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Full Papers in Conference Proceedings

1. Nava Kamal Borah

*Tea Tribes and Socio-Economic Development: A Study on
Murphulani Tea Estate Orogolaghat District.*

Ethnic Diversity of North-East India and Indian Democracy



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**Edited by :
Dr. Amulya Kr. Borah**

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Tea Tribes and Socio-economic Development: A Study on Murphulani Tea Estate of Golaghat District

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INTRODUCTION:

India is one of the leading producers of tea in the world. Tea plantation is mainly located in North- Eastern Region of India, specially Assam and Southern States of India. On an average, Assam produces over 480 million kg of tea per year, making it the largest tea growing region in the world (North East Enquirer, 2002). The tea plant was first discovered in Assam in 1823 by Robert Bruce, Merchant and soldier during his visit to Assam. Among the agricultural based industries, tea plantation occupies an important place in Assam. In Assam tea is grown in both the Brahmaputra and the Barak valley. Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Nagaon, Sonitpur, Darrang, Cachar, Hailakandi, Karimganj are the districts where tea gardens are mostly located. Tea industry has contributed substantially to the economy of Assam. About 17% of the workers of Assam are engaged in the tea industry and is one of the biggest contributors to the organized workforce of the economy (The Govt. of Assam official website). The tea industry of Assam has also been empowering women by giving the job opportunity in the tea estates.

Tea garden labour community is multi ethnic groups of Teagarden workers in Assam. It is a term used to denote those active Tea garden workers and their dependents who reside in Tea Estates spread across Assam. Tea Tribes are heterogeneous, multi-ethnic groups which includes many tribal and caste groups.

The tea garden workers of Assam is perhaps the most exploited class in the organized sector of the economy. Assam's tea industry is dependent on about two million labourers all of whom are the descendents of those who were brought to Assam as slaves initially by the East India Company and later by the British rulers and entrepreneurs from 1830's through 1920's, mostly from Santhal Parganas district of Jharkhand. The descendents of these slaves are now called the tea tribes (Chatterjee and Das Gupta, 1981; Verghese, 1996). Low wages, poor housing and lack of avenues for social mobility have been a recurring theme since its inception in the early 19th century. The tea gardens labour lines have unique identity as it is neither an urban nor industrial nor a rural area. Among the total tea garden working labours in each tea garden only 30-40 % of them are permanent employees. During the peak season each garden employs casual labours at same wage structure but less benefits than that of the permanent labourers. There also no maternity benefits scheme for the tea garden labourers. It has been observed that during pregnancy and post natal period, women continue to engage in hard works. Besides, poor socio-economic conditions, illiteracy, over-crowded and unhygienic living conditions in the residential colonies make tea garden populations helpless to various communicable diseases and underfeeding.

AREA OF THE STUDY:

This study is carried out in Murphulani Tea Estate (Andrew Yule & Co. Ltd, A Government of India Enterprise) which is situated in the western part of Golaghat District of Assam and 10km faraway from no.39 National Highway (AH-1). The tea estate is spread across 609 hectares of land situated at an average elevation of 156m above sea level. The local legend holds that the estate land was once covered in wild flowers, giving it name Murphulani or my flower garden. The estate makes use of clonalbushes for tea production and has an annual yield of 1236 kgs. It is well-known

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