protest was made in this context by the labourers living inside and outside the gardens of Assam. They could have protested against the decisions of the then Bordoloi Government of Assam. But their ignorance, illiteracy, poor economic conditions, and planters’ dominance inside the gardens prevent them from doing so. Moreover, it was beyond the expectation of tea garden labourers that they would get any privilege from any corner on the basis of their communities. So, they were not concerned with community related identity. With the passage of time an elite section emerged among them, who could understand the provisions of constitutional safeguards for backward classes, scheduled castes and tribes; and criteria for availing these safeguards under the provisions of Indian constitution. As a result, the enlightened section of tea garden labourers, specially youths came forward and tried to unite their people on ethnic line. Presently ‘All
Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association’ (ATTSA) has been working for the all round development of the tea and ex-tea garden labourers of Assam. Apart from it, ‘All Assam Adivasi Students’ Association’ (AASAA) has been working for the development of the Adivasi people of Assam.

5.4 ASSAM TEA TRIBES STUDENTS’ ASSOCIATION (ATTSA)

‘Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association’ (ATTSA) has emerged from ‘Chotanagpuri Chatra Sammilon’, which was formed, in a conference held on 27th and 28th December, 1947, at Digholia Goan Maidhya Engraji Vidyalay, of Tengakhat, Dibrugarh. Under the initiative of Santosh Kumar Topno of Moran, Simon Sing Horo of Chontak, two social activists of Christian Missionary namely, Reverend Joseph Tuti and Reverend Nathinial Horo and the students of tea garden labourers assembled in the compound of the school. The student representatives from Dibrugarh, Tinisukia, Jorhat, Tezpur, lakhimpur also joined the conference. However, at that time the numbers of educated persons of tea garden labourers were very few. Deneshwar Tasha (2009), mentions that while Santosh Kumar Topno along with his associates decided to hold a conference to form an organization in 1947-48, they observed that there were only 4 tea garden labourer students, who were employed in jobs after completing higher education namely, Prof. M P Saruwan, Chiril Richard, Herombo Santosh Rajroy and Tintush Tigga; and only 4 college going students of tea garden labourers, viz; Santosh Kumar Topno, Simon Singh Horo, Anand Marsi Barla, and Valentine Kerketta. The numbers of students studying in Higher Secondary School were as follows, in Tezpur 52 students, in Golaghat 22 students, in Jorhat 25 students, in Sibsagar 15 students, in North Lakhimpur 12 students, in Moran 10 students, in Nagoan 10 students, in Tinsukia 7
students, in Mongoldoi 5 students and in Titabar 4 students, altogether 172
students.\(^5\)

On the other hand, the members selected for the Executive Committee of
the organization were as follows, Simon Sing Horo as the President, Rakhal Nag as
vice President, Santosh Kumar Topno as General Secretary, Nathinial Horo as
Cashier, and Christa Prasad Changa as Assistant General Secretary. The aims and
objective of the organization as declared in the conference were, to unite the tea
garden and ex-tea garden labourers of Assam as an integrated and powerful
community, and to develop and widen the social and educational aspects of tea
garden labourers’ society, so that they can go forward hand in hand with the
developed or developing communities of greater Assam.\(^6\)

Under the leadership of Simon Singh Horo and Santosh Kumar Topno for
three consecutive periods from 1947 to 1950, ‘Chotanagpuri Chatra Sanmilon’ had
been trying to spread its activities among the tea garden labourers’ students living in
Missionary Schools, hostels, and other places and trying to organize them.  
However, in the third annual conference of the organization, held in Kasomari Goan
of Sarupathar on 28\(^{th}\) and 29\(^{th}\) December, 1950, the leadership of the organization
was changed. Nirud Kumar Hembrom was selected as the President and Christo
Udoi selected as the General Secretary of the organization. But, due to unknown
reasons they became inactive.\(^7\) In the year 1952, on 17\(^{th}\) and 18\(^{th}\) July, the fourth
Annual Conference was held in Raidongria Goan of Moran, which was not
successful due to the indifferent attitude of the leaders towards the organization. As
a result, a special conference was held in July, 1953, at Borhula of Jorhat District.
Abenger Hereng was elected as the President and Gerson Tiru was elected as the
General Secretary of the organization. Unfortunately, under the leadership of
Herenge and Tiru, again the organization became inactive, and this continued up to 1957.\textsuperscript{8}

In spite of the noble aims and objectives, this organization was not taken seriously by the non-Christian students. So it was confined within the Christian students who were mainly boarders of Missionary hostels. As the organization was formed in Christian Missionary complex, Hindu students were not interested in joining. Tasha (2009) mentions that before independence, due to the efforts of the Christian Missionaries, tea garden labourer students were able to get the light of education. However, in post independence era primary schools and Middle English School were established in most of the villages and tea gardens of Assam. The children from rich and wealthy families got the chance of enrolling themselves in these schools.\textsuperscript{9} Nevertheless, the number of educated non-Christian tea garden labourer students increased, and these groups of students had no faith in ‘Chotanagpuri Chatra Sammilon’ and wanted to form a different organization for the development of the tea garden labourers’ society. They united under the leadership of Dinanath Chowdhuri and Chatra Gopal Karmakar, and a new organization was formed in the conference held at Koomtai T.E. of Golaghat subdivision of greater Sibsagar district, known as “Assam Chah Banua Chatra Santha”. After the formation this organization, both the organizations began working simultaneously, but again in the same year; a meeting was convened in Bamunipathar, Tezpur, where both the organizations decided to amalgamate into a single organization. The name of the newly formed organization was “Sodou Assam Chah Bagisa Samprodai Chatra Santha”. Again in the first half of the seventies of the twentieth century it was renamed as “Assam Chah Mazdoor Janajati Chatra Sangha”. Since the inception of the organization, it has been trying for all round
development of the tea garden labourers’ society of Assam through a democratic movement. The following example can be cited in this regard.

In 1976, during the chief minister ship of Sarat Chandra Singha, an effort was made by the then president of the Congress party, Devakanta Baruah, Labour Minister Gojen Tanti, and Chatra Gopal Karmakar, the General Secretary of ‘Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha’, by urging the Central Government to provide Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes status to the tea garden labourers of Assam. Tasha (2009) mentions that it was not done due to the conspiracy of a few politically motivated leaders of the ‘Assam Chah Mazdur Janajati Chatra Santha’. In the mean time, in 1977, Lok Sabha was dissolved, afterwards Janta Dal government was formed, and the matter was suspended.

In the year 1981, due to the efforts of Assam Chah Mazdoor Janajati Chatra Santha, a regular programme of tea garden labourers called ‘Chah Banuar Asor’ was introduced through All India Radio (AIR) and Assam Tea Garden Labourer Welfare Board provided hostel for the students of the community in every district. To encourage and create writers among tea garden labourers, ‘Assam Chah Mazdoor Janajati Chatra Santha’ requested the editors of different daily, weekly, and other news papers, magazines, journals and periodicals to publish writings of the writers of the community. 10 Accordingly, the weekly news paper ‘Janambhumi’ started to publish a separate column ‘Suej Pator Are Are’, similarly thrice daily ‘Agradut’ published ‘Chah Sramikor Kanthoswar’; weekly ‘Purbanchal batori’ published ‘Eti Koli Duti Pat’. Likewise, ‘Abhijan’, ‘Seuji Sora’, ‘Na lakhimi’, ‘Nagorik’, ‘Saptahik Nilachal’, ‘Dainik Asom’, ‘Asom Bani’ ,and ‘Mahajati’ published a separate column for the writers of the community.
Another significant achievement of the organization was that under the initiative of the organization from 1981-82 Labour Development Centre was brought under the control of Assam Tea Labourer Welfare Board of Assam. Similarly, a separate Secretariat for tea and ex-tea garden labourers was also established in 1982.

In 1983, during the Silver Jubilee session, *Assam Chah Mazdur Janajati Chatra Santha* was renamed as “Assam Tea Tribes Student Association” (ATTSA). The significant demands made in the Silver Jubilee Session were as follows,

1. To provide books and uniforms and food to the school going students of tea garden labourers, so that nobody will remain absent from school due to scarcity of these.
2. To reduce the distance from home to school, primary schools should be established within the gardens, so that children can go to school easily.
3. To establish crèches for the little children, so that mothers can take their elder children to school and go to work easily.
4. Adult education centre should be established, for the illiterate adult tea garden labourers, where they can get minimum knowledge of reading, writing and arithmetic.
5. To provide Vocational Education for meritorious students and after completion of their education they should be employed.
6. Employment of unemployed tea garden labourers according to their educational qualification.
7. To provide training in different aspects to the educated or school leaving youths, and encourage them to open Self Help Groups, Co-operative Societies, fair price shops, and Money Lending Avenues at low interest.

Tasha (2009) mentions that from the very beginning, ‘All Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association’ has been demanding for the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes status of the tea garden labourers. On 4th July, in 1987, during the period of Assam Gana Parishad’s Government headed by P.K. Mahanta, the representative of All Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association, consisting of President Lokeshwar Kurmi, General Secretary Bhagirath Karon, executive members Dulen Nayak, Mohendra Ganju, Narendra Kumar submitted a twenty point Charter of Demands to the State Government demanding the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes status for the tea tribes. The demands included in the Charter were as follows:

1. Tea and Ex- Tea Tribes of Assam should be granted the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes status.
2. The Plantation Labour Act should be amended and it should be implemented entirely.
3. To provide free hostel for tea garden labourers’ students in every subdivision of Assam.
4. Provincialisation of the schools located inside the tea gardens of Assam.
5. Daily broadcasting of the programme ‘Chah Shramikor Asor’ by the radio center, and to introduce special programme for tea garden labourers in Tele Vision.
6. Appointment of social welfare officer in the tea gardens on the basis of the tea garden labourers’ population, and tea garden labourers and ex-tea garden labourers should get preference in this regard.

7. To appoint the educated youths of tea garden labourers and ex-tea garden labourers in official jobs of the tea gardens.

8. To appoint the educated youths of tea garden labourers and ex-tea garden labourers as the teachers in the schools located inside the tea gardens.

9. To provide good quality and free ration to the tea garden labourers.

10. To establish pre-primary schools inside the tea gardens.

11. In case of tea garden labourers, Permanent Resident Certificate should not be applicable.

12. To provide training to the educated women of tea garden labourers in different institution.

13. To establish a Cultural Center to preserve the language, literature and culture of tea garden labourers and to carry out research on these aspects.

14. To appoint the Secretary of the Secretariat for tea and ex-tea garden labourers, Labour Commissioner, Chief of Tea Education cell, Commissioner of Tea Garden Labourers girls’ council, the Commissioner of Assam Tea Plantation Provident Fund Scheme from the tea and ex-tea garden labourers.

15. To provide fresh drinking water in the tea gardens.

16. Electrification of the tea garden areas.

17. To distribute the ceiling surplus lands of the gardens to the tea garden labourers.
18. Special census to collect the data regarding the population of tea garden labours and other information.

19. To implement Compulsory Adult Education inside the tea gardens and to appoint the tea and ex-tea garden labourers in the responsible post of the adult education department.

20. To subside the causes of disturbance in the border areas of Assam, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, so that the inhabitants of these areas get rid of the violent situation that occur due to the border disputes of these areas.

However, during the Assam Gana Parisad government, headed by P.K. Mahanta, ‘All Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association’ under the leadership of Lokeshwar Kurmi and Bhaghirath Karon staged different demonstrations on the basis of above mentioned twenty points demand. An agreement was signed between both the parties; but unfortunately it did not work to achieve the goal. On 27th November, 1990, President’s Rule was declared and Assam Government was dissolved.

In a memorandum to the Chief Minister of Assam, Dated 28th August, 2014, ‘All Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association’ expressed their resentment for the indifferent attitude of the government towards the tea garden labourers, and pressurized the government to fulfill their long standing demands with an immediate action. Their demands were as follows-

1. Inclusion of tea tribes within the scheduled tribes / scheduled castes list.
2. Permanent patta for the lands, which are occupied by the tea garden labourers for years, and allotment of two bighas of land to each family.
3. Reservation of 15 pc jobs in case of government employment.
4. Modification of Plantation Labour Act 1951, and to compel the garden authorities to implement the Act entirely.

5. Reservation of 15 pc jobs in case of appointment of Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) passed students in Primary and Middle English Schools for tea garden labourers’ children.

6. Appointment of 20 graduate teachers, as declared by the Chief Minister earlier in 2005.

7. To convert the Tea Tribes Welfare Department to a full-fledged department and to grant at least 500 cores every year.

8. To increase of the daily wage of the tea garden labourers to Rs. 300.

9. To survey the ceiling surplus lands occupied by the tea planters and distribute such land to the tea garden labourers living in temporary house.

10. Special census to collect the data regarding the population of tea garden labourers and other information.

11. To grant financial aid to ex- tea garden labourers for the building of house.

12. To reserve seats for the tea garden labourers’ students in the following manner-

   a. Medical College---- 5 nos. of seat in each college.
   b. Engineering College--- 5 nos. of seat in each college.
   c. Agriculture College --- 5 nos. of seat in each college.
   d. Veterinary College--- 5 nos. of seat in each college.
   e. College of Forestry---- 10 nos. of seat in each college.
   g. College of Fishery----- 10 nos. of seat in each college.
   h. Bachelor of Dental Surgery.---------- 3 nos. of seat in each college.
   i. B.SC Nursing--- 5 nos. of seat in each college.
   f. Pharmacist---- 5 nos. of seat in each college.
   g. Polytechnic--- 10 nos. of seat in each college.
h. Industrial Training Institution --------- 5 nos. of seat in each department.

i. Sericulture diploma-- 5 nos. of seat in each college.

j. University------ 5 nos. of seat in each department in each university of Assam.

13. Reservation of 10 nos. of seats in case of appointment of ACS, APS, AFS.

14. To eradicate the corruption in implementing the schemes under National Rural Health Mission. Implementation of fruitful schemes other than the existing P. P. schemes in medical field.

15. Supply of fresh drinking water to the tea garden areas.

16. To convert the Education Cell of tea gardens, established by the Assam Government into a full-fledged department under one independent Secretary to inspect the education system of tea and ex-tea tribes’ locality.

17. To reserve seats in Medical, Engineering and other institutions of higher education, on the basis of population separately for Brahmaputra Valley and Barak Valley.

18. To constitute a separate Sub-Committee for issuing Tea Tribes certificate to the members of the community.

Besides these basic demands for the protection of the interest of the tea and ex-tea garden labourers, ‘Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association’ is also concerned with the interest of the state as a whole. In case of the border dispute between Assam and Nagaland ‘Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association’ has been expressing strong resentment and staging protest against it through a democratic way. In a memorandum to the Prime Minister, ‘Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association’ showed their concern about the issue and mentioned that “the border clash between Assam and Nagaland since a long period of time has reached a serious violent situation. Recently on 26th July, 2014, two students Sri Filson Kujur and Sri Ajay
Garh, resident of Roman ‘Basti’ under Urium Ghat Police station of Dhansiri sub Division, dist. Golaghat, Assam, had been kidnapped by some unknown persons. Local public were demanding unconditional release of these students. The local people were staging “Dharna” in a democratic way on 12th August, 2014, in front of 155 CRPF Camp, deployed as neutral force, to maintain peace, law and order in ‘B’ sector of Assam Nagaland border. But 155 CRPF ordered ‘lathi’ charge on the public and surprisingly at the same time the Naga extremist started gun fire on the Assamese people gathered there, which resulted in 11 people killed on the spot. Then near about 16 villages were set ablaze and 726 houses were burnt by Nagas. Out of fear and to save their life people ran for safety. But a sudden attack of Naga over the Assamese people led to loss of life and property in Assam. The loss has not yet been rehabilitated. But the government of Assam has not been able to take any kind of immediate measures except deploying ‘Seema Suraksha Bal’(SSB) as a neutral force in the place of CRPF to resolve the clash between the two states.”

Moreover, Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association condemned the massacre that took place between the two states and the attitude of the state government by stating that “We the ATTSA, deeply condemn this illegal activity over the Assamese people and the irresponsibility of the Government. So, we request you to take necessary action for the permanent solution of Assam Nagaland border as soon as possible. Otherwise ATTSA will be bound to take unruly revolution against the government for the sake of the Assamese people.” Through the memorandum, Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association mentioned six demands, which are expected to be fulfilled by the Central Government. Demands were—

1. Immediate intervention of Central Government over Assam-Nagaland border issue.
2. Immediate release of the two students Filson Kujur and Ajay Garh.

3. High level inquiry over the illegal attack on innocent Assamese farmers and put convicts under judicial trial.

4. Legal action on CRPF and SSB officials who indulged in violating the roles of neutral force.

5. Compensation for all the dead, injured and homeless Assamese people.

6. Overall development of the Assam-Nagaland border area.

Since its inception, ‘Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association’ has been demanding of the Government of Assam to solve the problems faced by the tea garden labourers in their life through democratic movement, and sent several memoranda to Chief Ministers of the state in this regard. However, the government has not yet paid due attention to their demands. Wage hike, adequate medical facilities, supply of fresh drinking water, better education facilities, supply of nutritious foods, repairing of roads inside the gardens, inclusion of the tea tribes in Scheduled Tribes (P) list, permanent land holding, implementation of Rajib Gandhi Rural Electrification Plan inside tea gardens etc are their main demands, which they want to be fulfilled by the government.

However, in September, 2001, Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association in a meeting, held in the Amateur Theater Hall, Golaghat, with the students’ leaders of Ahoms, Chutias and Koch-Rajbanshis, decided to fight jointly from a united platform for their Scheduled Tribes (P) status. Later on, the leader of Morans and Motoks also joined them. Since then all the six communities have been fighting for their Scheduled Tribes (P) status from a common platform, known as ‘Choi Janagoosthi Eikya Mancha’.
5.5 ADIVASI ORGANISATION OF ASSAM:

In the year 1957 under the leadership of Mamias Tusu, the then member of the legislative Assembly from Gosaigaon Constituency, ‘All Assam Munda, Orang and Santhal Conference’ was formed at Grahampur. Since the inception of the organization, it has worked as a social organization. Later on in 1959 in a convention held at Goruvacha Village under the initiative of Mamius Tusu, Francis Hans and Mamius Marandi, it was renamed as ‘Adivasi Council of Assam’ (ACA). Dineshwar Tasha mentioned that since the inception of the organization, it has been recognizing the tea garden and ex-tea garden labourers’ labourers of Assam as ‘Adivasi’. During the time of communal riot in Kokrajhar, in spite of having good understanding with Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association, probably misled by Assam Adivasi Council, a new organization was formed parallel to the Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association. This new organization emerged as ‘All Adivasi Student Association of Assam’ (AASAA) on 2nd July 1996 under the leadership of Justin Lakra and Joseph Minj. Granting scheduled tribes status to the Adivasis of Assam has been the top most priority in its many memoranda, Mahasabhas resolutions and democratic movements at state and national level. In support of their scheduled tribes (P) demand, this organization organized a number of mass rallies and other demonstrations demanding implementation of the Plantation Labour Act of 1951, wage hike, reducing the working hours (Current 7 am to 4.30 pm to 9 am to 4.30 pm) and abolition of bilateral wage agreement between ‘Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha’ and Consultative Committee of Plantation Association (CCPA) and compilation of tea industry with both the Plantation Labour Act 1951 and the Minimum Wage Act 1948 and so on.
In this context, the comment of Raphael Kujur, the president the organization, is worth mentioning when says, “our gardens suffer from a colonial hangover; workers are made to stay for long hours for paltry wages. We want the working hours to be changed from current 7 am to 4.30 pm to 9 am to 4.30 pm”.

It is worth mentioning here that the persecution of the Adivasi people of Assam, which has been caused due to the rise of ethnic nationalism and related militancy across the states and violent incidents that took place due to the border disputes, led to the loss of hundreds of innocent Adivasis lives and rendered them homeless. In 1996, 200 hundred Adivasis lost their life due to violent clashes between Bodo terrorist and Adivasi in the district of Bongaigoan and Kokrajhar. Similarly, in 1998, at least 100 Adivasis again lost their life in repeated attacks during the months of May- September by the militants of National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) in Kokrajhar. Again in July 2002, the same militant group massacred 9 Adivasis and 5 others in the district. On 25th July, 2003 in the Pengari incidents the members of Assam Adivasi Student Association of Assam namely, Nathaniel Munda, Dambu Hasa Purty, Sanika Sawansi, Joseph Barla, Mangra Gowala, Basdeo Gowala, Jiten Tanti and Arun Tanti were shot dead and many others injured and crippled for life.

On 24th November, 2007, during the Mass rally for Scheduled Tribes demand an Adivasi girl was stripped naked and chased in public and many others were brutally beaten and many leaders of the organization were put in the jail. Many Adivasi people living in the border areas of Assam, viz. at Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border area (Sonitpur and Lakhimpur), Assam-Nagaland border area (Golaghat, Moriani) were killed during the violence arising out of the border disputes.
From the above mentioned incidents it is revealed that the *Adivasi* people of Assam are one of the most vulnerable sections for the violent attacks by the militant groups of other communities of the region.

Before the formation of *Adivasi* organization in Assam, the *Adivasi* people were thought to be included in the term ‘tea and ex tea garden tribes’ (*Chah Janajati and prakton Chah Janagoosthi*). All the official correspondences or any letter of recommendation sent from the state government to the central government regarding the issue of Schedule Tribes status was always done under the above mentioned name. Their demand for enlisting the *Adivasi* of Assam in Scheduled Tribes list was over looked by the Central and State Governments, on the ground that it is not possible to include the tea garden labourers as ‘tea tribes’, because no tribes could be recognized under this brand name. The *Adivasi* leaders opined that “now it become very clear that this very approach in such recommendations is clearly designed by the government of Assam to deprive the *Adivasi* of Assam from getting Scheduled Tribes status, because constitutionally it is impossible to get Schedule Tribes status under such unconstitutional names.\(^{18}\) As a result of which the whole process is delayed and becomes complicated. Only because of this tea garden labourers of Assam have been bifurcated into two sections i.e. ‘tea tribes’ and ‘*Adivasi*’.

Before the formation of Assam Adivasi Students’ Association of Assam, under the pressure of other *Adivasi* organizations, the Assam Government with the help of the then speaker Prithibi Majhi appealed to the Central Government to remove the area of restriction on the way of granting Schedule Tribes status to tea garden labourers through a letter (no. LADS 96/08 dated 06/01/96). Another letter dealt with fresh inclusion of *Adivasi* in the Schedule Tribes (p) list. For this purpose,
Prithibi Majhi with the help of Adivasi Council prepared a list of 97 communities under names ‘Tea & Ex Tea Tribes. The Assam assembly had passed a resolution to grant Scheduled Tribes to the ‘Tea Tribes’ along with the six other communities on 5th August 2004. Unfortunately, the letters failed to get approval from the Central Government and the Registrar General of India (RGI) for following reasons.

1. The letters failed to present the Adivasi as Scheduled Tribes and the 5 major characteristic of tribal, (primitive traits, distinctive culture, shyness of contact with the community at large, geographical isolation, backwardness) required to be recognized as Schedule Tribes were missing.

2. The letters presented Tea & Ex Tea tribes to be included in the Scheduled Tribes list. The Registrar General of India rejected the term ‘The Tribes’ being unconstitutional.

3. The list of 97 communities was very confusing and misleading. The letters appealed to include the Scheduled Castes as Scheduled Tribes, which is constitutionally unacceptable.

4. Some other request to include Adivasis and Tea Tribes in the same plan as the communities like Ahom, Chutia, Koch Rajbanshi, Morat and Motok etc, which is unacceptable for the Registrar General of India.

On the other hand, a resolution concerning with the demand of scheduled tribes of the Adivasi of Assam was also placed on the floor of parliament, but due to lack of adequate justification Registrar General of India rejected the proposal for the following reasons.

1. Lack of intention of Assam Government to include Adivasi in the Scheduled Tribes list. In 1978 the Ministry of Home Affairs recommended 14 tea garden labourers’ tribes, but the Assam government refused to accept the
recommendation of Ministry of Home Affairs on the plea that tea garden labourers are better off than the local tribes.

2. Registrar General of India stated that the Adivasi has lost their original tribal characteristics.

3. There will be a drastic change in the political scenario of Assam, for around 1 crore population i.e. 50 pc of Assam population will be Scheduled Tribes resulting in Scheduled Tribes state, so after declaring tea garden labourers as scheduled tribes, the state would become a scheduled Tribes state. As a result of which ruling class will be sent out of power.

4. ‘Tea Tribes’ term is unconstitutional and no way can be included under Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes list.

5. Registrar General of India has not received any ethnography reports on the Adivasi of Assam.

Under such circumstances All Adivasi Students’ Association of Assam with the support of other Adivasi organizations, has consistently been pressurizing the government to stop the process of inclusion of the Adivasis as ‘Tea Tribes’. Further recognition of tea garden labourers as Adivasi by the Assam Government, media, other ethnic groups of the region and public gave the Adivasis a sense of self-pride and identity that intensified their assertion for tribal identity appropriate and clear to them and thus they further started re-asserting their tribal identity.”

As a result, several of Adivasi organizations including militant organization emerged at different point of time, such as ‘Birsa Commando Force (BCF)’, ‘Adivasi National Liberation of Assam (ANLA)’, ‘Adivasi People’s Army (APA)’, ‘Adivasi Dragon Fighters (ADF)’, etc. Apart from these, the literature published by the Adivasi literate section viz; ‘Ghariaya Goith’, ‘Adivasi Awaz’, ‘Ulgulan’ and other literature
published by All Adivasi Students’ Association of Assam such as, pamphlets, memoranda, souvenirs and press release plays a vital role in the Adivasi Movement of Assam.

However, after the Beltola incident on 27th November, 2007, a numbers of Adivasi organizations submitted memoranda to Assam and Central government demanding Scheduled Tribes status to the Adivasi of Assam. Mr. Joseph Toppo, after returning as Member of Parliament from Tezpur Constituency in 2009, demanded Scheduled Tribes status to Adivasi in parliament a number of times. In this regard, he demanded the then Prime Minister of India (Manmohan Singh) through a letter dated November, 24th 2010 no. 011-23094787/23093781, to grant urgently and immediately the Scheduled Tribes status to the Adivasis of Assam. However, no fruitful, result came out of these efforts.

In the last part of 2011, a tripartite talk was held between the representatives of Assam government and central government and Adivasi organization, regarding the granting of scheduled tribes (P) status to Adivasi. Central government directed the Assam government to form an Expert Committee to prepare separate Ethnographic Reports of the tribes and castes of the tea garden labourers of Assam. In August 2011, an Expert Committee was formed. The members of the committee were Dr. S.B. Pando, Chunuram Hembrom and Gonesh Kurmi, who prepared the required ethnographic reports and submitted it to the Central Government through Assam Government. This Expert Committee was assisted by a Monitoring Committee consisting of the heads of the Adivasi organization, such as Kanu Murmu (the convener), Pradeep Kawah, Rupsing Garh, Rupnath Bhumij, Stephen Ekka, Wilfred Topno and Rajkumar Toppo. Hence, the triangle efforts of Adivasi organization through the Monitoring Committee, All Adivasi Association of Assam

185
and Scheduled Tribes Demand Committee have been playing an important role in the game of bargaining with the governments.

5.6 IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONS ON THE LABOURERS LIVING INSIDE THE TEA GARDEN

The survey reveals that except trade unions (with specific wings) and Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association (with primary units), All Adivasi Students’ Association of Assam (without any wings) no other organization has been working in the sample tea gardens. However, the trade unions are very active in all the tea gardens but the activities of the students’ union are not very significant. In all tea gardens, trade unions in the form of ‘Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha’ and ‘Assam Chah Karmachari Sangha’ are working actively. Trade unions are primarily concerned with the economic aspect of the workers working in the tea gardens. The Presidents and Secretaries of these organizations are very close to the management. On the other hand, management also tries to maintain a good relationship with them. The managers try to resolve the problems of the labourers regarding wages, bonuses, medical facilities, house repairing, and house allotting etc. by consulting with the leaders of the trade unions.

In the poor tea gardens, labourers often revolt against the authorities due to deprivation of their due share. Trade unions are very active in these tea gardens. The trade union leaders of these tea gardens are kept in close contact by the garden authorities for the smooth functioning of the gardens. In Rungajan T.E. and Cinnamara T.E. trade unions are consulted by the garden authorities even on the matters of management. Besides the poor tea gardens, in other tea gardens too trade unions are playing a significant role in the labourers' society inside the tea garden as
well as in the administration of the tea gardens. In this respect Meghraj Karmakar mentioned in his article that actually the leaders of tea garden labourers refer to the leaders of the trade union. However, they concentrate their focus on the tea industry not on their society. They are more close to the tea garden authorities than to the labourers. They are always concerned with the profit and loss of the industry. Karmakar also mentioned that trade union leaders get involved in these matters because they are also benefited from these.²¹

On the other hand, students’ organizations are concerned with the socio-economic and political development of the tea and ex-tea garden labourers of Assam. The primary units of Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association are working inside the tea gardens in a disorganized manner. Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association has primary units inside the tea gardens, and members of such units are chosen from the youths belonging to labourers’ families. However, the youth of tea garden labourers are scared of joining the primary unit, as the garden authorities always discourage the youths from joining these organizations. The parents of the youths who join these organizations are also punished for allowing them to do so. Parents are told by the subordinate officials not to allow their children to get involved in the activities of these organizations, otherwise they will be sacked from their duties; sometimes parents are punished by reducing wages and other facilities on the plea of negligible offences, sometimes they are offered better facilities for not allowing their children to be involved in such activities.

Regarding the organizational structure of Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association and All Adivasi Students’ Association of Assam, labourers were asked by the researcher whether any unit of such organizations are there inside the tea gardens or not. Surprisingly in response 100 PC labourers replied negatively. But
they informed that a few members of such organizations live in the gardens. But they never try to involve them in their activities. They have their own jurisdiction within which they perform their activities, most of which are not known by the labourers. Generally, they used to come to the labourers only to seek their participation in rallies or such other demonstrations where huge gatherings are necessary to prove the intensity of the protest. Most of the labourers are not aware of the causes of such protest, only a few are aware of the causes of such demonstration. Moreover, due to work load they do not like to join in such activities of the organizations. Because, if they remain absent from their duty then they will not get wages for their period of absence. Even then some of them like to participate in such activities of these organizations. The following table shows the responses of the labourers regarding the participation in the activities of the students’ organizations.

Table 5.1

**Participation of the labourers in the activities organizations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tea Gardens</th>
<th>Modes of Participation</th>
<th>Raw Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Actively Participated</td>
<td>Partially Participated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koomtai T.E.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoolungooree T.E.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rungajan T.E.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinnamara T.E.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.70</td>
<td>33.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalowjan T.E.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatoonga T.E.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.30</td>
<td>6.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column Total</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Field Survey)
The table 5.1 indicates that the majority of tea garden labourers do not participate in the organizational activities. Participation is limited to a few jobless labourers (during off season) and educated youths living inside the tea gardens. Only, 9.20 pc of labourers actively participate or are closely related to these organizations. Of course, they do not possess any regular membership, but they have regular contact with the members of these organizations. Most of the labourers of this category are related to Assam Tea Tribes Student Association.

20 pc of labourers participate partially in the activities of the organizations. Only in the off season they can participate in such activities. Moreover, due to the heavy work schedule they have to work in the garden round the clock, so they can participate occasionally in such activities. Sometimes they are not even informed by anybody about such activities or they are not allowed by the garden authorities to participate in such activities and are even threatened verbally by the ‘sardars’. So, they cannot involve themselves regularly in the activities of the organizations.

On the other hand, 68.50 pc of labourers are not involved in such activities. The labourers of this category informed that due to heavy burden of tea garden works and poor economic condition of their families they do not like to join the activities of the organizations. They are scared of their wages and bonuses being reduced if they remain absent from their duties for such activities.

2.30 pc of labourers are not interested in such activities. They believe that they won’t get food unless they work and before thinking about the society, they must think about their families. They cannot let their family members die of hunger.

The study reveals that in rich tea gardens, labourers are engaged regularly in the tea garden activities; hence they cannot spare time for other activities. But, in poor tea gardens most of the labourers are jobless. They used to go outside the
garden in search of work as daily wage earner. Hence, they do not get time for other activities. Moreover, the jobless labourers of these tea gardens are hired by the political parties and other organizations to participate in the rallies and public gathering where a huge gathering is required. The labourers of this category informed that from such participation they can earn, so they like to join such activities. As such, they are not interested in their organizations from which they cannot earn.

5.7 AWARENESS ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS:

The study reveals that the students’ organizations of tea garden labourers have made continuous efforts at the state level to unite their people on ethnic lines under the banner of either ‘tea-tribes’ or ‘Adivasi’. But their efforts can not touch the labourers living at the grass root level. As such, a large chunk of the labourers living inside the tea gardens are still not aware of the activities of the students. In spite of the presence of the members of the organizations inside the tea gardens, the awareness of the labourers is not found to be in high level. Therefore it was felt necessary by the researcher to know about the awareness of the labourers regarding the activities of these organizations. The following table highlights the awareness of the labourers about the activities of students’ organizations. On the basis of their responses they are categorized into three groups, such as, ‘aware’, ‘partially aware’, and ‘not aware’.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Tea Gardens</th>
<th>Opinions</th>
<th>Row Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aware</td>
<td>Partially Aware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koomtai T.E.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.20</td>
<td>29.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoolungooree T.E.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rungajan T.E.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinnamara T.E.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.70</td>
<td>26.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalowjan T.E.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td>38.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatoonga T.E.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column total</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Field Survey)

The above table highlights the facts that the majority of labourers are not aware of the activities of the students’ organizations, only 14 pc of labourers are aware of the activities of the students’ organizations. On the other hand 35.70 pc of labourers are partially aware of these activities and 50.30 pc of labourers are found not aware of the activities of the students’ organizations.

The study reveals that the economic condition of the tea gardens affects the level of awareness of the labourers about the students’ organizations. In the poor tea gardens, due to poor economic condition labourers have to focus their attention on protecting their economic interest only; as a result, other general demands of their society remain unattended. On the other hand, due to lack of employment inside the gardens, most of the labourers are working outside as daily wage earners. A good gathering of daily wage earner labourers from Rungajan T.E. in Tokani Circle area
(Centre place of Golaghat Town) of Golaghat is a common scene. They come out of the tea gardens early in the morning to Golaghat town in search of work. Some of the women labourers informed that they also work in the houses of town dwellers as daily wage earner. Under such circumstances, the labourers of this category hardly get time to think about their identity or other social, political rights.

In the rich tea gardens labourers have to work under the strict surveillance of the authorities. Generally rich tea gardens are well managed and labourers do not get time for other activities. In comparison to poor gardens and middle standard gardens, rich tea gardens provide more fringe benefits to the labourers, Hence, the labourers need not cry for their day to day basic demands.

However, in case of one or two gardens certain exceptions are there. For example, being a poor garden, Cinnamara Tea Estate is known as one of the vibrant tea gardens of Jorhat district, as resentment against authority is very common here. It is the birth place of three prominent political leaders of tea garden labourers. They are Kamakha Prasad Tasha, Jibantara Ghatuar, Rupjyoti Kurmi. These political leaders have good hold upon the labourers. So, labourers are politically active, and frequently resort to protest against the authority for demanding their rights.

The attitude of the members of the organizations towards the labourers is also one of the factors responsible for low level of awareness of the labourers about the students’ organizations. For example, the presence of the members of the students’ organizations in Gatoonga T.E. is noticeable. A good number of members of these organizations belong to this garden. Actually they are the children of tea garden labourers. But unfortunately their activities among the labourers are found less inside the garden. As a result, labourers remain indifferent to these organizations. Moreover, one naked truth is that the members of these organizations are the
children of tea garden labourers and their basic needs are fulfilled from the salaries of their parents, working outside or inside the tea-gardens. If someday, their parents remain absent from their duties due to the involvement in the organizational activities then their salaries will surely be cut by the authorities. As a result, they will have to sleep on an empty stomach. So, it could be easily assumed that the active involvement of their parents in these organizations is not wanted by the members of these organizations. Another truth is that from the organizational activity, the members (except a few) of these organizations do not get any financial benefit; so, they have to depend upon their parents.

On the other hand, 50.30 pc of labourers are not aware of these organizations; they even do not know the names of the students’ organizations. The survey reveals that the activities of the students’ organizations at the grass root level i.e. within the tea gardens are not very significant. So labourers within the tea gardens remain indifferent to these organizations. Most of the members of these organizations are the inhabitants of tea gardens; even then they have not made any effort to mobilize the labourers to join their activities. But without the support, concern, and awareness of the labourers living at the grass root level, the success of their organizational activities or to fulfill the aspirations of tea garden labourers’ society is not possible.

Another significant factor responsible for the appalling attitude of the labourers towards the students’ organizations is their illiteracy. In this connection Dhorom Pat Nayak, a Central Committee member of Assam Tea Tribes Student Association, from Golaghat district informed the researcher that it is a very common practice of the trade unions existing inside the tea gardens that they seek help from the students’ organization, especially Assam Tea Tribes Student Association, for
staging demonstrations, rallies and such activities, and often labourers living inside tea gardens consider them as the Trade Union leaders. Actually this happens due to the illiteracy and ignorance of the labourers.

5.8 ROLE OF STATE

Since the inception of the tea industry in Assam there were a number of legislations made by the British Government during their reign, as well as by the Indian Government after independence. During the nascent stage of the tea industry in Assam the process of recruiting labourers from outside Assam to the tea plantations by the colonial planters was an unrestricted monopoly business. The emigration of indentured labourers to the tea plantations of Assam was organized initially under a free system with less control of the government. As a result of which, the recruited labourers had to suffer a lot. The Government of Bengal was informed through various sources and suggestions were made to take immediate action against malpractices. 22

During the first phase of the emigration of indentured labourers to Assam, the labourers were controlled by the Workmen’s Breach of Contract Act (Act of 1859). According to this Act a labourer was liable to prosecution and even imprisonment for breach of contract. Refusal to work and desertion was equally punishable offence and for which the labourer may be flogged subjected physical torture and imprisonment under the various provisions of this Act. The then Chief Commissioner of Assam, Fuller stated about the condition of labourers that they were deprived of all their freedom and their dismal conditions and atrocities inflicted on them reminded him one of the slave running in Africa and the global slave trade.
5.9 ACT III OF 1863

Considering the distressing condition of labourers’ recruitment system the then Bengal government decided to constitute a committee of enquiry in 1861. Consequently Act III of 1863 was passed by the government of Bengal, which put restriction on the system of labourers’ emigration and fixed the period of agreement for a maximum of five years and recruiters were asked to be licensed and labourers sent to Assam were to be given proper clothing, ration and medicine for the journey. A fine of Rs. 1000 or imprisonment was the highest punishment for the violation of any provision of the Act. The contractors were to submit the details of the labourers whenever needed by the Labour Superintendent.

5.10 ACT VI OF 1865

Another important legislation made by the government to protect the interest of the labourers working inside the tea plantations was the Act VI of 1865. The Act made provision for minimum wage of a labourer, working days in a week (six days) and contract tenure not exceeding four years. In case of violation of Act, the authorities of the tea gardens were to be fined Rs. 500 only. Unfortunately the provisions of the act were frequently violated by the authorities of the tea gardens. Garden authorities created certain badges to mislead the labourer. By showing these badges, garden authorities tried to convince the labourers that they were government authorized people, so they must be obeyed by the labourers and the labourers should work according to the terms and conditions laid by them. Otherwise the labourers could to be punished by the government. In actual practice those conditions were not mentioned anywhere in the Act, but it was a trick of the planters and contractors to deceive the labourers. The then Commissioner of Chotanagpur, Delson mentioned
about such kinds of labourers recruiting policies, in his letter to the Bengal Government, dated 7 December, 1868, that the aftermath of the tempting words of the professional contractors sent by the British planters were so attractive that it led the weavers, goldsmith and even the school going students, to come to work in the tea plantations of Assam.²⁵

5.11 Act of 1870

On 6th May, 1867 the Commissioner of Chotanagpur wrote a letter to the Bengal Government with an advice to remove the abnormalities of the labourers recruiting system.²⁶ The labourers brought by the contractors easily caught Cholera or other diseases due to the filthy environment in the labourers’ depot. So, the Commissioner urged the Bengal Government to look after the matters of individual procedure of labourers’ recruitment to Assam. Consequently a commission of enquiry was constituted in 1868 by the Bengal Government to examine the state of affairs and prospect of cultivation of tea in Assam Cachar and Syleth.²⁷ Accordingly the commission submitted its report along with certain suggestions to the government. In the report it was mentioned that the contractor must register the labourers by the district registration authority of the concerning district and to open a joint centre for the registration of the labourers. A resolution was also taken to establish the head office of the centre for the registration of the labourers, in any place except in Calcutta. But due to lack of finance it was not established. So, it continued to be controlled from Calcutta. A new legislation was made in the year 1870, which included certain new provisions, such as:
1. The *sardars* of the tea-gardens were given a license as given to the contractors, and empowered them to appoint up to 20 labourers in any tea garden as they wished.

2. Nobody could be involved in such activities without having a license. Otherwise they will be punished by having to pay fine or 3 months imprisonment.

3. Contractors were allowed to carry their individual venture of recruiting labourers.

4. A provision of labourer’s organization (consisting of 20 members) was made under the Act. Such organization could employ its members in any tea-garden without interference of *sarders* or contractors or anybody else.

5. The minimum wage under the Act. 1865 was abolished.

6. The tea-estates were given a wide range of powers over the indentured labourers. There was no minimum wage limit for the labourers and the labourers could be arrested and punished by the planters.

**5.12 ACT III OF BENGAL GOVERNMENT 1873**

Gradually the areas under tea plantation were increased and as a result of which the activities of Assam Tea Company was transformed to a favourable direction. With the increase of areas of the tea plantations there was a decrease of production cost in the tea industry. At the same time the rate of labourer appointment was also increased. Probably, due to an important factor, the flow of indentured labourers increased and in fact the labourers *sou moto* came to work in Assam along with the contractors or *Sardars*. In 1868-69, there was famine in Orissa, Rajputana, some provinces of North and South India and a few other places.
So the victims of the famine liked to emigrate to Assam with the recruiters. The labourers rushed to work in the plantations of Assam only to escape from the famine. “According to the letter of the then Commissioner to Bengal Government dated 1871, 3 May, that in 1870 there were altogether 13,700 numbers of labourers appointed in 260 numbers of tea gardens in the province. The contractors used to appoint the labourers without registering them in proper channel. Among the female labourers there were 60 years old women and even blind labourers were also appointed in the tea plantations. As a result, the system of labourers recruitment and appointment went out of control of the government. However, the Act of 1870 was repealed by a new legislation, the Act VII of Bengal Government 1873, which brought many changes in case of labourers recruitment. The task of appointment and emigration was made free of cost. According to the legislation of 1873 the appointment procedure of this kind continued till 1981. The main objective of the legislation was to encourage the procedure of ‘Sardari’ system and discourage the procedure of recruitment and appointment through individual and secret system. But due to financial crisis among the recruiters this system of recruitment did not succeed. Later on, a commission was constituted by the government of India to examine the working of the Bengal Act III of 1873.

5.13 LABOUR COMMISSION OF 1880

To solve the problem of the tea industry that arose after 1878, a petition was filed in 1880 by the Indian Tea District Association in London. Through the petition the association demanded to reduce the expenditure of the recruiter in case of import and export of the labourers, and to increase the contract period from three years to five years. So, the Bengal Government constituted a Labour Commission on
13 December, 1880, to consider the whole matter of emigration of labourers. The main task of this Commission was to create another division to supply the labourers to the tea plantations. However, after getting the recommendation of the Governor General it transformed into Act I of 1882.

5.14 BENGAL ACT I 1882

The report of the Labour Commission in 1881 led to the Bengal Act I of 1882, which is also known as Dhubri system of recruitment. This Act provided minimum wage subject to completion of minimum task; and gave powers to the inspectors to reduce the schedule task provided for payment of subsistence allowance in case of sickness.\(^{33}\)

5.15 BENGAL ACT OF 1889

In 1889, another Act was passed by the Bengal Government which specified the route to be followed to bring the labourers and ensured accommodation, food, water supply, clothing, medical attendance on the road and even disposal of dead body.

5.16 BENGAL ACT OF 1893

As it was full of anomalies, the Act of 1889 was amended in 1893 and a new Act III of 1893 was passed. According to this Act the maximum term of contract was reduced from five to four years. On 16 October, 1895, the trading department of Bengal Government appointed a Commission of Enquiry to investigate the condition of the labourers of tea industry. Accordingly, the commission submitted its report in 1896 and on the basis of this report, the Act VI of 1901 was passed.
5.17 ASSAM LABOUR AND EMIGRATION ACT, 1901

Through this Act an attempt was made to bring the contractors, who supplied unregistered labourers to the tea-industry under government control. Provisions were made to ban the contractors and instead of them ‘Sardars’ were allowed to recruit free labourers. On the other hand, certain provisions were also made to punish the guilty. The implementation of this Act provided a relief to some extent in regard to the emigration of labourers. This Act also provided an increase of the minimum wage of a labourer and the period of contract remained the same i.e. for four years.

5.18 ACT OF 1915

This Act abolished the contractor (Arkattis) system and made the garden ‘Sardars’ the only recruiting agents in recruiting districts. Assam Labourers’ Board was formed to look after the agents. The Board acted on behalf of the Government and it also examined the activities of the labourers’ organization formed in the tea district of Assam.34

5.19 TEA DISTRICT EMIGRATION LABOUR ACT 1932:

On the basis of the recommendation of the Royal Commission on Labour, 1931, the Tea District Emigration Labour Act in 1932 was passed which came into force on 1 October, 1933, and the Assam Labour and Emigration Act 1901 was repealed.

The Act of 1932 provided three types of recruiting systems, such as controlled, restricted and uncontrolled. The Act also included provisions for the statutory right of emigrant labourers to be repatriated after 3 years.
5.20 WORKMEN COMPENSATION ACT, 1923

Another legislation passed by the British Government in India which provide for payment of compensation to workmen and their dependents in case of injury and accident.

However, the working of Tea District Emigration Labour Act, 1932 and the Workmen Compensation Act 1923, could not provide much relief to the tea garden labourers. Therefore some other Acts were also implemented by the government, such as, the Payment of Wage Act 1936, the Industrial Employment Standing Order Act 1946, and the Industrial Dispute Act 1947, which could provide little relief to the labourers.

5.21 THE PLANTATION LABOUR ACT, 1951

The Plantation Labour Act 1951 is a landmark in the history of the tea plantation in India. The main objectives of this act are to provide welfare measures to plantation (tea, coffee, rubber, and cinchona) labourers and regulate the condition of workers. It extends to the whole of India except the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The Act is comprehensive and includes several provisions for the improvement of the condition of labourers living inside the tea gardens of Assam. In short, it is the panacea of labour diseases. According to the Act, provisions have been made to revise the wages of labourers from time to time, and to provide proper social security measures including bonus and retirement benefits, other welfare measures like provisions for better health and welfare, leave with payment, medical aids, leisure time, education facilities and so on. The state government enacted the Assam Plantation Labour Rule in 1956, to implement the welfare measures provided by the Plantation Labour Act of 1951.

201
In spite of having a wide range of remedies for the problems of the tea garden labourers, due to lack of proper implementing mechanism, Plantation Labour Act could not provide much relief to them. The implementing mechanism of the Act is inadequate. The inspectors requited by the State Labour Department to inspect the tea gardens are not sufficient and they have to cover a large number of gardens located in the outskirts or remote areas. On the other hand, the apathy of the garden authorities to provide adequate facilities to the labourers is quite evident from the demands made by the tea garden labourers’ organizations for the proper implementation of the Plantation Labour Act in different points of time. In this regard the garden management viewed that it involves huge expenditure, which is not possible to bear by them as the profits of the garden is not stable. Profit greatly depends upon the auction rate of the tea. The proprietor and managing director of Dalowjan tea garden opined that “the tea auction rate always fluctuates, though we produce same quality tea for years, but the rate varies in the auction. So, we are not sure about our profit and as such we cannot afford to provide all the fringe benefits as mention in the Plantation Labour Act.”

5.22 Assam Tea Plantation Provident Fund Scheme of 1955:

Another significant legislation is the Employee’s Provident Fund Scheme Act of 1952, which envisaged savings for the workers in the organized sector industries in the whole country except the tea plantations of Assam. However, the government of Assam made provision for the tea plantation workers and in 1955 passed the ‘Assam Tea Plantations Provident Fund Scheme’ commonly known as ‘Assam Act of X of 1955’. It is an important piece of Labourers’ welfare legislation enacted by the government to provide social security benefits to the workers.
The Assam Tea Plantations Provident Fund (ATPPF) Scheme covers the tea garden labourers of Assam and it came into force on 12 September 1955. After introduction of Provident Fund Scheme, a series of legislations have followed with certain added benefits such as,

2. Family Pension Scheme, 1972.

Tea garden labourers hardly provide for effective security against contingencies like old age, death, invalidity and other emergency expenses with their small amount of earning. So, they have to depend on the amount of work they can complete in a week or a day, because whenever they are not able to work, for any reason, then they will not be entitled to get wages. As a result, they have to face privation and hardship. It is to meet this type of need that the concept of social security was developed. The objective of The Assam Tea Plantation Provident Fund Scheme is to provide social security to workers and employees working in the tea gardens of Assam.

The founder of The Assam Tea Plantation Provident Fund scheme, Late Omeo Kumar Das in his inaugural speech delivered on the occasion of inauguration of The Assam Tea Plantation Provident Fund Scheme, on 12th September 1955 said about the scheme that “The Tea Plantation Provident Fund Scheme which indeed is a landmark in the history of the plantation industry in Assam”. On the same occasion the then Chief Minister Late Bishnuram Medhi on his inaugural speech said that “hitherto tea garden labourers, after years of services could scarcely look forward to any savings to fall back upon in their old age, and were often forced to become object of charity…The present legislation has provided opportunity to contribute a
portion of their earning which will be returned to them augmented two fold at the
time of retirement. Compared to the future benefit, the present hardship, if any,
should be gladly accepted.”  

Besides the above mentioned legislations there were a large number of
parliamentary commissions constituted from time to time to investigate the matter of
granting Scheduled Tribes status to the tea garden labourers of Assam. The
parliamentary committees like ‘A.K. Chanda Commission’, ‘Lakur Commission’,
‘Dhebar Commission’,and ‘Pataskar Commission’, etc were constituted from time to
time, which recommended for the inclusion of the tea and ex tea tribe community of
Assam for inclusion in the list of Scheduled Tribes.

It is worth mentioning here that the state government has also responded
positively in this connection. The state government headed by the then Chief
Minister of Assam Late Hiteswar Saikia also recommended the government of India
for granting Scheduled Tribes status to the tea garden labourers of Assam. Similarly,
Tarun Gogoi, the then Chief Minister of Assam had also brought this long standing
demand of six communities (i.e. Kosh- Rajbangshi, Moran, Motok, Ahom, Chutia
and Tea Garden labourers) of Assam for inclusion in the list of Scheduled Tribe of
the state to the Honourable Prime Minister of India. In 2004, pursuing a unanimous
resolution adopted in the floor of the Assam Legislative Assembly Prithbi Majhi, the
then speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly had also led an all party delegation
of Assam Legislative Assembly to New Delhi and submitted a memorandum to the
central leaders to this effect.

In 2013, the state government submitted the ethno graphic records of 36 tea
tribes to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and recommended their inclusion in the
Scheduled Tribes list. But the task force has left out 10 of them from its
recommendation, saying that they do not conform to the criterion for inclusion in the Scheduled Tribes list of Assam.

In 2014, the state government had also recommended the granting of Scheduled Tribes status to five tribal communities, viz: Ahom, Motok, Moran, Kosh-Rajbangshi and Chutiya along with Tea Tribes.\textsuperscript{39} However, the Central Government also decided to reduce the number of criteria for granting Scheduled Tribes status to the tribes demanding for inclusion in the list of Scheduled Tribes. Union Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram said that “the centre would bring down the number of criteria for scheduling a tribe to three from the existing five conditions in view of the changing circumstances. The five existing criteria for scheduling a tribe are losing this relevance and we want to bring down the number of criteria to three.”\textsuperscript{40}

Primitive traits, geographical isolation, district culture, shyness of contact with communities at large and economic backwardness are the five criteria that a community needs to fulfill to be qualified for the Scheduled Tribes status. According to Jual Oram “As of today, shyness of contact, which has been one of the conditions for scheduling a tribe, is no longer relevant except one or two cases such as Jarawa Community of the Andamans. The criteria of geographical isolation is also under review and we will now seek an ethnographical report Vis-a-Vis scheduling”.\textsuperscript{41} At same time, the Union Minister also said that scheduling was a long drawn and multi-disciplinary process involving several stages and the matter involved seeking opinion from the state government concerned, the Registrar General of India (RGI) and the National Commission of Scheduled Tribes.\textsuperscript{42}

However, recently Government of India has put forwarded a positive step towards the demand of six communities of Assam, namely Moran, Motok, Chutia,
Koch-Rajbanshi, Tea tribes and Tai-Ahoms, by taking decision to set a committee for considering the matter of granting Scheduled Tribes status to these communities. On 29th Mach 2016, the Central Government announced its plans to constitute a committee to consider the demand of the six communities and report back within a specific time frame. A delegation led by Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports, Sarbananda Sonowal and comprising Bharatiya Janata Party Members of Parliament, Himanta Biswa Sarmah and a 20 member delegation representing the six communities called on Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh. Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Kiron Rijiju was also present at the meeting on 29th February, 2016. 43 The Home minister in a significant move decided to take over the issue of the six communities from Tribal Affairs Ministry. Sarbananda Sonowal said to reporter of The Assam Tribune that a committee headed by Special Secretary (internal Security) has been constituted, which would submit its report by May 30, 2016. The committee would look into all aspects of the issue of granting Scheduled Tribes status to the six communities, including drafting of modalities. Clarifying his comment, he said that the modalities would pave the way for declaration of Scheduled Tribes status to the six communities. However, in case of Tea Tribes, still there is a confusion regarding the granting of Scheduled Tribes status to all the tea garden labourers irrespective of their castes and tribes or to the Adivasi tribes only.

On the other hand, the tribal organization of Assam has been opposing the State’s move to grant Scheduled Tribes status to six communities of the state. The Coordination Committee of the Tribal Organization of Assam (CCTOA), urged the Central government not to proceed in this regard. The representatives of the organization also proposed to sit in a tripartite meeting before the final decision.
Aditya Khaklary, the General Secretary of All Assam Tribal Sangha, said that granting Scheduled Tribes status to the communities living in the plains would spark trouble across the country.\textsuperscript{44} He stated in a press conference, held on 28 May, 2016, that according to the constitution these communities do not fulfill the criteria needed to be Scheduled Tribes. For that, the constitution has to be amended; it will create more trouble across the country. Then everyone will ask for the Scheduled Tribes status. Their Other Backward Classes status should be retained and if needed they should be provided other facilities like political reservation.\textsuperscript{45} All Assam Tribal Sangha also demanded the State as well as Central government that they should discard their ‘anti-tribal’ policy, describing the move to accord Scheduled Tribes status to the ethnic groups as contrary to the Constitution of the country. It reasoned that these groups do not fulfill the legal criteria to acquire the Scheduled Tribes status.\textsuperscript{46}

Moreover, the Coordination Committee of the Tribal Organization of Assam, held a national convention in Guwahati, where the organization vowed to undertake different forms of protest including giving call for an indefinite ‘Assam bandh’ and blocking the National Highways and Railways routes.\textsuperscript{47}

According to the leader of ‘Choy Janagusthi Ekyamansha’, their demand for granting Scheduled Tribes status is genuine and in no way it would harm the tribals of the region. In a press meet, the leaders of the organization expressed their disappointment by stating that the Central Government had to submit the report of the committee for the preparation of Modalities, before 23 June, 2016. However, due to Election’s Code of Conduct, the time limit has been extended up to 22 September, 2016. So, the organization demanded for the submission of the report of the committee constituted for the purpose, otherwise, they would go for an unruly
movement against the Government. In a tripartite meeting held between representatives of the Union Home Ministry, Assam government and six ethnic communities in New Delhi, on 23rd September, 2016, fixed 15th October, 2016, as the last date for submitting modalities to grant Scheduled Tribes status to six communities of Assam. However, the matter has been still pending with the Central Government.

Considering the above mentioned circumstances, tea garden labourers, along with other five communities, are in a state of confusion regarding the government assurance of granting Scheduled Tribes status to them, as it is delayed by the state authority for this and that. Due to the opposition from tribal organization, the matter of granting Scheduled Tribes status to these six communities has become more complex.

However, the study reveals that the Central as well as State Government have enacted various laws to improve the condition of the labourers of the tea gardens of Assam. For example, Plantation Labour Acts, 1951 and Assam Tea Plantation Provident Fund Scheme of 1955. Under Plantation Labour Acts, 1951, labourers are entitled to get medical facilities, sickness and maternity benefit, educational facilities for the children, housing facilities, provision of drinking water and ration etc. On the other hand, Assam Tea Plantation Provident Fund Scheme of 1955 provides social security against contingencies like old age, death, invalidity and other emergency expenses. The responsibility of implementation of welfare measures has been vested in the hands of garden authorities. The government of India has entrusted this responsibility to the garden authorities through the Plantation Labour Act of 1951 (PLA). The government of Assam gave this Act a concrete shape through the Assam Plantation Labour Rules of 1956, which provided
various welfare measures for the workers in the tea gardens. The survey reveals that to some extent only the rich gardens have implemented the provisions of the Act, and the middle standard tea gardens owned by native planters have implemented few of them. But in the poor gardens the provisions of Plantation Labour Act are entirely violated by the authority.

The tea garden areas are generally included under the Gram Panchayat areas. So, the schemes which are implemented by the Panchayat in the village areas also include the tea garden areas. Hence, labourers are also entitled to get the benefits of these schemes, such as, under ‘Indira Abas Yojana’ (IAY), labourers living inside the tea gardens get housing facilities. Under ‘Swarna Jayanti Gramin Swarojgar Yojana’, labourers living inside the tea gardens form Self Help Group (SHG), the families belonging to low income group are entitled to get Below Poverty Level (PBL) Card, Antodaya Card. Now a days, the roads running inside the tea gardens are to be repaired by the Panchayat concerned. Moreover, the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) provides 60 pc of medicine and financial aids for the infrastructural development to the hospitals of the tea gardens. The District authorities are authorized to inspect the hospitals of the tea gardens and look after the management of the hospitals, which receive assistance through the scheme. But in actual practice, the scenario of the life of the labourers inside the gardens is quite different. Assitances or facilities provided for the labourers through the provisions of the Acts and schemes are not reaching to all of them. The following table shows the opinions of the labourers regarding the assistances received from the governments.
TABLE: 5.3
ASSISTANCE RECEIVED FROM THE GOVERNMENT BY THE LABOURERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of tea gardens</th>
<th>Economic assistance</th>
<th>Social assistance</th>
<th>Educational assistance</th>
<th>Not received any assistance</th>
<th>Row Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Koomtai T.E.</td>
<td>8 9.80</td>
<td>4 4.90</td>
<td>8 9.80</td>
<td>82 75.60</td>
<td>82 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 2.5</td>
<td>8 10</td>
<td>70 87.5</td>
<td>80 100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoolungooree T.E</td>
<td>9 9</td>
<td>9 9</td>
<td>6 6</td>
<td>76 76</td>
<td>100 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rungajan T.E.</td>
<td>30 20</td>
<td>15 10</td>
<td>10 6.70</td>
<td>95 63.30</td>
<td>150 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 9.50</td>
<td>3 7.10</td>
<td>35 83.30</td>
<td>42 100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinnamara T.E.</td>
<td>24 20</td>
<td>4 3.30</td>
<td>12 10</td>
<td>80 66.70</td>
<td>120 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34 5.90</td>
<td>47 8.20</td>
<td>418 72.80</td>
<td>574 100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column Total</td>
<td>75 13.10</td>
<td>34 5.90</td>
<td>47 8.20</td>
<td>418 72.80</td>
<td>574 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY)

The above table indicates that 13.10 pc of labourers have received economic assistance from the government in kind or cash. Some of them have received food grains at subsidize rate, some other have received one time financial assistance from the fund of Member of Legislative Assembly etc. On the other hand, 5.90 pc of labourers have received social assistance; such as, fund for house and latrine building and tube well for drinking water etc. Another 8.20 pc of labourers have received educational assistance for their children. However, majority of the labourers, amounting to 72.80 pc, have not received any assistance from the government in cash or kind.

The labourers, who have received economic and social assistance for house or latrine are casual labourers. They also informed that it is a very tough task for them to be included in the beneficiary’s list to avail the facilities provided under schemes. In case of Panchayat Raj institutions, basically the Gram Sabhas are entrusted with the responsibilities of identifying the beneficiaries. The Gram
Panhayat carries out selection process through the Gram Sabha and submit the selection list to the Block and District Panchayata for approval. For this purpose Gram Sabha distributes application forms to the people in its meeting which is likely to be attended by all the voters. However, only one or two labourers attend such meetings, as such, the majority of labourers are not aware of these schemes. On the other hand, President, Secretary, Block officers and other officer of district level play a decisive role while approving the final list. They like to include in the list only those who are in their good books. As such, illiterate and ignorant labourers are deprived of such benefits. In case of educational assistance, those who are pursuing higher education in the colleges or other institutions are entitled to get such assistance under various schemes of the State Government.

In the sick or poor gardens, most of the labourers remain jobless during the off seasons. They are even not provided with the minimum benefits which are mentioned in the Plantation Labour Act 1951. In the rainy season they have to sleep with empty stomach, as they are not able to go outside the garden for work.

5.23 BASIC DEMANDS OF THE LABOURERS

Presently Assam alone produces more than half of the total tea production of the country. The production and cultivation of tea is increasing significantly over a period of time, which is 629.1 thousand tons in 2013 compared to estimated production of 590.12 thousand tons in 2012.\(^{50}\) But the increasing rate of production and profit of the tea industry has not improved the living standard of the tea garden labourers. The condition of the labourers living inside the tea gardens remains the same as in the British period, even deteriorating than before. The welfare measures
for the labourers undertaken by the garden authorities are in very miserable condition. Majority of them remain out of the reach of the labourers.

From the field survey, in the sample tea gardens of Golaghat and Jorhat district, it is revealed that in spite of having schemes and plans of the Central as well as State Government to develop the socio-economic condition of the labourers living inside the tea gardens of Assam, the condition of tea garden labourers is deplorable. In case of fringe benefits under the provision of Plantation Labour Act, it was found that only the rich gardens like Koomtai Tea Estate and Hoolungooree Tea Estate provide some of the benefits mentioned in Plantation Labour Act. For example, both the gardens provide adequate medical facilities to the labourers. Hospitals of both the gardens receive assistance under National Rural Health Mission Scheme and are provided with adequate infrastructure, staff, and permanent doctor. Labourers are also provided with transportation facilities in case of medical emergency. However, in poor tea gardens like Rungajan Tea Estate and Cinnamara Tea Estate and middle standard tea gardens like Dalowjan Tea Estate and Gatoonga Tea Estate medical facilities provided to the labourers are not sufficient. Except the rich tea gardens, in other tea gardens doctors are appointed on part time basis. Hospitals are running with one dresser and one or two nurses, without having adequate stock of medicine.

Majority of tea gardens in Assam do not have sufficient facilities for health, drinking water, sanitation system, electricity, and many of the welfare measures mentioned in Chapter III of the Plantation Labour Act 1951, which are to be provided by the tea garden authority.

The survey titled “Study of Health Problems and Nutritional Status of Tea Garden Population of Assam”, reveals that a high magnitude of under nutrition and infectious diseases exist among the tea garden population of Assam. Major
findings revealed by the survey are that the health problem in case of tea garden labourers is very serious and acute. The rich tea gardens generally have one hospital with adequate infrastructure and staff. But most of the tea garden hospitals are run by a dresser and one nurse without a doctor or part time doctor. On the other hand, he provisions of the Plantation Labour Act 1951 are not even in all respects these are lopsided provisions. The provisions incorporated in the Act have become onerous as these were formulated in the early years of the tea industry.

The tea garden labourer lines are neither urban, nor industrial nor a rural area. It is basically an industrial village cluster and is always kept underdeveloped so that the tea management company can get cheap labourers easily.

In 2001, the government of India set up the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) across the country with the aim ‘Education for All’ in view. The survey commission by Assam Sarva Siksha Abhiyan Mission (ASSAM) during 2002 shows that 25 pc of children in the age group of 16-19 are not in school in entire Assam, while 43 pc of which are among the tea gardens. Out of 2,46,843 children in the tea garden areas in the age group 1,05,821 (42.87 pc) are out of school". Consequently, Assam Sarva Siksha Abhiyan Mission decided to constitute the Tea Garden Education Committee (TGEC) to investigate into the matter of education of the children of tea garden areas. In 2003 Assam Human Development Report Estimates that 1,000 Tea Garden Education Committees were set up by 2003. The report of the committee indicated several constraints for the development of literacy campaign in the tea gardens such as:

1. Very poor quality infrastructure. Majority of tea gardens have only a lower primary school with capacity of 100 to 250 students.
2. Classes are held in very poor quality buildings with inadequate desks and benches.

3. Usually there are one to two teachers for four classes that have 100 to 250 students.

4. In majority of the schools, teachers work half day in the tea gardens and half day in schools.

5. Majority of schools are closed during the plucking time since both teachers and students work in the gardens during that time.

6. As the teachers are paid by the management, therefore, is liable to the management for managing the school.

7. As child labourer is highly encouraged in the tea gardens, in majority cases children leave school to work in the tea gardens for a nominal amount of money.

8. Teachers are paid very nominal salary as they are not involved in the production process.

The Public Distribution System (PDS) in the tea gardens was started during the later part of the nineteenth century by the British Planters to provide rice and other items to the labourers. In the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century, this distribution of food items was provided only to those who were employed, which was known as ‘ration’ and was extended to many other items. Under the present system, tea industry provides food grains through Public Distribution System under APL (Above Poverty Line) scheme. Food Corporation of India (FCI) supplies food grains to tea garden employees at a rate fixed by FCI. In addition to such rates, the tea garden employers are required to bear the landed cost of such food grains which includes transportation and landing charges.\textsuperscript{54}
Moreover, ration supplied to the labourers and their dependents are a part of their negotiated wage package. Labourers, who have ‘ration cards’, get sugar and other Government subsidized items from local fair price shops. Unfortunately, most of them do not have ration card.

In the rich tea gardens like Koomtai Tea Estate and Hoolungoorree Tea Estate, the casual workers are also entitled to get ration. Middle standard tea gardens like Dalowjan Tea Estate and Gatoonga Tea Estate, also provide similar facilities to the casual workers while they are at work. But in poor tea gardens, like Rungajan Tea Estate and Cinnamara Tea Estate occasionally rations are provided to the permanent labourers, according to the limitations decided by the authorities.

On the other hand, there is no provision for providing housing facilities to the casual workers. Such workers live either with a permanent worker or in a house built at their own cost inside the gardens and some of them live outside the gardens. Management hardly provides ‘pucca’ houses, even to all its permanent workers in the tea gardens of Assam, even in rich tea gardens.

In the case of wage of the labourers, it is found that the wage of a labourer per day is 115/- irrespective of their sex, nature of appointment such as permanent and temporary. From the survey it is found that the appointment of adolescents as ‘Sukra’ or ‘Sukri’ is a regular practice of the tea gardens. However, the wages of adolescents are less than those of adult labourers.

However, Anganwadi centers are running regularly in all the tea gardens. Through these centers mid day meal is provided to the school children. This attracts the small children and so they go to school regularly. It was found that only Koomtai Tea Garden, maintain educational institution up to high school level. The school was established by ML Barhoi and his son Soneshwar Barhoi.
Considering these factors the researcher felt the need to investigate regarding the needs and demands of the tea garden labourers to improve their socio-economic and other aspects of life. A question regarding their demands to the government was asked by the researcher to the labourers. Six presumed demands were also provided along with the question and labourers were supposed to give answer according to the preferences of demands needed to improve their living standard or way of life. The presumed demands given along with the question were: (1) Demands for wage hike and other economic assistance (2) Demands for better educational facilities, (3) Demands for better social life, (4) Demands for political share, (5) Demands for constitutional safeguards and (6) Demands for employment of the educated youths. These demands were presumed by the researcher on basis of the demands made by the different organizations as well as considering the present living standard of the labourers within the tea gardens of Assam. The labourers were supposed to answer the question by giving preferences to all the given demands.

The table 5.4 indicates that the demands for wage hike and other economic assistance get first preference from the labourers. Second preference according to the above table goes to the demand for better educational facilities. The demand for better social condition is considered by the labourers as the third demand. The demand for employment of educated youth is identified as an important demand of the labourers, which shows in the table as fourth demand. The demand for constitutional safeguards is given fifth preference by the labourers. The demand for political share is considered by the labourers as last but not the least demand.

The demands for wage hike and other economic assistance is the first and foremost demand of the labourers working in the tea gardens of Assam. The economic problem of the tea garden labourers is so severe that they can hardly
manage one square meal a day and are always in constant fear of hunger. At present
the daily wage of a tea garden labourer is Rs.115/- per day. Which is very low
compared to any other organized sector. In Assam tea garden labourers are deprived
of many benefits which are likely to be provided by the garden authority. Such as,
14 days sick leave on two-third wage, maternity benefit for women workers 84 days
on full wage, basic amenities like fresh drinking water, health centre, electricity,
quality school for children etc. Moreover, unlike other industries, tea garden
labourers do not get a paid holiday in the week.

Secondly, they consider the demand for better educational facilities as their
basic demand. Now a days, tea garden labourers realize that illiteracy is a significant
problem. Without education development of their society is not possible. But higher
education is very costly. They cannot afford to provide higher education for their
children. They can send their children to school only up to primary level.

Thirdly, they consider the demand for better social life as their basic
demand. The living condition of the tea garden labourers is appalling and
unhygienic. Labourers’ lines are thickly populated without having provision for
drinking water, drainage and sanitation system. Hard labour, imbalanced diet and
poor living condition made their life vulnerable to diseases like malaria, cholera,
diarrhea and so on. Life of the labourers is controled by the managers of the gardens.
They enjoy extra-authoritarian power over the labourers. In case of tea garden
labourers, the responsibility for social security measures has been vested in the
hands of management. The social security measures refer to the basic facilities
necessary for the mental, physical and intellectual development of a person. The
government of India imposes this responsibility on the management through
Plantation Labour Acts 1951. However, very few gardens have implemented them in
full. As a result, labourers are deprived of these facilities and so they lead miserable lives. In the society of Assam their social status is nil. They are always looked down upon. Moreover, their alcoholic habit spoils their health, economic status and social life.

Fourthly, they prefer the demand for employment of educated youth as basic demand. In the recent years, educated youth of the community are opting for jobs outside the garden. However, such aspiration of the educated youths remains unfilled due to the tough competition with the other advanced section of Assam. The organisations of tea garden labourers have often demanded for the employment of the educated youth of the community. For example, on 19 May 2015, The Assam Chah Janagusthiya Jatiya Mahasabha (ACJJM) called upon the Tarun Gogoi led State Government to make provisions for appointment of at least 5,000 educated unemployed youths of the tea garden labourer groups in various departments of the government, stating that the number of unemployed youths in the plantations of Assam is rising. Similar demand were also made by the students’ organizations of the community. Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association and All Adivasi Students’ Association of Assam have constantly pressurized the government for the employment of the educated youths through various memorandums to the government in different points of time.

After independence, gradually an educated and elite section emerged among the tea garden labourers. They became articulate and organized to remove the backwardness of the community. Different organizations have been formed at different points of time to protect the interest of their people and to avail of the constitutional safeguards provided for the backward sections. Such as, promotion of educational and economic interests of the weaker sections, right to conserve distinct
language, script and culture, reservation of seats in educational institutions, central and state legislature, reservation of jobs in government and semi-government departments and enlisting the community as Scheduled Tribes, etc. However, the demand for constitutional safeguards is given fifth preference by the labourers. Except for the educated section, most of them are not aware of it. Some of them have heard about the ‘demand for scheduled Tribes’ but they do not know what it actually means. However, the demand for political share is considered by the labourers as last but not the least demand.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demands</th>
<th>Preferences</th>
<th>Total Score</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demands for wage hike &amp; other economic assistance</td>
<td>f = 420, W = 2320</td>
<td>3164</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demands for better educational facilities</td>
<td>f = 116, W = 696</td>
<td>2735</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demands for better social life</td>
<td>f = 21, W = 126</td>
<td>2359</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demands for political share</td>
<td>f = 1, W = 6</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demands for constitutional safeguard</td>
<td>f = 25, W = 150</td>
<td>1397</td>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demands for employment of TGL educated youth</td>
<td>f = 2, W = 12</td>
<td>1674</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

f = Frequency, w = weightage (SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY)
5.24 CONCLUSION

Tea garden labourers are still lagging far behind from the developmental process of the state and the government has not yet paid due attention to their demands. The Acts implemented by the British government during their reign in India were mainly to protect the colonial interest to dominate the indentured laborers. These were one sided and not for the protection of the labourers but for the protection of the planters. The legislation implemented by the independent government is the Plantation Labour Act of 1951, which is lopsided. Most of the provisions mentioned in the Act have not been implemented by the garden authorities and Plantation Labour Act is silent in this respect. Moreover, with the passage of time those provisions became irrelevant. It is true that Plantation Labour Act has also been amended for several time, even than lacunas are there. It is found silent regarding the violation of the provision of the Act by the management of the tea garden.

However, the elite section and the educated youths of tea garden labourers have started a revolution for asserting their identity and all round development of their society under two distinct banners i.e. Adivasi (AASAA and other Adivasis’ organization) and Tea Tribe (AATTSA and other tea tribes’ organizations) movements. The unification of tea garden labourers under different banners caused difficulty for asserting their identity as a whole. On the other hand, administrative authorities took the chance of delaying to fulfill their demands, specially enlisting them as Scheduled Tribes (P), on the plea that all the labourers are not hailing from Adivasi origin or the name ‘tea tribes’ is unconstitutional. If only the Adivasi people are granted (re granted) the Scheduled Tribes (P) status, then it is obvious that tea garden labourers will be divided into two sections, Adivasi tea garden labourers and non Adivasi tea garden labourers, which will create another unforeseen problem for
them and its repercussion may affects the tea industry of Assam as a whole, and as such affect the economy of the state as well as the country, as Assam alone produces half of the total tea produce in the country.

Though the tea garden labourers’ organizations, specially Assam Tea Tribes Students’ Association and All Adivasi Students’ Association of Assam constantly pressurize the government for the fulfillment of their demands, but the governments (Central and State) have not yet taken any fruitful step to fulfill their demands. Of course, a few short lasting assurances were given by the State government and Central Government to these organizations, which could provide temporary relief to the tea garden labourers of Assam. After every uprising of these organizations, Government tries to abate the intensity of their insurrections with certain assurances of fulfilling their demands, without any definite or concrete decisions. Though, several legislations have been enacted by the State as well as Central governments to improve the socio-economic conditions of the tea garden labourers’ society of Assam, but without proper implementing mechanism these legislations have become ‘scare crows’ for the tea garden labourers. In this regard the role of their organizations inside the tea gardens is not at all satisfactory, because most the labourers living inside tea gardens are not aware of the activities of these organizations. The primary units of the students’ organization (except Trade Unions) are not actively working inside the tea gardens of Assam. Only Trade Unions, particularly ‘Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha’ and ‘Assam Chah Karmchari Sangha’ are working actively inside the tea gardens. However, these trade unions are concerned primarily with the economic aspect of the labourers. On the other hand, the occasional visit of the leaders and the members is one of the major factors which make the labourers indifferent to these organizations. Tea garden
labourers’ organizations have not yet tried to touch the hearts and minds of the labourers living inside the tea gardens of Assam.

Another factor which is responsible for the indifferent attitude towards the organizational activities is that labourers are preoccupied by economic constraints. So, they prefer the demand of wage hike or economic assistance from the government as their primary demands. They consider other aspects needed to improve their life as secondary demands.
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