

**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE TEA  
PLANTATION WORKERS OF BANGLADESH**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN  
ANTHROPOLOGY**

**Protima Das**

**DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA**

**2010**

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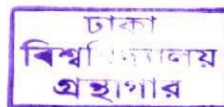
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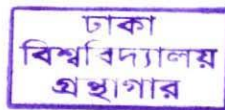
# **AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE TEA PLANTATION WORKERS OF BANGLADESH**

**Protima Das**

A Thesis submitted to the University of  
Dhaka for the Degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN  
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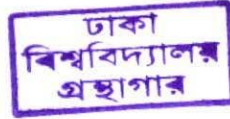
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UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA**

**MARCH, 2010**

## DECLARATION

The material embodied in this thesis is original and has not been submitted in part or full for any other diploma or degree of any University.

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Dhaka, 02 March, 2010

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **Introduction**



## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

#### (a) The Problem

This is an ethnographic study of tea plantation workers of a tea garden of Sylhet district in Bangladesh. The tea garden is known as 'Kamalcherra Tea Estate' has been chosen for the purpose of the present study. So far, a few systematic studies on the tea plantation workers of Bangladesh have been conducted. Their contributions are no doubt very important to understand the present phenomenon but none of these studies are full length ethnographic studies. The present research is a humble attempt towards this direction. The present study, therefore, aims at the understanding of the different aspects of the life of tea plantation workers of Bangladesh. It has investigated the various aspects of the life of the tea plantation workers of Bangladesh at the micro level.

#### (b) Conceptual Framework:

(1) Ethnography: Ethnography means the description of culture of people. Ethnography is the trademark of cultural anthropology. One of the defining characteristics of ethnographic research is that the investigator goes into the field, instead of bringing the field to the investigator. Ethnographers go into the field to learn about a culture from the inside out.

'Writing an anthropological thesis is itself an instrument of research, and perhaps the most significant instrument of research in the anthropologist's armory. It involves breaking up the vivid kaleidoscopic reality of human action, thought and emotion which lives in the anthropologist's notebooks and memory and creating out of the pieces a coherent representation of a society ....' (Edgerton and Langness, 1964:58).



Ethnography presents the anthropologist's interpretation (of some aspect) of the "reality of human action" and not merely a description of it. An ethnographic account can be compared with accounts of other societies that are similar geographically, culturally or organizationally, thereby providing a framework for evaluating its interpretation. There are two broad categories of data: the verbal statement of the members of the society and their observed behavior. Each ethnography is unique. It describes and analyses aspects of a particular social setting and social world. However, much the author may seek to generalize, to compare, and to theorize on a grand scale, the work is necessarily grounded in the local. The ethnography is uniquely shaped by the sensibilities and style of its individual author. The ethnographer is, we know, the "research instrument" par excellence. The fieldwork is the product of a personal and biographic cal experience. More over, the test in which that fieldwork is finally reconstituted is an authored work. Inevitably, it reflects the "Literary" style of the individual sociologists or anthropologist.

## (2) Tea Plantation Workers:

During the past 200 years, the word "Plantation" changed its meaning and is now generally used to describe a particular economic system of crop production, largely for export. One of the major characteristics of plantation system was that it brought together land, capital, management and labour from all over the world in areas, which offered opportunities for new agricultural products for export. For the propose of the plantation convention, 1958 (No. 110), the term "plantation" includes "any agricultural undertaking regularly employing hired workers which is situated in the tropical or subtropical regions and which is mainly concern with the cultivation or production for commercial purposes of coffee, tea, sugar-cane, rubber, bananas, cocoa, coconuts, groundnuts, cotton, tobacco, fibers (Sisal, jute and hemp), citrus, palm oil, cinchona or pineapple; it does not



include family or small scale holdings producing for local consumption and not regularly employing hired workers” (ILO:Geneva, 1966).

Tea plantation workers are the body of people available for work in the tea industry, requiring a large resource of people as distinct from machinery. There are four categories of workers engaged in tea plantations. They are: Male and female, adolescents and children. The first two are workers above the age of 18, divided according to sex. Then the workers who are between ages of 16 and 18 years known as “adolescents” and “children” are those between the ages of 12 and 16 years. Employment of adolescent and child labour is a special feature of the plantation industry. The plantation workers in the tea garden are therefore of two types (a) workers in the fields and (b) workers in the factories.

The plantation worker does not own the instrument of production, nor does he own his dwelling place or even the land on he works.

**(c) Objectives of the study:**

The main focus of the study is to explore the ethnographic picture of the tea plantation workers, which is reflected in their way of life. The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- (1) To find out the ethnic background of the plantation workers ;
- (2) To explore the material culture which indicates their dwelling, dress, food, ornament and other material objects distinctive of their community.
- (3) To examine the social organization of the tea plantation workers in connection with their life cycle (family, marriage, kinship, clan, birth, funeral



ceremonies, rituals, belief system and other analogous divisions) ;

- (4) To study the economic organization of the plantation workers and also study their environmental sanitation, hygienic habits, disease and treatment ;
- (5) To study their religion;
- (6) To study their inter-community relationship and relationship with the management.

**(d) Rationale of the Study:**

Tea is one of the main cash crops of Bangladesh. It is an important item of our export and it earns a fair amount of foreign exchange for our country. One of the main contributors behind the foreign exchange in our exchequer is the tea plantation workers, who are often forgotten. So there is a great necessity to investigate their socio-economic life pattern from anthropological approach. That is why I propose to make an in-depth study on the tea plantation workers of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is the ninth largest producers of tea, well behind India and China which account for half the world's total. Production figures for the tea garden of Sylhet and Chittagong were 43,000 tons in 1983 and 38,000 tons in 1984, 2% of the world's tea production (Chowdhury, 1998: 10).

The main source of foreign exchange earner from tea is the plantation workers. But their life and living standard are yet to be evaluated properly and recongnized by the society nay the government also.

#### **(d) Methodology of the Study:**

In order to understand the above-mentioned problem it is necessary to study the life and living of the tea plantation workers of Bangladesh at close quarters by living among them, so as to get an insight into their life and living. By merely interviewing workers on specific points one can cover a large number of workers. However the results may not be very accurate as there is a difference between what people say and what actually exists (Bhowmik, 1981:27). Therefore, anthropological method is used for the study of the present problem.

Primarily the study has been conducted through intensive fieldwork and by the application of anthropological method of participant observation. The fieldwork for this study has been conducted for more than a year with the tea plantation workers of a selected tea garden named "Kamalcherra Tea Estate" situated in Sylhet district of Bangladesh. The researcher has lived among them and observed their (plantation workers) day-by-day activities, how they live, their social and economic organization, their religion and rituals, family and marriage, kinship system and their relationship with the management. Data has been collected through participant observation and by using household census schedule, by focus group discussion, case study and also by collecting materials from secondary sources.

Participant observation is a method for gaining access to the interior, subjective aspects of human life and living (Pelto Pertti, 1994).

In the application of the technique (participant observation) it is essential to realize that it is not only the investigator himself but also the members of the group being studied who are to regard him as participant (Kluckhohn, 1940: 331-343).

Anthropological method of participant observation has been chosen by the researcher so that it can focus on human interaction



and meaning viewed from the insider's view point in everyday life situation and settings. It aims to generate theoretical and practical truths formulated as interpretive theories. The methodology of participant observation involved a flexible, open ended opportunistic process of inquiry through which what was studied is constantly subject to re-definition based on field experience and observation. Participation is a strategy for gaining access to inaccessible dimensions of human life and experience.

Before going to the study area a literature review has been done by the researcher. Through this she has come to know the background of the tea plantation workers of Bangladesh and the early problem of the plantation system. A diary has been maintained for keeping records of daily gathered information's. Camera was used to keep important photographs. The researcher has taken the help of an interpreter for a very short time when it was necessary during the field work. Focus group discussion was also used for research. In brief the following technics were used:

- i) Intensive fieldwork among the plantation workers under study .
- ii) The use of household census.
- iii) Focus group discussion
- iv) Case study
- v) Collection of materials from secondary sources.

The ultimate goal of the researcher was to use the participant observation method to generate theoretical and practical truths about the tea plantation workers of Bangladesh that are grounded in the realities of their daily existence and finally conducted an ethnographic study on the tea plantation workers life and living.

It may be noted here that Kamalcherra is not the real name of the Tea Estate under study. 'Kamalcherra' is its pseudo name given by the researcher. In anthropological study for the shake of research



sometimes a pseudo name is necessary. For this study it was also a requirement.

This study is an outcome of an epistemological and ontological exploration of the life of the tea plantation workers of Bangladesh particularly in Sylhet region in historical perspective and intensive ethnographic field work of over one year during the time period between 2004 and 2006. The initial field work had begun in 2003. It was necessary to be able to introduce self to others, have an understanding about the eco-system of the region, the flora and fauna, natural environment (both inorganic and organic), the tea plantation system and the people who were engaged in the entire process. However, the central focus was on the tea plantation workers life.

The interest to carry out a study on the plantation worker has grown as I have had several interactions with such workers when I used to visit them as it gave the linkage of my husband's fictive kins with tea plantation of Sylhet. My interest was substantiated by the very reality that I had experienced, to be more precise plantation workers are exclusively on non-Bengali origin, migrated from outside the border of Bangladesh. Their way of life is not only different but also unfamiliar in all terms. Striking aspect has been the level of poverty, housing, miseries, lack of health facilities, lack of education and any other source of income. It was tangible that their life does not correspond to modern standard in any term. The wage that they receive is so low that cannot be attributed to economical measurement, while the labour time is on an average eight hours with a half an hour lunch break as it is visible, but in reality they have to work any time they are asked for and the nature of the job is to provide services to the management workers and higher authority and finally the owner.

The relation between them is not a typical patron-client relationship neither it is feudal aristocrat and serf relationship or even labourer and producer relationship, it seems a reflection of slavery.



The ordeals has profoundly implicated in having a serious thought to undertake this study and explore the extent to reach these ordeals encompasses the life of the plantation workers in particular, and relationship between human being in general.

I had a clear understanding about my constrains with regards to understanding the tea plantation workers and tea plantation, its suitable eco-system, production of such plants, processing and its marketing.

However, given my keen interest on the subject and the object, I decided to undertake this study. I began from searching literature on the plantation workers in Bangladesh and have found that it is scanty and ethnography is almost absent. Nevertheless, I was fortunate to have some literature on tea plantation workers on other countries, India in particular and its historical route appears to be in the period of colonial power in South Asia.

The emergence of tea as a drink and plantation leaf as raw material is also linked and may be the initiative of colonial power.

As the demand had grown, suitable sites for tea plantation had been reached all over south Asia and the expansion had undergone and is underway. The market has grown and encompasses almost the entire globe. Therefore, the necessity to expand the production of the tea plantation had grown demanded human labour. How this had been ensured is yet to explore by the historian, but my the very raw and first hand familiarity at Sylhet site appeared to be that the labour producers are not local and basically belongs to diverse linguistic group, which provides a clue that they were not migrated from neither an exclusive country nor a place. They belong to different linguistic group and origin. However, a surface level discussion revealed that they have not come willingly, majority of them were forced to migrate to work at tea plantation as labour and some of them had come as to their malicious poverty.



Assembling of tea plantation worker at a certain plantation had taken place after migration and a long time number of centuries all of them undergone different ethnic processes like – assimilation and unification are outcome of this and other process is yet to explore.

Having recognized the complexity of the reality and epistemological exploration the author has thought to carry out an ethnographic field work in order to have understanding about life of tea plantation workers.

#### (f) **Review of literature:**

So far very few systematic attempts have been made to study about tea plantation workers life in an anthropological approach in Bangladesh. A few studies dealt with their life and living conditions. Some of these studies provide us with important information about tea plantation workers life and living. Therefore, these works are tried to discuss in the following paragraphs:

Bhowmik's study *Class Formation in the Plantation System* (1981) is related to class formation of tribal workers in West Bengal. The workers had migrated from Chotanagpur. Before migration they worked as wage labourers and peasant cultivators; their traditional mode of activities were changed to specific conditions of wage labour. Naturally, this process brought with it changes in the workers standing. The author remarks on the method of recruitment, trade union activities in the early period and the social customs of the tribals.

Beckford's, book *Persistent Poverty : Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World* (1984) pursuing a new Marxist framework in analyzing various plantation economies and societies the world over, has argued that the plantations in the colonies were not agents of development as claimed by modernization theories, but rather tributaries of imperialist-expansion.



De Silva's book, *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment* (1982) have offered an extensive criticism of the dualist interpretations of snod grass for which the Srilankan plantation economy was in the nature of a foreign enclave.

Griffiths has done a commendable work on the history of the South Indian Tea. He states that the plantation sector emerged in India in the early 1830s when the East India Company was seeking alternative sources for procuring tea to Europe. His book, *History of Indian Tea Industry* (1972) contains a detailed account of the beginning of Tea cultivation in India, the early labour problems, the problems faced by planters, recruitment of labour, the association of planters, Trade Union movement etc. For the most part of the book deals with plantation in North India with particular reference to Assam. The author justifies his position sitting availability of extensive source of material from associations and government in those areas. Therefore, his work on plantation in South India is limited in scope and detail. The information of tea, marketing, expansion of tea export to Europe, scientific research and development, transport and communication. He does remark on labour conditions, recruitment and so on. However, there is no attempt made to investigate management style, functions or the conditions of life in working class colonies.

UPASI (United Planters Association of South India, 1961) a planter's association published *Hand Book of Plantation Facts*, is a collection of articles by various hands, highlighting the history of association, its activities, and the reports of its meetings. The focus is almost exclusively on the difficulties faced by planters in their work and on their day-to-day lives. The articles are mainly based on personal experiences of the authors and are illustrated with photographs of members of UPASI, tea plantation and tea processing industries. The Labour Bureau study on condition of Women workers in the plantation sector was carried out in 1981 to examine the problems faced by women labourers in their working, living and social conditions. The study also brings out welfare measures



available to women workers vis-a-vis labour laws, applicable to women workers in the entire plantation sector in India. It was found that woman workers were equally skilful, and some cases more competent than men workers. But lack of education and training deprived them of promotion to skilled and supervisory jobs. Managers did not want to appoint women supervisors because they feared that women would not be able to exercise proper control over the workman. The crèches lacked adequate facilities and so become quite unpopular. No toilet facilities were available at the work place. There were hardly any medical facilities available to people in smaller plantations. Housing facilities were of low quality. According to this study majorities of women worker were members of one or other trade union; but few of them took part in the Union activities.

Kurian's work, *The position of Women Workers in Tea Plantation in Srilanka* (1981) discusses how the plantation sector emerged and developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century under British rule by importing labour from famine prone areas of Tamil Nadu. This led to the migration of large numbers of lower and sub-caste Tamil labourers to Srilanka. The recruited labour through middlemen and this came to be known as Kangani System. The Kanganis came from the higher castes and had Western education. They not only supervised the workers but also controlled the estate markets where they sold food products at prices of their choice. The Kanganis in due course became influential, wealthy and powerful in the estate.

Jain's book, *Sexual Equality, workers in Asian plantation System* (1988) covers labour and gender relations, economy, family, marriage and world view and their sociological importance. The author highlights the emergence of Tea plantation in Assam and the method of recruitment that prevailed during the colonial period. She points out that labour from lower castes and tribals were recruited from Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal at very low wages through garden Sardars. These Sardars are similar to Kankanis in Southern India.



Mishra's work *Tea Industry in India* (1986) has carried out an extensive study of the tea industry in West Bengal and its economy, identifying problems and the current state of the industry.

Sarkar's work on *The World Tea Economics* (1972) is focused on production and consumption of tea world wide and its demand and supply in the market, price fluctuation income from tea industry and review of world tea trade.

Baak in his work (1997) has made a study of plantation production and political power in South-West India. But it has little or no mention of the management system as such, Devi Uma has made a study of the Third World plantation economy in *The plantation Economy of the Third World* (1988). It examines the history of plantation and looks at the impact of plantations on Kerala as a whole. Tharian George's *Work. The Economics of Tea Plantations in South India* (1982) also describes the economic aspects of plantation industry and has little to say on management practices.

Sen's book *Inequality Re-examined* (1992) investigates the inequalities related to such categories as class, gender and communities. He discusses the low profile of woman workers to the labour force and argues that mutual co-operation and enforcement of policies by the management and government will improve the ability of rural woman to make substantial contribution to economise production and prosperity.

Chowdhury's (1998), *Tea Plantation workers of Bangladesh*, is a very important study of tea garden workers. This book has enlightened on various aspect of tea garden workers life. We get a vivid feature from this book about the background of the workers, their family, marriage, religion, some rituals, economic aspect of the workers life and also the bureaucratic pattern of tea garden management etc. This book is a distinct inspiration for further study of anthropological work.



**CHAPTER II**  
**Socio-Economic Profile of the Study Area :**  
**Kamalcherra Tea Estate**

## **Socio-Economic Profile of the Study Area : Kamalcherra Tea Estate**

Kamalcherra Tea State has been chosen for the purpose of the present study. It is situated three kilometer (km) away from Sylhet Town (Divisional Headquarters) towards Sylhet Osmany International Airport. The Airport is two km away from the tea garden.

In the study area, Airport road is passing through the garden. There is also a national tea garden named Lackatoora Tea Estate, a Cadet college, Forestry department office beside the garden. The garden belongs to Toker bazaar union Parishad.

Kamalcherra Tea Estate is well communicated from the capital city of Dhaka by Rail, Road and Air. From Dhaka Biman, Bangladesh Airline/GMG operates a number of flights to Sylhet Osmany International Airport. From Airport the Estate is hardly two km distance connected with superhighway and can be reached by any mode of transport. Bangladesh Railway operates three intercity trains from Dhaka to Sylhet. This garden is also well communicated by road from Dhaka.

It was established in 1854 by a British tea planter Mr. Winston of Duncan brothers. Tea industry was pioneered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the British planters. Later, in the sub-continent, Indian entrepreneurs purchased tea garden from their European owners. So the history of tea industry goes back to 1820 when tea plant was discovered growing wild in Assam District of India. Gradually Bangladesh was found suitable for tea cultivation and tea plantation was started. Tea was introduced as a plantation crop in 1854 at Kamalcherra Tea Estate in Sylhet District of Bangladesh.

The ownership of the tea gardens in Bangladesh are divided into two sectors now. The Government sector and the private sector. Three British Companies namely, Finlay and Co., Duncan Brothers



and Lawrie Plantation own about 51% of tea gardens of Bangladesh and 49% of the tea gardens are in the private sectors. At present Kamalcherra Tea Estate is also under private sector. Its owner is one Mr. Akbar Ali. Though contribution of the tea gardens under private sectors are significant but Finlay and Co., is the 1<sup>st</sup> tea producing company in Bangladesh and also the fact is three British tea companies still dominates Bangladesh's tea trade, a trade which is controlled internationally by Britain and British companies.

There are seven Valleys in which the tea gardens of Bangladesh are located. They are as follows:

- (i) Balishira Valley;
- (ii) Lashkarpur Valley;
- (iii) Manu-Dolai Valley;
- (iv) Langla Valley;
- (v) Jury Valley;
- (vi) North Sylhet Valley;
- (vii) Chittagong Valley;

Kamalcherra Tea Estate belongs to north-Sylhet Valley.

#### **Kamalcherra at a glance :**

|                              |                              |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Year of Establishment     | : 1854                       |
| 2. Total Grant Area          | : 1000.00 Hectors            |
| 3. Area under Tea Plantation | : 425.00 Hectors             |
| 4. Type of Tea Manufacture   | : C.T.C. (Crush, Tear, Curl) |
| 5. Annual Tea Production     | : 6,00,000 kg.               |
| 6. Total Work Force          | : 1200 workers               |
| 7. Managing Agent            | : The Sylhet Tea Company     |

#### **Population :**

The Tea Estate under study contains a total population of 1786, distributed in 379 household. Among them the member of male are 924 and female are 862. The number of men and women workers engaged permanently and also non-permanently in the garden. Out of 379 labour household 315 household belongs to different ethnic and

religions groups and 64 household belongs to Muslim plantation workers.

**Table 1**  
**Population Composition of the study Area**

| Ethnic/Religious Groups | Household | Population |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Bauri                   | 110       | 502        |
| Savara                  | 29        | 127        |
| Nayek                   | 26        | 124        |
| Baraik                  | 25        | 120        |
| Goala                   | 17        | 89         |
| Kurmi                   | 14        | 74         |
| Oraon                   | 13        | 60         |
| Mudi                    | 11        | 39         |
| Mirdha                  | 9         | 39         |
| Kaloar                  | 8         | 37         |
| Bunaj                   | 5         | 22         |
| Kormokar                | 4         | 16         |
| Bhowmik                 | 5         | 17         |
| Pradhan                 | 4         | 16         |
| Kol                     | 3         | 13         |
| Biswas                  | 4         | 13         |
| Ganju                   | 2         | 10         |
| Khadal                  | 2         | 9          |
| Teoari                  | 2         | 9          |
| Chasa                   | 2         | 9          |
| Bhumij                  | 2         | 8          |
| Bakti                   | 2         | 8          |
| Tanti                   | 9         | 20         |
| Chanda                  | 2         | 13         |
| Madraji                 | 2         | 8          |
| Kahar                   | 1         | 4          |
| Nag                     | 1         | 4          |
| Ghatoar                 | 1         | 4          |
| Muslim                  | 64        | 360        |
| Total :                 | = 379     | = 1786     |

Source : Field work in Kamalcherra Tea Estate. 2004

Population of the study area then consists of multi ethnic and religions groups. The various ethnic communities are originally brought from different District of India and Nepal. Namely, Domka, Bankura, Ranchi, Nagpur, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Cuttak, Bilaspur, Assam, Madras and also other Districts of India. This was happened nearly 150 years back. The workers now working in the garden are the offspring of their forefathers. The workers have been brought from Nepal also. Recently, the authority of the garden recruited Muslim workers. Most of them are from Barisal District of



Bangladesh. Therefore, an occupation could be able to ensure a heterogeneous group to reside together for centuries with their different culture.

### **Residence :**

The plantation provides eighteen residential areas for the workers known as "Labour Lines" where housing facilities are available for the workers families. The labour lines are known by their names. Each labour line has a name. Some of these names are office line, *Boro line*, *Majh line*, *Chital mati*, *Pora Bari* and *Barisali Basti* where Muslim workers reside.

Since 1977 tea companies in Bangladesh have had a legal duty to replace 10% of the *Kuchcha* houses on the labour lines each year with *pukka* houses with cement floors and tin roofs. *Pakka* accommodation is very unusual indeed on the tea gardens of Bangladesh.

The distribution of houses in the tea residential blocks, i.e, the 'Labour Lines' is not equal. The highest concentration of house is found in the *Boro Line* and *Majh Line*.

At the centre of the area of the plantation there is the residential area having brick building for the managerial other office staff of the plantation. It is noticed that similar to other industrial communities the plantation has a heterogeneous population who live interspersed in the labour lines. Therefore, there is no residential segregation according to different ethnic communities in the plantation. Such multi-ethnic residential pattern is non-traditional.

**Household :** I conducted a household census during my field work. It appears from the household census that there are 379 households (Table -1) in the tea garden under study. These household contain 1786 people. In many households both the husband and wife are registered as permanent workers. The number of permanent male workers is greater than that of the female worker.

Most of the permanent workers are however married. There are also some permanent workers who are widow.

The data on the households of the plantation reveal the complexity of identifying their types as well as their composition. It is found that some individuals who live in a family in certain cases are unrelated members.

However, without going into details of the definition and composition of the two types of families, namely, nuclear and joint which are beyond the scope of the present study, it is better to discuss the distribution of the households of the plantation into two types of family.

In the plantation, there are 379 workers' households of which 70 are joint type and 70 are nuclear type and 9 are unclassified. Among the Bauries, Baraiks, Oraons, Savara, Nayeks, Kurmis, Goalas, Mudis, etc. nuclear families are predominantly found.

The nuclear families comprise of parents and unmarried children. The joint families include married couples, unmarried and married children along with their relatives. There are 9 other households which are the residual form of nuclear families and may be categorized as unclassified. Five of these households have single member of each, the other four household have two members of each.

Nuclear family is commonly found in any industrial society. Similarly in the plantation, workers prefer to live in the nuclear families. The plantation system also influences the workers to live in the nuclear families, because the houses which are provided to them are suitable for nuclear family. Besides, there are other facilities which encourage nuclearisation of the worker' families in the plantation.



### **Water bodies:**

**Tube Well :** Management have given them eleven tube well in different places in the labour line for drinking water and also for other uses of the workers. There are few wells and taps also seen in the labour line for uses of the workers.

**Fountains:** There are some very small fountains have been seen over here and there nearby the labours lines which the workers call *cherra* and they uses water from it for their bath and clothe wash and also for necessary uses.

**River** Surma is about 5 miles away from the study area.

### **Forest land :**

For the cultivation of tea plantation friable red loam soil is the most suitable. The plant requires a well distributed heavy rainfall but cannot tolerate water-logging. Anything in the shape of water-logging is very baneful to its growth and gardens can only be planted out on land which can be well drained. Land which in its natural state is covered with tea forest is usually considered the most suitable, but excellent result has been obtained in Sylhet from reclaimed marshy land. The cost of sitting up tea gardens in the marshy land is very high but yield is usually large.

In the study area the workers not only plants tea bushes but also they have planted some trees for their needs nearby their houses and also nearby the unused land. The trees are namely, Betel nuts, Bamboo, Jack fruits, Mango etc.

### **Wild life :**

The survival, threatened as extinct wild life lived of the workers are grouped as following:

Dominant : Fox, Monkeys, Squirrel, Mongoose, Crow, Snake and Rat.

Threatened : Otter, Tortoise, Rabbit, and Owl.

Extinct : Porcupine

Some of the workers told to the researcher that tigers and bears were found with a little number in this area about 50/60 years back. They heard different stories of tigers and bears from their father and grand father.

Reasons for threatened/Extinct :

- Ecological imbalance due to destruction of forest land.
- Hunting
- Lac of food
- Lac of water

Reptiles and fish :

Snakes of different sorts and sizes, some poisonous and other harmless, are to be met within the jungles, tea bushes, and canal of the garden. The canals created from the natural fountains contains different species of fishes like *Puti*, *Magur*, *Gajar* etc.

The seasons :

In the study area because it belongs in the Sylhet District of Bangladesh, it is natural that almost the six seasons, namely, summer, rainy, autumn, late autumn, winter and spring have their own seasonal impact in the workers life but, there are three distinct well-marked seasons have their great impact on the workers life – the winter, the summer, and the rains'. The cold weather begins about the middle of October, when the hot weather may be said to begin the month of March. However, generally passes for the spring. The hot weather continues till about the middle of June, about which time the monsoon



bursts and *Asher* in the rainy season. The rains gradually continue off and on till the end of September or the beginning of October. The workers remain busy round the year with their different task of work and suffered by many ways by the impact of these three seasons on their life.

### **Sanitation :**

The sanitation system of the tea garden is very poor. There is no latrine or bathroom in any house. Men, women and children are found attending to nature's call in the open.

### **Drinking water :**

The researcher found eleven tube-wells in different labour line. Generally all the workers drink tube-well's water. But these tube-wells are not sufficient for their drinking purpose. So they use canals water or fountains water and also water from wells and taps for household works and other activities.

### **Education :**

Most of the tea garden workers are illiterate. A few numbers of young boys and girls of this generation become literate. Some of them have passed the S.S.C. examination. The tea garden management provides a primary school for them and a few years ago BRAC has established a primary school in the garden and many boys and girls of the garden are now going to school. Those who wants to study in the secondary school level, they goes to secondary level school in the town for study.

### **Electricity :**

A few years back tea garden management have given electricity connection to some of the workers houses. But it is not sufficient for their need.

## **Transportation :**

They used to walk to go to nearby places or here and there. They use cycle or van or bus to go to distant places.

## **Health**

The workers go to tea gardens own hospital if they get seriously ill. But their ethno-medicine or Folk medicine is also popular among them. They also apply indigenous medicine or *Jhar-fuk* in order to cure from less harmful diseases.

## **The effect of geographic environment on workers life :**

The effect, direct or indirect of the geographic and climatic environment may be traced in almost every aspect of the tea garden workers life and also made up their physical and mental characteristics, their economic conditions and their animistic religion. These surroundings provide them with a number of edible root, leaves and fruits. The worker lives mainly on ration given by the management. But only the permanent workers gets ration. Non-permanent workers do different kinds of temporary work and passes their livelihood in a very poor way. Sometimes they grow on their courtyard some edible root, leaves and fruits. The workers also gathers firewood from nearby jungles and although they are fond of animal food and indulge in it on particular occasion- either after the periodical hunting expeditions or an occasion of religious or social festivals. Climate control may also be traced in the material and construction of the workers huts and in the furniture they ordinarily uses. These huts have walls of mud land roof of straw or bamboo. These materials are available around them. So the effects of geographic and climatic conditions may be similarly traced in the workers mental characteristics and their religion. The warmth and sunshine of climate is reflected in their gay, vivacious temperament and the ruder and grander feature of the scenery of the nature,



sentiments of fear and awe of the super-normal and mysterious powers that appear to them to reside in earth.

### **Management of the tea garden :**

In a tea Industry, production is being organized in an organized manner and like all other industries, it has also a hierarchy of staff. The Tea Estate under study is not an exception to this rule. This tea Estate has also a hierarchy of staff and works are distributed among the various categories of staff. Different categories of staff perform different functions in the organization of production.

The staff includes all types of employees of the plantation from the manager to the wage labourers and they are arranged in a hierarchical order.

The manager is at the top of the hierarchy of the staff. He is in fact represents the owner of the garden. The owner lives permanently in the city but he and his relatives visit the tea estate occasionally. There is a bungalow called company bungalow meant exclusively for the owner and his relatives. But it is the manager who safeguards the interests of the owner. He looks after day to day work and he is responsible for the over all administration of the tea estate. Manager's function is to distribute tasks among the assistant managers and the manager functions through them.

There is one Medical Officer and one social welfare officer in Kamalcherra Tea Estate. Their salary is equal to the salary of one assistant manager but they exercise less power and enjoy less benefit from what the assistant manager enjoy.

The supervisor is next to the social welfare Officer in the hierarchy. He works as a linkman between the managers and the staff, he receives orders from the managers and carries them to the head *tila clerk*, the *tila clerks* and other subordinate officials if and



when necessary. Below the rank of supervisor there are positions of head *tila clerk*, *tila clerks* in the plantation side head factory clerk and factory clerks in the factory side and head clerks and other clerks in the office administration side.

In the plantation side, there are *Sarders* who are below the *tila clerks*. The *tila clerks* are known as *Tila babus* and the *Sarders* are their subordinates. The *Sarders* also play an important role in the process of production. They distribute the work among the plantation workers and they supervise their work. They remain present in the sections during working hours. They are responsible for taking accounts of work from each and every labourers working under their supervisions. The *Sarders* is the topmost level for the plantation workers. They cannot get the post of *tila clerk* for their identity of a plantation worker or labourer. The researcher has found ethnic identity and their job nature is the main obstruction for getting such a job.

Below the rank of *Sarders*, there are positions of *Chowkidars*. They are in fact guards or watchman who is assigned with particular duties of guarding; they also work as guards in *bunglows* of the managerial staff. They are to ensure safety and security within the Tea Estate.

In the factory side, there are head factory clerk and other factory clerks. Below them there are some machine men who are paid on monthly basis.

In the office side, there are head clerks, other clerks who are under the direct control of managers and assistant managers. They help the management in office administration. There is also one typist in the office. There is one storekeeper to ensure the security of goods kept in the store. The plantation workers are however at the bottom of the hierarchy. All other members of the staff mentioned above enjoy more benefits, more power and prestige and exercise more control than the workers.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **Ethnic Background and Settlement Pattern of the tea plantation workers under study**

### **(a) Ethnic Background of the plantation workers:**

Literature on the tea plantation workers has reflected the ethnic background of the plantation workers in Bangladesh. The British planter developed the tea plantation industry based on low cost land and labour who will respond to strict discipline and hard work for subsistence wages.

As the tea growing activity is labour-intensive the problem recruitment of labour was quite imposing and often very difficult. Local labour was not sufficiently responsive and keen to work in plantation. One of the reasons being that the specially required for particular type of work in the field-practices was very much lacking in the local people. Moreover, the life in tea gardens was very arduous and local people were not enthused to join in the labour force as tea garden labourer. The laborers had to be recruited from else where.

Tea Plantation is an agro industry where both agricultural and industrial working environment exists. This is to be expected as investment in tea bushes were of a long term nature with cycles of approximately 40-50 years. Alienation of land suitable for tea cultivation was easily carried out through the colonial government which Patronized British investment in the colonies. In order to create a steady supply of labour that suited the requirements of the industry the British planter brought in labourers from Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal of India as they needed labour who can be controlled through alienation from the local population without prospect of social integration with the local population. The landless labourers who were mainly from the lower castes of Hindu society and also different ethnic groups were brought in and housed on the plantation for work. It is important to note that plantation labour communities were created by the British planters and kept under precarious conditions so that they will respond to the employment opportunities on the plantation. Language, religious and cultural differences ensured that no social integration was possible with the local population. They had no alternative opportunities for



employment and were therefore condemned to take what is offered as employment opportunities by the British planters. They were illiterate and kept as such so that they will be totally dependent on their employers for a livelihood.

In starting stage of such an industry, recruitment of workers was largely made particularly in the plantation of Bangladesh from different ethnic groups of different places from India and also from lower caste people of Hindu society. Most of them were poverty stricken illiterate villagers who had no experience of industrial occupation. Their work at the tea plantation had been considered as creation of employment opportunities for the poor people. The process has been basically migration, sometimes forced migration of the members of the different parts of South Asia independent to geographical location and physical distance. So this has been mainly 'cutting off' a minor portion of the members from the main ethnic communities. This process had led to a new composition of the tea plantation workers is pivoted to discern the ethnic background of kamalcherra Tea Estate therefore consists of multi ethnic and multi religious groups. They are as follows:

Bauri, Baraik, Savara, Nayek, Goala, Oraon, Kurmi, Mudi, Mirdha, Laloar, Biswas, Bunaj, Bowmik, Pradhan, Karmokar, Ganju, Khadal, Chassa, Tewari, Kol, Deb, Bakti, Tanti Bhumij, Bahadur, Debnath, Madraji, Chanda, Ghatoar, Kahar, Nag, Chetri and Muslim.

**(b) History of their Migration and Settlement :**

Tea industry is a labour – intensive industry. In the beginning acute labour scarcity stood on the way to expand tea industry in Bangladesh. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the clearings of lands, the local people were reluctant to take employment, probably because:

- (i) they enjoyed an almost self-sufficient economy, and



- (ii) their socio-cultural back-ground impeded them to work as tea labourer. Besides, the British planters might also have been reluctant to employ the local willing people. Because the uprooted labour was obviously far more easy to control and exploit.

**Table 2**

**Place of origin of the plantation workers of Kamalcherra Tea Estate**

| Sl No | Ethnic/Religious Groups | Place of Origin                              | Household         |
|-------|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1.    | Bauri                   | Domka, Bankura, Ranchi, Chotonagpur of India | 110               |
| 2.    | Savara                  | Orissa of India                              | 29                |
| 3.    | Nayek                   | Cuttack, Orissa, Domka of India              | 26                |
| 4.    | Baraik                  | Ranchi, Chotonagpur, Bankura of India        | 25                |
| 5.    | Goala                   | Cuttack of India                             | 17                |
| 6.    | Kurmi                   | Bilaspur, Chotonagpur, Assam of India        | 14                |
| 7.    | Oraon                   | Ranchi, Chotonagpur, Assam of India          | 13                |
| 8.    | Mudi                    | Assam of India                               | 11                |
| 9.    | Mirdha                  | Orissa of India                              | 9                 |
| 10.   | Kaloar                  | Bilaspur of India                            | 8                 |
| 11.   | Bunaj                   | Cuttack of India                             | 5                 |
| 12.   | Kormokar                | Assam of India                               | 4                 |
| 13.   | Bhowmic                 | Domka of India                               | 5                 |
| 14.   | Pradhan                 | Orissa of India                              | 4                 |
| 15.   | Deb                     | Assam of India                               | 4                 |
| 16.   | Kol                     | Orissa of India                              | 3                 |
| 17.   | Biswas                  | Orissa of India                              | 4                 |
| 18.   | Gonju                   | Orissa of India                              | 2                 |
| 19.   | Khodal                  | Orissa of India                              |                   |
| 20.   | Teoari                  | Nepal                                        | 2                 |
| 21.   | Chasa                   | Orissa of India                              | 2                 |
| 22.   | Bhumij                  | Ranchi of India                              | 2                 |
| 23.   | Bakti                   | Domka of India                               | 2                 |
| 24.   | Tanti                   | Cuttack of India                             | 2                 |
| 25.   | Debnath                 | Assam of India                               | 3                 |
| 26.   | Chanda                  | Assam of India                               | 1                 |
| 27.   | Madraji                 | Madras of India                              | 1                 |
| 28.   | Kahar                   | Orissa of India                              | 1                 |
| 29.   | Nag                     | Chotonagpur of India                         | 1                 |
| 30.   | Ghatoar                 | Orissa of India                              | 1                 |
| 31.   | Chetri                  | Nepal                                        | 1                 |
| 32.   | Bahadur                 | Nepal                                        | 1                 |
| 33.   | Muslim                  | Barisal of Bangladesh                        | 64                |
|       |                         |                                              | <b>Total: 379</b> |

(Source: Field work in Kamalcherra Tea Estate, 2004)



Consequently, the labourers were recruited from various cultural, linguistic and ethnic heritages from other provinces of India. Different groups were recruited from different places, for example, the Munda and the Gond from Bihar, Santal, Tanti and Bhumij from Bengal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, the Lohar from Bihar, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, the Khond from Andhra Pradesh.

Ecological factors seem to have been the main reasons for this large scale migration. In their original habitats the people had been facing acute poverty because of infertility of soil, crude technology, recurrent flood, drought and famine, and the ruthless exploitation by the land-lords and money-lenders. Besides, many people lived in a perpetual state of insecurity because of frequent fatal attack by the deep forest animals.

All these people were branded as '*Coolie*', and the world at large recognizes them accordingly, and not by their group affiliation. The word '*Coolie*' is however now considered derogatory and has been replaced in official documents by the term Mazdoor, i.e., labourers. The labour force in a plantation is usually composed of people belonging to various ethnic groups.

A good number of these migrant labourers initially suffered from mal-adjustment; some of them died, others went back home after the expiry of the contracted period; and still others fled away before the expiry of that period. A major section of migrants, however, survived that stage and gradually made up their mind to make a permanent settlement in the new habitat; in a new economy; and far away from their original homes (Kar, 1986: 128-139).

As usual with a plantation system, the British tea planters did not seem to be interested in creating a labour force, based on a rational management of labour. They bought labour at a high cost but spent very little to maintain it. Low wages and coercion were the rule of those days. Short work was punished with flogging and absconders, when recovered, were also flogged. The management - worker

relationship in those days was condemned by Guha as “the worst form of serfdom (Kar, 1979: 84).”

Under such circumstances of inhuman torture and tyrant behavior, desertion from tea gardens was the way out; and it became a common practice (Kar, 1993: 53-55).

Most of the time-expired labourers and the deserters could not return to their homes mainly because (i) journey back home was risky and there was no assistance from any corner, (ii) they belonged to the landless section of the population and their livelihood in their homeland was uncertain. In fact, Chotanagpur, Santal Parganas and most of the other places from where labour was recruited were noted for famine and acute food scarcity, which were partly due to natural calamities, but mainly due to the oppressive system of land revenues. This compelled a major section of the people to live in a floating condition at home. Besides, the chances for re-employment, both in tea gardens and out-side the gardens, and opportunity for settlement in the land available near the tea gardens, and getting casual employment during peak plucking season also contributed towards their deciding to stay back in Sylhet district of Bangladesh.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Material and Non-Material Culture of Plantation Workers Under Study**

## MATERIAL CULTURE

Material culture implies manifestation of culture and may be expressed by material needs and human behavior in adapting to and maintaining control over the bio-social environment. Material culture for mere survival and satisfying the basic biological needs would consist of tools and appliance for subsistence. However, human needs even for primitive societies are varied and more than mere subsistence and so material culture for human societies reflects various interests, emotion and behaviors. The material culture of the tea plantation workers includes basic tools and weapons are required for them as well as housing, clothing, means of producing food, and many other materials described here.

### Housing:

Many octogenarians of different tea estates have replied that their grandfathers came to this place along with their families. The place was full of jungles and wild beasts. No Human habitation was in existence. The European planters got the area cleared on war footing made temporary barracks to accommodate labourers. Life in the barracks was horrible and beyond description. The situation improved gradually with the passage of time. But the condition of the labour lines remained filthy and unhygienic for many decades. Even after independence of the country, the living condition did not improve satisfactorily.

The general living condition of the workers is poor and unhealthy. The first generation of the workers had to work hard to clear the jungles, and built thatched barracks where no privacy was maintained. Later on, tinned roofs or thatched houses with mud plaster were made. The workers had to face many difficulties for several decades. The tropical climate, heavy rainfall, high temperature and abundance of swamps and jungle have caused health hazards in



Kamalcherra tea estate. In general their living condition is poor. The entire family with average 5-8 members is housed in small one or two roomed houses. In most of the labour houses hardly one or two cots are found. The furniture is scanty, the cloths are minimum, and it becomes more pathetic during winter. Articles of modern amenities like radio; TV, electricity etc are also not available to the majority of tea workers.

The industry management provides each permanent worker with a house. But husband and wife do not get two houses even if they are permanently employed in the tea plantation. Workers both male and female, have a right by tradition or convention to live in these houses as a family unit and use the surrounding courtyards as a park.

In the tea estate with better facilities workers (especially *Sardars* and *chowkidars* and also tea gardens school teachers) live in *pakka* houses. The *pakka* houses are mostly two roomed, a few houses, however, have three rooms. Each room has two windows. In terms of space, the houses are not up to the mark. Due to scarcity of space some workers have constructed a separate *kachcha* room for use as kitchen. Usually they are found to have accommodated a corner of the living room as a place for cooking. Domesticated animals are usually found to be kept under a shed adjacent to the living room, for there is fear of cattle to be stolen. Some workers have been found to keep cattle tied in the verandah of the house. *Kachcha* houses are numerically dominant. Kamalcherra tea estate has houses mostly of *kachcha* types. Tin made and *pakka* houses are also there but less in number. *Pakka* houses are very few in number. They are two roomed and have one window in each room. The *kachcha* houses are mostly one roomed and lack of windows. In this estate also, kitchen is accommodated. This estate has houses of *pakka* and *kachcha* types. Some workers have constructed a *kachcha* room attached to these rooms. The *kachcha* houses are mostly one roomed with no window. The workers who have domesticated animals keep them under a separate shed near the living room. The cleanliness of the houses,



irrespective of their types, is at a very low level. Ventilation especially of the *kachcha* houses is inadequate.

**Labour Lines:** Immigrant labourers in the entire tea plantation live in a haphazard way. They are well spread in the entire plantation area keeping in view the nearness to the working sections. Typically a single room known as labour shade is crowded with people of different ages of a family. There are still rooms only 8'x12' that can accommodate four persons at the most, is often crammed by as many as ten persons. The walls are generally made up of mud and the roof of bamboo and sun grass. Cattle and human beings are often seen living together in the same house.

Living conditions in these houses were found very subhuman. Cooking and living are done in the same room. It was observed during my fieldwork that in many cases, cows and goats were reared in a corner of the same room by building a partition. Not only is the room small, but its windows and doors are also very small. Most of the rooms have mud walls and straw roof. In most cases, maintenance of these houses is very poor. The workers reported that the management of the garden is quite indifferent about the repair and maintenance of their houses, although the management reported that they maintain

Table 3  
Distribution of Labour Lines (ethnic/religious group wise)

| Labour lines   | Ethnic/ religious groups                                                      |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Office line    | Naik, Oraon, Bauri, Gonju, Tanti, Ghatoar                                     |
| Boro line      | Bauri, Baraik, Goala, Kurmi, Mudi                                             |
| Majh Line      | Mridha, Kaloar, Bunaj, Bauri, Baraik, Karmaker, Bhowmik, Pradhan, Kol, Savara |
| Chital mati    | Biswas, Khodal, Teoari, Bakti, Tanti                                          |
| Pora Bari      | Chanda, Madraji, Kahar, Nag                                                   |
| Barisali Basti | Muslim                                                                        |

(Source: Field work in Kamalcherra Tea Estate, 2004)



and repair the houses and also built regularly. During the rainy season, living conditions in such houses becomes deplorable since rainwater enters the rooms through the broken roofs. Most of the workers built a second room at their own expense. However, in almost every house there is a small space adjacent to the kitchen which is used for washing and as urinals at night. Sometimes children use this room for relieving at night also. But for the latrine purpose they use open spaces to ease themselves, thereby compounding the problems of hook worms and anaemia. It is seen from the (table No-4) that in each of the labour lines different ethnic group of workers are living together. It is gathered that this system of multi ethnic group living together in lines started when the Britishers ruled India and their planters used this technique like their rulers which is still in vogue. The reason for this is mainly may be not to allow the different ethnic groups to unite together and create any movement or revolt against the authority.

### **Food Habit:**

The food and drink habits of the plantation workers have undergone some observable changes. By and large they take rice and wheat (in the form of *rooti*) in present setting. *Rooti* and the rice are the staple food of the workers. They also take rice beer (*haria*) which is also popular a big number of the tea workers. Items like tea, betel-nut, betel-vines, etc. in average tea worker's consumption habit are exclusively new addition in the present setting.

The workers live hand to mouth by the wage they receive. The workers, who go to work in the morning, drink salted tea and eat dry bread. They carry fried atta (*rooti*) or fired wheat or dry bread with them to eat during lunch break. Some of them take lunch at home with dry bread with salted tea. The workers with slightly better economic condition eat vegetables with bread.

Most of the workers eat rice with vegetable at night. They take fish only when they can afford it. Dinner is the workers main meal of



the day. The food items normally they take are rice, bread, potato, fish, dry fish, meat, egg, pulses, vegetables, milk etc. Generally they take maximum two items in a meal due to economic hardship.

The quality and quantity of meal in a lunch is even poorer. Almost all of them take bread at lunch. It has been observed that some of them ate bread with smashed potato and *chatni* (some kind of pickle) made of green tea leaf. Some of them ate only bread with plain water or cold tea without sugar. They reported that they don't have money to buy sugar for tea. For breakfast also they eat bread and black tea without sugar. It is very cruel to know that the tea workers are never supplied with processed tea from the factory. The workers reported that they steal fresh leaf from the garden and dry and process it at home without the knowledge of the management. It is obvious that a worker cannot be strong and stout enough for such hard physical labour after eating such poor quality food. When the workers entertain any guest they try to arrange an improved diet consisting of meat, fish, rice, etc. However, this depends upon the economic condition of a worker. Usually, during any festival or wedding ceremony, an improved diet is cooked in a worker's household.

If the workers with low income do not have any other source of earning, it becomes very difficult for them to survive. They are to go without food for quite sometime. At times when they suffer from food shortage, they buy rice or wheat from the shop or from the street seller on credit and for this they have to pay a high price. Many street sellers are seen selling rice, wheat, salt, oil and lentil within the garden. If the price of 1 kg of rice is Taka 25.00, one has to pay Taka 30.00 for buying it on credit.

Rice beer (*Haria*), a kind of wine drinking is a common habit of the worker in the garden. This is their habit. Many of them drink wine without thinking about their family. The wage is given to the workers on Tuesday and on that day the workers first buy their food and daily necessities and also purchase wine. Many of the workers drink wine daily. When they do not have money then sell various



household materials to buy wine. The price of one glass wine is Taka 7.00. Many drink wine up to Taka 15.00 at a time. There are many workers who have become penniless and their families were broken due to this heavy drinking. They justify their excessive drinking by the argument that their body becomes totally inactive after working hard in the garden for a whole week but when they drink, they gain energy and their body becomes active once again. Besides, buying wine many workers prepare *haria* at home. This is made by mixing a kind of medicine with votted rice.

Many of the ethnic group workers embraced Hindu religion. Like Hindus they developed caste system amongst them. They have also adopted caste system as *Jati* or *Samaj*. Different ethnic groups as for instance, Bauri, Baraik, Savara, Kurmi, etc., they treat as different caste and consider themselves a separate *Jati* or *Samaj*.

So, the tea workers suffer from social stigma, obscurantism and many orthodox feeling. In fact, the workers get less exposure or social interaction among the workers of different ethnic groups in the past. As the workers society is also caste ridden which has divided the ethnic workers society in caste based groups or sections such as higher or lower caste, touchable and untouchable. The higher castes, though small in number, still dominate and exploit the lower caste including the ethnic groups. This has created ill-feeling among them and their harmonious social life is vitiated. Caste system is, in fact, the root cause of institutionalized inequality. Each garden society suffers from the stigma of '*Panichal*'. It means that water touched by any lower caste (Bauri, Rabidas, Kol) will not be used by the other caste people like Goala, Kurmi etc. Even from a common well the non-*Panichal* group cannot fetch water, if any person of from higher caste or lower *Panichal* group is fetching water from the well then the other group will refrain from taking water then. The outdated orthodox system is still in practiced in the garden society. The Muslim workers are also included in the non-*Panichal* group.



The Goala are considered as a cleaner group by most of the people. Probably for this reason, a Goala is engaged in supplying drinking water and tea to the labour force at working time in tea plantation.

Another feature of food conjuring has been observed that the Kurmi and a section of the Savaras do not domesticate pigs nor they take pork. Further investigations reveal that the Oraons, the Savara, are considered to be of lower status by the other groups who do not take pork and who wear yellow clothes during marriage ceremony. They have been found not to interdine with one another. Beef and pork seem to play an important role in determining the status of a group in social hierarchy. Thus, the Savaras and the Bhim Savaras neither eat nor rear pigs, and they consider themselves to be a higher status than their counterparts who rear pigs as well as eat pork.

Thus, it seems the ceremonial dress, domestication of pigs, taking of beef and pork and also religion (Christianity, Hinduism and ethnic religion) are some of the important variables in deciding the status of a group in social hierarchy.

There is different *samaj* division amongst the workers and they follow this strictly. As a result the workers of one *samaj* or *Jati* do not eat in the household belonging to another *samaj* or *Jati*. Normally the *samaj* is named by their ethnic group name. Such as Bauri *samaj*, Baraik *samaj* etc. Amongst the Muslim worker there is no such division.

All these observations are probably indicative of the fact that the tea workers (ethnic) in Bangladesh who share many things in common trend to maintain dual identities.

The labour Rules promise to ensure safe water source and sanitation of the tea workers. But to now the only source of drinking water is a few tube wells, which too, is not sufficient. In some cases there is one tube well for 30-40 households, but in one instance eight



tube wells were found for 1500 persons. In some places a tap is provided for 20-25 households that remain open from 6 to 8 A.M. and again 3 to 6 P.M. The surface wells provided get easily polluted with coverlid broken for heavy duty too many users. Drinking water polluted by faecal matters is sure to make them sick. Another alarming aspect is to point out that many workers drinks water from wells. It was found that most wells are uncovered. The level of hygiene directly determines the type of diseases that may affect the community health. In the tea estates with better medical facilities both *pakka* and *kachcha* well and taps are sources of drinking water. Water from these sources are also used for other purposes such as bathing, cloths and utensils washing, etc. While one out of the three residential areas has tap facilities the remaining three have facilities of *pakka* and *kachcha* wells only. It has been found that there is optimum use of the taps by the workers. Those who are without the facility remain content with the wells which are not regularly disinfected. Well-water is cleaned annually and thus workers are prone to water borne diseases. Purification of water is not done by any of the families. In fact they do not have any idea of purifying water for drinking.

### **Sanitation:**

The level of sanitation in the residential lines of the workers is very low. Common latrines are practically non-existent in the residential lines. The workers defecate in bushes and by the side of rivulets. They are unaware that such defecation behavior may cause spread of some intestinal diseases. Drainage system of proper type is absent. Sullage water from the households is drained out up to the outer periphery of the courtyard where it gets accumulated. Rain water is as well as water from the wells flow to the main drain which surrounds cluster of houses but the drain remains usually choked resulting in water accumulation. The accumulated water forms a fertile ground for mosquito, germ breeding and spread of diseases. Due to their ignorance of better sanitation system and illiteracy causes various diseases.



## **Dress Pattern**

Dress-pattern of the workers is similar to neighbourer Muslims and Hindus. They told that their ancestors generally wore short-cut dresses. But by the time, they have habituated with the dress like Muslims or Hindus. Some of the young workers wear modern fationable dresses.

### **Male dress**

Workers generally wear *lungi* or *Dhutti* and vest. Generally, the older men wear *dhuti* and the young men wear *lungi*. The young men, who have connection with different institutions and town generally, wear shirt and *pajama*, when they go to the outside of the village.

### **Female dress**

The women wear *sari*. Generally, the older women wear *saris* with white colour. On the other hand, the younger wear *saris* with different colours. Red colour and all bright colours are very much liked by the workers.

Most of the times, the workers remain shabbily dressed. They remain dirty and unclean. During the plantation work they wear khaki half pant, a cotton vest and half shirt. Some of them wear *dhoti* (not below their knees) and half shirt and a *pagari* or *Muretha* (a piece of white cloth wrapped round their head). The women workers wear sari, blouse, undergarment, while at work; they use a piece of white cloth as apron round the waist, one end of which covers their breast. The women workers have limited cloths. They work during day and return back in the evening in worst condition. The women workers take bath wearing few clothes after finishing their plucking business. It is due to their dire poverty as hardly they can afford plenty of cloths.



## **Clothing of Children**

Children go about naked till their second or third year. After that age, a young boy wears a small shirt or half-trousers and a female child wears *Jama*. Generally unmarried girls wear *Jama Pajama* like Bengali girls.

## **Furniture and Fixture:**

For their very low income the workers cannot use enough furniture in their houses. Many of them have only a thin jute mattress to sleep on. Those who can afford have a wooden cot and maximum one or two chair or one or two wooden stool for their guest. Some of them have wooden table and also *alna* for keeping clothes. Bamboo made baskets of various sizes is commonly used for storing different materials including agricultural products.

The young members of the workers families prefer to hang colour pictures and cinema posters in their houses. Most of the elderly people expressed no interest for these pictures and posters, but they do not mind younger people hanging those on the walls of their houses. Some of the workers had painted simple decorations, flowers, birds and trees, in pale colours on the whitewash, or modeled plants and bushes out of the clay of the walls.

Very few households use electricity even though there is no supply of electricity in the labour line. But the tea workers were very honest in reporting that in most cases they use electricity illegally. All workers reported that they use firewood for cooking. Therefore, workers are well spread in the entire plantation area keeping in view nearness to the working sections. They are accommodated in different labour lines well spread in the tea garden area.

## **Household utensils**

The workers generally use different utensils made of aluminium. They also use a few numbers of utensils made of mud.

**Chart 1**  
**List of household appliance and agricultural implement and tools**

|     | Workers Word  | English                     | Materials used and purpose of use                                               |
|-----|---------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Dag           | Pot                         | Made of alluminium, used for cooking                                            |
| 2.  | Matki         | Pitcher                     | Made of clay and alluminium, used for carrying and storing water.               |
| 3.  | Karai         | Frying Pan                  | Made of iron, used for frying vegetables.                                       |
| 4.  | Karai         | Frying Pan                  | Made of aluminium, used for frying vegetables                                   |
| 5.  | Tashla        | Pot                         | Made of aluminium, used for cooking rice.                                       |
| 6.  | Karay         | Pot                         | Made of aluminium, used for cooking vegetables and curry.                       |
| 7.  | Chula phukbar | Stick                       | Made of bamboo or wood, used for stiring rice and curry at the time of cooking. |
| 8.  | Thali         | Plate                       | Made of clay, aluminium, used for eating rice.                                  |
| 9.  | Bati          | Small bowl                  | Made of aluminium and tin used for serving curry.                               |
| 10. | Gilash        | Drinking glass              | Made of aluminium, used for drinking water.                                     |
| 11. | Boti          | Chopper                     | Made of iron with wooden handle, used for cutting vegetables for cooking.       |
| 12. | Chula         | Oven                        | Made of earthen ware, used for cooking..                                        |
| 13. | Lakri         | Blowing pipe                | Made of bamboo, used for lighting fire.                                         |
| 14. | Chatu         | Tongs                       | Made of iron, used for holding hot cooking pot.                                 |
| 15. | Sara          | Pot cover                   | Made of clay and alluminium, used for covering the cooking pots and pans.       |
| 16. | Batti         | Lamp                        | Made of tin, used for providing light in the dark.                              |
| 17. | Mach          | Match                       | Used for lighting fire.                                                         |
| 19. | Pukly         | Bamboo pipe                 | Made of bamboo, used for cooking special rice and yogurd.                       |
| 20. | Sharta        | Betel nut cutting implement | Made of iron, used for cutting betel nut                                        |

(Source: Field work in Kamalcherra Tea Estate, 2004)

Due to their poor living condition they cannot afford much household appliances. They have also forgotten to made many of their traditional tools and implements for non-practicing of those.



## Different articles manufactured by the workers

The workers can make the following articles by themselves:

### Chula

The make chula (oven) for cooking by digging earth in the middle of the courtyard in front of the home.

### Piri

The workers make *piri* from small wood. They use to sit on.

### Fishing net

The male workers for the purpose of fishing also manufacture fishing nets.

### Khanta

Different types of *khantas* are made by female workers. *Khanta* is generally made with used up and torn cloths or on discarded *saris* which are sewn together almost invisibly. The used up cloths or discarded *saris* according to the size and thickness required are arranged one on top of the other till the desired thickness is obtained. These used up cloths are then tacked loosely round the edges. The ground is filled in with highly embroidered designs of various kinds. White and coloured threads are used from the borders (*par*) of the old *saris* and the border and the surface are stitched together to make it a thing of beauty. Generally it is about six by four feet and is used to wrap up the body when one sleeps during winter. This is also a gift item for women workers to their daughters. They also makes small *khantas* for their new born babies.

## Agricultural tools and equipments for working in the garden

### Plough

Let us now proceed to a description of the principal agricultural implements used-by the workers. It consists of five parts or components. The plough-proper (*hal*) is a thick piece of *Sal* wood about two feet and a half long. It is generally fashioned into shape by the worker cultivator himself cut of wood brought by himself from the village-jungle or from some neighbouring jungle. The ploughshare is made by the village blacksmith and consists of a strait piece of iron from three-quarters of a foot to one foot long and about an inch broad. It is fixed on to a groove in the upper part of the plough proper and fastened in its place by an iron hoop. The ploughshare when in use requires constant mending by the village blacksmith. The third part is the beam that is made of wood. The fourth part, which is the yoke, is fitted on to the beam with leather-strap. The fifth part is the handle that is a piece of wood with a crook at the end. The ploughman seizes the curved end with his hands when driving the plough.

### Leveler

The leveler is required to level fields and press the soil. The Tea workers use it for leveling the tea plantation field.

### Harrow

The harrow is a narrow piece of wood about 2 yards long with two apertures in it. Two thin bamboo or split pieces of wood are fitted into the two apertures and joined to the yoke at one point so as to form a triangle. Man standing on the harrow works it and driving the bullocks attached to the yoke. The harrow serves to press down and pulverize the soil and to bury the seeds in after they have been sown



### Clod breaker

It is made by the men and used to break the larger clods of earth in the fields.

### Spade

The spade consists of three parts – namely a bamboo or wooden handle about a yard long. Iron socket which fits into the handle, and a flat steel blade which is welded on to the socket. They use it for earthwork, such as digging fields, and repairing and constructing bridges and embankments. The Tea workers use the spade extensively while making drainage system in the tea gardens especially during rainy season.

### Axe

The axe like the spade consists of a bamboo or wooden handle, an iron socket which fits into the handle, and a steel blade. They use it for hewing timber, or chopping wood with and for similar other purposes. Due to storm or heavy breeze when the rain trees of the garden falls axe are the best equipment for chopping or removing the trees or trunks from the garden.

### Knife

Knives of different shapes and sizes, made of soft iron by the village blacksmiths are used by the workers. The knives are used for grafting, pening the tea plants.

### Country-cart

The country-cart is a wooden frame with two block wheels in three pieces. Some time the country carts are also used for carrying tea leaves from one place to the other.

### Straw pad

Women also make a circular straw pad for the head. On these pads they place the tea leaves baskets, water jars etc. for carrying from place to places.

### Weapons of hunting

The principal weapons used by the worker for purposes of hunting are :

- i) The bow
- ii) The arrow
- iii) The axe
- iv) The sword
- v) The spear
- vi) Cubs and sticks of different varieties.

The bow: The bow consists of a thin bamboo and a bowstring made of a slender strip of split bamboo. They use the bow only in ceremonial occasions now a days.

### The arrow

The arrow consists of a reed shaft generally with a pointed iron arrow. The arrow is used to hunt different animals, birds etc.

### Musical instruments

The musical instruments used by the workers of Kamalcherra are listed as follows:

- i) Madal
- ii) Dhol
- iii) Dhak
- iv) Bamboo flute
- v) Harmonium and Tabla



## Madal

Madal or *khel* is the most popular musical instrument and one or two may be found in only a few well-to-do workers families. It is a cylinder shaped drum with earthen sides and with taps of baboon skin. It is slung from the shoulders of the drummer and is sounded with the hands and not with sticks. The male workers play Madal while female workers perform their *jhumur* dances and also use it especially in different *pujas*.

## Dhol

Another cylindrical drum is the *dhol* that is similarly slung with a strap over the shoulders and rests crosswise on the chest of the drummer. It is a hallowed out block of wood with a cowhide cover on its left top which is sounded with a small stick and a goat hide cover on its right top which is sounded with the hand. It is played upon both at weddings and at some of the dancing festivals.

Tat Musical Instruments : *Kedari, Gupeejantra, sarangi, Tuila, Huyoung, Anand Lahari* etc. are used generally during *Pujas* and on special occasions.

Sunshir Musical Instruments : *Bansuri, Yarbonsi, Shahnai, Madan Bheri, Singa, Shakh* are used in different religious festivals.

Anwaddha Musical Instrument : *Mandar, Dhol, Dhak, Dhamsa (Dhonsa), Nagor(d), Damma, Karha Tasa, Jurdi nagra, Vishya Dhanki, Dhapchangu* are coming items for songs and dances.

Dhan Musical Instrument : *Kartal, Jhanjh, Thala, Manjira, Ganta*, are common musical instruments available with common workers house.

## Ornaments

The women like ornaments. They use different types of ornaments that are made of silver and imitation. Women of all ages

wear ornaments in religious festivals and special occasions. Children and infants also wear silver ring on their ears. In some tea gardens they still wear ornaments made of clay, wood and animals bone.

### Health Culture of the Workers

It is quite often said that aspects of health, i.e. system of beliefs in relation to diseases and causation of diseases, methods of treatment and cure, etc. constitute a part of culture of the said society. Health behaviour is, therefore, an important part of a culture which can be called as health culture. Housing, sanitation, personal hygiene, food habit and child bearing practices form an integral part of the health culture of any community and have strong bearing on the general health.

The tea plantations with poor medical facilities provide a dismal picture of *Kachcha* houses are numerically dominant. Kamalcherra tea estate has houses mostly of *kachcha* types. Tin made and *pakka* houses are also there but less in number. There is a scarcity of living space. The workers in this tea estate use the living room as a kitchen. Domesticated animals are kept usually under a separate shed but in proximity to living room. Kamalcherra tea estate too is characterized by predominance of *kachcha* houses having no windows. *Pakka* houses are very few in number. These houses are two roomed and have one window in each room. The *kachcha* houses are mostly one roomed and lack of windows. In this estate also, kitchen is accommodated. Domesticated animals are usually found to be kept under a separate shed near the living room. But some workers are found to the animals in the verandah. Some workers have constructed a *kachcha* room attached to these rooms. The *kachcha* houses are mostly one roomed with no window. The workers who have domesticated animals keep them under a separate shed near the living room.



The cleanliness of the houses, irrespective of their types, is at a very low level. Ventilation specially of the *kachcha* houses are inadequate. The level of sanitation in the residential lines of the workers is very low. Common latrines are practically non-existent in the residential lines. The workers defecate in bushes and by the side of rivulets. They are unaware that such defecation behaviour may cause spread of some intestinal diseases. Drainage system of proper type is absent. Sullage water from the households is drained out upto the outer periphery of the courtyard where it gets accumulated. Rain water as well as water from the wells flow to the main drain remains usually choked resulting in water accumulation. The accumulated water forms a fertile ground for mosquito, germ breeding and spread of diseases.

The level of hygiene directly determines the type of diseases that may affect the community health. In the tea estates with better medical facilities both *pakka* and *kachcha* houses, wells and taps are sources of drinking water. Water from these sources is also used for other purposes such as bathing, clothes and utensils washing, etc. While one out of the three residential areas has tap facilities the remaining has facilities of *pakka* and *kachcha* wells only. It has been found that there is optimum use of the taps by the workers. Those who are without the facility remain content with the wells which are not regularly disinfected. Well-water is cleaned annually and thus workers are prone to water borne diseases. Purification of water is not done by any of the families. In fact they do not have any idea of purifying water for drinking.

This type of housing and sanitation system among them causes many diseases. The frequency of suffering from fever (particularly malaria), diarrhea, dysentery, stomach pain, physical weakness, eye pain and headache were found to be very high. They also suffer from certain chronic diseases like gastric and urinary tract infection, chest pain, etc. Tuberculosis was also found to be prevalent among them.



Food intake of the tea workers is very poor. Main food items of tea garden workers are rice, vegetables, fish, wheat, tea and liquor (*Haria*). A kind of forest potato is available underground in the nearby jungles. They are fond of this wild potato. The workers go to garden works early in the morning having a mug of red tea mix with salt and one wheat bread. At lunch hour they take the same menu and at night rice and curry are cooked in their houses. These are the normal diet of a tea garden worker. But most of the workers remain starved for three days a week. They get the weekly wages on Thursday. Their pockets go empty as soon as they repay their outstanding debts to the shopkeepers from whom they purchased food stuff and liquor on credit last week. They consume a lot till Tuesday; and from Tuesday to Thursday they remain half fed. For this kind of food habit, they suffer from malnutrition, weakness and become ill consequently.

Ethnic-wise analysis of personal hygiene reveals an interesting picture. In the tea plantations with better health facilities all the Baraiks wash their faces and clean their teeth daily. Tooth-powder is used by majority of them. The remaining persons use twigs. Shaving of beard is not a daily phenomenon among the Baraiks. The intervals after which beard is shaved vary from 4 to 15 days. Cutting nails is usually undertaken after a month. This also is not strictly observed. Taking bath is daily phenomenon for the majority of the Baraiks, it is not so for others. Daily use of soap, changing of cloths and washing of clothes is very much uncommon. Shoes are often worn by the Baraiks. It is not an occasional event. There is practice of washing of hands after latrine but not with soap. Hands are also washed before meals. Purification of water is not common practice.

The Kurmis are found to wash their face and clean their teeth daily. They use twigs only for cleaning their teeth. Daily shaving of beard is not resorted to by any of them instead it is done once a week. There is no particular interval of cutting their nails. Daily bathing, changing of clothes and washing them are very uncommon. The use of soap during bath is not common nor is it used for washing hands



after latrine. Pre-meal and post-latrine ablution of hands is practiced, but not with soap. Wearing of shoes and sandals are common.

Washing of face and cleaning of teeth are daily practices of the Goalas. Twig is commonly used for cleaning the teeth. Shaving of beard once a week is the usual practice. Nails are cut at least after a month. In fact no regular interval is maintained for that purpose. Taking of bath, changing of clothes daily and washing them are not usual. Soap is not used for every bath nor is it used for washing hands for post-latrine ablution. Hands are washed with water before meals, and shoes are occasionally worn. The idea of purification of water seems to be absent.

The Oraons, like other ethnic groups, wash their face and clean their teeth daily. For cleaning teeth twig is mostly used though some have been found to make use of tooth-powder. Shaving of beard is found to be undertaken at irregular intervals between a week and fifteen days. Cutting of nails also follows an irregular interval. Clothes are not changed daily nor are they washed daily. Bath too is not taken daily. Soap is not used daily for bath. Soap is not used by many for washing hands during post-latrine ablution. Hands are washed before meals with water only. Shoes and sandals find a place among them daily wearing for work purpose.

As has been stated earlier that there is a common belief that the ethnic groups are inclined towards traditional medical system. This inclination, it is said, is existent even in the presence of modern medical facilities. This section is devoted to examine as to how far the belief is true among the ethnic group of workers of tea plantations mentioned earlier. The behaviour of the workers is expected to be different in the different ethnic categories of tea plantation workers. In the Kamalcherra tea plantation the workers have been found to suffer from diseases like dysentery, diarrhoea, cholera, worm, infection, general weakness, measles, chicken pox, tuberculosis, anaemia, malaria, paralysis, rheumatism, old-age problems and liver



cirrhosis. However, dysentery, diarrhoea, general weakness, chicken pox and old-age problems are the most prevalent ones.

While paralysis, chicken pox and measles are generally attributed to supernatural agencies, witchcraft and spirit intrusion, other diseases have been attributed to physical, natural or biological causes. This is indicative of a decline in the belief in the causative factors like supernatural agencies, witchcraft, spirit intrusion and their traditional practices of curing. It is also indicative of existence of two categories of etiology of diseases side by side and corresponding treatment. The workers of different ethnic groups namely Oraons, Baraiks, Bauris, Savaras have found to attribute supernatural agencies, witchcraft and spirit intrusion alone as causes for any particular disease. However, it may be pointed out that certain disease like measles and chicken pox have been attributed solely to supernatural agencies.

It seems that the spread of education, modern medical services and the contact with the outside world have eroded much of the base of the traditional concepts of etiology of diseases.

In the event of failure to cure a patient at the health centre, the workers shift to traditional practices. This phenomenon may be explained by the fact that alternative sources of facilities of treatment by modern doctors are not available or there is lack of accessibility to alternative sources of modern medical treatment. Economic constraint has been cited as a hindrance by many of the workers. Simultaneous applications of both the systems of medicine have been recorded by some respondents. This perhaps is due to lack of knowledge. The respondents have been found to do so for hope of quick results.

Lack of essential facilities at the health centre has often been a reason for the persons choosing traditional medical treatment out of helplessness. A sizeable number of respondents have cited it as a hindrance in adoption of modern medicine. The negligence of the staff



of the health unit and the ill-treatment metted out to the people have also been cited reasons. The people have suggested improvement in the health facilities in the health unit of their plantations.

Care of pregnant woman is found to be done according to the traditional concepts and practices. So is the delivery. Good food and rest are the only precautions for a pregnant woman. There is an overwhelming preference for birth of a child at home. An expecting woman is not taken to a hospital or maternity home unless it has been found as a complicated case and suggested by the midwife. Usually the service of a midwife is sought by the people. The traditional medicine man is not an obstacle in the way for a person adopting modern medicine. This may be supported by the fact that the traditional medicine men themselves are often subjects of modern methods of treatments. There is no suspicion among the ethnic groups with regard to modern medicine instead there is a degree of faith. This may be due to prolong contact with modern medicinal culture and the effects of modern medicine.

Consultation of modern medical practitioners first by the vast portion of the population is indicative of increasing faith in modern medicine. In the event of modern medical treatment failing to cure a disease the workers usually consult an *Ojha*. There are also sporadic cases of acquiring modern medical facilities from other sources. The workers are generally forced to continue their traditional faith and practices due to non-availability of modern medical treatment easily, economic constraint and the negligent treatment received from the health centre. The lack of many essential health facilities at the plantations' health centres often develop a negative attitude towards allopathy among the plantation workers. Thus they are left with no option other than approaching traditional medicine man for cure.

From the above analysis of the health behaviour of the workers in tea plantations it may thus be said that traditional health culture is on the decline. There is a shift towards modern health culture. The traditional barriers no longer work as impediments. But while there is



a shift towards modern medicine, the faith in traditional medicine is not totally absent. It still persists due to lack of proper facilities in the health centre of the plantations. Low level of treatment at the health centre, lack of accessibility to modern health facilities outside the plantations, economic constraints to avail health services from outside, etc. are the main reasons for the continuity of traditional health culture. No aversion to modern medicine is observed. The workers are prepared to accept modern medicine totally if facilities are there. Therefore, the lack of facilities and accessibility to modern medicine and modern amenities of hygiene and sanitation are responsible for the persistence of traditional health culture. It is evident that if all these modern health facilities are easily available to them the workers of tea plantations are prepared to accept them.

## **Non-Material Culture**

### **Language:**

“Human being does not live in the objective world alone .... But are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society ... the fact ... is that the “real world” is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached”. (Sapir, 1949: 162).

Anthropological linguistics has mainly been interested in languages as system of knowledge independent of the ways in which people actually speak. It is also clear that in socially stratified societies, speech norms are different in different social classes. Elites and working-class people not only have a different vocabulary but also pronounce words differently. Language, like other parts of culture, shows both stability and change.



## **Ancestral language and changing linguistic forms:**

The ethnic groups who are now working as tea plantation worker in kamalcherra Tea Estate originally are from different linguistic groups. Chasa, Das, Bauri, Baraik castes linguistically and culturally they are close to Bengali community but social environment and plantation life have kept them separated from the Bengali community living in villages and towns. During fieldwork time they told me that they are originally from Hindi speaking areas of India. They have heard from their grand father and grand mother who used to speak Hindi at home.

**Oriya speaking workers:** This group of workers came from Orissa (Sambalpur, Cuttuck) of India. Linguistically, they belong to Oriya group. Caste wise they are branded as Tanti, Naik, Goala, etc. Early generations somehow maintained their linguistic identity, but the present generation has forgotten their mother tongue and has adopted Bengali language.

**The Oraon, Santal, Munda, Bhumij workers:** These ethnic group of people is also well spread in kamalcherra Tea Estate. They originally immigrated from Chota Nagpur (Now Jharkhand state of India). Ethnically they are known as Munda, Oraon, Santhal, Bhumij, Ho, Kol, Mirdha, Karmokar, Kheria, Ghatoar, and Kurmi. Besides having different original occupation, the dialects which this different ethnic group of people spoke differed. The Oraon spoke Kurukh, a language belonging to the Dravidian family which was basically differed from the languages or dialects of the other ethnic groups. Mundas spoke their own language known as Mundari. But almost half of the working population in Kamalcherra Tea Estate is Bauri, Baraik, Savara, Kurmi groups. They speak in Bhojpuri dialect and have kept the dialect alive by their constant practice at home.



So the interesting fact is that though the Oraons and the Bhojpuri speaking groups namely Bauri, Baraik, Savara, Kurmi retained the Kurukh and Bhojpuri dialect. The other ethnic groups had all forgotten their own language.

So a new form of dialect was required for the plantation workers. According to Professor Bhowmik it was named Sadni or Sadri and also this was the *lingua franca* of the different ethnic groups including the Oraons. In this respect, Oraons were bilingual. On the other hand, the only traditional dialect the other ethnic groups knew was Sadri. Sadri is a dialect which is spoken by the different ethnic groups. It is a mixture of Hindi and indigenous dialects. Now a days in kamalcherra Tea Estate Sadri is spoken by the tea plantation workers who were originally from different ethnic groups.

I could found that a language shift happened among the tea plantation workers. This kind of language shift was a necessity of the workers for continuing their new occupation in the tea garden.

The language shift was however, not necessarily from an ethnic to a non-ethnic dialect. In fact, several ethnic groups shifted over to other ethnic dialects as contacts between them were growing fast. As a result, they lost their own traditional dialects. Mainly three major causes may have work behind this situation. First, there are members of ethnic groups who speak a dialect with which they are traditionally identified. This is a case of language retention. Second; there are cases where ethnic groups or a section of an ethnic group declare a regional language as their mother tongue. This is evidence of continued process of language shift indicting gradual assimilation of the ethnic groups into the dominant regional language.

While language shift has been a major process or a problem of indigenous areas, it is remarkable that a very significant proportion of the ethnic population in India have been able to retain their language. A very large number of tea garden labourers have been brought from India to Bangladesh. Tea garden workers display a very high degree



of diversity in their language affinity. Despite the relative isolation suffered by these ethnic communities, there have been areas of contact in which give and take between the ethnic and non-ethnic language has continued throughout history. The geographical patterning of ethnic languages suggest that along the zone of contact between them and the non-ethnic people, progressive interaction has resulted in the fusion of linguistic elements on either side. The incidence of bilingualism and multilingualism among the ethnic groups has increased phenomenally. It may be assumed that as ethnic and non-ethnic interaction was growing, a section of the ethnic population shifted to other dialects or dominant languages with which it had no traditional affinity. This is to the dominant languages of the regions of their habitation indicated a process of language shift and assimilation into the regional languages. So they also face the same problem. The problem of language shift and retention however is significant among the numerically smaller ethnic communities who have left their traditional place of residence for one reason or other. They are unable to retain their cultural identity and as a consequence their linguistic identity as they have to interact with a dominant culture group in the process of their socio-spatial interaction and adjustment. Such groups more than others faced the problem of assimilation or absorption. As a response to these situations and as a defense mechanism, they adopt various tools in retaining their linguistic identity by way of bilingualism or multi-lingualism.

The tea plantation workers are completely cut off from their original homeland. They can only partly recall the language of their fore fathers. So most of the ethnic groups could not retain their ancestral languages. Majority of the workers simply know the places from where their forefathers came, but they did not ever visited their ancestral places.

### **Literacy:**

The plantation workers of kamalcherra Tea Estate are mostly different ethnic communities. Most of them are traditionally

agriculturists and illiterate. Even today most of them are illiterate and a few have primary education.

**Table 4**  
**Ethnic/Religious groups and literacy**  
**(Persons included above 6 years of age)**

| Ethnic/Religious groups | Number of literate persons |    |           |   |       |       |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|----|-----------|---|-------|-------|
|                         | Primary                    |    | Secondary |   | Total | %     |
|                         | M                          | F  | M         | F |       |       |
| Muslim                  | 13                         | 8  | 21        | 2 | 44    | 18.80 |
| Bauri                   | 34                         | 13 | 25        | 4 | 76    | 32.67 |
| Savara                  | -                          | -  | -         | - | -     | -     |
| Nayek                   | 1                          | 2  | 4         | 2 | 9     | 3.84  |
| Baraik                  | 19                         | 10 | 16        | - | 45    | 19.23 |
| Goala                   | 12                         | 3  | 1         | - | 16    | 6.83  |
| Kurmi                   | 12                         | 1  | 1         | - | 14    | 5.98  |
| Oraon                   | -                          | -  | 1         | - | 1     | 0.42  |
| Mudhi                   | 1                          | -  | 9         | - | 10    | 4.27  |
| Mirdha                  | 3                          | -  | -         | - | 3     | 1.28  |
| Kaloar                  | 3                          | 1  | 1         | - | 5     | 2.13  |
| Bunaj                   | 2                          | -  | -         | 1 | 3     | 1.28  |
| Kormokar                | 1                          | -  | -         | - | 1     | 0.42  |
| Bhowmik                 | 1                          | -  | -         | - | 1     | 0.42  |
| Pradhan                 | 1                          | -  | -         | - | 1     | 0.42  |
| Tanti                   | 2                          | -  | -         | - | 2     | 0.85  |
| Kol                     | -                          | -  | -         | - | -     | -     |
| Biswas                  | -                          | -  | -         | - | -     | -     |
| Ganju                   | -                          | -  | -         | - | -     | -     |
| Khodal                  | -                          | -  | -         | - | -     | -     |
| Teoari                  | 1                          | -  | -         | - | 1     | 0.42  |
| Bhumij                  | 2                          | -  | -         | - | 2     | 0.85  |
| Chasa                   | -                          | -  | -         | - | -     | -     |
| Bakti                   | -                          | -  | -         | - | -     | -     |
| Chanda                  | -                          | -  | -         | - | -     | -     |
| Madraji                 | -                          | -  | -         | - | -     | -     |
| Kahar                   | -                          | -  | -         | - | -     | -     |
| Nag                     | -                          | -  | -         | - | -     | -     |
| Ghatoar                 | -                          | -  | -         | - | -     | -     |
|                         | 108                        | 38 | 79        | 9 | 234   | 100%  |

(Source: Field work in Kamalcherra Tea Estate, 2004)

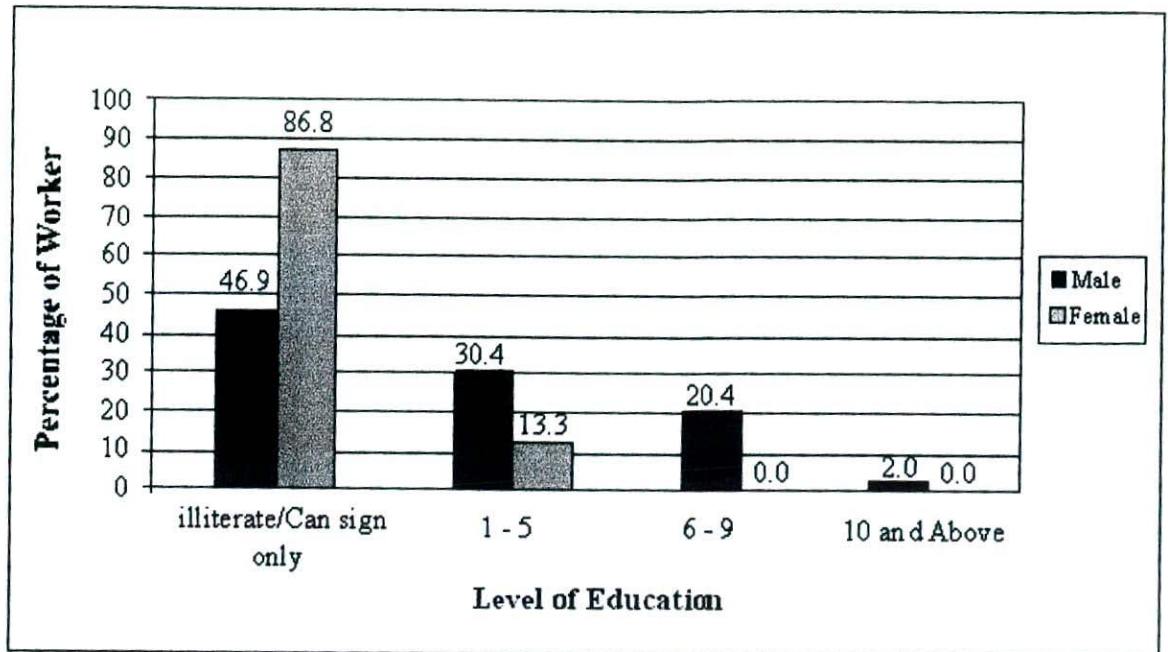


Out of total population of 1786, 815 (65.09 percent) are illiterate of whom 382 (30.51 percent) are men and 433 (34.58 percent) are women. There are 768 children who do not go to school. Among them 203 children are under six years of age who are automatically excluded from the sample. Rest 465 number of children is dropout children from class 1, their age limit varies from 6 to 15 and they have join work for their family as temporary workers. The rest 234 persons (18.69 percent) are only literate of whom 187 (14.94 percent) are men and 47 (3.75 percent) are women. Out of 187 literate men only 108 (8.63 percent) have secondary education. Out of 47 literate women 38 (3.04 percent) have primary education and 9 (0.72 percent) have secondary education.

From the above discussion, it is observed that with higher education are generally from the males. Such educated persons are from the present generation and they are mostly employed in the garden as school teacher and in Railway also. The rate of female education is very low in this plantation. Though there is a primary school run by the plantation authority side by side another primary school run by a NGO namely BRAC. The students who want their secondary education are to go to nearby secondary school in the city. But this situation is very rare in the garden.

Literacy is believed to influence the behavior of the members of a community. The level of literacy has a strong bearing on the social status of a community. The total number of literates among the workers in kamalcherra tea garden is 234 against illiterates. The level of literacy is fairly low among the workers in kamalcherra tea estate. The picture is the same in the other tea estates too. This is in spite of the fact that all the tea plantations have provided facility of primary education for the wards of the workers.

**Figure 1: Gender gap in education among the tea plantation Workers in Bangladesh**



The educational facilities, like nearness to schools (primary, middle and high) and better communication network, are not available to the plantation workers and their children. So the literacy among the age group of 5-15 and 16-25 is not much higher in the garden. It goes on decreasing with the increase in age. The literacy percentage is miserably poor in the age group of 66-75 or above. The analysis farther depicts that the quality of education among the tea garden workers is below standard. Their educational ambition is not high. Their education results are at any stage not upto the mark, and the number of dropouts at high school level is maximum. The number of college going labour boys and girls is less. A very small percentage of students from tea workers family are meritorious who can be counted on fingers. The plantation environment is responsible for such containerization of mind. The crazes for educational advancement among the children of the tea workers are also minimum. The workers are themselves careless about their children's education. The planters have no time to look into the matter. The labour organizations also remain silent or simply shed crocodile tears.



## **Recreation**

Dance and music make up an integral part of their social interaction. The recreation facilities for the workers are very less and hardly have they availed recreation except in holidays and religious rituals. Drinking local wine (*haria*) is a part of their recreation and they get intoxicated very soon and use different slangs specially at night.

## **Songs**

The different classes of songs are named after the different kinds of dances they accompany. The names of the persons who composed particular songs are not remembered, and no singer may claim proprietary right in his or her songs. There are no professional singers amongst the workers, though some young singer here and there sometimes acquires a local reputation as a perfect singer. Men, women and children may sing the same songs, with the exception of marriage songs and songs that are sung generally by women and little girls respectively. A few worker songs are traditional, may are old and some are modern.

## **Dances**

Dances and songs are believed to bring happiness and prosperity and a stimulation of the helpful forces of nature, so that the earth may be fruitful and they may be blessed with an abundance of animal and vegetables, food and the fertility of man and of the rest of creation may increase.

The most important incidents in the life of workers are love and marriage, hunting, and agricultural operations. As every season of the year has its appointed work for the workers, so too has every season its appropriate dances and songs. Their year begins after the harvesting of his lowland rice in November-December. The period from the paddy harvest till the next *Phagu* festival in March, when operations for growing the next paddy crop have to be thought off once more, is the merriest season of the year for them. This the



season when granary is generally full and he has comparative leisure from work in the fields and it is now that young men and girls turn their thoughts seriously to love and marriage.

A principal feature of the customary dances of the period known as the *jadur* dances is the long line of maidens with their arms interlaced retreating backwards as the young men advance towards them with measured steps to the sound of drums, and anon, as the young men in their turn step backwards, advancing towards them with the most captivating movements of the feet the girls know. At the end of this season, at the great religious feast known as the *Sarhul*, they annually celebrate the marriage of Mother-earth with the Sun god. From the *Phagu* festival in March till the *Sarhul* festival in April, all human weddings are suspended, and songs are sung, dances performed and rejoicing made in honour of the divine union.

By the time of the *Phagu* festival, the weddings of the year have almost all been celebrated. Most of the marriageable boys and girls have now been wedded, and the dances known as the *Jatra Kharia* dances that are now taken up appear partly to symbolize the bliss of wedded love. Unlike the *Jadur* dances in which the young men are arranged in a group separate from the girls, and the style of dancing is expressive of a longing for union of one group with the other, in the *Jatra Kharia* dances the male and female dancers are generally intermixed. In these *Kharia* dances, the men no longer carry musical instruments.

After the *Jeth-Jatra* in June, the *Jatra Kharia* dances are given up and the *Karam* dances are taken up and continued till September. The peculiar feature of the *Karam* dances is the graceful stooping posture of the youthful dances.



From the second half of *Aswin* the paddy crops begin to be ripe. The days of anxious expectation are over. The ripening sheaves of paddy that now wave with the breze and adorn the bosom of Mother-earth, gladden the hearts of the old and the young and men and women once more prepare to work merrily side by side.

Besides the dances at the *Akhra*, they have a magico-religious dance known as the marriage-dance (*Benja-nalna*) which is danced at marriages, and a social dance known as *Chali Bechna* which is danced only by the girls in private house and in the lanes and not at the public *Akhra*. Besides these regular dances, there are a few dances that the workers appear to have borrowed from their Hindu or rather Hinduized neighbours. These are the *Jhumar* and the *Lujhri* dances.

## Folktales

Although folktales may contain a supernatural element, they are not sacred in the same way as myths. Folktales are told mainly for enjoyment, although they often have important educational functions. Most folktales and other verbal arts, such as riddles and proverbs, have a moral. Oral traditions are thus important in the socialization process of every society and especially in societies without writing. Folklore can tell us much about the cultural values of a society, because it reveals which actions are approved and which are condemned. The heroes in folktales give us clues to characteristics considered admirable in a particular culture. The audience is always led by the way the tale is told to know which characters and attributes are a cause for ridicule or scorn and which are to be admired. Thus, in studying folklore, the cultural context of its telling is an important clue to understanding the tale itself.

## A Tale of *Dal Puja*

This tale of *Dal Puja* (*Karam* festival) was recorded from an elder worker of tea garden. A few century ago there was an worker



family consisting of seven brothers. Their elder one was engaged in business. Other six brothers used to live in homestead and engaged themselves in different agricultural works. They used to celebrate *Dal Puja* other religious festivals and rural games. Somehow the family was going good and they did not suffer from active poverty. After a decade the elder brother returned home completing his business trip. At the house the elder brother observed that his six brothers are regularly celebrating their rituals, religious festive and agricultural jobs but economically the family remained in poverty. At this the elder brother became annoyed with his six younger brothers and asked them what benefit they have received from religious rituals and festivals. Suddenly the elder brother got sentimental and told his brothers that nothing will help them only from religious celebrations and rural jobs and then, angrily he up-rooted their *Karam* Tree and threw it very far which is about seven seas and dozen rivers away from their house. This *Karam* Tree was thrown at a location that was inhabitable, covered with wild Jungles and bushes and full with harmful insects. After throwing the *karam* Tree the Six younger brothers were crying and crying and used to tell ' *Hai Karam*' ' *Hai Karam*'.

After up-rooting the *Karam* Tree it was observed that the elder brother could not take any food. The foodstuff on the food pot of elder brother were going exhausted then and then. Even it was seen the seven brothers are taking food in daytime, the rice and other items were given with all the seven brothers' pot but elder ones pot got exhausted in a twinkling of eye and it was been happened with other celebrations. Gradually poverty engaged them day by day. The elder brother began to realize his misdeed for up-rooting the *Karam* Tree and he seriously felt that in any way he will bring back this *Karam* Tree and for this he left his house for an unknown destination. His mission was only to collect that *Karam* Tree at any cost. But the fact was that the *Karam* Tree has gone far away. He started his all-day walking to collect that tree. On his way he felt extremely hungry but no food was available. On his walking he saw a *Dumur* fruit in a plant. He collected this *Dumur* from the plant but unfortunately he



saw the *Dumur* was filled with insects and he remained hungry. Again he started walking. This way he continued and he felt extremely thirsty. But water was not available. A considerable distance ahead he saw a pond, when he reached the pond side the pond water extinguished suddenly. He ultimately realized his unfortunate fate for ignoring religious beliefs, rituals and up-rooting the *Karam* Tree. He found no shelter, no food, and no drinking water anywhere. Again the elder followed to walk and telling '*Hai Karam*' and '*Hai Karam*'. In this way he saw a big *Barai* plant. Sufficient *Barai* produced from this plant. A good quantity of *Barai* is lying behind the tree. The *Barai* plant asked the elder brother 'Where are you going?' The elder brother said, 'I have thrown out my religion, rituals and *Karam*. If I cannot recover the *Karam* Tree, the poverty of my house will never alleviate. I am going to recover it. Then the *Barai* Plant again asked the elder 'look, there are many *Barais* produced in my plant and a much quantity lying behind me. You are much hungry, try to take some '*Barai*'. Then elder took some *Barai* in his hand and looked it was also filled with infectious insects and worms. At last he could not take this food even. The *Barai* plant asked the elder, 'you are acrossing seven seas and dozen rivers to collect the *Karam* Tree; there you will ask why people does not take my fruit. The elder answered 'yes, I will do'.

Again he started walking. Walking a far he saw a big Beneyan Tree. A Bird was sitting at the branch of the tree. One shooter liked the bird to fire it down. The elder brother felt sympathy with the Bird and asked the shooter not to kill it and wanted to give him some money. At last the shooter left the place with elder's money. Then the Bird became very happy with the elder brother and told him 'you have saved my life'. The Bird told the elder 'I will remain grateful to you if I can help you any time. You call me any time-you think me and call me in mind and then I will reach you'. The elder replied, 'yes', All right.

The elder brother again started walking. On the way he saw a snake bunter was trying to catch a snake. The snake was running to



escape from the hunter. At one time the snake fled away and asked the elder brother 'please save me from the hunter'. The elder brother told the snake 'I lost all my religion and *Karam*, I am going to recover it'. 'I am to go very far. I got no time to save you and you can bite me also'. The snake told the elder for God sake 'you save me from the hunter I will give you 'gold *Mohor*'. It is very precious and resource of seven kings. It will help you a lot in your mission'. Then the elder brother took the snake at a safe place nearby. The snake hunter came to the elder and asked him, 'have you seen any snake running here. The elder replied the hunter a different direction. The hunter left the place. Saving for life the snake presented the elder brother with the 'gold *Mohor*' and told him 'it is very precious, you will get anything if you want from it'. The elder brother started walking with 'gold *mohor* and continued to say '*Hai Karam and Hai Karam*. Afterwards he was acrossing a big abandoned field. There he saw many cow boys are looking after cattle. He also observed may small ditches in the field. In those ditches many rats used to live. The elder brother saw a small cowboy was trying to catch a rat in a ditch and want to kill that rat. Then the elder brother requested the small cowboy not to kill the rat and gave him some money. The rat got happy for this and appealed the elder brother 'you have saved my life. If you want me for any job, please remember me. I will come to you'. The elder brother said all right.

The elder brother again started his walking saying '*Hai Karam and Hai Karam*.' On the way, he saw in a homestead some mebers of the house were preparing '*cheera*' in the kitchen of the house there was a pot filled with milk. One cat managed to reach the milk pot and eaten the whole milk and ran out from the kitchen. At this stage, the house head along with other members were chasing that cat to kill. The elder brother then requested the house head to release the cat and in exchange he offered some money. The house head agreed to release the cat and the cat got free. Then the cat came to the elder brother and told him 'you have saved my life. You remember me in any works of you, I will reach you'. The elder brother said all right.



After this the elder brother carried out his journey saying *Hai Karam* and *Hai Karam*, walking sometime he reached at a bank of a big pond. This pond was owned by a nearby house holder and he arranged and preserves a good quantity of fish in his pond. But an otter used to catch fishes and ultimately exhausted his whole quantity of fish deposited in the pond. At this the householder became extremely angry for this 'otter' and requested the householder not to kill the 'other'. The householder agreed to release the 'other'. Then the 'other' came to the elder brother and said 'you have saved my life, you would remember me during your need, I will reach you instantly for any help.

Afterwards the elder brother started to walk and ultimately reached at a bank of a big ocean. He was thinking seriously how to cross this big ocean. At that time he remembered the bird. The bird flew and came to the elder brother. The elder brother seated on the pit of the bird and started flying over the sea. During the flight of the bird over mid deep sea the elder brother slipped his gold *mohor* from his possession and it dropped in the mid deep sea. The bird successfully crossed the sea and landed at a safe location at the bank of the sea. The elder brother was deeply thinking to get back the gold *Mohor* in that situation. Suddenly he remembered the tale of the Otter whom he saved his life. He continuing the memory of the Otter and the Otter came to the elder brother. The elder brother narrated the whole matters including the dropping of gold *Mohor* to the otter and asked the otter to recover the gold *Mohor*. In the sea abundant fishes inhabits there. It was believed that some wild *Boal* eaten that gold *Mohor* at the time of dropping of the gold *Mohor*. As such, the otter went in the sea and asked many fishes who engulfed or eaten the gold *Mohor*. But no fishes answered positively. By this time that wild *Boal* was suffering heavy pain in the stomach. The otter sensed it and asked the *Boal* for his acute suffering and pain in the stomach. The *Boal* told the whole story and said, he has eaten a hard matter which might be the cause of the unbearable pain. The the other dragged the *Boal* at the bank of the sea. At that time one householder was passing through the bank of the sea. Observing this big *Boal* he thought it



would be a nice food after cooking and his family members would be happy for this rare dish. He drove the otter away from the fish and took it in hand and started to move towards his house. The otter narrated all the matters to the elder brother and they were thinking to recover the gold *Mohor* at any cost. Suddenly the elder brother remembered that cat. He mentally remembered the cat and the cat came to him. The elder brother then sends the cat towards that householder carrying the *Boal* fish. The cat started crying towards the householder till to reach his house. The householder was annoyed with the cat and was trying to beat the cat. But the cat was crying and going along with the householder. At last the cat managed to reach the homestead of the householder with continuous crying and with repeated obstructions from the householder. The house holder then gave the fish to his wife asking her to cook it nicely and told his wife that the cat came to his house with miserable crying and for this sympathetic matter he asked his wife to give the stomach of the fish to the cat. After dressing the fish the wife of the householder gave the fish stomach to the cat. The gold *Mohor* was lying in the stomach of the fish. At that, the cat, the cat collected the gold *Mohor* from the inside stomach and got it back to the elder brother.

Receiving the gold *Mohor* the elder brother sat on the pit of the bird and flew over the dozen rivers and ultimately landed at the side of that *Karam* Tree. At that place, there were many beautiful *Karam* trees. The elder brother observed that his up-rooted *Karam* Tree was lying in place which covered with many thorny branches, insects and harmful worms. The elder brother was looking and searching his up-rooted *Karam* Tree there. Then, the beautiful *Karam* Trees were asking the elder brother 'Do not go there, that place is dangerous and unsafe, you take us with you'. The elder brother told 'No, I require that up-rooted tree branches of *Karam* Tree which I had been thrown'. Ultimately he recovered those three branches of *Karam* and again sat on the pit of the bird and started flying over the seven seas and dozen rivers and landed at the site of the Banyan Tree. Reaching there he fled the bird and started walking on foot. After walking a distances he reached at the side of that *Barai* plant.



The *Barai* Plant asked the elder brother 'Hallow Brother' what information you have carried for me. The elder brother replied 'yes, you have some information. Under the ground of you there are seven numbers of dishes which are filled with money. You distribute this money to the people. Then the people will take your fruits'. The *Barai* plant requested the elder brother to take away that money for himself. The elder brother thought how to take away the money dishes from the ground. He remembered the tales of that rat. The rat came and it took away all the seven dishes from the ground and these to the elder brother. Then the elder brother started walking with three Branches of *Karam* Tree and seven money dishes. On walking with three branches of *Karam* Tree and seven dishes he reached at the side of *Dumur* Tree. The *Dumur* asked the elder brother what information he has carried for her. The elder brother replied that there are many money under the ground of the *Dumur* Tree' and asked her to distribute hese money among the people and then the people will eat his fruits. The *Dumur* plant asked the elder brother 'No, I will not distribute the money, you please take these'. The elder brother took those money under the *Dumur* plant and started on walking with his recovered three branches of *Karam* tree and money dishes towards his house. Reaching nearby his house the elder brother saw a beautiful celebration was going on in his house. He used to hear good songs, *Madals* and observed beautiful dances being carried out there. The elder brother saw his six younger brothers were celebrating *Dal Puja* with the branches of the *Karam* tree and the three branches of *Karam* were reached to his six brothers ahead for some unknown beliefs. The elder brother realized his misdeeds fro up-rooting the *karam* tree, resulting poverty in his family. The elder brother then planted his carried three branches of the *Karam* tree in his house and joined with dancing and music with his brothers and others with due satisfaction and joys in celebrating the *Dal Puja*. From then, all forms of poverty and meseries were gone out from their family.

## CHAPTER V

### Social Organization



## Clan:

The term Clan, (and its close relative, the term *Sib*) has been used differently by different anthropologists, and certain amount of confusion exists about its meaning. The Clan (or *Sib*) will here be defined as non corporate descent group in which each member assumes descent from a common ancestor (who may be real or fictive), but is unable to trace the actual genealogical links back to the ancestor. This seems from the great genealogical depth of the clan, whose founding ancestor lived so far in the past that the links must be assumed rather than known the detail (Haviland, 1990:283).

Thus a clan generally refers to a unilineal kinship group whose members believe them to be descended from a common ancestors, but who cannot trace this relationship genealogically. Clans are not generally residential units but tend to spread out over many villages. Clans therefore, often have political and religious functions, rather than primarily domestic and economic ones. One of the most important functions of a clan is to regulate marriage.

In most societies, clans are exogamous. The prohibition on marriage within the clan strengthens its unilineal character. Clan exogamy also extends the network of peaceful social relation within a society as different clans are allied through marriage.

Clan, lacking the residential unity of lineages, depend on symbols of animals, plants, natural forces, and objects to provide members with solidarity and a ready means of identification. These symbols, called totems, are often associated with the clans mythical origin and provide clan members with a means of reinforcing the awareness of their common descent. Totemism is the belief that people are descended from animals, plants, or natural objects. The tea plantation workers also believers of totemism. Totemism is a changing concept that varies clan to clan. It has been observed that in



the workers society there are several clans and totem beliefs still exist in many of their rituals.

Totemism establishes a relation of kinship between person belonging to one clan who are not related by blood, and exogamy prescribes that the persons held to be so related shall not intermarry. Further, when terms of relationship come into existence it is found that they are applied not to members of a family, but to all the persons of the clan who might have stood in each particular relationship to the person addressing them. Thus a man will address as mother not only his own mother, but all the women of his clan who might have stood to him in the relation of mother. Similarly he will address all the old men and women as grandfather or grandmother or aunt, and the boys and girls of his own generation as brother and sister, and so on. With the development of the recognition of the consanguineous family, the use of terms of relationship tends to be restricted to persons who have actual kinship; thus a boy will address only his father's brothers as father, and his cousins as brothers and sisters; but sufficient traces of the older system of clan kinship remain to attest its former existence. But it seems also clear that some, at least, of the terms of relationship were first used between persons really related; thus the word for mother must have been taught by mothers to their own babies beginning to speak, as it is a paramount necessity for a small child to have a name by which to call its mother when it is wholly dependent on her, if the period of infancy is got over without the use of this term of address there is no reason why it should be introduced in later life, when in the primitive clan the child quickly ceased to be dependent on its mother or to retain any strong affection for her.

The tea plantation workers belong to different ethnic groups. They are sub-divided into numerous exogamous clan. Each clan bore the name of birds, fish, animals, plants or minerals. Any one of a clan member could not eat the flesh of the bird or the animal or the plant of his clan. For instance, if a person's clan name is *larka*, meaning tiger, he would not eat tiger flesh. There were clan name *barwa* meaning wild dog. A bird name *Karketta*, *topno* which means tortoise and so on. A boy and a girl of same clan could not marry.



The usual characteristics of totemism, in its later and more common form at any rate, are that member of a clan regard themselves as related to, or descended from, the animal or tree from which the clan takes its name, and abstain from killing or eating it. This was perhaps not the original relation of the clan to its clan token in the hunting stage, but it is the one commonly among tea plantation workers.

Each ethnic group had its own clan. Sometimes there was considerable overlap between several ethnic groups came from Chotanagpur of India. For instance, *Kartaka* was a clan among Mundas as well as Oraons. The list of these clans are given below:

|                     |   |                |
|---------------------|---|----------------|
| Bagh or nahar       | - | Tiger          |
| Bachas              | - | Calf           |
| Morkuria            | - | Peacock        |
| Kachhwala or limuan | - | Tortoise       |
| Nagas               | - | Cobra          |
| Hash                | - | Elephant       |
| Bandar              | - | Monkey         |
| Bhainsa             | - | Buffalo        |
| Richharia           | - | Bear           |
| Kuliha              | - | Jackal         |
| Kukura              | - | Dog            |
| Karsayal            | - | Deer           |
| Heran               | - | Black-buck,    |
| Mircha              | - | Chillies       |
| Kathota             | - | Bowl           |
| Holdimuri           | - | Termaric plant |
| Karkatta            | - | Bird           |
| Topno               | - | Tortoise       |
| Tirki               | - | Young Mice     |

My studies on kamalcherra Tea Estate among different ethnic groups are that they identify themselves as different *Jati* than others.

These people have protected their *Jati* within their clan for long ago. They arrange marriage of their wards within their own *Jati*. For instance, Bauri and Kumri are different *Jati*. No *Bauri* will arrange marry with any *Kumri Jati*, but they will marry within *Bauri Jati*. Here Bauris Clan is *bagut* which means tiger. Likewise Kumri Clan is *Holdimuri* which means turmeric plant. They prohibit marriage with any *Jati* other than their own. It is because their total population is very less in their *Jati*. But if someone marries other than his own *Jati*, than they compromise with that marriage through penalty and *Priyaschitta* which means purification. In that case garden priest has to be given Taka ten or twenty and fed all the people of their own *Jati* and the community.

Members of a Clan will not injure the animal after which it is named, and if they see the corpse of the animal or hear of its death they throw away an earthen cooking-pot, and bathe and shave themselves as for one of the family. At wedding the bride's father makes an image in clay of bird or animal and places it beside the marriage-post. The bridegroom worships the image, lighting a sacrificial fire before it, and offers to it the vermilion which he afterwards smears on the forehead of the bride. Women are often tabooed with representations of their totem animal, and men swear by it as their most sacred oath.

The most important function of a clan is regulation of marriage rules among the clan members. Any breach of marriage regulation provokes it to act and punish the offenders.

The members of the clan pool their resources to enable a poor family in arranging a funeral feast or socio-religious functions like marriage, worship, etc.

The tea workers follow clan exogamy as well as clan endogamy. Due to the impact of Hinduism amongst the workers they became more exogamous.



Basing on this research it can be said that the traditional clan exogamy in the ethnic group of the Tea garden has been shattered due to the colonial plantation system. The British ruler in the Indian subcontinent for the shake of their business and economic exploitation theory have collected different ethnic groups from various places or India by alluring with lucrative offer and made the workers to work in the tea plantation sector. By this they not only changed those people original occupation, they also changed their social and cultural norms and traditions. So it may be said that from long past the workers leaving their homeland and adopting a different occupation have lost their age long norms, traditions like inter-marriage, inter-dining etc. to cope with a new way of life.

### **Kinship :**

Kinship includes relationships through blood and relationships through marriage. According to Marvin Haris (1968) all persons whose relationship to each other can be described in terms of a combination of affinity or descent or a combination of both one is considered kin to the other. The domain of ideas constituted by the beliefs and expectations that kin shares with each other are called kinship. Kinship is the paramount ideology of domestic life. In every society, the formation of groups and the regulation of behavior depend to some extent on socially recognized ties of kinship. A kinship system refers to the totality of relationships based on:

- (i) ties of biological ancestry or cosanguinity,
- (ii) marriage that links individuals in a web of rights and obligations,
- (iii) fictional ties.

Rules that connect individuals with particular sets of kin because of known or presumed common ancestry are called rules of descent. In the tea plantation workers society consists of different ethnic groups knows more or less immediately which set of kin to turn to for support and help.



The workers have three known rules of descent that affiliate individuals with different set of kin as mentioned earlier originally they are from different ethnic groups.

Two basic types of descent rule, or kinship ideology, operates in tea plantation workers society. In a system with a rule of unilineal descent, descent-group membership is based on links through either the paternal or the maternal line, but not both. Two types of unilineal descent rules are patrilineal descent and matrilineal descent. Among the workers patrilineal descent groups are dominant. The most frequent rule, affiliates an individual with kin of both sexes related to him or her through men only. Although a man's sons and daughters are all members of the same descent group, affiliation with that group is transmitted only by the sons to their children.

We know matrilineal descent affiliates an individual with kin of both sexes related to him or her through women only. In each generation, then, children belong to the kin group of their mother. This system does not exist in the tea plantation.

Ambilineal descent affiliates an individual with kin related him or her through men or women. In other words, some people in the society affiliate with a group of kin through their fathers; others, through their mothers. Consequently, the descent groups show both female and male genealogical link – whereby an individual affiliates for some purpose with a group of matrilineal kin and for other purposes with a group of patrilineal kin. Thus, two rules of descent, each traced through links of one sex only, are operative at the same time. Tea workers sometimes exercise this kind of system to get the job permanently. That is one of the causes that they do not use their ethnic group name for their working purpose.

For the tea plantation workers working in the tea garden was not their original work for the livelihood of their forefathers. For centuries



they suffered from various difficulties in their ethno-religious life. They were the victim of the circumstances and could not retain many of their ethnic identity and ethnic systems. So bilateral kinship system also adapted in their society. The term kindred describes a person's bilateral set of relatives who may be called upon for some purpose like weddings, funerals, or some other ceremonial occasion; a kindred, however is not usually a definite group.

Thus kinship ties help the workers life in various ways. In regulating marriage kins are functioning for them. In baby birth time near relative comes near to the pregnant lady and helps her for giving a child birth.

Among the tea plantation workers now a days basically kinship ties can be classified as consanguineous kinship and affinal kinship. The consanguineous kinship favours to all the kins related through blood are biological ties, while affinal kins are those recognized through marriage.

Beside regulating marriage member of a persons lineage helps him or her economically, to contribute to a bride price or fine, and to support the person in life crisis. Mutual aid often extends to economic cooperation on a regular basis. Money earning, either by harvesting cash crop or by leaving community for a time to work for cash wages is sometimes viewed by the descent groups as belonging to all.

In performing political functions workers relatives influences them for vote giving functions in the national election time.

In ethnic communities religious function are the most important occasion when a clan or lineage perform their own religious believes and practices, worshiping their own gods or goddesses and ancestral spirits. Tea plantation workers also do the same way.

Under a classificatory system several people, lineal as well as collateral, and often even a final, are all referred to by the same term



of designation. The item classes them as similar. Such terms refer more to relationship rather than to kin. Against this, a descriptive term of designation describes the speaker's exact relation toward him, her, whom, he, she is referring to or addressing.

The exogamous kinship group of the clan still forms the foundation of the social system of the tea plantation workers. Their system of kinship is of the kind termed both descriptive and classificatory system. The fundamental feature of these systems are the application of different kinship term in addressing different kin or relatives for example ego address his father as *Boppa* but he addresses his uncle (Fathers younger brother) as *Kaka*. But in case of ego's own generation, or cross cousins with the same term, he addresses his own elder brother or sister, so in this context, the system of kinship said to be complex. The researcher also found the influence of Hindu and Muslim kinship terminology over it. The workers have lost many of their own terms and borrow different terms from their neighboring Muslim and Hindus. Because they have been living side-by-side for a long time.

### Kin-ties

Kin-ties among the workers are very strong. They live together, work together and keep close contact with each other. In all societies people are bound together in groups by various kinds of bonds. The most universal and the most basic of these bonds is that which is based on reproduction, an inherent human drive and is called kinship.

Kinship plays an important role in the life of the plantation workers. It plays many function such as to ensure security by providing mutual aid and to regulate and control marriage to lead the life in a legal way, to develop the economy by exchanging material goods, to have same religions beliefs and so forth.

The family is the primary incubation of personal security. In case of a emergency a person seeks help from his kin at first.



The following are some of the more frequently used kinship terms among the tea plantation workers:

| <u>Kin or relative</u>              | <u>Term of address</u> |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Father's father                     | Dado                   |
| Father's mother                     | Dadi                   |
| Mother's father                     | Nana                   |
| Mother's mother                     | Nani                   |
| Father                              | Boppa                  |
| Mother                              | Mai                    |
| Father's elder brother              | Baro Bap               |
| Father's elder brother's wife       | Baromai                |
| Father's brother                    | Kaka                   |
| Father's younger brother's wife     | Kaki                   |
| Mother's brother (elder)            | Mama                   |
| Mother's brother (younger)          | Mama                   |
| Mother's brother's wife             | Mami                   |
| Mother's sister                     | Moushi                 |
| Mother's sister's husband           | Mousha                 |
| Father's sister                     | Buajee                 |
| Father's sister's husband           | Pisha                  |
| Ego's elder brother                 | Dada                   |
| Ego's elder brother's wife          | Bhoujee                |
| Ego's young brother                 | By name                |
| Ego's young brother's wife          | Choti Bahuria          |
| Ego's elder sister                  | Didi                   |
| Ego's elder sister's husband        | Bahanei                |
| Ego's elder parallel cousin(Male)   | Dada                   |
| Ego's elder parallel cousin(Female) | Didi                   |
| Ego's son                           | By name                |
| Ego's son's wife                    | Bahu                   |
| Ego's daughter                      | By name                |
| Ego's daughter's husband            | Damad                  |

## **Ceremonial Functions of certain Kin**

In the performance of certain social ceremonies, the workers usage assigns definite functions to particular relatives. The more important of these functions are the following:

### **During pregnancy**

When a female worker is with child, it is the custom to invite her father or brother to her husband's house to perform the sacrificial

ceremony to prevent the evil spirits of her father's house from doing her any harm.

### **At Birth**

It is properly the function of the baby's grandfather to officiate as the sacrifice at the ceremony performed after the birth of a child and meant to ward off the evil eye and the evil attentions of malignant spirits from the child.

### **At Marriage**

At a workers wedding, it is the function of the bride-groom's and bride's married sister to besmear the forehead of the bride-groom and of the bride respectively with turmeric and oil and to perform certain other ceremonies believed to ensure happiness and prosperity to the pair during their married life. The father or elder brother of the bride has to draw, from the village-well, water required for the marriage rites. This water has to be brought a cockcrow before any one else has touched the well. Again, when the actual marriage rites are being performed, it is primarily the function of the brothers and cousins (male) of the bride to hold a screen round the bride and bride-groom and persons officiating a the marriage so that they may be screened from the gaze of strangers (who may have the evil eye) and of evil spirits. When the bride first leaves her parents' home for



her husband's, her father puts an iron-headed arrow into her hands. The girl carries it to prevent the evil spirits of her parents' house from following her.

### **At death**

At the cremation of a deceased worker, it is usually the sons of the deceased who have first to put fire into the mouth of the corpse, after which other relatives do the same.

### **Kin Relation among the Members of a Family**

FaFa/SoSo (Father's father and Son's son). The FaFa and SoSo usually maintain between them a joking relationship with marked informality. The FaFa may tease the SoSo by saying that he will break, his waist and leg. Usually they are members of the same family and have the opportunity to see each other frequently. The FaFa very happily fondles the young SoSo. Whenever any other relative punishes the SoSo he looks upon the FaFa for comfort. The FaFa and SoDa relationship also follows similar pattern.

MoFa/DaSo (Mother's Father and Daughter's Son). It has been observed that in general the same relationship obtains between the MoFa and DaSo as between the FaFa and SoSo.

### **FaMo/SoSo (Father's Mother and Sons Son)**

The FaMo sometimes offers a helping hand to the mother of the child in early childcare. For example she may routinely apply mustard oil on the body of the SoSo and place him out in the sun to get the sun's rays. Frequently the FaMo acts as a constant guard and provides protection to the child. The FaMo who due to old age retires from usual activities may take care of the SoSo so that the parents of the SoSo can utilize the time in a productive way. Such performance on the part of the FaMo makes her a useful member of the household even at an old age.

### Fa/So (Father and Son)

An intimate relationship between Father and Son was not usually observed. The father as the source of family authority is largely a disciplinarian. He spends relatively little time in close intimate contact with his son. This happens particularly when the son is five years old or over. A father expects his son to be dutiful and obedient. For any failure in the expected performance the father feels it reasonable to punish his son. Sometimes the father is observed in

beating a son, between and such a background of personal relationships, a son feels like behaving toward his father with an attitude of respect. A similar pattern of behaviour is extended to his father's brothers.

### Fa/Da (Father and Daughter)

Compared with the mother a father is less tough in his dealings with the daughter. A daughter behaves with her father in a respectful manner. Such kind of behaviour on her part also extends to the father's brothers.

### Mo/So (Mother and Son)

During the first few years of son's life, the mother acts as a warm and supportive personality to satisfy the basic needs of the infant. If the first birth is a son, the mother receives the child with great joy. The mother makes a sincere effort for the welfare of her son and tries to provide all kinds of protection to him. The son's personal request for any favour from his father is preferably channeled through his mother. The mother acts as a disciplinarian in significantly soft way compared with father. The mother usually points out the good qualities of her son and keeps biding his deficiencies to her husband. Taking advantage of his mother's soft heart, the son frequently tries to ignore her instructions which are not to his liking. Sometimes the son



also dares to tell lies to his mother which he will not usually do while talking to his father.

#### Mo/Da (Mother and Daughter)

This relationship is similar to that of Mo and So. As the daughter becomes efficient in discharging household duties and caring for the siblings, and approaches marriageable age, the mother turns most affectionate if her daughter is well disciplined in her movements and highly courteous in her behaviour.

#### EBr/YBr (Elder Brother and Younger Brother)

Elder brother at an early age demonstrate a disciplinary attitude towards younger brothers and expect to be treated with respect. In the practical sense, the elder brother to a considerable extent retains the position of authority until the younger brother is able to establish a separate residence. During the lifetime of the father, in arranging the marriage of a YBr, the EBr plays an important role. If the father is dead, the EBr frequently tries hard to get a suitable marital partner for the YBr. Much time such assistance in arranging a marriage proves helpful in the development of a useful cooperative spirit between the conjugal units of two brothers.

#### EBr/Ysi (Elder Brother and Younger Sister)

The YSi looks upon the EBr in a respectful way. The EBr sometimes plays a key role in arranging the marriage of the YSi. If the father dies before the marriage of the YSi, suitable arrangement of her marriage becomes obligatory on the part of the EBr. By undertaking such a responsibility, the EBr functions as a substitute of the father.

### ESi/YSib (Elder Sister and Younger Sibling)

Elder sisters are given the responsibility of taking care of younger siblings. When the elder sister is over ten years old she is frequently required to function as the substitute of the mother to the YSib.

### MoBr/SiSo (Mother's Brother and Sister's Son)

A SiSo is expected to behave respectfully towards his MoBr. The MoBr is always affectionate towards the SiSo. The SiSo is allowed to make frequent visits to the house of the MoBr where he is always, cordially received.

### Hu/Wi (Husband and Wife)

Traditionally husbands and wives do not come close to each other during the course of daily activities. Routinely during normal activities the closest proximity occurs at the time of serving meals. In the study area during the fieldwork, it was quite clear that the wife expected major decisions to come from her husband. When a newly married woman was asked regarding the total number of children she would like to have, the most common reply was that decision on such an important matter lay with her husband. The husband is almost always a dominant personality over his wife.

### Mo-in-law and Da-in-law (Mother-in law and Daughter-in-law)

The Mo-in-law – Da-in-law relationship is the most important of all in-law relationships in the patrilocal families of the study area. The newly married woman frequently comes as an unknown individual to reside permanently in her husband's house. During daily household activities she remains in closest contact with her Mo-in-law plays a leading role in providing the Da-in-law necessary guidance



and direction in undertaking household duties in the new environment.

### **Family :**

A family is a social and economic unit consisting minimally of one or more parents and their children. Members of a family always have certain reciprocal rights and obligations, particularly economic ones. Family members usually live in one household, common residence is not a defining feature of families. In simpler societies, the family and household tend to be indistinguishable; it is only in more complex societies, and in societies becoming dependent on commercial exchange, that some members of a family may live elsewhere.

In tea plantation workers society family is the ultimate socio-economic unit. Daily activities of each member of a family significantly influence the social, economic and religious life of the community. There are about 379 families in kamalcherra Tea Estate which can be divided into three types, nuclear, joint and unclassified on the basis of their size and composition. The nuclear families generally consist of parents and their unmarried children. The joint families consist of married sons and daughters living with their parent or sometimes two married brothers living together with their sons and daughters. The unclassified type includes single member or more members consisting not of husband and wife but of some other relatives. Out of 379 families there are 250 nuclear, 79 joint and 50 unclassified families.

Table 5

Size of the nuclear family

| <u>Family size</u> | <u>Number of families</u> |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 2                  | 42                        |
| 3                  | 52                        |
| 4                  | 56                        |
| 5                  | 47                        |
| 5+                 | 53                        |
| Total : 250        |                           |

(Source: Field work in Kamalcherra Tea Estate, 2004)

The nuclear families are of various types in their size and composition. The size varies from two to five and above members. The most common type of nuclear family has four members. There are 56 such families. Next in order comes the families with three members (52) c five members (47), five plus members (53) and two members (42).

The larger size are however not always due to greater number of children born to the couples in these families, but often some unmarried dependent relatives come to stay in these families as permanent members.

Table 6  
Size of the joint families

| Family Size | Number of families |
|-------------|--------------------|
| 4           | 2                  |
| 5           | 35                 |
| 6           | 21                 |
| 7           | 9                  |
| 8           | 7                  |
| 9           | 4                  |
| 10          | 1                  |
| Total : 79  |                    |

(Source: Field work in Kamalcherra Tea Estate, 2004)

The joint family's consisting of five members are most numerous followed respectively by six, seven and eight members families. There are 35 families consisting of five members and 21 families consisting of six members and 8 families consisting of seven members and 7 families consisting of eight members. There are also 4 families consisting of nine members and 1 family consisting of ten members (Table 6).

In such joint families sometimes married sons and daughters may live with their parents. There is a *Ghardamad* system where the daughter's husbands live with their parent – in – laws. This system is



prevalent in the families particularly who have agricultural lands of their own. The *Ghardamad* works on this land. Such system is very common among the Baraiks. Sometimes brothers sons or sisters' sons are also seen living with their relatives in large families. In some cases where the couples have no son they keep *Ghardamad* to work on their land. There is also another reason for which *Ghardamad* works in their father-in-laws land. In a plantation, a daughter may be recruited if her mother is ill or retired. A son also may have a job in lieu of his father or mother; a daughter-in-law may have a job after her in-laws have retired. But the son-in-law will never get a job in a plantation after retirement on his father in-law or mother-in-law. Other relatives may live with a couple if they do not have accommodation.

Sometimes father's brother or sister who is working in the same plantation may also live with their nephew or niece, and sometimes minor brother and sister live with their elder brother or sister. Although there are a few joint families in this plantation the nuclear families are predominate. The plantation's recruitment policy has strengthened such nuclearisation. The plantations offer equal opportunity to the woman along with their husbands in the job market and consider a nuclear family as a basic unit to receive work facilities and other benefits. Certain facilities such as free quarter, free firewood, free cultivable land, and ration at subsidized rates are given to each family. This naturally encouraged the workers to form nuclear families. In many cases these are the factors responsible for splitting up of large joint families into their constituent nuclear units.

Additional employment and filling up of the new jobs are done primarily on the basis of family units and not from the unemployed persons available within the plantation as such. The facilities given by the management is same for all categories of family units including single member units.

There are also other factors which induce large household to split into smaller one. This accommodation is not sufficient for larger households. In such quarters there is only one room and kitchen. If



there is any family where two adult persons are workers, say for example, a father and a son who live together, they are entitled to get one quarter only. For instance Birju Bauri (40) lives with his married son Ratan Bauri (22) who is also a permanent worker. As they live together they are entitled to get one quarter only. But if Ratan Bauri establishes a separate family he will be provided with a separate quarter.

The functional role of the family has changed as the traditional mode of production has change to a new type of production relation in the plantation economy. Work in the plantation has changed their economic activity from self-supporting peasant cultivators to wage labourers. Thus the family has changed from a unit of production to a

unit of consumption. Traditionally, joint living was essential for joint and organized efforts agricultural work and to support the family economy. But under the present situation in plantation society, joint-living to some extent deprives the workers of some of their due benefits from the garden authorities. Thus joint family, except under special circumstances, is disfavored.

Though there is a predominance of nuclear family in the plantation society, nonetheless a close relationship with other primary and secondary relatives are maintained. Here the kinsmen and relatives who live side by side in nuclear families after help one another in times of need. In this feature of close kinship inter-dependence the plantation society differs from the other industrial society.

### **Authority in the Family:**

There is a co-relation between class position and the authority of the males. In the lower strata, husbands are more likely to chain authority because they are male, but actually they have to allow more authority to their wives. Men of the upper strata generally assert less values of patriarchal authority, but in practice they manage to enjoy



more power as they have more power resources. Women of the upper strata if they work, contribute a little to their family income. Their husbands are less dependent on the services of their wives and as a result husbands' position in role bargaining is much stronger (Goode, 1965:74-75).

In the patriarchal society traditional male values are institutionalized in the family economy, social and religious life. In reality power and authority of the plantation workers, women as mothers and is a consequence of the patriarchal family structure with its excessive emphasis on male descendants. Though giving birth of sons in a patriarchal society is very important like greater Bangladesh society. Such "son-complex" is absent in the tea plantation society. One reason may be that in this society both sons and daughters work and earn, and both of them are economically independent. In the plantation the daughters are not the economic liability but an asset to their parents as they earn from their childhood. So daughters are not burden to the parents, rather the parent's get bride-price at the time of marriage of their daughters. In the plantation society the functional role of the family has changed the authority of patriarchal pattern and gradually diminished with the break down of larger in-based joint families. The nuclear family units have emerged as independent self-governing entities with changes in authority structure within the family units. Firstly, there is a change in the headship of the family. Traditionally, the eldest male members of a family used to be the head of the household. In the plantation situation, the quarter is allotted to the individual name of the male worker who may not necessarily be the eldest member of the family. Thus the eldest member of the family gradually loses not only the economic control over the family but as well the power and authority. The power and authority generally rest in the hands of the earning members of the family. In the plantation society men are not only the providers. Their wives work and contribute to the maintenance of the family. As a matter of fact, in many cases their husbands contribute a part of their income to the family purse as they usually spend most of their income in drinking.



In the plantation society men usually exercise less authority over women. Women belong to different ethnic groups generally are exposed to very few restrictions. They enjoy much more social freedom than the Hindu or Muslim women. Inclusion of women in plantation as wage earners is a criterion of considerably higher social status for plantation women. In plantation society plantation work becomes normal and essential component of married women's daily existence. The men and perhaps the women themselves have always seen women's part as one that derives from their position in the family. It is also important that the social institutions may affect women's standing within the family and outside the home in different ways. For example the status of some of the ethnic origin women like Baraiks are extremely low in their society, while the employment in the plantation enables them to bring the majority of the family income, and this has raised their status within the family. Women's status in the society as well as their power is low when they have low status both in economic and social spheres, and high when they enjoy relative authority in both the spheres. Women's status, personal power and authority in the family are considerably high among the ethnic group workers. This has been possible for their crucial economic contribution as well as for the pre-existing values of near equality of women in the domestic spheres. 448945

Thus a typical family situation in plantation society becomes as for example after marriage (if he is a permanent worker of the garden) a son moves from his parental home and establishes a new family with his wife and children. The plantation authority provides him with a free quarter and he becomes the head of the household. The father, if alive or the oldest male members of his old family loses control over the new family. When the extended family breaks down into single unit the father's authority tends to equalize with that of his wife, grown up children become more independent of parental control. Thus new ideas and values are absorbed more quickly in the families where young people hold the rise of the family. The wives got more opportunity to enjoy considerable authority in the family. The family and conjugal life have been significantly affected by the



absence of the elderly members. The traditional kin bonds have also considerably weakened and the marriage has now become a more personal one than family affairs. Thus many new ideas and values penetrate in the traditional social system through these family units run by young husband and wives.

### **Adjustment between Domestic Life and Working Life:**

Every employed person is faced with the problem of defining the relationship between work and family in his or her life. If one is single or without children or dependent parents, this task seems to be relatively easy. Goode develops the idea that individuals "shop around" for "role bargains" in order to reduce their role strains. He feels that an individual's total role obligations are impossible to fulfill and there must exist various means to mitigate the role strains.

Kinzer advocates that the general cultural norms may be mitigated by specific role relationships and specific cultural norms. These mitigating factors are: (i) specific cultural norms or legislation such as laws protecting the woman workers, access to the educational system, etc., (ii) husband's approval to his wife's working, (iii) means by which mother is relieved of continuous supervision of her children, and (iv) norms more often implicitly than explicitly relating to the role of a working woman (Goode, 1965: 109).

The role conflicts occur when a person occupies two or more positions simultaneously and when the role expectations of one are incompatible with the role expectations of the other. The multiple statuses of a woman as a worker, as a wife and as a mother with her correspondingly multiple roles are each and in combination of potential sources of conflict. The role conflict may be of two types: (i) intra-role conflict and (ii) inter-role conflict. The first one is associated with different expectations that others hold for a person, i.e., role set. The second one i.e., inter-role conflict is associated with the different expectations that are associated with a person as the incumbent of two or more positions, multiple roles (Kinzer, 1975:185).



The women plantation workers occupy the statuses of woman, worker, wife and mother. They work for the economic necessity with the full knowledge of their husbands and children and associates with people who share their view. They seem to be happy with their job. They never feel inadequate and inept as a wife and a mother. Most of the women workers in the kamalcherra Tea Estate hail from ethnic background. In ethnic society the restrictions on movement of women are few. At the same time they enjoy economic freedom which also helps them to reduce their role conflict in their family as wives, as mothers and workers. Their working conditions, rules and facilities are also congenial for their work outside home. These to some extent help to mitigate the role strains of the women workers in the family. The women integrate their work and the family in an accommodative way. The role of wife and mother in a traditional situation is somewhat different. Here though they work, it is guided more by family needs rather than by rigid job requirements. The women workers of the plantation have low career aspirations and promotion facilities as well as job opportunities elsewhere are very limited. These factors also tend to make them more adaptive to the work and home environment. Their low aspirations and almost nil education also help them to adjust better to the family life than the educated middle class working women who are to compete in a shrinking job market and enter into a conflict with a rigid patriarchal family system.

In Hindu society, husbands are, traditionally; minimally accommodative to the day to day family needs, their primary commitment is to their work. But in Ethnic society particularly in plantation the situation is quite different. Here husbands are more accommodative to their wives. Most of them help their wives in household work including cooking, or in looking after the children.

Participation of women in economic activities is not a new phenomenon particularly in regard to the ethnic women of the plantation. Family is the basic economic unit. The increasing nuclearization of the families in plantation has made the husband and wife relationships more crucial. Marriage here can be seen as a



co-operative venture based on equal partnership. In such a situation mutual adjustment is vital for family stability, the women stretching their interest in work beyond the home while the men becoming more home centered. The situation has also influenced the relationship between parents and children at home.

In a typical industrial society there is a rigid separation between home and place of work. But in the plantation industry the situation is different. In a plantation both residential and working place are often close to each other. The working hours in the plantation are also routinised to accord with the day to day activities of the domestic life. The plantation women workers rise at about 5 A.M. to do household chores and prepare the breakfast. At 7 A.M. they have to go for their plantation work. After working in the field from 7 A.M. to 12 noon they come back home. They get a lunch break from 12 noon to 2 P.M. when they prepare and serve lunch to their husbands and children. They again attend the afternoon work in the plantation at about 2 P.M. and continue to work up to 5 P.M. Then they return home and on the way collect some firewood from the garden. In the evening they prepare dinner and do the remaining household chores including taking care of the livestock.

A case study of a young working mother will reveal her daily routine. Asari Bauri (24), wife of Raghu Bauri (25) has two sons – the elder one is of 4 years of age and the younger one is of 11 months only. Asari Bauri said that she woke up 5 A.M. and swiped the house. Then she prepared tea and *Chapati*. She and her husband took the breakfast when the sons were also fed. Then she cooked the mid-day meal in which husband helped her. Then she fed their goat. Husband also looked after the sons at that time. She went out for work at 7.30 A.M. along with the sons and took some tiffin for them. The younger son was kept near the working place in the garden and he was watched by the elder one. When the child required breast milk she fed him. At 12 noon she came back home and took lunch together with husband and son. Then she washed utensils and brought drinking water from the well when sons were looked after by her



husband. At 2-30 P.M. she again went out for work along with her two sons and returned home at 5 P.M. Her husband collected some fire wood and she cooked evening meal when husband also helped her. Then she fed her goats. In the evening they took meal together and went to bed. The women workers those who have infants carry them on their back to the working place. The infants are laid down on a piece of cloth spread on the ground near their working place. While working them time to time look after the infants and breast-feed them if necessary. This facility given by the management avoids the problem of looking after the young children while they are away to work. Many families may not have elderly persons at home to look after the children. If the plantation authority had not permitted them to carry infants to their working place they would have faced the problem of raising the children. The women workers in plantation have to perform two roles, one as housewives and the other as wage earners while the men enjoy their leisure after the plantation work is over.

Grown up children move freely within the garden premises with their playmates when their parents are away to work. The working condition in the garden offers necessary facilities and breaks to help the women to look after their children and attend to domestic duties. Though some husbands share the domestic burden with their wives it is the wives who are to toil harder. But this they do quite willingly and without any conflict. A conflict arises when the husband squanders away the money in drinks or runs after another woman.

### **Husband's Attitudes Towards Wife's Employment:**

It has been seen that in the working class families in the plantation although wives enjoy considerable freedom and authority in household matters the husbands symbolize the ultimate authority and power. This is but natural in a patriarchal society. In the joint family the father-in-law occupies the highest position of authority though he seldom wields his power without consulting his sons and daughter-in-laws. However, a husband's attitudes towards his wife's



employment are important in understanding the role conflict of the working women in the plantation family.

It is seen that a high percentage of the husbands shows a positive attitude towards their wives employment. In the Kamalcherra Tea Estate workers states that their husbands and also wives want them to work. But even in the latter cases there is no familial problem arising out of their working against their attitude.

In general the overwhelming majority of the plantation workers live in a family atmosphere where positive attitudes are shown towards their jobs. In fact such a positive attitude of both the husband and wife helps not only to augment the income of the family but also to maintain cordial relations within the family. Even in joint families the parent-in-laws accept the outside employment of the daughter-in-laws as normal. It is not economic inducement alone that has helped to develop this positive outlook. This is also perhaps due to the traditional ethno-religious ethos. Most of the workers in plantation have come from an agricultural background where it is normal for people to participate in agricultural activities. The employment pattern in plantation also requires both men and women workers and if they are recruited from the same family it gives stability to the labour force. All these factors have contributed to evolve a norm in the plantation society where the employment of women is taken as something expected and natural.

The women workers do not seem to make any conscious effort to adapt to both the roles, one as housewives and the other as workers. In the conducive working environment of the plantation both the roles come naturally to them. The adaptation process is easy and devoid of trauma. Husbands of a few women workers who work in organizations other than the tea plantation cannot help their wives in household work. Many of them get salary which is sufficient for maintenance of their families. But their wives do not like to discontinue their plantation jobs. This shows that they work not only for economic reasons but for other reasons also. These women are



habituated to work in agriculture and the plantation industry provides them with a comparable agrarian occupational background. Because of the working class background their husbands often encourage them to continue with their employment in the plantation.

### **Sharing of Household Responsibilities:**

There is no uniform pattern of allocation of household functions and responsibilities among the members of the family all over the world. The allocation of household functions and responsibilities vary from society to society. These also depend largely upon the degree of change that has affected the institution of family and marriage due to the process of industrialization. However, pattern of allocation of household functions and responsibilities between sexes differs in traditional societies as compared to industrial societies. In traditional Hindu society allocation of household functions and responsibilities is distinct between husband and wife. This distinction has given rise to specialization of duties among them, such as, while wife looks after all the domestic work and rearing up of children, the husband earns for the maintenance of the family. The former's duties are confined to the domestic activities while the latter's duties are largely outside the home. However, industrialization has brought certain changes in this traditional pattern by bringing cooperation of both husband and wife at the domestic level. Such a rigid distribution of duties between husband and wife is not distinctly found in plantation society. In the plantation society, as said earlier, both husband and wife work together and most husbands equally participate in domestic activities. Thus they share each others' economic and domestic responsibilities.

The sharing of household responsibility is principally found in the spheres of three domestic activities: handling of family purse to meet regular expenses, performance of daily domestic chores and looking after the children. Besides, planning for the future and certain decisions on crucial matters which may appear from time to time need to be taken. The fact on these aspects was collected from the women



as well as some men who are closely involved in the management of the family.

It is natural that when the wife is working as wage-earner she has a dual burden to carry. If the husband does not share the domestic responsibilities, tensions and ultimately rift may follow between a husband and wife. It is found that majority of the husbands help their wives in domestic activities. In the plantation society doing the domestic chores and looking after the children do not affect the dignity of the husband. But probably this is a feature common to the working class where both men and women work as wage labourers.

### **Child-care and Socialization Process:**

Socialization is the process by which the young human being acquires the values and knowledge of his group and learns the social roles appropriate to his position in it (Good, 1965:10). The family is the primary institution which provides an environment to the young members to get socialized. The society at large provides them with a wider environment to interact with others and grow into full members of the society.

Parents play a vital role in the socialization process of their children. But the woman's biological 'destiny' as mother becomes a cultural vocation in her role as a socializer of children. In bringing up children, plantation woman achieves her main social definition. However, the cultural allocation of roles in bringing up children and limits of its variability are not the essential problem for consideration. What is much more important is to analyze the nature of the socialization process itself and its requirements. The nuclear family is centered on the two-generational hierarchy between parents and children.

Plantation society has a settled population that is born, grows up and continues to live in the plantation environment. Children, when they grow up, often follow the foot-steps of their parents in so far as employment in the industry is concerned. The children, therefore,



from their childhood share an awareness of the common problem of how their future life would shape up.

Among the workers of tea plantations child rearing is not much of a practical problem as it is among the urban middle class working mothers. The workers in a plantation generally live within a community of kinsmen, though most of them live in separate households. Some old kinswoman may be asked to keep an eye to the children when their mothers go out for work. Sometimes old and retired parents look after the toddlers. Nursing infants are often carried on the back of their mothers to the place of work. A mother may also keep the infant in the garden crèche, which most of the women do not do, as they said "babies are not properly cared for there".

As noted above the socialization of the children is greatly influenced by the plantation environment. From the very childhood the children watch their parents doing different kinds of plantation work and when they become adolescent—the time to be employed as 'child labourers', they are quite acquainted with various types of plantation work.

The mothers carry the infants on their back to the working place and the older children, specially the girls, accompany them. They look after their tiny brothers and sisters while their mothers remain busy with the work. Sometimes they also help their mothers in plucking and weeding; little girls collect dry twigs from the garden for daily cooking. The children also get some sort of training from hearing the frequent discussions on work among adult workers as well as from the instructions given by the *Sardars* to their mothers. The nuclear family with its limited number of members and a working mother necessitates the girls to do the household work. The girls from their very childhood get used to do the day to day household work along with their mothers and help her in cooking, cleaning utensils, looking after young brothers and sisters and fetching water from the well. From childhood till they are married the girls move freely with



boys and girls and thus learn the mystery of sex life. Cases of casual sex affairs, with boys are not infrequent among adolescent and young girls.

Both the parents share the responsibility of their children. Being the lower class working people the plantation workers do not prepare their children for an ordered and achievement oriented life. Their ambition is very limited which is to get a job for their children in the plantation. They do not wish to make the process of life more complicated by making futuristic plans for the children. This may be one of the reasons for not encouraging their children to go for schooling.

In the plantation workers society girls are socialized in their role of male dependency which continues even after marriage and they have a family of their own. Thus the values, norms and patterns of behavior are transmitted from one generation to the next.

They treat their sons and daughters equally. Even in matters of vital importance like employment, choice of a partner in marriage, etc. they are not discriminated. However, in the case of education, the parents show discrimination between sons and daughters.

The standard of literacy among boys and girls is quite low as mentioned earlier. But whatever weightage is given to schooling it is primarily meant for boys. Those of women workers interviewed by me did not intend to send their daughters to the school. In most cases the plantation women workers are illiterate and it is natural that they do not want to educate their daughters. They hold that female education is not necessary for employment in the garden as well as for raising a family. But, in choosing a career in tea plantation women workers, in general, are willing to give equal encouragement to their sons and daughters.

On the whole in the socialization process the plantation family reinforces the 'gender roles' that is, the cultural definitions of the



traits and behavior that are appropriate for men and women. The process of socialization of plantation women builds a poor self-image for themselves. The process also leads to relate them with the men-folk in the family in terms of dependency, a symbol of which is to identify the women in terms of their husbands, rather than by their own names. The women are socialized and values instilled in such a way that they accept, without a murmur, their exploitation by the men-folk. The patriarchal family system, the lack of education, dependency, role differentiation and inferior position in the political

system and in trade union help to create a social environment in which inequality between sexes is perpetuated. Economic freedom has done little to mitigate this position.

### **Status of Women in Plantation**

In studying the status of women in a plantation society we must study the complexity of roles which the plantation women perform in socio-economic, cultural, religious and political field. We have already seen the role performance of women in these spheres. The question that looms large is that whether economic emancipation of women workers has correspondingly elevated their status in the society or not.

The plantation society is heterogeneity of different ethnic groups and castes. Traditionally speaking, in caste society the status of women is generally lower, whereas in ethnic society it is relatively higher. One of the factors which contribute to a higher social status of women in ethnic society is the economic role that they perform as wage earners.

It will be wrong if it is assumed that the plantation women enjoy equal rights and privileges with men. They can select their mates and can leave their mates as and when they like or they can marry again. Only the system of bride-price is prevalent among them. If the groom is unable to pay the bride price he has to live in the girl's family for a



certain period and has to perform the domestic duties in his father-in-law's house. Such system of *Ghardamad* also refers to some kind of higher status of women in the society. But still society is male dominated and women are treated as a commodity. The wife is often referred to as the "kept" by the husband but a husband is never referred to as a "kept" by the wife. Marriage being easily dissoluble the children may remain in the custody of mother or father as may be agreed upon. In many cases the children stay with their mother and when she remarries the step-father accepts her children as his own. This has been possible because the woman also contributes her wages to support the family.

The over all occupational status of the women workers is lower than that of the men workers. Although wages of men and women workers are equal today, even a few years ago the latter used to receive lesser wages. Unequal opportunity in the occupational hierarchy, that is, women are never made a sub-staff, renders them a lower status vis-à-vis the men. Women always work as daily-rated workers.

Plantation women workers have no role in the decision-making processes in connection with theft, witchcraft, inter-ethnic marriage, inter-ethnic conflict, etc. which are decided by the ethnic *Panchayat* of the plantation time to time. The women do not have any voice in the *Panchayat*.

Trade union leadership from the women workers of plantation has not yet emerged. Although women workers are members of the trade unions they hardly participate in the regular union meetings. But sometimes they take aggressive roles and join procession, demonstration, etc. Marginal participation in the union activities does not indicate that they have power in influencing the decision of union leaders.

The educational attainment of plantation women workers is very low. Generally the level of literacy of the plantation workers as a



whole is very poor. In case of women workers this is almost nil. This has further helped to perpetuate the lower status of women workers. The women workers are totally ignorant about the role of modern education in improving the status of women. It is seen that though apparently plantation women workers enjoy considerable freedom of action their status when compared to men, appears to be low. Economic contribution has not helped to raise their status so as to make it equal with men. Their status is comparable to that of landless families in agricultural society because, in both cases, the products of their work are expropriated by their husbands.

Tea plantations are usually situated in remote areas and the workers live within the boundaries of the tea plantations. They have minimum connection with the outside world.

But the kamalcherra Tea Estate is situated near the Sylhet town. Workers interaction with the outside world is greater than that of the workers of the interior plantations. The society of kamalcherra has undergone some changes but by and large it has remained traditional. The young boys and girls have changed styles of their dresses. They occasionally visit Sylhet town. The old and the middle aged women mostly remain confined within the tea garden. Their interaction with the outside world is very limited. They only meet the outside people in the local weekly market (*Haat*). The *Haat* is the place where the men and women workers meet with their relatives, friends and non-ethnic people. It probably relieves the workers from the boredom of garden life and that is why they look forward to the market day. Everything of daily necessities and fineries are available in the *Haat*. This market day, held on every Tuesday, is also the weekly holiday of the neighbouring tea garden, namely, Lakhatoorah, Doldoly etc. of the region. Many workers from the neighboring tea gardens come and assemble at a particular spot in the *Haat* where they drink, gossip and exchange information with one another. Many marriages are negotiated in the *Haat*. It is also a place for romance for the young boys and girls. Many of the workers come to the *Haat* for drinking rice-beer (*Haria*) and country-liquor (*Daru*). Now-a-days the young



women workers seldom take rice-beer (*Haria*) or smoke. Many of them come only for enjoyment and relaxation. *Haat* is perhaps the only place of contact with the outside world particularly for the older generation of workers. But the young girls and boys are fond of cinemas who frequently visit town for this purpose. Besides the weekly *Haat* there is also a local *Haat* which is held on the pay-day of the garden labourers, i.e., on every Monday. Readymade garments, fresh vegetables, fish and various household goods are sold here.

The young girls are more fashion-conscious than the old ones. In kamalcherra the women are not so conservative like the women workers of other gardens situated in the remote areas of Sylhet District. Here the Oraons and Mundas may dine with each other but generally not with any other communities. The concept of pollution has also touched them similar to the Hindus. Food is regarded as polluted if touched by anyone not in their common status group. Womenfolk are more orthodox in these matters. They do not take food or water at the market, no matter how hungry or thirsty they are (Bhowmik 1981:109-110). Such a situation is rare in kamalcherra. The women here do not maintain such a pollution concept regarding food. They are not so orthodox; they eat and drink food touched by persons belonging to other status groups. Even they eat food in the *Haat* and interdine with Bengalis. In spite of this fact the workers appear to be conservative in regard to their dresses. Except a few girls, they use their traditional dress even today. The upper part of their body is covered with a blouse and a piece cloth is wrapped round their waist reaching up to the ankle. Only a few girls wear Saris when they visit town and relatives of the neighboring plantations.

The plantation women live within their own community, with their traditional beliefs and customs. They are ignorant of the changes that are taking place in the outside world. Plantation women seem to be more conservative than men. Some thirty years ago they were totally isolated from the rest of the world. In case of men such conservatism is breaking down rapidly as they come in contact with



the outsiders more often. But in the case of women such isolation is also breaking down but a slower pace.

Drinking and smoking are very common among both men and women workers. However, now-a-days young women workers are less addicted to drinking. Even some of them totally abstain from drinking and smoking. Perhaps they have been influenced by the upper caste women whom they frequently see in the market and in the town.

Though some plantation workers have connection with town, yet most of the women workers live in relative isolation from the rest of the world. The plantation women are less conscious about their living condition as well as their working condition. In most of the houses there is an absence of furniture. Those who are a bit affluent can only afford to have a wooden or string cot, and one or two wooden chairs. They are used to sleep on the hard floor.

The outlook of the plantation women workers can be judged from their low level of literacy. They have no idea about the need or importance of women's education. So they do not encourage their daughters to go to schools. Their knowledge about outside world is also very poor. Thus they remain in an under-dog position and have become prisoners to a self-perpetuating system in which it is difficult to come out and improve their condition.

### **Marriage:**

Marriage refers to the customs, rules and obligations that establish a special relationship between a sexually cohabiting adult male and female, between them and any children they produce, and between the kin groups of husband and wife. Marriage is also a socio-cultural phenomenon which recognizes union between a male and female and intended to give sexual rights to each other of the couple and to fulfill further social functions. There are various considerations among the tea plantation workers for getting marriage.



One of these is to have additional hands to look after the family when the parents become old. The other consideration, being getting social approval and rights for sex gratifications. Marriage is also considered in this society to have children who maintain the line of descent.

Marriage is a very important social institution in the social life of the tea plantation workers. But, the practice of marriage is not as simple in this society as in many other ethnic societies.

### **Age at marriage:**

It was mentioned earlier that there are two types of marriages practiced by the workers. One is a marriage arranged by the guardian of the girl; the other is a marriage of choice, where the couple decided to live together without any prompting from the elders of their respective families. These two types of marriages have distinct ages at marriage. The age at marriage for female is lower in the case of arranged marriage than in the case of marriage by choice. The average female age at marriage is 15 years for arranged marriage; for marriage by choice it is slightly more than 18 years. The difference in the female age at marriage is a little over two years in these two types of marriages.

It was not a common practice among different ethnic groups to arrange marriages for girls at a young age since long. It only occurred in cases where the father was better off than the others. He could, in this case, afford to give his daughter away to another family at an early age. The women always work, so they are an asset to the family. In most cases of arranged marriage it was found that the father was either well-off or he had a number of daughters. In the remaining cases it was found that the husbands of the girls were *Ghardamads*.

There are various rules of marriage among the tea plantation workers who belongs to different ethnic groups. These are as follows:

- 1) Monogamy is normal rule of marriage in this society. Although polygamy is also allowed but not usually practiced. However, polygamy is only permitted and not polyandry. Anthropologists opined that polygamy is practiced by the many Indian tribal society to facilitate a better division of labour (Hasnain, 1983).
- 2) Cross cousin marriage prevails and preferred in this society. However, marriage with parallel cousin is strictly forbidden in the tea plantation workers society. Because their society consist of different ethnic groups. So, most of the families are cases of cross cousin marriage. The practice of cross cousin marriage among the tea plantation workers society is regarded as an attempt to solidarity with their own community. Anthropologists have tried to analyze the reason for practice of cross cousin marriage in the ethnic societies. Majumder (1950) Interpreted about the practice of cross cousin marriage as a convenient way of avoiding payment of high bride price as well as for custody of their work as a permanent worker within the family.
- 3) Engogamy is the common pattern within plantation workers. Clan exogamy is also practiced among the workers.
- 4) Lavirate marriage is not permissible in this society. Husband's elder brother is equated with one's father. Likewise elder brother's widow equated with one's mother.

Practice of sororate marriage are not uncommon in the plantation workers society. It is very rare. However, one can marry his wife's younger sister after the death of his wife but one cannot marry his wife's elder sister.



Both patrilocal and matrilineal residence pattern are found among the tea plantation workers. It may also be mentioned that irrespective of whether a residence is matrilineal or patrilocal a newly married family within about 2/3 years time after marriage try to get own establishment and move for their respective parent's house. A permanent worker gets a labour-shade for his or her and the couple starts their married life as a nuclear family.

**Divorce:** System of divorce is very common among the tea plantation workers. Both husband and wife enjoys the similar privilege in making decision of seeking divorce. Because, both husband and wife earns money from working as permanent and non-permanent workers in the tea garden. Divorce is caused by the following reasons :

- a. (i) Barrenness, (ii) Drunkenness of husband (iii) Non-industrious, (iv) Adultery, (v) Indifference to the family, (vi) extramarital relation.

There is no specific ritual to be followed for seeking divorce. When the divorce is sought for mutually, the matter is settled by the tea garden *Panchayet* in presence both the parties. When divorced case is settled in most of the time there is arrangement of compensation as decided by the *Panchayet* to be paid by the concerned party. Normally when divorce case is sought for mutually by both husband and wife nobody has to pay any compensation.

For different ethnic groups in the tea garden, marriage is less a sacrament than a contract which can be dissolved when either party wants it. If a boy and a girl are married and after sometime the girl does not want to live with him she can leave him and live with another man. In case they have children the couple mutually decides with whom they (the children) should stay. The system of dissolving marriage is prevalent among all ethnic groups, irrespective of their religious belief. Premarital and extra marital sex relation is common



among the tea plantation workers. Marriage and cohabitation do not follow one another. Consensual Unions, where a couple decides to live together without being married, are quite common. In fact, more often than not, such unions are a prelude to marriage.

### **Some special feature of marriages in Kamalcherra Tea Estate:**

Among the tea plantation workers of Kamalcherra Tea Estate marriage appears to be more a social contract based on individual choices, rather than a sacrament. A boy and a girl can marry according to their own will without prior consent of their parents. Sometime it may take place by negotiation. In their society a couple live together with her friends without being married, is very common. In one sense we can call this a prelude to marriage. Some of their age old ritual paraphernalia during marriage are still same as practiced in their ancestral places. During marriage time, they plant bow and arrow in *mandap* like furrowing tools. Next day after marriage bride and bridegroom, after taking bath would observe a traditional function. The bride will move with earthen pitcher full of water on her shoulder; her husband with bow and arrow on her other shoulder. At every 20 steps the husband will hit on tree or bush and whatever falls (leaves, fruits or buds) will be put in the pitcher by other ladies who are following them. This signifies that her husband has brought these things after hunting for happy conjugal life. These labourers speak in their own dialect, sing the same folk song, and wear the same dress during marriage. The marriage ceremony itself is simple, but the preparations leading to it are elaborate and responsive. The Baraik and Kurmi groups wear yellow cloths during marriage ceremony. Again the Oraon, the Savara and some other groups use white cloths during marriage ceremony.

In Kamalcherra Tea Estate the plantation workers belongs to different ethnic groups but their indigenous identity is most commonly known among them as *jatis* or *Samaj*. Such as a Oraon would identify Baraik or Bauri people as Baraik *Jati* or *Samaj* and Bauri *Jati* or *Samaj*. The workers also used *Jati* concept for their own



ethnic groups as *Samaj* (society). This concept is a strong social phenomenon for identify different ethnic groups. So far marriage purpose *Jati* is a very big factor for them. They do not want to marry in different *Jatis* boy or girl. They want to get married within their own *Jatis* or *Samaj* but it is not always possible. Endogamous marriage is the general rule though there are numerous cases of inter-ethnic group marriages. In such a case the boy has to pay a token of fine to the girl's parents.

In Kamalcherra Tea Estate there are several marriages took place among different ethnic groups. This type of inter-ethnic group marriage are considered as serious offence. This is generally settled through the *Panchayet* and sometime as serious conflict between the two parties may arise. In such cases the boy has to pay a heavy fine.

Although marriage is strictly monogamous, sometimes polygamy also takes place. When the first wife proves barren, the man can marry for the second time. There are also some men who have extra-marital relations with women living outside the tea estate. But such extra-marital relations are not socially accepted. The culturally approved formal marriage may be postponed, if the marriage formalities prove too burdensome at a given point of time. This happens among almost all the communities in the plantation. Therefore, they enter into a new way of living pattern namely *Raji-Khusi* first and then, in most cases year later, they get married when their finances permit. In this formal marriage ceremonies are performed by a grand feast. Bhowmik has found the same trend among the Adivasis of the plantation of Doars. He has reported that consensual union followed by marriage is not only found among the Adivasis but it is also noticed among other communities (Bhowmik, 1981:121).

It is reported that there are a good number of instance where the couples are ceremonially married just before the marriages of their sons and daughters. Because, if the parents do not perform their own marriage ritual, their children do not get legitimacy. Marriage among



the different ethnic groups of Kamalcherra may operationally be used to indicate the common residence of a man and a woman exercising sexual rights and recognizing the children born out of them.

In a negotiated marriage the father of a girl searches for a groom when his daughter reaches the marriageable age. If a suitable boy is found and if the boy's parents approve the girl then there becomes an elaborate discussion for the fixation of the bride-price. The boy's parents have to pay the agreed upon amount of bride-price to the girl's parents. If a woman is lost to her clan, the husband's clan must pay compensation or 'bride-price'. This is not a purchase in any sense – the woman is not being sold in the marriage market – it means that women have value both to the family or clan they leave and to that to which they go. The bride's family has lost a working member and a potential child bearer and must be compensated for the loss. The kinsmen of the bridegroom all contribute to the bride-price and the kinsmen of the bride all share it. This becomes security for the bridegroom's good behavior, for if he maltreats his wife, she may leave him and the bride-price will not be re-paid. But if she behaves badly, she goes back and it will be re-paid. Once fixation of bride-price is over the pre-marriage celebrations take place associated with large consumption of rice-bear (*Haria*) in the company of kinsmen, friends and relatives.

On a fixed date the girl leaves for the boy's home where kinsmen and friends are also entertained with large quantity of *Haria*. There is another ceremony known as *Kutumb-Khilana* (engagement). If the girl likes the boy's family after a few months, the relatives of both sides are called for a feast with drink. After these preliminaries are over, the actual marriage ceremony is performed. If the girl does not like the boy's place or his people she may return to her father's house and may marry again. In such a case the bride-price is returned to the boy's parents.

There is another type of marriage, known as a *Ghardamad* system which I have mentioned earlier. In case the boy is unable to



pay the bride-price, he lives with the in-laws as a *Ghardamad* and pays the bride-price by serving them in domestic works.

Plantation communities as a whole try to confine affinal relations within their occupational group from the neighboring gardens. It is difficult to give the exact number of such marriages that had taken place as no record is kept. But it seems that now-a-days most of the marriages take place within the same plantation. It is due to some economic interests that they try to confine the marriages within the same plantation. According to workers from different ethnic groups, a present the job opportunities of a worker is very limited and if a girl is married to a boy of other garden she will have to leave here job. Since there is no guarantee for getting regular job in other tea plantations, girls as well as their parents are more inclined to settle their marriages in the same tea estate. The workers of different ethnic groups no more prefer to establish marital allians with their native place although earlier they used to bring wives from there frequently. This has resulted into a discontinuity of social relations with the home land. This breach has been further augmented by factors like considerable distance, lack of proper communication and mental attachment with the distant kinsmen, changes in the ideas and values.

Now generally the boys would like to marry industrious girls as they are comparatively lazier and want to enjoy their time by gossiping or relaxing. So girls are to do extra and earn for the family. If parents likes a girl by her behavior, family etc. they tell it to the son and arrange for the marriage. But now a days the boys prefer to see the girl before marriage. But hardly the girls get this chance. If the boy likes the girl he tells to his parents. Then the would be grooms father, elder bother or brother-in-law see the boy and matter is finalized. Once these formalities are over they inform the matter to their *jati/samaj* and seek their help. Then the groom's parents invite the boys parents to fix a people of his *jati* or *samaj* visit the house of the groom and they fix date and month of the marriage. This is the beginning of a traditional marriage. After that they also get the horoscope of both the bride and groom verified by their priests.



During my field work I participated two wedding ceremonies. Description of these are given below:

### **Wedding ceremony of Baraik *jati* :**

Ritual among the Baraik *jati* during marriage about a week before the marriage a ceremony takes place which is called *Mongol-acharan* or *Tilokboron*. In this festival both men and women are allowed to attend along with the parent and some of their own elderly *jati* people. The items required are Saree preferably white color with red stripe on the ends, a blouse, pate-coat and some cosmetics for the girl. They are to bring sweets for the girl and her relatives to entertain including their own *jati* or *samaj*. They use the makeup and saree brought by the bride's family and present the girl before the bridal party. The girl pays respect to all the elderly people of the bride and they bless the girl. That's how the initial formalities start. On the day the girl's parents entertain the bridal party with food. The menu is generally rice, pulses, small fishes and sometimes chicken meat. The girls *Jati* people cook the food and all the people sit on the floor eat the food together. After the food is served then the local wine *haria* is served to all except the minor boys and girls. This is compulsory and the bridal party is to be made happy by giving sufficient wine and give special attention to them. Drinking wine is a part of their life though now a days this is diminishing due to social and economic crisis. They have started understanding the ill effect of drinking wine but hardly get rid of the habits.

The same system is also followed by the groom's side. There relatives and social *jati* people go to the bride's house and perform the *Mongol-acharan* with clothes like *Dhuti*, Vest and an essential ornament a wedding ring made of imitation or silver. The girl's side does not bring any food items. The bride's family entertains the groom's side with food as per their capability, and wine is served as usual. When the groom side departs the girl's father give some token money to the bride's father for wine. Their conviction is if the parents are happy the girl will live comfortably in that house after marry.



### **Turmaric functions:**

The ceremony before the marriage is turmeric function starts three days prior to the marriage date. This is mainly to celebrate the marriage ceremony. From this day the entertainment starts in a befitting manner. They prepare the turmeric with oil by blending different item and the bride's body is massaged with the item every day in the morning and the evening. On the marriage day they use this oil paste for seven times. These three days the bride is not allowed to bath. After the function the wine drinking session starts. The *Jhumur* dance starts once the wine is drunk. The band party generally the drum and the bell are used in the ceremony. They enjoy the songs and dance where the youngsters also participate. The whole nights they enjoy like this.

Two people from the bride's side carry the turmeric oil paste to the groom's house where the same function is performed. The wine is also served among the *jati* people and relatives and songs and dances are performed.

The place where the bride grooms are married is called *kunja* (stage). This *kunja* is prepared with multicolor paper, bamboo, colour powder etc. In the dialect of tea workers it is called "*Samra*" also. This is made in bride grooms house on the open space in front of the house. Inside the *kunja* they keep soil on the middle of the *Kunja*. This soil is brought from the potter's clay, Priests house soil or the vicinity of the kali temple which is regarded as holy soil. They also place seven banana trees, four pitchers and four clay pots to burn the thread with oil.

On the day prior to the marriage they bring water to bath from seven houses of the neighbors in seven pitchers. Both male and female collect the water accompanying drums and signing and dancing. This process is customary for both bride and grooms family. With the collected water both bride and grooms take bath separately in their houses on the day of marriage. On the marriage day both



bride and grooms do not take food in their houses. They are fed from their relative's houses or from the neighbors. Generally the bride starts from his house by drinking milk, water and mango bud. Before starting for the groom's house the bridal party accompanies the bride. As per the given time the marriage is to be solemnized. In front to the main gate of the groom's house the youngsters stop the bridal party to enter the house to get gate money. The bride pays a token money say ten or twenty Taka then the bride is welcomed in the house. The bride sits inside the *Samra* on a chair where the marriage ceremony takes place. The groom and bride exchange garland and gives seven rounds around the bride, and amidst drum beating the marriage ceremony is continuing. The priests perform all cultural and religious customs and the bride and grooms are officially declared married. The bridal party is entertained with food, drinks, sweets etc. Same food is also given to their *Jati* people. The bride remains in the groom's house together on the night and the next morning other rituals are performed.

### **Wedding ceremony of Kurmi *Jati* :**

The place of wedding was decorated with various designs (*alpana*) and the wedding *mantra* was recited there. The bride and the groom sat on tools. It was compulsory for the bride's father to provide the tools upon which the bride and the groom were to seat. The tools were very nicely decorated. In between the two tools the father of the bride sat. Two banana trees were tied to a bamboo and it was decorated with bamboo leaves. Two pitchers were filled with water and the mouth was covered with mango leaves. The body of the pitcher was also decorated with cow dung. A water pot was kept on the right side and two pieces of *sheel Pata* i.e. grinding slab and stone were placed on either side of the bride and the groom. In front of them one large brass plate and two brass pots were kept. There was also a piece of sandle wood, kept in front of them. A pot filled with burning ashes and a stove made of clay were also placed there. Two small pots of rice are also kept there. The yard in front of the house was decorated with seven banana plants. There was a fixed timing for the wedding to be held. Before the timing the uncle and the elder



brother of the groom placed a *spot* (made of milk and gur) on the forehead of the groom. This is known as *tilak spot*.

Before the *tilak spot* was placed on the groom, the bride's father had given the groom everything that he had to give. I observed that the bride's father gave the groom some clothes for the bride and the groom and some money. After this the wedding *Mantra* was read and then on the bamboo stick a thread was tied and the bride and the groom circled the stick while the *Mantra* was being recited. The invited people from outside to come and sing and dance all night long during the wedding ceremony. Both the bride and the groom were taken to their room after midnight and it was only then that they ended their fasts. The next day the groom along with the bride went to the bride's house and stayed there for three days. All the wedding clothes of the bride and the groom were provided by the bride's father.

### **Inter-ethnic marriage :**

During field-work time, it is found that the incidence of inter-ethnic marriage seems to be on the increase. It seems that with the increase in communication and inter-action with society outside the plantation traditional ideas about marriage are rapidly changing and inter-ethnic group barriers are gradually breaking down. Inter-ethnic marriage, therefore, is widely practiced in kamalcherra Tea Estate so much so that often marriages between two different ethnic groups take place. However, such inter-ethnic marriages always involve a fine imposed on the couple. A part of the fine is given to the parents of the girl and rest is taken by the *Panchayat* as it becomes the mediator between the two involved social groups. Thus the multi-ethnic society of the tea plantation has adapted to the reality of situation and has found means to adapted inter-ethnic marriages through the medium of a fine, which is often a token of social sanction. Only in very rare cases ostracization is resorted to when ethnic groups belonging to two different social statuses inter-marry.

The Muslims follow certain customs during their marriage ceremonies. The proposal of marriage is sent to the girl's side from the boy's side. When both sides agree then a suitable date is fixed for the wedding. Those who can afford it invite friends and relatives to the wedding.



## CHAPTER VI

### Economic Organization



## **Economic life :**

The economic life of a community refers to the institutional and functional involvement of the people centered on the activities associated with the satisfaction of the material needs of the people. Every community has its own methods to meet the basic needs. The basic needs of the community are conditioned by natural and socio-cultural factors as well as by the level of technology available and in practice.

The development of tea plantations required two basic requisites: a large area for cultivation and a large labour force. The plantation all over the world is survived on imported labourers which are comparatively cheaper than the local labourers. In tea plantation, planters had to depend on indentured labourers from outside. Thus the immigrant labourers become an inseparable part of the plantation system. Plantation is by and large associated with a resident labour force.

In a tea Industry, production is being organized in an organized manner and like all other industries, it has also a hierarchy of staff. The Tea Estate under study is not an exception to this rule. This tea Estate has also a hierarchy of staff and works are distributed among the various categories of staff. Different categories of staff perform different function in the organization of production.

The staff includes all types of employees of the plantation from the manager to the wage labourers and they are arranged in a hierarchical order.

The manager(*Bara shaheb*) is at the top of the hierarchy of the staff. He in fact represents the owner of the garden. The owner lives permanently in Sylhet town but not in the tea garden. The owner and his relatives visit the tea estate occasionally. There is a bungalow exclusively for the owner and his relatives. But it is the manager who



safeguards the interests of the owner. He looks after day to day work and he is responsible for the over all administration of tea estate.

He is assisted by one senior assistant manager(*Chota shaheb*) and one assistant manager. Manager's function is distributed among the assistant managers and the manager functions through them.

The supervisor is next to the assistant manager in the hierarchy. He works as a linkman between the managers (including assistant manager) and the staff, he receives orders from the managers and carries to the head *tila* clerk, the *tilla* clerks and other subordinates officials if and when necessary. Below the rank of supervisor there are positions of head *tila* clerk, *tila* clerks in plantation side, head factory clerk and factory clerks in the factory side and head clerks other clerks in the office administration side.

In the plantation side, there are *sardars* who are below the *tila* clerks. The *tila* clerks are known as *tila babus* and the *sardars* are their subordinates. The *sardars* also play an important role in the process of production. They distribute the work among the plantation workers and they supervise their work. They remain present in the sections during working hours. They are responsible for taking accounts of work from each and every labourers working under their supervisions.

Bellow the rank of *sardars*, there are positions of *chowkidars*. They are in fact guards or watchman who are assigned with particular duties of guarding, they also work as guards in bungalows of the managerial staff. They are to ensure safety and security within the Tea Estate.

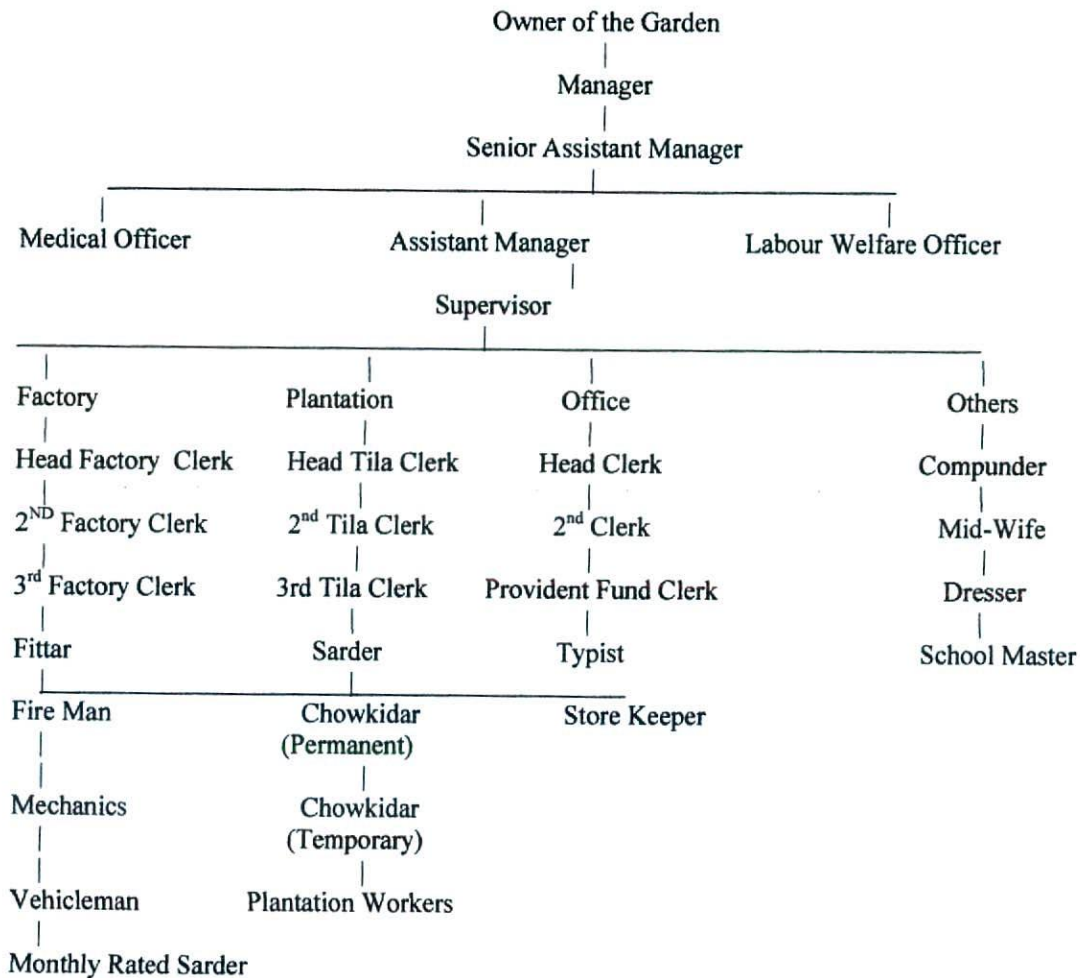
In the factory side, there are head factory clerk and other factory clerks. Below them there are some machinemen and fire-men and below them there are some *sardars* who are paid on monthly basis.

In the office side, there are head clerks, other clerks who are under the direct control of managers and assistant managers. They



help the management in office administration. There is also one typist in the office. There is one storekeeper (*Gudam babu*) to ensure the security of goods kept in the store. All other members of the staff mentioned above enjoy more benefits, more power and prestige and exercise more control than the workers.

## CHART 2 MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE



(Source: Office, Kamalcherra Tea Estate)

The number of positions held by the staff members has been shown in (Chart no -1). The total number of staff including managerial, office and other staff is 90 in kamalherra Tea Estate at present.

The plantation workers are however at the bottom of the hierarchy. By 'workers' we understand both plantation and factory regular daily rated workers. Almost majority of the factory workers are male while the majority of the plantation workers are female. The plantation workers are called unskilled workers and factory workers are the skilled workers.

I have heard from the very old workers who are now retired from their work that in the beginning, the workers of Kamalcherra Tea Estate were divided into three categories, viz *Marad* (Male worker), *Aurat* (female worker) and *chokra/chokri* (children).

### **Recruitment of the workers:**

The recruitment policy in plantation does not follow any disparity in recruiting men and women workers. However, recruitment of workers is a part of general recruitment process which has deep historical roots. I shall briefly mention this process below:

At the beginning of tea plantations the employers had to depend entirely on various sources and agencies for the recruitment of workers. There were some recruiting agents in Assam, *Sardars* were in north-east India except Assam, and *Kanganies* were in South India. Though origin of tea plantation labourers of Assam and West Bengal, except the hills of Darjeeling district, was same, the process of recruitment in the latter region differed from that of the former. There was acute shortage and unsatisfactory character of local labourers in Assam plantations in 1839 also in Sylhet district too. In 1841 the Assam Tea Company first attempted to import labourers from the tribal belt of Chotanagpur. In 1859 the Tea Planters Association was formed to regulate the recruitment process of tea labourers in Assam in an organized manner. The same thing happened in Sylhet District of Bangladesh too (Griffiths, 1972:269). Then recruitment was done mainly through the *Arkatis* (recruiting agent) who employed dubious means to recruit the simple ethnic group of people. The *Arkatis* were mainly from Baraiks and Bauris who were landless craftsmen living



in the neighbouring regions of the Oraons, Mundas, Santals. Sometimes the *Arkatis* were Hindus and Muslims also. 'The hard working, poverty stricken tribals of Chota Nagpur were suitable for tea gardens as they were also the cheapest labourers available to the employers' (Dalton, 1973:161).

However, recruitment through contractors in 1863 was unsatisfactory. Recruitment was also done through the garden authorities themselves. This was often done through the garden *Sardars*, who were often sent to the recruiting districts (Griffiths, 1972:271). These two methods of recruitment of labourers through *Arkatis* and through garden *Sardars* were often followed by the plantation owners for collecting labourers. The *Sardars* of the gardens were sent to the recruiting ground in the recruiting season (generally began after the rains in October and ended in February). It was easier for the *Sardars* to induce the new recruits to show the advantages of work and the prospects of ultimate settlement on independent holdings. The *Sardars* would look round among his countrymen for anyone willing to go to "Bhutan" for work. After collecting a few they would take them to the recruiting agents who would advance them the necessary money to return with the coolies. The *Sardars* were usually accompanied by a garden supervisor who always kept an eye over them (Bhowmik, 1981: 55-56).

The recruited labourers were then sent to various tea plantations in an inhuman condition. Basic health and sanitation facilities were not providing to them. Thus a few of them survived. This proved expensive for the planters. Thus three types of recruitment system were established. The most popular was the *Sardari* system and other was *Arkati* system. The third one was the recruitment through local agents of some private agencies in the recruiting districts. The manager of the garden generally sent a *Babu* (clerks) to the recruiting areas that contacted these agencies and selected the workers. These agencies made some agreements with the labourers and the garden concerned. The workers were given various false promises by the recruiter that the labourers would be given light work and plenty of



paddy land in the garden and also plenty of money. The planters also recruited annually unindentured labourers from Chotanagpur, Santal Parganas, Chaibasa and from the neighbouring regions through the garden *Sardars*. In order to recruit labourers, the planters had established an organization called the Tea Districts Labour Association with its headquarters in Calcutta. The machinery of recruitment and forwarding was provided by this association which also recruited on behalf of its members for the Dooars and Terai plantations in Bengal though no legislation to this effect existed in the state. Seventy seven percent of the tea industry in north-east India recruited labourers through this association (ILO, 1966). The Tea District Labour Association had its recruiting agents in the recruiting districts and to who the *Sardars* would report for assistance. Thus the recruitment was carried out through the recruiters who were known as Garden *Sardars*, Resident *Sardars* and Local *Sardars*. The first two worked as the agents of the tea estates from which they had been sent to recruit, while the recruiters were agents of the Tea District Labour Association.

### **Recruitment in Kamalcherra Tea Estate:**

It has already been mentioned that the Kamalcherra plantation is located in Sylhet district. In kamalcherra Tea Estate workers were originally from Chota Nagpur and Santal Parganas of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Nepal. A significant portion of them consists of non-Hindu ethnic people as Bauri, Baraik, Savara, Nayek, Kol, Kurmi and others.

Recruitment of workers in this plantation during the pre-independence period was done mainly through the *Sardars*. Only a few recruitment were done through some private agencies. Migration to this garden was primarily family based. Before 1940 when there was labour scarcity both husband and wife were recruited together as workers. That time this plantation preferred to recruit couples from various indigenous societies as they were easily available on low wages. However, some individual labourers were recruited also who



had come in quest of plantation jobs or who had come to this garden as wives of the workers. Christian Churches played an important role in the labour recruitment process. The bulk of the Christian labourers had already been converted to Christianity in their original places and they were advised by their Church authority to migrate to the tea districts for jobs.

During field work time it has been observed that now-a-days workers are recruited or selected by the present management system existing in kamalcherra Tea Estate.

But at present the category of the workers are different.

### **Permanent and Non-permanent Workers:**

According to the Government Rule, (permanent law for employment, 1961) the Labourers who are employed in any shop, trade or industrial organizations have to undergo a probationary period of six months. Government holidays, lockout or any kind of strike (not illegal strike) are included within this probationary period. The probationary period is extended for further period of three months in case of unsatisfactory performance of duties during probationary period. According to the Government rules, if any labourer is terminated while undergoing probationary period and if the same employer employs him back within three years to the same job, then (if it not done on permanent basis) he has to be considered as a probationer labourer. The probationary period which he had completed previously will be included within this new probationary period.

Any permanent labourer who is appointed in another post as a probationer may be sent back to his permanent job during his probationary period.

But the above law of appointment, and training was absolutely denied to the tea plantation workers. The tea plantation workers of

Kamalcherra were divided into the following categories and their wages were fixed accordingly.

### 1. Permanent Workers (*Bagan Dafa Workers*)

A permanent worker is one who has been passed by the employer as fit for work and has been registered on the check role for the period of contract. The permanent workers (*Bagan dafa workers*) of the tea-garden have to work for six days a week. They enjoy some of the facilities of the company. The worker of *Bagan dafa* are again divided into three groups according to their skill.

- (a) First group
- (b) Second group
- (c) Third group

Those who are physically strong and can work hard belong to the first group and those who are less capable than those in the first are selected in the second group those who are even less fit belong to third group. The daily income of the *bagan dafa* workers is Taka 28/- per day.

### 2. Non-Permanent (*Basti Dafa*) Workers :

Non-permanent (*Basti Dafa*) workers are those who are engaged for work a purely temporary character. There are many workers in kamalcherra Tea Estate who have worked for over year but still they have not been recognized as permanent workers. This group of workers is known as *basti dafa* or temporary or part time workers. The wages of a *basti dafa* worker is Taka 24/- per day.



### 3. *Adult Dafa* :

It has been stated earlier that if any worker of the *bagan dafa* dies then one member of his family working in the *basti - dafa* shall be appointed in the *bagan dafa*. But one may not be directly appointed in the *bagan dafa* from the *basti dafa*. He shall have to pass through adult *dafa* which is a stage between the *basti* and *bagan dafas*. The rate of wage of the worker of this *dafa* is taka 27/- per day.

### 4. *Children Dafa* :

The age of the worker of this *dafa* is between 8 and 12. When the pressure of work in the tea-garden increases, then the managing authority appoints children between the age of 8 and 12 in the children *dafa*. The rate of wage of the worker of this *dafa* is taka 22/- per day.

Table 7

#### Nature of employment in the plantation sector

| Nature of Employment |                            |                            |               |
|----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| Workers              | Resident permanent workers | Resident permanent workers | Total workers |
| Male                 | 84.2                       | 15.8                       | 100.0         |
| Female               | 81.9                       | 18.1                       | 100.0         |
| Adolescent           | 72.0                       | 2.8                        | 100.0         |
| Child Labour         | 60.0                       | 40.0                       | 100.0         |
| Total                | 80.0                       | 20.0                       | 100.0         |

Source : Bangladeshiyo Cha Sangsad, Annual Report 1997-98

### **Wages:**

Tea gardens are classified as A, B, C according to their production quantum. Gardens producing more than 2,50,000 kg of tea annually are classified as 'A' class gardens. 'B' class gardens produce more than 1,00,000 kg but less than 2,50,000 kg of tea annually; while 'C' class gardens produce more than 50,000 kg and

less than 1,00,000 kg of tea annually. Gardens producing less than 50,000 kg of tea annually are non-classified gardens. Kamalchera Tea Estate is a 'A' class garden.

**Table 8**  
Wage rates by category of Tea Estate and type of workers

| Category of Tea estate | Type of Worker           |                                 |                          |                                 |                          |                                |
|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
|                        | Adult male and female    |                                 | Adolescent boy and girl  |                                 | Boy and girl( child)     |                                |
|                        | Daily wage rate (in Tk.) | Amount of yearly bonus (in Tk.) | Daily wage rate (in Tk.) | Amount of yearly bonus (in Tk.) | Daily wage rate (in Tk.) | Amount of Yarly bonus (in Tk.) |
| Category A             | 26.75                    | 410                             | 26.05                    | 390                             | 25.45                    | 385                            |
| Category B             | 26.55                    | 395                             | 25.85                    | 380                             | 25.25                    | 375                            |
| Category C             | 26.35                    | 385                             | 25.65                    | 375                             | 25.05                    | 370                            |

Source : Memorandum of Agreement between the Bangladeshiyo Cha Sangsad and Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union

The permanent and non-permanent workers may be classified into three categories :

- i) Field Workers : These people work in the estate as pruners, weeding and spraying workers or workers employed in the houses of managers, assistant managers etc. They are usually paid on time rate.
- ii) Pluckers : These are people plucking tender leaves. Usually women are employed for this type of work. It is often a piece-rated work.
- iii) Factory workers : Both skilled and unskilled workers working in the tea factory are included in this category. The wage rate is slightly different from the field wage rate.



**Table 9**  
**Rate of Wages of the Plantation Workers of Kamalcherra Tea Estate**

| Differnet Sections                             | Daily wage | Weekly wage | Ration per head/per week                   |
|------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Permanent workers<br>( <i>bagan dafa</i> )     | 28.00      | 168.00      | 3-1/2 Kg (2-1/2 Kg wheat<br>+1 Kg of rice) |
| Non-permanent workers<br>( <i>basti dafa</i> ) | 24.00      | 144.00      | No ration                                  |
| Non-permanent workers<br>( <i>aduli dafa</i> ) | 27.00      | 162.00      | No ration                                  |
| Children workers                               | 22.00      | 132.00      | No ration                                  |

(Source: Field work in Kamalcherra Tea Estate, 2004)

### **Job description:**

Tea is among the most labour-intensive of all the plantation crops. It has both an agricultural and a manufacturing dimension. According to well-established precepts, 60 per cent of the income from tea is agricultural, the balance being of an industrial nature. A brief account of both the aim of facilitating an insight into the kind of productivity gains those are possible in an effort to improve the viability of this sector.

### **Working hours:**

The permanent and non-permanent workers working hours are from 9 A.M. to 2 P.M. As the factory is always in functions, both permanent and non-permanent workers have shifting duties. A worker has to complete a duty for 8 hours in a day.

### **Nature of employment**

The nature of employment varies according to the category of estate. In the C category estate half of the workers are temporarily employed, whereas in the A and B category estates only a little more than five percent of the workers are temporarily employed.

**Table 10**  
**Nature of employment in the Plantation Sector**

|              | Nature of employment       |                            |               |
|--------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| Workers      | Resident Permanent workers | Resident Permanent workers | Total Workers |
| Male         | 84.2                       | 15.8                       | 100.0         |
| Female       | 81.9                       | 18.1                       | 100.0         |
| Adolescent   | 72.0                       | 28.0                       | 100.0         |
| Child labour | 60.0                       | 40.0                       | 100.0         |
| Total        | 80.0                       | 20.0                       | 100.0         |

Source : Bangladeshiyo Cha Sangsad, Annual Report 1997-98

### **Length of Service:**

In the plantation industry all skill are obtained from the job. Therefore, length of service has a direct bearing on the productivity of tea workers. Good pluckers must have over 20 years of experience (Sivaram, 1996). But only about 24 percent of the plantation workers in Bangladesh have this long period of experience. Experience of half of the workers is 10 years or less. On an average, a male and female worker is employed for a little more than 15 and 13 years, respectively.

By an agreement, retirement age of the tea workers has been fixed at 55 years. But very few workers, particularly women workers above 50 years, were found through my study. Therefore length of service, on which age has direct bearing, is found to be short. It may be due to the fact that the tea workers cannot reach retirement age due to various health problems arising from occupational hazards. During my visits in the labour line I met three women staying at home due to disability and illness. But they reported that to continue the provident fund facility they are getting their jobs done by others, particularly by their daughters or grand daughters.

### **Leave Facilities:**

The Tea Plantations Labour Ordinance, 1962, confers tea workers have the right to weekly holiday, casual leave, annual leave,



sick leave, festival leave, etc. My study shows that tea plantation workers have a weekly holiday, but without pay. They do not get any casual leave or annual leave. But they get sick leave of 20 days with partial pay. They enjoy the following festival leave with full pay:

|     |                               |        |
|-----|-------------------------------|--------|
| 1.  | Martyr's day                  | 1 day  |
| 2.  | Independence day              | 1 day  |
| 3.  | May day                       | 1 day  |
| 4.  | Victory day                   | 1 day  |
| 5.  | First day of Bengali New year | 1 day  |
| 6.  | Eid festival                  | 3 days |
| 7.  | Lal Puja                      | 1 day  |
| 8.  | Durga Puja                    | 3 days |
| 9.  | Sabe Barat                    | 1 day  |
| 10. | Poush Sanckranti              | 1 day  |

---

Total        =    14 days

Beside these leaves there are no other leave facilities. Not only is wage cut for any absence from work, but allocation of ration is also cut. However, there is provision of paid leave in case of sterilization or vasectomy.

### **Nature of work participation:**

**Harvesting (plucking):** Commonly referred to a plucking in tea parlance, this activity is overwhelmingly labour-intensive, despite the tendency lately in some areas of the region to use shear harvesters during the heavy cropping period when labour is scarce. Plucking accounts for about 70 percent of the workdays on estates and about 40 percent of the total cost of production. The main factors that influence plucking are :

Yield – a higher level being attained by adopting better agricultural and management practices leading to enhanced plucking output;

Plant density – fields with less plants (about 8,600 per hectre in the “seedling” tea) having a lower plucking potential than those with more plants (about 12,500 per hectre in vegetatively propagated tea);

Leaf variety – the small-leaved China variety yielding less than the large-leaved “Assam” variety or the hybrid medium-leaved vegetatively propagated plants;

Climate and topography – higher elevation, steep areas, prolonged drought, etc. Serving as constraints to plant growth, field productivity and, hence, plucking output;

Age of plant – older bushes yielding less than the new and replanted fields;

Leaf standard – the traditional “two leaves and a bud”, while ensuring quality, does not generate as extensive a crop as does plucking the third leaf – a practice that is now gaining ground – or even coarse plucking, which substitutes quantity for quality;

Plucking frequency – for instance, a seven-day interval involving about 52 rounds a year resulting in a different level of yield – profitability – than a five-day frequency involving about 73 rounds;

Wage rates and incentives – a properly designed incentive system, in particular, resulting in less leaf going unplucked and, at the same time, enhancing workers’ earnings;

Worker productivity – embraces a wide spectrum of factors such as earnings, motivation and socio-economic influences.

The pluckers have to weigh the leave from morning to 12 “O” clocks and again join the work after having lunch in the afternoon. Those who pluck leaves, have to pluck 19 kgs of leaves to fulfill their



*hajri* (attendance) at taka 28 only. On the other hand if they do not pluck the required amount of leaves then their *hajri* (attendance) is deducted. If any one plucks leaves more than 19 kgs will get an additional wage for extra work. This however depends upon the quality and condition of the leaves. If the leaves are of good quality then it is possible for one to pluck more than 19 kgs. The workers face much difficulties in fulfilling their *hajri*; where the leaves are of bad qualities, the tea plants are bare and the plants itself of bad quality. This work is done by carefully snapping of the tender shoot between the thumb and first finger. Basically, the harvest is of a bud and two tender leaves below it, this is where the highest concentration of flavour producing chemical is. The timing of plucking operation has therefore to be geared to the rate of growth of new shoots, which is of course varies from season to season. Plucking therefore seems to be an apparently simple task, attention. So those who are physically weak cannot fulfill their *hajri*. For this they are given low wages. Mostly women are employed to pluck leaves, because women have a better skill in plucking.

To make the best quality teas it is necessary to harvest green tea leaves from tea bushes on time before it gets mature. The most suitable tea leaves for plucking are the two leaves and a bud or tender young leaves. For this operation they have to follow proper plucking rounds, which is to continue harvesting from each bush without missing any at regular intervals.

This is the highest labour intensive operation on a tea plantation, and is mainly done by female workers. Females account for 55-60% of the average workforce in kamalcherra tea estate. Tea harvesters who collect green tea leaves from the bushes are called "pluckers". The harvesting (plucking) operation is a selective process. It was identified decades ago by the management that females are the best people for these selective processes, as they take good care of the tea bush and the harvested leaves. In this process the output of tea plantation females are always higher than their male counterparts. Here, pluckers have to manually break the tea stem from the bush



with two leaves and a bud for best quality teas and transport it up to the processing area without damaging the harvest. Damaged, bruised tea leaves destroy the quality of tea and gives a bad end product and also causes heavy wastage and loss.

The harvesting of green leaves on time results in higher productivity and yields. If the plucking rounds are not maintained properly, this increases the growth of height of the tea bush, making harvesting a difficult task. In this situation it is recommended to prune the bush. Generally, a well maintained tea bush in high grown areas are pruned once in 4 years when the bush is about 4 feet tall (the average plucker is about 5 feet tall).

For harvesting a high yielding VP field, it requires about 15-20 workers/labourers per hectare per plucking round and about 4-6 rounds per month. For a seedling field, the requirement of workers for harvesting is between 10-15 workers per hectre per round, and average 3-4 rounds per month. Generally men are used in estates to harvest over grown (cover 4 feet) high tea bushes and in situations where there is a desperate need or shortfall of females to maintain proper plucking rounds. This happens mainly after festive holiday periods like New Year, *Deepavali* festival and during worker strike or go-slow situations which are very common in tea plantations.

In tea plantation a worker is allotted to a certain piece of work which he or she has to complete within a given period of time. This is known as *Thika*. The *Thika* tasks are fixed either in terms of bushes or Dangs or Nals. A nal or Dang is an area of 12 squire feet and roughly 3000 Nals comprise an acre. The tasks assigned to women and children for their *hajri* are proportionately less than the men. The amount of each of the tasks which the workers perform are discussed here. Approximately 8 to 16 Nals of land is given to a man worker for deep hoeing in a day. A man is required to complete light hoeing in about 40 to 48 Nals of land in a day. The deep pruning operation is to be done in 60 to 72 bushes in a day by a man worker; he has to perform light pruning in about 60 to 180 bushes in a day whereas he



can perform forking and weeding of 160 to 240 bushes within the same time. However, a woman worker has to do light pruning in about 60 to 100 bushes or forking and weeding in about 160 to 200 bushes in a day. In the *Thika* in which a woman worker is engaged in plucking has to pluck a fixed amount of tea leaves. In kamalcherra Tea Estate the amount of leaves to be plucked by a worker varies from 15 to 22 kgs per day. The minimum fixed quantity of leaf plucking varies from season to season. The manager and the *Bagan-babu* decide the minimum quantity of leaves to be plucked. The men and women workers have no say in this matter. They pluck more and can earn more by over plucking. In the *Thika* were other types of work are to be done, a worker works on a specific number of tea bushes in the garden as mentioned earlier or on a specific area of the tea estate. After completion she is paid a wage for her tasks or *Thika* which is known as *hajri*. If a worker is engaged in plucking he or she will get an incentive or 5 Taka for every kg of leaves plucked in excess to *Thika* of a fixed amount of leaves which varies from 15 to 22 kgs in a day from season to season. Over plucking is commonly known as *Dubly*. During pruning, every adult and efficient worker is allotted a specific number of tea bushes which he or she has to prune. In the slack season some of the workers are engaged in miscellaneous work which cannot easily be measure on a piece rate basis. Such work are repair of roads and bridges, erecting, fences, etc. for which they are paid on time basis. Those works are generally done by men workers and they are given basic wages for work of 5 to 6 hours. Again, early in the plucking season there will not be sufficient flush on the tea bushes to enable the pluckers to earn their basic wages if the plucking like *Chatni-patti* or *Ticca* is adopted. In the *Ticca* plucking early in the season there may be a danger if the plucking of leaf is done indiscriminately, because it may spoil the flushing surface of the tea bushes. Like in all other tea plantations the workers of the kamalcherra Tea Estate also get payment on the time basis for the first few rounds of plucking usually called tipping. The time required to spend on this work is generally 6 to 7 hours a day. Similarly towards the end of the flushing season also plucking on time basis is followed.



Other workers engaged in the plantation are herdsmen, water-carrier (*Paniwalla*), etc. All of them are men workers.

**Fertilizing :** Given the required soil conditions, there is a high degree of correlation between field productivity and the application of inorganic fertilizer. Apart from adhering to the recommended dosage –roughly, 1 kg of nitrogen for every 10 kg of made tea –the industry is now looking more closely at establishing précis linkages with fertilizer prices (subsidies for which have, by and large, been withdrawn) as well as the price of tea itself. Fertilizer application continues to be a manual operation, the workdays involved being almost the same for most fields, except that fields with very high productivity require additional rounds which, in turn involve more labour, albeit to a small extent. Applying fertilizer or so called manuring is vital to get a better harvest. Manuring, replaces the different chemical components back to the tea bush. There are macro and micro elements of fertilizer. Nitrogen (N), Phosphorous (P), Potassium (K) are considered as main macro components and Magnesium (Mag), Calcium (Ca), Zink (Zn), Boron (Br), Ferrous (Fe) are micro components used in very small quantities.

Fertilizer could be applied manually, distributing the required chemicals directly to the roots of the tea bush. For this operation the required workers per hectre is 3-5 and carried out with the onset of rain. In kamalcherra application of fertilizer is done 3-4 times per year for VP teas and 2-3 applications for seedling tea. There are instances where some nutrients are applied as a liquid spray. This is called folio spray and it is done at the rate of 2-3 workers per hectre. Here, chemicals are sprayed on to the tender leaves of the tea bush (flush), for vegetative propagated fields there will be 3-4 applications per year and for seedling 2-3 times per year. The variety of fertilizer and the frequency of applications are decided based on the yield and the soil conditions.

Other than the main operations mentioned above, operational work force is required for pruning of tea bushes. Pruning is the process of artificial removal of leaf bearing branches of the tea plant.



It may involve all or more branches being removed from a tea bush at a height of 18-24 inches from the ground. In this estate the pruning average height is about 20-22 inches according to the slope of the field.

Pruning needs workers at the rate of 45-55 workers per hectre at the intervals of 4 years on VP teas and 4-5 years on seedling tea fields.

Generally, 25-35% (1/3), of the total matured tea area of an estate is pruned per year, followed with many other operations related with pruning, such as cutting drains, applying dolomite, planting and re-supply of shade and other trees, cleaning the moss and ferns on tea bushes, applying lime etc. New clearing operational work like preparing fields, holing, planting, transportation, etc. also requires a large number of workers.

Kamalcherra Estate generally requires 40-50 labourers per day for the manufacturing process of tea at the factory. The worker requirement depends on the capacity and the harvest (estimate: 1 worker for 55 kg of made tea). An average of 22.5% (e.g. 12,000 kg green leaves gives 2,700 kg made (black) tea).

**Weeding:** Technical opinion now is that weeds in the tea fields are to be controlled, not eradicated. It is, therefore, a question of weed management with an eye on the cost-benefit line of the operation. Well-maintained and productive fields with good ground cover require little expenditure on chemicals and labour for weeding, whereas the substantial weeding costs incurred for fields with large vacant areas add little to productivity. Furthermore, manual weeding is slowly giving way to chemical weeding, so that what was a labour-intensive component of production is now no longer so, and the workforce involved in weeding is bound to shrink further in the future. Mainly men workers are involve in this sort of work.



The second most important labour intensive operation in an estate is weeding. This could be done in many ways. The most environmental friendly way is to take out unwanted plants manually from the site. This also an economical method as the removed weeds could be used as manure after turning them to compost. Men are used to clean the property, especially to take out perennial flowery, hard weeds and creepers. Another advantage of using manual labour is that they could remove only the unwanted plants/weeds leaving the useful plants in the site, it is also called selective weeding. Manual weeding is considered as the best method of weeding, especially where the immature tea plants are considered. The method of weeding is mostly used during the time period when the harvest is less, to give more work to the labourers. In an estate generally 15-20 workers per hectre is used to clean an average weedy field, and this operation is done 1-2 times per year for a field and followed up by 2-3 times a year with spot manual weeding using 5-8 workers per hectre.

Chemical weeding is the most common and convenient way of eradicating weeds from the estate. According to the growth and variety of weeds, selected chemical or mixture of chemicals are used. Application of weedicide is done by sprayers at the rate of 3-4 workers per hectre. Generally chemical weeding is done for a field 1-2 times a year followed by spot spraying at the rate 1-2 workers per hectare 2-3 times a year. This method could be harmful if the protective steps are not followed. There is a high possibility of soil and water resources getting toxic due to excessive use of chemicals.

**Pruning:** The average life of seedling tea plant is well over 50 years, with hybrid types having a life of around 40 years. Pruning is important for maintaining the tea bush in the right form and height for growing and plucking. Pruning is also necessary for the removal of branches that are decayed or dead as a result of drought, pests or diseases, thereby to ensure a clean and healthy plant. The rule of thumb is that the length of the pruning cycle is determined by the elevation of the estate. In practice, pruning is undertaken when the



yield of particular field starts to decline. Lately, however, certain economic considerations have also been incorporated, and the decline in the average cumulative net return has been suggested as being the appropriate yardstick for this purpose. There are several types of pruning –rejuvenation pruning, clean pruning, lung pruning and so on, as well as the simple cu-across at an optimum height. Pruning is another manual operation but, unlike plucking, it is undertaken by men workers who are assigned a daily task, the number of bushes to be pruned varying with the type of pruning and the customary practice. Invariably, the task is completed well within the stipulated hours of work and, in that respect, much scope exists for rationalizing the workload and encouraging group activity.

**Other field operations:** These include soil conservation measures, control of pests and diseases, and sundry activities. The labour requirements – mostly men workers –do not vary significantly with field productivity, being about 15 per cent of the total workdays absorbed on an average tea estate.

**Manufacturing:** About 4.5 kg of freshly plucked green leaf is required to manufacture 1 kg of black tea (finished product). In South Asia, factory expansion and modernization have not kept pace with the additional crop generated in the field, and it has been a matter of slowly upgrading the conventional technology. Between the two principal methods of manufacture –orthodox and CTC (cut, tear and curl) – the global demand for the latter has been on the rise because of its higher cuppage (about 1.6 times more cups than its orthodox counterpart) and greater acceptability in quick brewing tea bags. Producing countries in the region have, accordingly, affected a shift to CTC manufacture, with the entire Bangladesh product being of this variety. It is pertinent to note that because of the relatively continuous process which CTC entails, the factory labour requirement is just about half that necessary for orthodox production. This trend of lower labour absorption in tea processing is expected to continue.



**Overheads:** By and large, tea production in South Asia is a large-scale enterprise. In Bangladesh the entire industry is composed of large enterprises. The industry is therefore still estate oriented. In this situation, managements throughout the region are obliged to provide a wide array of welfare facilities to workers and their families, such as housing, medical care, education, sanitation and crèches. The workforce employed in the provision of welfare facilities represents about 5 percent of total workdays at the estate level. Although it may be difficult to visualize a correlation between expenditure on welfare and worker productivity, an attempt is made below to establish such a linkage.

In a plantation tea bushes are kept to a stunted growth of about three feet as such a height gives the largest number of plucking points. The other factor is that such a height is convenient for the men and women workers of the garden as plucking is done by hand. The plucked leaves are comprised of two leaves on either side and a bud in between.

The daily wage workers of the tea plantation perform all types of manual work such as plucking of leaves, weeding, hoeing, manuring, forking and cleaning the soil, pruning the tea bushes in winter, taking care of nursery bed of young tea plants and cleaning the tea stalks in the factory. Most of the labourers employed for plucking (*Patti-tepai*) are women. The men workers also pluck leaves occasionally. The men workers are often engaged in hoeing (*Thali-pharua*), cleaning the ground around the bushes (*Khulni*), spraying of pesticides, and so on.

The period from May to November is generally regarded as the busy season in the tea plantation. July to September is the peak period of the plucking season and the workers, specially the women workers, can earn entire wages from plucking over the required norm. December to March is the slack season in plantation. During this period the earning of the women workers as well as the average earning of the labour family remains generally lower. During the slack season in winter the volume of work as well as working hours reduce considerably. Women workers of the plantation remain busy at least



for a large part of the year, while the men workers can enjoy leisure when work in the plantation is over. In some cases, the women workers in the plantation work even longer hours than the men. In the north Indian tea gardens, the work system for men is that of “task-work”, which means that when the task set for the day is done, the work is over. Normally four to five hours are needed to complete the work under the system. While women workers employed in plucking at “piece-rate” are to work for seven to eight hours in order to earn the minimum daily wage. The plucking season generally begins with the early rains in March and ends either in November or in early December. The plucking gives the highest yield during July to August when rainfall is heavy. The plucking of the early monsoon is supposed to produce the best quality of tea.

**TABLE 11**  
Division of labour  
(Sex-wise classification of plantation work)

| Operations in garden and factory      | Period in month     | Sexes of workers |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| <b>Garden operations</b>              |                     |                  |
| 1. Filling of vacancies of tea bushes | January - May       | Men, Women       |
| 2. Transplanting                      | January - March     | Men, Women       |
| 3. Manuring                           | February - May      | Men              |
| 4. Tipping                            | March - April       | Men, Women       |
| 5. Plucking                           | March - December    | Men, Women       |
| 6. Spraying pesticide                 | April - September   | Men              |
| 7. Pruning                            | October - January   | Men, Women       |
| 8. Weeding                            | Throughout the year | Men, Women       |
| 9. Hoeing                             | Throughout the year | Men, Women       |
| <b>Factory operation</b>              |                     |                  |
| 10. Machine operating                 | March -December     | Men              |
| 11. Withering                         | March -December     | Men              |
| 12. Rolling                           | March -December     | Men              |
| 13. Fermenting                        | March -December     | Men              |
| 14. Drying                            | March -December     | Men              |
| 15. Sorting                           | March -December     | Men, Women       |
| 16. Packing                           | March -December     | Men              |

(Source: Field work in Kamalcherra Tea Estate, 2004)



After the plucking is over the bushes are pruned. Such pruning is made from six inches to eighteen inches. The pruning can be divided into light, medium and deep on the basis of the height of the pruning. Pruning of the tea bushes is a very important task in the garden. The yield of the oncoming season depends on how the bushes are pruned. So such pruning is done by the efficient men worker of the garden. Light and medium pruning (*Kalam-Kata*) are only done by young and efficient women workers. But the deep pruning is only done by the efficient men workers as it requires both efficiency and physical strength. The men workers also perform other hard work such a deep-hoeing, digging and spraying of pesticide and weedicide. The work in which women are generally employed are plucking of leaf. They also do weeding, manuring, light hoeing (*Thali-pharua*), collecting the seeds of the shade trees, forking (*Jilloni*) and preparing nursery beds. In many work in the plantation the women workers are as efficient as the men workers, and it is believed that in some work such as plucking the women workers are more efficient than the men. In plucking the women workers score over the men workers both in efficiency and quality of leaves plucked. The men workers also pluck leaves, but are generally found that the quality as well as quantity of leaves plucked are not as high as those of the women workers. There is a reason behind it. The plucking of good quality of tea leaves requires patience, and for this the women workers are more suitable than the men workers. Other factor may be that the men workers prefer the work which requires greater physical labour, such as hoeing, digging, et. However, the women workers in the plantation are always given light work. During the peak season, i.e., from April to November they remain busy in plucking, and during the slack season they are employed in light and medium pruning, forking and weeding. Pruning in plantation can be considered as semi-skilled work. Only young and efficient women workers are allotted for pruning. However they are very few in number. In the factory of the tea plantation aged and weak women are employed in picking out the stalks (*Chunai*) from the tea leaves. Sometimes the aged men and women workers are engaged in making nursery seed beds.



The women and adolescent workers performed the same type of work. Children are generally given light agricultural work such as removing creepers and parasites from the tea bushes, light-digging, collecting the seeds of shade trees etc.

Generally a work in the plantation is done in groups. Under the supervision of *Daffadars* or *Sardars* the workers are divided into several groups. A group is consisted of about fifty workers either men or women. The *Daffadars* generally supervise the plucking of leaf in the plantation. The *Sardars* supervise the other work. This is generally allotted in gangs or *Patti*. Some are allotted to plucking leaves while others to hoeing, etc.

### **Physical Conditions at the work place and occupational hazards:**

In the plantation industry no machine is used. The workplace is vast tract of land under the sky. Hence, it is believed that occupational hazards are minimal in this industry. But my field visits and study results reveal that there are a number of hazards that affect workers' productivity quite adversely. Among these, hazards arising from spraying insecticides and using chemical fertilizer in the tea garden are also widespread. Relation with the manager, '*Tilla babu*' (Field manager), and *Sarder* (Line supervisor) is also an important factor affecting the productivity of the tea workers.

The plantation workers have to work to in the field from sunrise to sun set. They work continuously for about eight hours daily under scorching sun. Earlier, the sun was not such a problem for the tea workers since there were a large number of big trees which served as an umbrella over the workers' head. But now the number of big trees in the tea garden has decreased drastically partly because of theft and partly because of the negligence of the tea industry management. Moreover, according to the agreement between the Cha Sangsad and the Cha Sramik union, previously the management provided *Mathal* (a wicker-cap) regularly. It is found from my study results that now the management does not supply this *Mathal* on a regular basis.



The tea industry management is also required by agreement to supply two big napkins every year. The workers use this napkin to over their head and to soak sweat. This agreement was also found to be grossly violated. Because of all these reasons, work in the garden exposed the tea workers either to the scorching sun or heavy rain – two dominant natural phenomena in Bangladesh. Working under the sun's intense glare or working while being drenched in rain often causes cough, cold and fever among the tea plantation workers. More than 42 percent of the workers reported that work under sun or rain is the main reason for the cough, cold or fever they suffered in the previous times.

Table 12

Health hazards of plantation work (Self-perceived reasons for diseases)

| Reasons for various Diseases                 | Male | Female | Total Workers |
|----------------------------------------------|------|--------|---------------|
| Work under rain/Sun                          | 48.0 | 52.0   | 100.0         |
| Hard work/standing for a long time           | 54.0 | 46.0   | 100.0         |
| Bare feet                                    | 79.0 | 21.0   | 100.0         |
| Mosquito Bite                                | 54.0 | 46.0   | 100.0         |
| Spraying of insecticide in bare hand and eye | 80.0 | 20.0   | 100.0         |
| Lack of pure drinking water                  | 50.0 | 50.0   | 100.0         |
| Others                                       | 50.0 | 50.0   | 100.0         |

(Source: Field work in Kamalcherra Tea Estate, 2004)

Health hazards also arise from working in bare feet. The workers who are working in bare feet in the tea garden is one of the reasons for their health problems. It is also known that both male and female tea workers work in the field without shoes. They said that because of their pervasive poverty they could not buy shoes even though they are aware of the health hazards arising from working in bare feet. They also reported that because of bare feet, they suffered from skin diseases. Female workers reported that currently they are suffering from skin diseases. They are also aware of the health hazards arising from spraying insecticide with bare hand. Most of them reported that previously, according to the agreement between the Cha Sangsad and



Cha Sramik Union, the management used to provide gloves, mask, spectacle and soap to the workers who sprayed insecticides in the garden. But now they do not provide the same. Maximum of the workers, who spray insecticides in the field, did not use gloves and mask. Thus, the agreement between the cha Sangsad and the Cha Sramik Union is being blatantly violated.

The hazard of working while standing is widespread among tea workers, which causes chronic leg ache. Majority of the workers reported that they suffered from leg and hand pain.

Lack of drinking water the work place is another dominant reason for their health problems. Tea workers often feel very thirsty since the work under the sun. Many workers were found to carry water with them. But they finish it within a few hours. For the rest of the time they work without drinking water even though they feel very thirsty. Only A category estates like Kamalcherra were found to supply water at the work place although according to the Tea Plantations Labour Rules, 1977, "in every plantation there shall be provided and maintained at suitable points at each work site, conveniently accessible to all workers, a regular supply of sufficient quantity of drinking water".

The workers also reported that mosquito bite is a reason for most health problems. Some hazards also arise from carrying the heavy tea bag over the head. There are very few places for taking rest. In present estates there is no such place at all. The workers have to walk a long distances with heavy bag of green leaves. In the absence of any shelter, the workers get drenched in the rain and the bag becomes heavier. Moreover, in most cases the workers carry the bag on one shoulder. This condition results in shoulder pain.

It was observed that in many cases the workers adopt self-protection against some hazards. The pluckers reported that they apply an oil mix on their body to protect themselves from mosquito, insects and chemicals. But because of poverty they can not adopt



other protective measures like wearing covered shoes or using wicker-cap.

### CHART NO 3

| Time             | Description of the work for week days                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Comment                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                  | Male worker                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Female worker                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| In the morning   | Leave the bed at six 'O' clock. Then they have a bath and take break-fast. The send their cows before going to work. The <i>chowkidar</i> comes and informs every one the section in which they have to go to work for that that day. The workers reach their working place around 9 a.m. Those who have small babies play with them for a while before going to work.                                                                                | The woman after waking up in the morning wash their face and then clean their house with broom. After clearing the yard some take bath. They then prepare <i>roti</i> and tea for everybody. If she has children then she feeds them and then goes to work.                                                                                                                                                                  | <i>The women have more work to do in the house in the morning than men. Some men help the women in their work some do not. Those men who have land plough their lands at dawn.</i> |
| In the afternoon | If the men have duty somewhere outside in the afternoon, then they do not go home for lunch. They bring lunch with them in the morning. Some time they eat <i>roti</i> with vegetables but most of the time they eat only <i>roti</i> for lunch. They take rest in their place of work (within the garden). The men do most of the hard works of the garden, like clearing jungles, ploughing the field and putting fertilizer cutting hay, wood etc. | Those women who have babies come home during lunch hour to feed their babies. They eat <i>roti</i> and drink tea at lunch before returning to work. Those who do not have babies and if their duties are some where outside, then they also bring lunch with them in the morning. The women most of the time are engaged in plucking the leaves. The have to weigh the plucked leaves at 12 p.m. and again in the afternoon. |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| In the evening   | The men have a bath in the canals on their way back from work. The men do not do any of the house work after returning from work. Some stay and rest at home and gossip with friends. Some go to buy cigarettes for smoking and those who have drink habit go to the <i>patta</i> to drink.                                                                                                                                                           | Most of the women have a bath before returning home from work. Those who have babies feed them milk first. After taking a little rest they enter the kitchen to prepare the dinner. They do not get any help from the men.                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| At night         | After having dinner the men sleep. They forget all their worries once their head touches the pillow. Those who have drinking habits get drunk at night and do indecent thing. They feel that by drinking they will get a good sleep without any pain.                                                                                                                                                                                                 | The women who do not have any children after finishing their work go to bed by 10 p.m. But those who have babies can not sleep until their babies sleep.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                    |



| Description of the work for Friday |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                    | Male                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Female                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Comment                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| In the morning                     | They sleep till 9 or 10 a.m. They do not have to do work. Those who drink, sleep till 12 p.m. After waking up some go to collect sticks for cooking, some go to the market. On this day also go to visit their friends and relatives. | The women also do not rush with their work but they have to do all the household chores. They do all the leftover work of the week like washing cloths, cleaning the house property, giving their children a wash. They also tend their cows and chicken. | Those who own land cultivate their lands on Friday, which keeps them very busy. In the same way they cultivate the lands given to them by the company. They get more time for cultivation on Fridays than any other day because it is their holiday. |
| In the afternoon                   | After having lunch they either sleep or look after their kitchen garden. Those who own land or are given land by the company, cultivate the lands.                                                                                    | After lunch the women either to sleep with their children or if they have any housework then they complete that. They also sometimes play with their children.                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| At nights                          | At night they gossip together either outside or inside their house. After having dinner they sleep.                                                                                                                                   | The women after finishing the household chores join the males to gossip. After having dinner and cleaning everything they sleep.                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

**Apart from daily wages tea garden workers entitled to the following facilities:**

**(1) Ration:**

The plantation labourers of kamalcherra Tea Estate are given ration on weekly basis. The facilities of ration are however given only to those belonging to the *bagan dafa* (permanent workers) and no one else. A labourer of the *bagan dafa* is given 2-1/2 kgs of wheat and 1 kg of rice. Besides, 1 kg of rice or wheat is given for each of three dependent children of a *Bagan dafa* worker. Therefore, the weekly ration of a *bagan dafa* worker is  $3\frac{1}{2} + 1\frac{1}{2} + 1\frac{1}{2} + 1\frac{1}{2} = 8$  kgs, if he has 3 children. The company gives ration to a dependent child up to the age of 12. When a child reaches the age of 12, the company considers him fit and able for employment. If both the husband and wife are labourers of *bagan dafa*, they are given 3-1/2 kgs of ration each. They are also entitled to ration for 3 children who



are dependent on both of them. That means that the husband and wife will not separately get ration for 3 children who are dependent on both of them. The cost of 1 kg of rice or wheat in ration is taka 1.30 only which is deducted from their wages. In the past the company used to give the workers rice, dal, and sugar, oil, salt and clothes etc. in the ration. But these are no longer given. It may be mentioned here that the ration given to the labourers is very insufficient. A family of average size may pull on for 2/3 days with this quantity of ration. Therefore, the condition of the large families is even worse. The retired labourers are given 2-1/2 kgs of ration per week.

There are many plots in low lands within the kamalcherra Tea Estate which are not suitable for tea plantation. The labourers made these lands cultivable without taking any wage from the company. They then used to produce crops or cereals in these lands for their own consumption and they used to pay rent for that. But later on, the company took control over these lands and formulated new rules. If any labourer cultivates one acre (27 decimals) of land then the company deducts 110 kg of rice or 200 kgs of grain from their ration. After deducting the ration for the above land, if the labourer is entitled to more ration then only he is given the additional amount. The labourers do not get any real benefit out of this system, because due to heavy and continuous rainfall, draught, hailstorm, attack by insect and other natural calamities the crops are damaged almost every year. As a result the labourers neither get a good crop nor their ration. The labourers cultivate the lands because these lands were leased in to their fathers or grandfathers by the management in most of cases. The present cultivators, therefore, have a feeling of attachment to these lands. Therefore, they don't want to give up cultivation in these lands in spite of the introduction of rigorous system of rent by the company. Another reason is that the labourers do not have any clear idea about their loss. In the past their forefathers received both crops and ration by cultivating these lands. But due to the new company rules, the labourers of today are deprived of facilities given to their forefathers



in the past. Economic hardships of these labourers have increased in the recent time.

The facilities given to the labourers of Kamalcherra Tea Estate is very inadequate. A large number of labourers still belongs to *basti dafa*. They do not get any extra facility from the company. But to increase the skill of the labourers, they should be given more benefits. The fulfillment of basic needs such as food, clothing, education, housing and medical care is supposed to increase their skills. The workers of *bagan dafa* are however entitled to the following facilities.

### **(2) Yearly vacation and leisure:**

The labourers of the *bagan dafa* are entitled to 20 days' leave for being sick. They are entitled to a wage of taka 10.00 per day during this leave period. If any worker is sick for more than 20 days, he is not supposed to get a wage for that excess period. But there is no such medical leave for the workers of *basti dafa*.

### **(3) Maternity leave :**

The pregnant women workers of the *bagan dafa* are entitled to such leave. The period of this leave is 3 months. The pregnant women workers go to maternity leave before and after the child are born. They get full wage for this leave. They are paid on weekly basis like all other workers of *bagan dafa*.

### **(4) Bonus:**

The company gives bonus to the labourers of the *bagan dafa*. The Hindu workers get bonus during Durga Puja and *Dol Jatra* and the Muslims get it during the two Eids. The Hindus get a bonus of Taka 130.00 during Durga Puja and Taka 70.00 during *Dol Jatra*. The Muslims also get the same amount of bonus on the occasion of Ed-ul-Fitr and Ed-ul-Azha.



### (5)Residence:

It is also a rule of the company that every worker of *bagan dafa* must be given a house. If there is only one worker working in the *bagan dafa* then he gets a house measuring 10-1/2 ft by 15 ft. and if he has a family then he gets a house measuring 10-1/2 by 22 ft. It may be mentioned here that at the company only supplies hay and fence to the workers to build their houses and also grants them leave for constructing their houses. The company grants a total of 14 days' leave to a worker of *bagan dafa* for building his new house. For repairing the roof of a house a worker is granted 9 days' leave and for ordinary repairing one is granted 7 days' leave. During such leave, the workers are entitled wage at the rate of Taka 28.00 per day. The space in the houses (given to the workers by the company) is not adequate at all. After the marriage of their sons and daughters, it becomes impossible for them to live under the same roof. Hence, those who can afford build a new house for themselves, and those who cannot afford it live under the same roof. The company gives a few decimal of land to each worker for building his house. All houses of the workers are similar i.e., the wall of the house is made of clay and the roof is of hay. The labourers planted various types of fruit bearing trees around their houses and they have been living there for several generations. The houses of the labourers are built in a row. There are no sanitary facilities in most of the houses. But in most of the Muslim houses, there is a *katcha* toilet.

In Kamalcherra Tea Estate, there are also some brick built houses. At present, some more brick-built houses are being constructed in the *Bara* line section of the garden. About 25 houses have already been completed. These houses have tin-shed roofs and the walls and floors are cemented. Foundation for twenty more houses have been laid recently.



## **(6) Medical Service:**

If any labourer of the *bagan dafa* is sick then he gets treatment facilities from the company. For this reason a medical centre has been established within the Tea Estate. But the medical service is very poor here because no doctor is available when labourer requires treatment and even when the doctor arrives sufficient medicine or treatment is not given to the patient. As a result medicine is bought by them from out side. The doctor remains absent in the Medical Centre most of the time. The compounder gives medicine to the patient in the absence of the doctor. The labourers also do not have any faith upon the treatment given by the doctor. The workers often suffer from malaria and diarrhea. But doctors are hardly available for the treatment of these diseases. The doctor is very indifferent about treating the patients. The service thus given by the doctor is totally inadequate.

The physical environment of the labour lines is extremely poor. In the garden the attack by the mosquitoes is tremendous and the labourers do not have any mosquito-nets to protect themselves. Many are also attacked by cold fever and diarrhea. There are many labourers who suffer from malnutrition due to lack of food and as a result their power to resist diseases becomes very weak.

Earlier, the labourers used to drink water from the well, but now the company has provided tube wells in different lines. But these tube wells remain out of order most of the time. The doctor gives them advice about health, nutrition, family planning etc.

## **(7) Education:**

There is a primary school in this Tea Estate to provide education to the children of the labourers. But most of the children do not attend the school. The attendance is very poor in this school because the parents find it lucrative to engage the children in other works.



## Subsidiary sources of income of tea garden workers:

There was acute shortage of labour when the British first started plantation here. It was very difficult to find any local worker then. At that time though the labourers did not enjoy many fundamental rights, still they could eat sufficiently. Hence the labourers did not think seriously of a subsidiary source of income. But with the growing economic pressure and with the increase of their family members the workers are forced to think of other sources of income and at present the tea-garden workers are engaged in the following subsidiary occupation to supplement their income.

**Table 13**  
Various Fringe benefits of the tea plantation workers

|      | Sterling Tea Garden                                           |                                                                         | Other Tea Garden                                              |                                                                         | All Types of Garden                                               |
|------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Year | Expenditure on Medical facilities per worker per year (in Tk) | Amount of Maternity Benefits per married female worker per year (in Tk) | Expenditure on Medical facilities per worker per year (in Tk) | Amount of Maternity Benefits per married female worker per year (in Tk) | Average amount standing per members in the provident fund (in Tk) |
| 1996 | 513                                                           | 170                                                                     | 390                                                           | 238                                                                     | 9,476                                                             |
| 1997 | 603                                                           | 230                                                                     | 440                                                           | 270                                                                     | 10,470                                                            |
| 1998 | 610                                                           | 244                                                                     | 397                                                           | 281                                                                     | 11,171                                                            |

Sorce : Bangladeshiyo Cha Sangsad, Annual Report 1997-1998

### i) Animal maintenance:

There are many grazing fields within the tea-garden which are used for grazing animals. So many workers maintain cow, sheep, goat, etc. The tradition of maintaining animal within the tea garden is very old. Many workers maintain cow for its milk. They sell the milk of the cow, goats, sheep etc. The workers who have land require bullock for ploughing it. Though the garden is appropriate for



maintaining animals, still the management is against it indirectly for it is harmful for the tea garden. The management does not encourage the workers to engage themselves in other economic activities. Thus the labourers have to maintain cows and other animals secretly. Many healthy cows are often stolen. The villagers from near by villages are usually engaged in those stealing. Apart from maintaining domestic animals the workers also grow chicken and duck, they increase their income by selling the chicken, duck and also the eggs.

## ii) Agriculture:

As mentioned earlier, the workers of the tea garden have agricultural land provided by the company in which they cultivate crops and cereals. But the ration is deducted according to the amount of land provided to the workers as stated before. There are also workers who own lands outside the tea garden. All these lands were purchased by their predecessors. Only a few workers were however able to buy a small piece of land out of their saving. In the past the price of these lands was extremely low. Cultivation of crops and cereals is, therefore, an additional source of income for some workers. There are a few workers who have 5 acres of land each of their own. They are the rich and powerful workers of the garden. They do very little work associated with the tea plantation. They are surplus farmers who sell out their surplus and earn a lot.

## iii) Small Trade:

There are some workers in the garden who apart from working in the garden are engaged in small trades. They have small grocery shops within the Tea Estate. One labourer is found to be engaged as an agent in cow trading and this is a subsidiary source of his income. There are some workers who own *pattas* (wine-shop) within the garden. The wine-shop owners buy wines on wholesale from the towns and sell them to the workers. The shop-keepers buy wine at the rate of Taka 100.00 per gallon and sell it at the rate of Taka 130.00 per gallon. So, this is also a subsidiary source of income for some.



(iv) Wood Selling:

Many of the workers in this Tea Estate earn money by selling wood. Those who are young or unemployed gather woods and sell them either in kamalcherra Tea Estate or in Sylhet town. The plantation shade trees are grown to provide shade to tea-plants in the tea gardens. The shade trees are extremely tender and their branches and stems break in slight wind. The labourers gather these branches and sell them.

(v) Income from other activities:

The temporary workers of the kamalcherra Tea Estate are often engaged in other kinds of economic activities. For instance, one labourer gets Taka 50.00 for working in a rubber garden and he gets only Taka 28.00 for working in the tea garden. Therefore, he prefers to work in the rubber garden. There are *Pan Boraches* (i.e. where Pan is cultivated) near Kamalcherra Tea Estate. The temporary workers of kamalcherra Tea Estate go to work in the nearby rubber garden and in the *Pan Boraches*. The workers can earn Taka 40.00 daily by working in the *Pan Borach*. Many unemployed dependents of the plantation workers also work in the nearby villages and they earn about Taka 40/50 daily during sowing and harvesting season. But the labourers who are engaged in these temporary activities have no freedom. When the pressure of work in the plantation increases the workers of the *basti dafa* (temporary) are forced to work in the plantation. If any body refuses to work, then pressure is applied to the heads of the households belonging to *bagan dafa*. The workers of the *bagan dafa* are threatened if any member of their families working in the *basti dafa* refuses to work. As a result the labourers though get higher wage for their work outside; they are forced to work in the tea garden at a low wage. However, work is not always available outside the garden. In the peak agricultural period, work is available outside. The workers in the *basti dafa* remain out of job for more than three months in a year.



## **Income and standard of living:**

The food keeps the body health by providing energy, nutrition, filling decay and producing heat. For this reason every person should eat the right quantity of food. The energy in the body depends upon the calories value of the food intake. The necessity of food is not the same for everyone. Those who work harder require higher quantity of food than those who do not work hard. Those who are physical labourer require food of 3000 to 3500 calorie. Because of lack of food, the labourers often suffer from malnutrition throughout the year. As a result they do not find any incentive or enjoyment in their work.

The present rate of wage is not sufficient for the workers to purchase meat, fish, egg, milk etc. So, they are unable to eat these kinds of food. Most of the workers of plantation area are illiterate. The workers cannot educate their children due to lack of money. The workers live in the houses in the labour lines with small rooms and without windows. The houses are extremely congested. These houses appear to be the godowns of man. The workers are often attacked by cholera diarrhea, tuberculosis and many other infectious diseases due to the lack of ventilation, good sanitary system and bathrooms in the houses.

At present, the prices of necessary commodities have increased tremendously. So, the labourers have lost their purchasing capacities to a large extent because their wages have not increased at the same rate. As a result the standard of living of the workers is deteriorating gradually.

There are some workers in the garden whose economic condition is improved because of their extra income from agriculture. The lands which they cultivate are all situated outside the garden. They have their personal plough and bullocks. But even though their economic conditions are improved but they have not yet improved their living conditions. In some households, cassette, recorder, radio or television are seen but still their living conditions have not improved



substantially in the sense that they have not yet built sanitary toilets etc. They live in an unhygienic atmosphere.

Majority of the plantation workers of Kamalcherra Tea Estate cannot eat two meals a day properly let alone buy their bare necessities. Due to shortage of food they have become physically weak. As a result they are attacked with various diseases and they have lost interests in their work and cannot work with concentration. Their efficiency is thus reducing to some extent.

### **Management and Workers Relationship**

The tea industry has a special significance in the industrial map of Bangladesh. A tea garden is normally a vast tract of hilly land where tea plantation is carried on. The working system of tea-garden differs from that of other organizations. Tea plantations require large tracts of land and a large labour force. People who directly or indirectly sell labours for tea production are called the plantation workers. Historically, plantations are a product of colonialism. There is a vertical hierarchy in the plantation with skilled supervisors or managers directing the production undertaken by the unskilled labourers whose "primary skill is to follow orders" (Jones, 1968:154-69).

### **Plantation hierarchy:**

Tea plantations are characterized by a rigid hierarchy. Generally speaking the organizational structure is divided into five strata; the owner, management, staff, sub-staff and labourers or workers. The management consists of one manager each for the plantation and the factory and also an assistant manager. The manager is the legal representative of the employer and who is also the most important authority in the tea garden. He is assisted by the assistant managers. The tea gardens are managed as an extreme hierarchy: the manager's live like gods, distant, unapproachable, and incomprehensible. Some even begin to believe that they are gods, that they can do exactly what they like (Rolt, 1991:149).



Managers have anything up to dozen labourers as their personal, domestic servants. They are made to tie the managers shoes lace to remind them that they are under managerial control and that they are bound to do whatever they are asked (Jones, 1986:14). Clerks are regarded as staff and supervisors, *sardars* and watchman all count as sub-staff.

The hierarchy is also reflected in a plantation characterized by a strong sense of superiority and inferiority. The social distance between management and labour is huge and their relationship is typically a master-servant relationship. The sense of community is often weak. Even the workers or labourers who are divided by ethnic origin, castes, family, gender, age etc lack a sense of unity of being a group with collective interests. This fragmentation is further by current developments such as the casualization of labour, sub-contracting and preferential treatment. Furthermore, sub-staff members like to emphasize that they have to guide and educate these backward workers, while they in its turn looks down on the 'unskilled sub-staff'. Such notions legitimize the rigid hierarchy and strict pattern of control on tea plantations; they also serve to frustrate upward social mobility thereby perpetuating the lowly position of labourers.

The relation between management and the tea workers is mainly industrial relationship. Also industrial relation is the relationship that exists and grows out of employment. Industrial relationship is a group of animated capital; it deals with either relation between the employers and workers organizations or the relationship between the organizations themselves.

In this tea Estate manager is the head of the management. The assistant managers, clerks, *sardars*, *chowkiders* work under him. The manager has the power to orders to the assistant managers and the clerks have the power to give order to those working under them. Generally the manager, the assistant managers and clerks are the



persons appointed from outside the garden. But the *sarder* is appointed from among the labourers of the garden.

They do not promote or recruit from any ethnic group worker above *sardars*. Management does not want to break their age old exploitation system and thus they also do not want to promote the interest of the workers.

**Table 14**  
**Staff Position in Kamalcherra Tea Estate**

| Ser | Staff                         | Number | Remarks |
|-----|-------------------------------|--------|---------|
| 1.  | Manager                       | 1      |         |
| 2.  | Assistant Manager             | 1      |         |
| 3.  | Assistant Manager             | 1      |         |
| 4.  | Medical Officer               | 1      |         |
| 5.  | Labour Welfare Officer        | 1      |         |
| 6.  | Supervisor                    | 1      |         |
| 7.  | Head Factory Clerk            | 1      |         |
| 8.  | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Factory Clerk | 1      |         |
| 9.  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Factory Clerk | 1      |         |
| 10. | Head Tila Clerk               | 3      |         |
| 11. | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Tila Clerk    | 3      |         |
| 12. | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Factory Clerk | 3      |         |
| 13. | Provident Fund Clerk          | 1      |         |
| 14. | Typist                        | 1      |         |
| 15. | Store Keeper                  | 1      |         |
| 16. | Compounder                    | 1      |         |
| 17. | Fitter                        | 1      |         |
| 18. | Fireman                       | 1      |         |
| 19. | Monthly Rated Sardar          | 8      |         |
| 20. | Mid Wife                      | 2      |         |
| 21. | Dresser                       | 3      |         |
| 22. | Mechanic                      | 1      |         |
| 23. | Vehicle man                   | 3      |         |
| 24. | Teacher                       | 2      |         |
| 25. | Sardar                        | 10     |         |
| 26. | Chowkider (Permanent)         | 20     |         |
| 27. | Chowkider (Temporary)         | 17     |         |
|     | Total :                       | 90     |         |

(Source: Field work in Kamalcherra Tea Estate, 2004)



The number of positions held by the staff members has been shown in table no. 13. The total number of staff including managerial, office and other staff is 90 in Kamalcherra Tea Estate at present.

In Kamalcherra Tea Estate tea growing area is divided into several sections. The labourers also divided into groups according to the nature of jobs. The *sardars* and *chowkiders* are responsible for distributing works among the workers. The manager and the assistant managers go to the different sections of the garden to supervise the work of the labourers during working hours. The manager and the assistant managers have their own people amongst the labourers of the tea-garden, who work as spies for them. Sometimes, the management for their own benefit treats the labourers very badly. As a result the labourers try to get organized against the management but such attempts do not normally succeed because there are spies among the workers working for the management. They inform all the news to the management and as a result attempts are taken against any such move in due time. The unity of the workers in thus disturbs and their movement is sabotaged at the beginning.

The management can dismiss a labourer from his job for following reasons:

1. If a labourer commits a theft or robbery,
2. If a labourer assaults another labourer or creates a trouble.
3. If a labourer creates a chaos within the garden.
4. If a labourer does any kind of work which is harmful to the garden and management.

Therefore, the management has a very wide scope to dismiss a labourer on the plea of vogue reasons mentioned above.

In various aspects of the labourers working life, they are exploited by the management. These are discussed below:



- i) **Giving them low wages:** The labourers have their work fixed and if they are able to complete their work, then only they get their wages. If a labourer is unable to complete his work then his wage is given according to the amount of work done by him. As for example, weeding in the garden is one kind of work in the garden. To receive his entire wage a labourer has to complete work in an area of 70 square pipes. The length of a pipe is 8-1/2 hands length. So, a labourer has to work a length of 35 pipes and 2 pipes in width. According to the labourers this is known as *nirik*. To receive his entire wage a labourer has to complete his *nirik* is measured by pipes. The daily wage of a labourer is of Taka 28.00 only.

(ii) Another work for the plantation workers is plucking tea leaves. After plucking the leaves are weighted. Tila clerks make false deal with the labourers and on the basis of the deal they increase the weight for the leaves. This is a way of exploiting the labourers. When weighing the leaves, clerks show the management the exact amount and receive the money on behalf of the labourers. But when clerks pay the labourers they pay less on the plea that the labourers have not plucked the quantity of leaves they were supposed to pluck. Most of the labourers are illiterate and they do not know about measurement and weights and this is how they are deprived of their due wages.

The management forces the labourers to work even during very bad weather. If they refuse to work they do not get their wages. So they are bound to work even during rain and storm.

(iii) Management does not want to appoint labourers on permanent basis .



Because they have to give various facilities to the permanent labourers, so the management does not like to appoint all labourers on permanent basis as long as possible. The temporary workers are given just their daily wages of Taka 24.00 and no other facilities. For this reason the temporary labourers do not like to do work in the garden. They get a higher wage for working in the villages as well as in the town outside the garden to get a suitable work at higher wages. During harvesting season, shortage of labour is felt for agricultural production in the nearby villages outside the garden. During this time the wage of the labourers increases a great deal. The temporary workers go to these villages (outside) to work for more wages. But the labourers do not have freedom to work outside because the management has control over this. If there is a pressure of work in the tea-garden, then the management does not allow the temporary workers to go outside and work there. The labourers are thus forced to work within the garden with a comparatively low wages.

iii) **Withdraw from households:** The heads of the household are normally permanent workers, and their dependents are enrolled on temporary basis. As the dependents of permanent workers, the management has control over them. So, if the workers on temporary basis disobey the management and go to work outside the garden then the management dismisses the permanent labourers of those households and withdraws all other facilities.

(i) **Workers don't have any legal rights to any land, trees or house of the garden :**

As mentioned earlier the workers only work for their livelihood in the garden. But they don't get any legitimate right on anything of the estate for example, the labourers plant various kinds of trees, plants etc. all around their houses. The labourers have rights over the fruits but not over the plants or trees. If the



labourers use the trees at any time then they have to face trial and sometimes they are even dismissed from their job.

**(ii) Disputes :**

Sometimes, disputes occur between the management and the labourers or amongst the labourers themselves. If a dispute occurs between the management and the labourers, then the management tries to solve it carefully. If it is between the manager and the assistant manager, then the source of the dispute is identified and then it is solved. In case of a dispute between the clerks and labourers, the manager and assistant managers are informed about it. The manager always assures the labourers of solving their disputes but in practice, he does nothing. The *panchayet* (local unit of Bangladesh Cha Sramik union) is also informed about the dispute but it cannot always play an effective role in solving the dispute.

But the disputes which occur amongst the labourers are usually over land, money and their domestic animals. The *panchayet* tries to solve these disputes. Often the *panchayat* cannot be impartial.

**Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union:**

There is one *panchayet* in every tea garden. It is the local-level political organization to look into the interests of the tea-labourers. The *panchayet* consists of 11 members who are elected by the workers from among themselves. *Panchayets* have links with their central union called Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union (BCSU). There is no direct connection between the workers and the BCSU. Most of the workers are unaware about the activities of the *panchayet* and Cha Sramik Union. However, most of them are members of this union and pay Taka 7-10 per month as membership fee. It is very interesting that a large number of workers do not know that they are members of the union—although they are paying membership fees for it regularly.



In most cases, membership fees are cut from workers weekly wages at the time of wage payment. In many cases, workers do not know anything about this wage cut. At present, the *panchayet*'s main job is to settle social disputes over marriage, boundary, ownership of trees etc. Thus, the relationship of the general members with trade union is very loose. One may argue that the trade union movement, the primary objective of which is to defend the economic rights of the workers, need not interfere with or influence their culture (Bhowmik, 1981:179).

Tea plantation workers have a great potential for organizing themselves in formally since a certain degree of solidarity has been observed among them. This solidarity stems mainly from geographical confinement and ethnic orientation. This solidarity was observed during their religious festivals, and times of crisis such as cyclones, attack by outsiders etc. This solidarity they can be effectively used to organize and strengthen the existing trade union and thereby a strong collective voice.

As tea-garden is an industrial organization for this reason the relationship between the management is one of exploitation. The relationship between these two classes is antagonistic. But this is also true that the tea labourers are now gradually coming in contact with outside world and this exposure is making them conscious today. The speed of consciousness is however still very slow. The working class is still, therefore, a class in itself and not a class for itself (Chowdhury, 1998:91-92).

The plantation employers are far better organized. They had established their association in 1951. After the establishment of an independent Bangladesh in 1971, the committee of the association decided to change from Pakistan Tea Association to Bangladesh Cha Sangsad. As on 31 December 1971, the total number of members of this sangsad was 125 tea gardens. Every two years this employers' association holds social dialogues, both with the Bangladesh Tea Estate Staff Association and the Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union. The



outcome of these social dialogues are two memorandum of agreement—one for the staff and the other for the workers. Working conditions in the tea estate are regulated according to these agreements. However, during the last few years several social dialogues between the workers' association (Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union) and the employers' association (Bangladesh Cha Sangsad) were held. Every two years, a memorandum of agreement is signed by these two parties. But findings showed that every time, most of the demands of this agreement remain unfulfilled. It was also observed that while preparing the agreement, the employers association did not take into consideration about half of the demands placed by the workers' association. Therefore, even after social dialogues were held between workers and employers, very little has been achieved so far in terms of decent work and decent living for the workers.

**Bureacracy:** Like any well organized industry, a plantation has also an organization of work and a hierarchy of staff. The organization of work includes distribution of works among the various categories of staff, keeping attendance registrar, paying salaries and ration and doing other type of works. The hierarchy of staff includes all types of employees of the plantation right from the manager to the wage labourers. All the employees could be differentiated into four categories, namely, (i) Managerial-staff, (ii) Office-staff (iii) Sub-staff and (iv) Workers. This staffing pattern follows a bureaucratic system of management mainly found among the tea plantations run by Bangladeshi owners.



## CHAPTER VII

### Political Organization



All human societies have to coordinate and regulate the behaviour of their members, all need mechanisms for making and enforcing decisions. Political organization is such thing. It is the patterned ways in which legitimate power, or is authority used to coordinate and regulate behaviour of its members.

The management does not want any of the workers to get involved in politics. They feel that if the workers become politically aware, it would be harmful for the management. At present there is one worker in kamalcherra Tea Estate who is a member of the local Union Parishad. He is also a member of Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union. The management respects him a great deal. The management feels that if the workers become politically conscious then they would be against the exploitation of the management. The workers of this tea-garden are not politically conscious and they do not have any idea about the politics of the country. They are completely isolated from the currents of wider political life. A few educated workers are however politically conscious.

Political participation of an individual in society depends upon four kinds of motives – deferential, solidarity, instrumental and civic. Deferential participation results from the actor's deep respect for and strong identification with the influencer and his concomitant desire to be and to appear to be influenced by him. This is generally found in rural areas of less developed countries where villagers often vote 'en masse' out of deference to their traditional leaders. This found mostly in the tea gardens in the district of Sylhet of Bangladesh where the workers vote en bloc as per the direction of the labour leaders.

The workers have realized that their existence depends upon the existence of the workers union and its leaders. However, the political air prevailing in the tea plantation of Sylhet district as a whole is vitiated. This is mainly due to internal rivalry among the office bearers of the union or other organizations who utilize some disgruntled youths to fulfill their sinister plan. According to them the top union leaders are self-centred and utilize the labour force as their



Their own political career at the cost of poor and innocent worker. To them worker is taken as their tool for rising up in the political hierarchy.

In fine, the political participation of the tea workers, particularly the women workers is miserably poor. The main reasons are poverty, illiteracy, lack of social and political awareness and absence of women organization to ameliorate their deplorable condition. The political attitude, orientation and vision of women workers are very narrow and no political culture has developed so far, in the mind.

### **Workers association:**

Political organization of the tea garden workers is a two-tier system:

- a. Inter-garden organization
- b. Intra-garden organization

### **Inter-garden organization**

In Inter-garden organization *Salish* is an informal body with five or ten members now workers recognize them as their *Panchayet*. The functions of *Panchayet* are:

- a. Settlement of all disputes in the garden
- b. Maintaining law and order in the garden
- c. Management of all social and religious activities.

### **Intra-garden organization**

The Intra-garden organization is the Cha Sramik Union of the workers.



## Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union:

Although the history of Trade Union Movement in plantations in South Asia dates to the mid –nineteenth century, it was not until independence that movement gained momentum. Most union in this sector, as elsewhere, operate on political lines.

Aware of the benefit of the trade union movement, non-unionised estate workers are now an exception throughout the region. Yet one specific area calls for reform. This relates to the weak representation of women trade union leaders. In an industry with a high level of female participation this may seem paradoxical and, as a result, some of their issues such as upward mobility, maternity protection, domestic violence, sexual harassment etc. are seldom addressed at the union level.

There is one *panchayet* in every tea-garden. It is the local-level political organization to look into the interests of the tea-workers. The *panchayet* consists of 11 members who are elected by the workers from among themselves. *Panchayets* have links with their central union called Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union (BCSU). Every worker of the tea-garden gives a subscription of Tk. 7.00 only every month for the union. There is no direct connection between the workers and the BCSU. Many workers especially the women workers are not however aware about the union. The *Panchayet* of the garden have direct links with the BCSU. The leaders of the BCSU enter the garden through the *panchayet*. The BCSU however claims that it does not have any link with any political party. The Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union prefers not to have any link with any political party of the country for their own benefit. The main objectives of BCSU are to achieve the following:

1. To improve the socio-economic conditions of the workers.
2. To maintain a good relationship between the workers and the management.



3. To bargain with the management to increase the wages of the workers.
4. To discuss about bonus etc.
5. To settle the dispute between the workers and the management.
6. To solve the local problems if and when the local *panchayet* fails.

### **Employers' Association:**

The plantation employers are far better organized. They had established their association in 1951. After the establishment of an independent Bangladesh in 1971, the committee of the association decided to change from Pakistan Tea Association to Bangladeshiyo Cha Sangsad. As on 31 December 1998, the total number of members of this Sangsad was 125 tea gardens. Every two years this employers' association holds social dialogues, both with the Bangladesh Tea Estate Staff Association and the Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union. The outcome of these social dialogues is two memorandum of agreement – one for the staff and the other for the workers. Working conditions in the tea estate are regulated according to these agreements.

### **Worker's Right to Organise in the Tea plantation Sector of Bangladesh:**

Only an organized labour force can effectively participate in a social dialogue with the employers who are so strongly organized if they want to ensure their right to decent work. In Bangladesh, workers' right to organize themselves into associations is protected by the industrial Relations Ordinance XXIII of 1969. Moreover, freedom of association and the right to organize and engage in collective bargaining, as provided by the ILO Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and



the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98), were ratified by Bangladesh a long time ago. Under these conventions, a workers' union (Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union) has been working among the tea plantation workers since 1948. There is another association, namely Bangladesh Tea Estate Staff Association. This association is the bargaining agent for the tea estate staff including the head clerk, clerk, mid-wife, compounder, malariologist, School master, and driver of the estate.

Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union is the only trade union that has been working among the tea plantation workers for the past several decades. According to the Bangladesh Cha Sangsad annual Report 1997-98 at present, this union has 76,000 registered members (more than 84 percent of the total resident workers on permanent roll). In each and every tea estate, this union has at least one *Panchayet* (garden unit of the Cha Sramik Union). At present there are about 200 *Panchayets*. Each *Panchayet* consists of 10-15 members elected by the workers from amongst themselves. There is a provision that at least 35 percent of these members should be women, whereas the majority of the tea plantation workers are women. Among the five *Panchayets* visited, only one *Panchayet* was found to have 35 percent women members. The Cha Sramik union carries out its activities through these *Panchayets*. The *Panchayet* is supposed to keep constant touch with the general workers and to hold general meeting regularly.

### **Awareness of Tea Plantation Workers about Trade Unionism and their involvement in Trade Union:**

Lack of large-scale awareness regarding trade unionism was observed among the tea plantation workers, particularly among the women workers. During my field work it has been observed that the most of the workers are unaware about the activities of Cha Sramik Union, but they are aware about the activities of their own tea garden *Panchayat*. However, most of them are members of this union and pay Tk. 7-10 per month as membership fee. It is very interesting that a large number of workers do not know that they are members of the



union although they are paying membership fees for it regularly. In most cases, membership fees are cut from workers weekly wages at the time of wage payment. In many cases, workers do not know anything about this wage cut.

The management reported that each and every permanent tea worker is a member of the Bangladesh Cha Sramik union. But they think that the trade union is not doing anything for them. The member workers reported that they did not derive any advantages from being a member of the trade union. Therefore, most of the workers showed no interest in the trade union although they have been members of this union for quite a long time. Under such circumstances, it is very natural that the power of collective bargaining will not be strong enough to engage all the employer to abide by all the ILO conventions and plantation laws, and thus ensure workers' their right to decent work. Main reason for this large-scale passiveness of the tea plantation workers regarding trade unionism is their lack of awareness about the activity of the Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union. Lack of knowledge and awareness of both male and female workers about labour laws and the inequality of gains accruing from the tea industry is also widespread.

### **Activities and Achievements of Trade Unions Involved in the Tea Plantation Sector and Constraints Facing the Process of Unionisation in this Sector:**

The Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union is largely responsible for the lack of awareness of the tea workers about trade unionism. It has not played a strong enough role in raising the awareness of the tea workers about their rights. Of the total population in the garden only few workers were found to be members of the *Panchayet*. Only these workers reported that they attended some meetings arranged by the trade union. The rest reported that they did not attend any trade union meeting although the *Panchayet* is supposed hold a general meeting on a regular basis. At present the *Panchayet*'s main job is to settle



social disputes over marriage, Thus, the relationship of the general members with the trade union is very loose.

However, the president of the central executive committee of the Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union reported that every week they hold two meetings (one on Tuesdays and the other on Fridays) with the workers. He and the other members of the executive committee of the Cha Sramik Union reported that the union has a number of programs to increase the welfare of the tea workers and raise their awareness about their rights as labourers and citizens. In addition, the union is running a program on health education. It is also running an education program for the elderly. It has also incurred some welfare expenditures for workers. The expenditures are incurred to provide the workers with health facilities, educational facilities and vocational training.

Recently, the Cha Sramik Union has started to organize mother's club among the women workers. This club primarily offers motivational programs. The most important ones are as follows:

1. Primary health care: In this program, women workers are motivated to drink pure water, take self-protection against general illnesses and occupational hazards, and follow general health regulations regarding mother's and children's health.
2. Reproductive health care : This program aims at motivating the women workers to bear the first child at the age of 17 years or later, to take proper ante-natal and post natal health care; to bear not more than two children; to breast feed the child up to the first two years, etc.
3. Family Planning: Through this program, the women are motivated to prevent child marriage and to plan the size of their family undertaking family planning measures.



4. Primary education: This program motivates the women workers to send their children to school.
5. Education for the Elderly and Awareness Building: Efforts are made through this program to educate the elderly and to raise the awareness of women workers about their labour and citizen rights, empowerment, labour relations at the work place, etc. Leadership training is also provided to women workers through this program.
6. Nutrition and Additional Income: Through this program, women workers are motivated to grow vegetables and rear cattle and poultry round the year, and thereby to raise the nutritional level and income of the household.
7. Savings: Women workers are motivated to save a part of their income for future security. The club helps them to open accounts with commercial banks.

### **Constraints in the process of Organizing Tea Plantation Workers:**

The trade union leaders mentioned a number of reasons for their non-performance and inefficiency in organizing the tea plantation workers. Among these problems the dominant ones are as follows:

1. Socio-cultural and religious barriers;
2. Prevalence of large-scale superstitions among tea workers;
3. Prevalence of large-scale lack of awareness among tea workers, particularly among the female workers about their legal rights and the role and function of the unions;
4. Very low education among female tea workers.
5. Lack of leadership;



6. Bonded nature of labour in the past did not allow the tea workers to raise their collective voice;
7. Tea worker are reluctant to come out of their geographical confinement since they are ethnically different from the majority community;
8. Female workers' limited commitment to work;
9. Inability of the existing laws to protect temporary workers;
10. Lack of direct linkage or involvement of Cha Sramik Union with the main stream trade union movement.

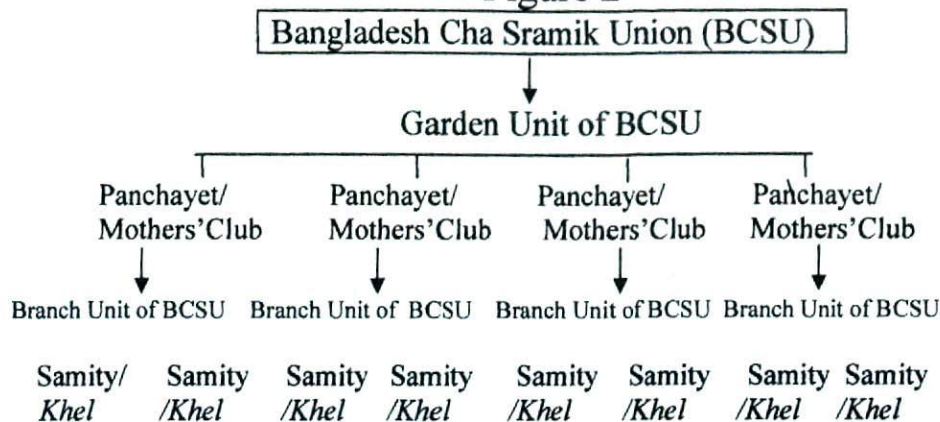
### **Potential of Tea Plantation Workers to Organize Themselves**

Tea plantation workers have a great potential for organizing themselves informally since a certain degree of solidarity has been observed among them. This solidarity stems mainly from their geographical confinement and ethnic orientation. This solidarity was observed during their religious festivals, marriages, funerals and times of crisis such as cyclones, attack by outsiders, etc. This solidarity can be effectively used to organize and strengthen the existing trade union and thereby raise a strong collective voice.

Solidarity among the tea plantation workers has also been observed in the form of *Samity* or *Khel*. During fieldwork time it has been seen that many of the tea plantation workers are members of *Samity* or a *Khel*. This organization has been drawn mainly on section or labour line (residence of workers). It can be seen that significantly more women than men are members of the *Samity* or *Khel*. The members of the *Samity/Khel* meet once a week to collect savings and receive credit from their savings. This is the only activity the *Samity/Khel* is presently engaged in.



Figure 2



Source: Office: BCSU Srimangal, 2004

The tea workers are in great need of credit to augment their income. Through their informal organization, they try their best to meet this demand. It can be seen that 49 percent of the tea workers received loan from the *Samity/Khel*. Most of these loans have been invested for production purposes. More women than men invested for productive purposes. This investment potential of women workers can be augmented several times if they can be provided with more credit facilities through the Cha Sramik Union.

Low yield and high cost characterize the tea industry of Bangladesh. Both demand and supply factors are responsible for this situation. Bangladesh has very little control over demand factors. Therefore, to raise the productivity of the tea sector, Bangladesh has largely depended on improving the supply factors. On the supply side, yield per acre is the crucial variable, which largely depends on various factors such as the age structure of the tea bush, quality and quantity of fertilizer used per hectare, irrigation and labour productivity. Productivity of the tea plantation workers in Bangladesh is far less than that of the other tea producing countries in Asia.

Findings of the present study shows that in addition to crop yield, a large number of factors have contributed to the low productivity of tea plantation workers in Bangladesh. Among these factors, socio-cultural and religious barriers; geographical isolation



and bonded nature of workers and fringe benefits; low quality and quantity of benefits in kind, and incongenial working conditions are the most influential ones. In addition of these factors, three other factors, namely absence of reproductive health facilities, absence of crèche facilities and lack of plucking amenities have contributed to low productivity among women who account for the majority of the plantation workforce. The present study shows that all these factors together deprive the tea plantation workers from their basic right to decent work. This deprivation greatly deteriorates the labour standards of the tea plantation industry in Bangladesh. Beside low yield, poor labour standards also shows the tea industry of Bangladesh in a poor light in the world market since international trade links labour standards with trade policy. Bangladesh has the potential to capture a substantial chunk of the world tea market only if it can improve its labour standards and ensure its workers' their right to decent work.

Social dialogue is the first and may be the only way to achieve workers right to decent work. Only an effective social dialogue between workers, employers and the government can confer this right to workers. However, during the last few years, several social dialogues between the workers' association (Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union) and the employers' association (Bangladesh Cha Sangsad) were held. Every two years, a memorandum of agreement is signed by these two parties. But findings show that every time, most of the demands of this agreement remain unfulfilled. It was also observed that while preparing the agreement, the employers association did not take into consideration about half of the demands placed by the workers' association. Therefore, even after social dialogues were held between workers and employers, very little has been achieved so far in terms of decent work and decent living of the workers.

This situation arises mainly due to the fact that the tea plantation workers are not yet sufficiently organized even though they have the freedom of association and a trade union (Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union) working among them since 1948. Findings of the present study show that majority of the total tea workers are members of the



trade union willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously. They are members of the union since they have been paying membership fees, which are almost compulsorily cut from their wages. Findings also shows that in some cases, they do not even know that they are members of a trade union. Such large-scale lack of awareness about trade unionism may be one reason for the stagnant state of welfare of the tea plantation workers.



## CHAPTER VIII

Supernatural World:

System of Beliefs and Practices



## Religious Beliefs:

Religious beliefs of the tea plantation workers of different ethnic groups is largely influenced by the Hindu religion. Originally they believed in 'Animism'. But the influence of Hinduism from centuries there are more similarities rather than dissimilarities between this two systems. At present they developed an unique religious belief system. Their original belief in several totems and supernatural spirits are still in practice. Side by side they also perform various *puja* like Hindu people. They are also believe in ghost and evil spirits.

In order to render clear the manner in which the clan named after a totem animal (or, less frequently, a plant) came to hold its members akin both to each other and their totem animal, an attempt may be made to indicate, however briefly and imperfectly, some features of primitive man's conception of nature and life is still practiced by them. Apparently when they began dimly to observe and form conscious mental impressions of the world around them, our first ancestors made some cardinal, though natural an inevitable, mistakes. In the first place they thought that the whole of nature was animate, and that every animal, plant, or natural object which they saw around them, was alive and self-conscious like themselves. They had, of course, no words or ideas connoting life or consciousness, or distinguishing animals, vegetables or lifeless objects, and they were naturally quite incapable of distinguishing them. They merely thought that everything they saw was like themselves, would feel hurt and resentment if injured, and would know what was done to it, and by whom; whenever they saw the movement of an animal plant or other object, they thought it was volitional and self-conscious like their own movements. If they saw a tree waving in the wind, having no idea or conception of the wind, they thought the tree was moving its branches about of its own accord; if a stone fell, they, knowing nothing of the force of gravity, thought the stone projected itself from one place to another because it wished to do so. This is exactly the point of view taken by children when they first begin to observe. They also think that everything they see is alive like them, and that animals exercise



volition and have a self-conscious intelligence like their own. But they quickly learn their mistakes and adopt the point of view of their elders because they are taught. In early stage man had no one to teach him, as he did not co-ordinate or test his observations, the traces of this first conception of the natural world remain clearly indicated by a vast assortment of primitive customs and beliefs to the present day. All the most prominent natural objects, the sun and moon, the sky, the sea, high mountains, rivers and springs, the earth, the fire, became objects of veneration and were worshipped as gods, and this could not possibly have happened unless they had been believed to have life. Stone images and idols are considered as living goods. A bachelor is married to a ring or a plant before wedding a widow and the first ceremony is considered as his true marriage.

Thus in early stages of man had no conception of inanimate matter, and it seems probable that he did not either realize the idea of death. Though it may be doubtful whether any race exists at present which does not understand that death is the cessation of life in the body, indications remain that this view was not primary and may not have been acquired for sometime.

They believed instead of being concentrated in certain organs, was distributed equally over the whole of the body. This mistake appears also to have been natural and inevitable when it is remembered that he had no name for the body, the different limbs and the internal organs, and no conception of their existence and distribution nor of the functions which they severally performed. He perceived that sensation extended over all parts of the body, and that when any part was hurt or wounded the blood flowed and life gradually declined in vigour and ebbed away.

The tea plantation workers of Kamalcherra Tea Estate are Hindu and Muslim by religion. But the Hindu workers in their socio-cultural context they are also animist, i.e., they worship different gods and goddesses. They also believe in the influence of evil spirit as



demonstrated through various natural calamities like flood, draught, famine, epidemic, etc. and so the practice of worship of nature is also quite common among them. It is their firm conviction that natural calamities and misfortune are the consequences of them. They want to please these gods, goddesses and evil spirits. The worship of nature by the workers includes worship of hills, forests, big trees and also the departed souls of the ancestors.

The discussion on religion, rituals and beliefs of tea plantation workers therefore, includes not only the religious performance of Hinduism, but also the description of such beliefs and rituals relating to worship of gods and goddesses, worship of nature and evil spirits. Some of these worships are practiced by individual members of the family while other are practiced on community basis.

In the tea garden I found that religious practices among the workers are practiced mainly on community basis. Century old traditional beliefs on trees, specially *Sal* tree in the garden, those who were farmer before joining in tea plantation work worships ploughing occasions, mother earth, snakes as *Nag Devata*, Boats, Tigers, Village deity *Sarhul*, they also worship and pray for their betterment of life.

Religion is the most important cementing force in socio-cultural life of the workers. It binds together and enables multi ethnic and linguistic groups to lead a harmonious life. The uprooted labourers settled in the plantation world carried their traditional religious beliefs with them in the tea estates. Ninety four percent of the entire labour force in tea plantation influenced by Hinduism. In each garden, there is a temple of *Kali*, *Lord Shiva*, *Durga*, where regular *kirtan*, *bhajan* and *puja* is offered.

A *Brahmin* priest is permanently pressed into services of temple and is paid by the management. He is assisted by a labourer who helps the priests. *Bhajan-kirtan* competition is regularly organized. The European planters during their powerful days did not like to interfere in their religious activities. The planters, though Christian, did not



wound their religious sentiments. Had they tried to convert them, they could have easily done, but they never thought to execute the conversion policy in the tea gardens. The managers did not ask any caste Hindus to bring beef packets from nearby market during those days as I have heard. Less than one percent of the total labour force belongs to Christian faith who is mostly the ethnic people of Chota Nagpur.

One percent of the entire labour force in tea plantation belongs to Muslim community who came from Barisal District of Bangladesh. The forefathers of some of them had immigrated a few generations ago and some of them immigrated in the recent past. The Muslim labourers are firm believers of God. They pray five times a day and on Fridays then go to the mosque for *Jumma* prayer. They think that it is a sin to drink alcohol. However, sometimes even some Muslim workers are seen drinking alcohol. This is the influence of Hindu and ethnic workers on them.

The workers who belong to different ethnic groups observed some traditional religious custom and rituals. These are discussed below:

### ***Baha Parab and Pagu Ma'***

In the month of April the nature is in full bloom, leaves and flowers are tender and lovely. During that time, the Mundas celebrate this *Baha Parab* near a tree called *charjan* (also sal tree). '*Pagu Ma'*' is the festival of bravery and heroism in order to propitiate God to help them in their outdoor hunting. At present they only perform very few customs of this festival because of their hard duties in the garden and less financial support.

### ***Manasa Puja (Bishahari puja)***

This is the most common festival among tea garden workers. It is also called *Bishahari puja* to propitiate snake god (*nag devata*). In



fact, this *Manasa puja* is common in every Bengali Hindu society whose impact on labourers in tea gardens is very high. The ethnic groups of Chota Nagpur and some other communities celebrate on 'Sravan Sankranti' day which fall in the month of August. This occasion is practiced by workers in a befitting manner.

### ***Bandana***

Perhaps the most popular festivals are *Bandana Parab* during the black moon of Kartik month. This festival is mainly for the benefit of animals and symbol of animal worship. The songs of this festival are called *Ohira*. Workers clean their animals, feed them well, give them complete rest, decorate and ornate them with flower.

They sing songs of admiration as an acknowledgement for their contribution. The primitive people believe that animals also have spirits which might harm or benefit them. So as to pacify these spirits as well as for better performance they worship their animals. The alluring of the week long festival takes place on the last day. Bulls and buffalos are chained to a strong pole and they are attacked with a dry animal hide. The angry and excited animals hit the dry skin with its horns and the crowd enjoy looking at its vigorousness, anger and excitement. A unique aspect of *Bandana* is the wall embellishment with the folk painting. This festival is practiced by the workers with its age old glory.

### ***Sarhul festival***

The *Sarhul* festivals are the worship of the village deity who is supposed to be the protector of the ethnic workers. Unless the deities of their village are pleased on them they can not be safe and prosperous. The festival is very popular for its festive mood. The whole region is highly charged with dance and song, food and drinks. It is celebrated in the spring season when the sprouting *Sal* tree gets



greener and *Sal* trees blossoms with its flower called *Shalony* or *Shalai*.

This is the symbolic flower of *Sarhul*. The village deities are worshipped with this flower. The *Shalai* is also a symbol of friendship and brotherhood which the garden priest distributes in every house of the village. The *Prasad* or offering of this festival is known as *Hadia* or *Diang*, immensely popular wine made of stale rice. Men and women get absorbed in nature with gay and overwhelm with joy.

If Holi is the festival of Hindus, Eid of Muslims and X-mass of Christians, *Sarhul* is equally important for the Santhals and Oraons. Santhals celebrate in the month of December-January (Posh month when harvesting starts) Boys and girls dance and sing songs. Flute and drum etc, are their main musical instruments.

### ***Tusu Makar***

Here the most common festival is *Tusu* or harvest festival comes during the winter in the last day of *Poush* month. It is also for the unmarried girls. For them *Tusu* is super excellent with grace and elegance who may fulfill their desire. Though there is no history behind this festival, there are some ritual and customs and what it has its tremendous store of scintillating songs full of life and taste. The workers enjoy this festival with great joy.

### ***Magh Parab***

Here the cultivation year begins with the fall of winter. The first day of *Magh* month which is known a *Akhain Jatra* or *Hal Punhya*, means the beginning of ploughing. The farmers, to symbolize this auspicious morning plough two and half circles of their agricultural land. This day is also considered as the symbol of good fortune. This is a harvest festival when the new crop comes to the house in the



month of December-January. This is also a old traditional festival and worker only performs a few symbolic practices.

### ***Karam Parab***

*Karam Parab* is the most important festival of the tea workers in both valleys with a view to propitiating 'Mother Earth' –the goddess of creation, for peace and prosperity. *Karam puja* is the most popular festival of Austric group of people (Bhumij, Munda, Oraon) living in the tea garden. There is a general belief that the desire of a man to germinate seed in human body is fulfilled by the worship of the mother earth. Regarding the origin of the *Karam Parab*, it is said that *Karam* and *Dharam* were two brothers. *Dharam* (younger) surrendered before his powerful brother *Karam*. Since then the worship of powerful king *Karam* remained in practice. Now, it is also known as *Karam Goshain* symbolizing (fortune), happiness, peace and prosperity.

### ***Nouka puja (Boat worship)***

This is done by boatman (Mallah) for the safety of boat man during boating exercise. It is also a very old traditional practice of the workers. At present they only practice this as symbolic manners.

### ***Baghaut puja***

In the beginning tigers used to come in the labour lines during night and killed men and animals. During day time also, tiger devoured animals while grazing in the field. In order to propitiate tiger, the *Baghout Puja* is offered. Now the workers practice this occasion under a tree namely *Sal*.

### ***Bhagta Parab***

*Bhagta Parab* namely the festival of the devotees, comes in the end of spring season and in the beginning of summer season. Among



the ethnic workers, it is popularly known as worship of *Budha Baba* because here it has got the own meaning and procedure of worshipping. *Bhagta* or devotees observe fast for the worship. In the evening they carry their village priest called *Laya* from bathing pond to the temple. I have heard from old workers that earlier it is a peculiar sacrificial scenario when the *Laya* gets out of the pond after bathing the devotees make a chain, locking their things with each other and come forward to offer their bare chest to *Laya* for walk over. After the evening worship, devotees take part in dynamic and vigorous *Chhau* Dance. The next day, primitive sports of bravery is observed. The devotees pierce hooks on the back of their skin and get tied at one end of a long horizontal wooden pole, which is hanging on the top of a vertical *Shal* wood pole, at a height of about 30 feet or sometimes 50 feet. Now the other end of the horizontal pole which is connected with a rope, pulled around the pole by the people and the tied devotee display the breath taking dance in the sky. I have heard about this festival from the old tea plantation workers. But they do not practice this ritual now-a-days.

Two main religious festivals are observed by tea garden workers. They are:

- i) Lal Puja (Holi)
- i) Durga Puja

**Lal Puja** : They avail maximum paid holidays observing these two festivals. Authority of the garden, as per labour agreement, pays their festival bonus well ahead the commencement of *Lal puja* and Durga puja. Young married girls go to their parents' houses once in the whole year during two festivals.

They observe *Lal Puja (Holi)* by singing, dancing with drum beats and spraying colors on each other. Main theme of their singing song is to welcome the appearance of new tender green leaf in tea bushes as well as the new plucking season of tea garden. The women folk dance their tradition old *jhumur* dance while the male people beat



on their *dhols*. *Jhumur* dance basically requires a minimum of five women standing in line holding each other by the waists. Then the *dhol* starts banging, and they gradually start moving from side-to-side keeping pace with the rhythm. Then they start singing along with the beat and dance faster. Gradually the *dhol* beat quickens and so does their steps. It's a very attractive part of their function especially because the women dress up in similar *sarees* and adorn themselves in gaudy make up. Also during *Holi*, or *Lal Puja*, the young men of the garden perform the *kathi* dance. They stand in a big circle holding sticks in their hands. Then with the *dhol* beats and singing they start hitting each others sticks rhythmically while dancing away.

### Durga Puja

In this connection they take preparation at least 6 months before. They start off raising sufficient fund from labourers subscription to observe Durga Puja in great pomp and grandeur. In order to raise funds in sufficient amount they stage '*Jatra*' for four nights at the Durga Puja premises and attract thousands of people both from inside and outside the garden. As a result, sometimes deployment of police becomes necessary to control mob in order to maintain law and order situation during *Durga Puja* is observed in the garden by erecting the statue of Goddess *Durga* using maximum artistic skills to make the statue most attractive. After the *Puja*, the statue is taken to near-by lakes or ponds with great sorrow, and then submerged in the water amongst wails and tears.

Tea Estate labourers observe several other *pujas* during the year through simple ceremony privately and individually without any grandeur and festive mood. But *Lal Puja* and Durga Puja are observed most ceremonially and publicly. Consumption of country liquor by tea estate labourers is rampant during *pujas*. Some of the other *pujas* that are usually observed are *Bish-hori puja* in the month of Sravan; *Rath puja* in the month of Ashar, *Sankranti puja* in the month of Poush; *Laxmi puja* and *Saraswati puja*. During the *pujas* they eat well, - basically chicken, goat and rice. Milk, banana, cheera, coconut, are



used for the pujas to please the gods and goddesses. Also they celebrate by purchasing new cloths for their wards. The garden labourers are very fun loving and spent care freely whenever, as much as they can.

Worshipping of all deities of the area in which decoration of the temple is nicely done. *Dasera* (Durga Puja), *Kalipuja*. *Lakshmi Puja*, *Dewali*, *Sarswati Puja* are very common festivals in all tea gardens irrespective of caste and community. *Durga puja* is the greatest festival of the Bengali community and its impact is also on the labour society. Each garden has '*Puja Mandap* where Durga puja is celebrated jointly. *Holi*, *Fagua*, *Ram Navami*, *Bisua*, *Akhi Tritiya*, *Sibratri*, *Eid*, *Muharam*, *Janmastami*, *Jeutia*, *Sankaranti* and other important festival of the tea garden workers. In fact, the workers coming from Bihar celebrate these festivals with great pomp and show.

The old tradition of worshiping tree symbolizes nature in its manifold phenomena. This system is still alive in the tea estates of Sylhet district. The age old tradition of worshiping Bunyan, Peepal, *Kadam*. *Bel* (hard apple) and *Tulsi* tree is regarded as most sacred among the Hindus. The Madrajis plant *Neem* tree before their houses to drive away the evil spirit from their houses.

*Ban devi/Ban devata* (god and goddess of forest) is the common worship of the tea garden labourers irrespective of caste or community in order to drive out evil spirit or inauspicious thing likely to occur in the garden life.

Magico-religious (The term 'Magico-religious' is used to mean those devices and traits in which there are clear bindings of religious beliefs and elements of supernatural things. Religion stands on one pole while magic on the other pole. Thus, magic and religions are not taken as separate dichotomy) belief and superstitions play a decisive role in the socio-religious life of the tea garden workers. Faith in the harmful effect of the evil spirit, *ghost* and witchcraft, if displeased,



has not dissipated from their heart. It is their belief that a few persons are endowed with extra power to tame such evil spirit. They install an altar for propitiating such evil spirit known as '*Bhut than*'. The priest is called *Ojha* detects the evil doers by.

There is a sacred place called '*Devasthan*' in every labour line where *Gram Puja* is solemnized every year in the month of June-July (*Ashar*). This puja is still prevalent in Bihar and UP in India from where the ancestors of these labourers have come to this place. The workers still believe that *Devi* (Goddess), if pleased, can drive out the possibility of the epidemics from one's house and the village. It is done toward off evil effect, accident, devastating flood and natural calamities like earthquake, draught or fire.

Every festival in the tea estates is accompanied with dance and music. Among the *Santhals*, *Dona* dance, *Baha* dance, *Danda* dance, *Langra* dance and *Bangal* dance are most important. Music by flute or drums is associated with these dances which augments pleasure and happiness. *Jhumur* is the most outstanding tune of ethnic culture of the tea garden workers. Mostly, the women dances in which male partners provide musical support by drum (*dhol*) and *Madal*. *Jhumur* is the expression of human feeling, pleasure and pain, remorse and repentance. *Tushu* song is another sweet and melodious song of these ethnic groups. The labourers whose ancestors came from Birbhum, Purulia, Bankura, Medinipur, and major parts of Bihar (Chota Nagpur) and Orissa brought this cultural heritage of *Jhumur* with them in these far flung tea estates of Sylhet. Their posterity has kept it alive even today.

## **Rituals related to menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and death**

### **Menstruation**

The workers do not perform any ritual at the time of first menstruation of a girl.



But they maintain the following *taboos* during this period:

- 1) During the menstrual period a couple cannot sleep in the same bed. A menstruating woman remains polluted. So they believe coitus at that time is harmful for the health of both partners.
- 2) Women maintain secrecy about their menstruation.
- 3) They also believe that a complete bath and change clothes must remove during menstrual pollution. Then the woman is free again to take up normal work, have intercourse etc.
- 4) During menstruation a women cannot get to the cowshed, for the cow may die from the unclean touch. During menstruation a woman cannot go to a field, crops will not grow if menstrual blood drops there. A menstruating woman is restricted from cooking. Only she can go to the kitchen if nobody else is available to do the cooking.
- 5) A menstruating woman cannot move from house to house during mid day or at sun set having her hair loosened up.

## **Beliefs and rituals concerning pregnancy and childbirth**

### **Determination of sex**

The workers belief that if a couple has cuitus in the first quarter of the night and conception follows the offspring will be a male, but if in the last quarter it will be a female.

### **Cause of twins**

The birth of twins is related to eating joint fruits. Therefore, fecund workers avoid eating joint or double fruits.



## Avoidance of pregnant women

A pregnant woman has to observe certain restrictions or there will be complications. She is restricted from going outside her house during midday and sunset. A pregnant woman also should not keep her hair loosened up. They believe that during this time the evil spirits and evil gods come to see a pregnant woman and may cast their evil eyes on the child in the womb and affect its health.

An eclipse occurs by laws of nature humans and especially pregnant women should be very careful in their movements at such a time. If a pregnant woman cuts or tears anything during an eclipse it will have an effect on the child. She should avoid performing her duties and not eat or drink anything for an eclipse is a natural calamity. The workers believe that a woman with a baby in the womb should not go out and stand under big trees with her hair loosened up might cast its evil eye on her and affect the life of the baby or cause it to be stillborn.

## Food Restrictions before Birth

A pregnant woman is not allowed to take excessive salt and chills, for these are harmful. Women are fond of sour things during their pregnancies. Tamrind, kul, green mangoes are favorite foods during their pregnancies. A pregnant woman should not eat foods made of banana flowers; some avoid ginger because of its shape, saying it would cause the fetus to be crippled. Some avoid garlic as it creates a burning sensation in the mouth and they think it might increase labor pains. Pineapple is forbidden because it is used to induce abortion.

## Food restrictions after birth

After delivery a woman takes dry foods like *cheera* or *muri* for a few days. A few days after delivery the mother is given boiled rice. After childbirth she is also restricted to take excessive salts and chills.



## Post partum pollution

The worker believes that a child should be born in a separate room of the household. But as they are very poor they cannot afford a separate room. Generally, after childbirth a piece of iron and an earthen fire-pot having incense and mustard seeds in it are kept inside the delivery room, of that evil spirits may not make entry there. The fire-pot is placed there because evil spirits are always afraid of fire. Using this, the mother and child are fomented; 25-30 days following delivery is considered as a period of pollution. During this period the mother cannot move from house to house.

She is also restricted from cooking, 25 to 30 days after child birth the mother of the new born takes a 'purification bath' and cleans all the clothes and bedding.

Even during the delivery of a child the Hindus perform certain rituals. The Hindu mother after the birth of her child is kept isolated in a room. Some worker's families give a bath to the mother and baby only after three days and some families give it after nine days. On the ninth day the baby is given a name. They inform a Brahmin (a priest) who reads the horoscope of the baby and selects what is good and bad for the baby and based upon this the baby is given a name. During this name giving ceremony, one arranges a feast if he can afford it. After the first three days of the birth of the baby the mother is given only fried *chira* with garlic and different spices to eat. She is given nothing but vegetables to eat for nine days. This custom is however, maintained by both the Hindus and the Muslim workers of the garden. To make the baby strong, the baby is given a massage with oil (mixed with garlic) from the seventh day until three months of the baby's birth. They habituate their babies to all circumstances and do not prevent their babies from playing in the sun or in the rain. They believe that their children should face all hazards of life associated with plantation when they grow up and thus they prepare the children for plantation work.



The rituals of the Hindus differ from those of the Muslims. The Muslims also observe certain rituals after a baby is born. After the sixth day of a child's birth, the child's hair is cut and the baby is given a bath. By the eleventh day the baby is given a name and a milad is held. From that day, the child's mother is given solid food to eat.

### **Name giving ceremony of Workers Community**

The general custom of workers is that the 'name giving ceremony' is observed on the day of the first hair-cut occasion. Sometimes this celebration being delayed after 10/12 days and even more up to one month for adverse financial disabilities.

In this ceremony the elder relatives and neighbors are invited as per financial abilities of the workers. The elder relatives and neighbours of the newly born child sit together to grace the occasion. In front of them a pot is being placed which is being filled with water. Afterwards, one grain of rice is thrown inside the pot as an evidence and may be called 'evident grain'. If the child is male then one grain each for child's paternal grandfather and maternal grandfather are being dropped in the pot. If the grains of paternal grandfather unite with the 'evident gain' the workers beliefs that the child want to name him as per his paternal grandfather. As per custom, the child is being named after his paternal grandfather. As such, the grandfather's name is *Susen* the name of the new born will be '*Susen*', and if the evident grain unites with the grain of maternal grandfather then the child being named as per maternal grandfather. In any way, the first name of the child will be on paternal axis. Again if the 'evident grain' unites with the grain of maternal grandfather, the child being named after maternal grandfather.

If the first child is named as per paternal axis, the family births second male child and in the celebrating routines comes up the name of paternal grandfather, then, the nearest relatives keep the matter secret and name the child in a new name. In the cycle of 'name giving ceremony' if the 'Second child- in the pot celebrating grains' the



maternal grandfather unites with the 'evident grain' the name of the child will be named after maternal grandfather. Afterwards, this family births next male child, the elder relatives keep the matter in secret and name the child in a new name. In the matter of female childbirth among workers, the 'name giving ceremony' happens in the same manner, but just 'grain of maternal grandmother and paternal grandmother exchanged with paternal axis in the water pot.

The workers beliefs that they want to live after deaths in the name of their grandsons and grand daughters in the days to come.

### **Death Ritual of Workers**

Among workers community 'death' is taken as a great misfortune and a sad demise. When a Hindu baby dies, the baby is not cremated. Instead the baby is buried. When an elderly person dies amongst the Hindus they are cremated. The eldest son first lights the fire for the cremation. A large quantity of wood and oil is necessary for the cremation of a dead person. For this reason the poor Hindu labourers bury their elderly persons instead of cremation. Some Hindus perform the funeral ceremony on the 10<sup>th</sup> day and some on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the cremation or burial. They mourn for one month after the funeral ceremony. During this time the men who are related to the dead person by blood have to shave their heads. During this time, they are not allowed to eat any food cooked with oil; they eat only boiled food during this period of mourning. It may be mentioned here that when a person dies amongst the Hindus, the caste distinction becomes more visible. The members of other castes do not eat, touch and mix with the members of the caste of the deceased at the time of the observation of these rituals and customs. The poor Hindu labourers of the garden cannot however, maintain these rituals so rigidly. The entire family is supposed to observe these rituals. But if they follow them strictly, they cannot go to the work. In that case, they do not receive any wage. Therefore, they observe the rituals for ten or sixteen days instead of one month. Due to poverty certain changes have been taken place in practicing rituals after death.



After the death of person, the deceased is goodly bathed and the dead body is covered with fresh white cloth. Then the deceased is taken to the graveyard. At reaching the graveyard, the dead is ignited only in mouth by a straw of Jute. The workers only ignite the mouth at a touch but does not follow the total burning of the body is laid in the graveyard, firstly covered with Bamboo *Tarja* and then the grave is filled with soil as happens in Muslim community's custom. Afterwards, the participants of the burial procession come to their respective houses, bathed themselves, and then come to the house of the deceased. It follows an ignition in the floor of the deceased person. The participants used to throw rice towards the igniting unit thinking to wash their soul. The workers believe, that any unholy soul will not come to them and make harm for themselves.

Afterwards, the funeral of the deceased is celebrated after 9 (nine) days or 13 (thirteen) days or one month more. During this period, the family members used to follow some *taboos*. As, they take vegetables and abandoned fish and meat. On the day of the funeral of the deceased the male members of the family observed total hair-cut especially the members who ignited fire on the mouth of the deceased. The female members of the family performed their nail-cuts. Afterwards, they bath to get away any unholy souls and events.

On the day funeral of deceased, the family members invite their relatives and neighbours as per their abilities and dined together. The invitees come and to grace the funeral occasion in presenting rice, the ducks and poultry. After the dining they start to drink *haria* and thus the festival ends.

When a person dies, the Muslims bury him. On the fourth day of a person's death a *milad mahfil* is held. There is Muslim custom that during the first four days of a person's death, the members of the household do not go to work and they do not cook food at home. On the 40<sup>th</sup> day of person's death again a *milad mahfil* is held and food is distributed among the beggars (if one can afford it).



## CHAPTER IX

### Conclusions



## Conclusions

This study provides an ethnographic account of the tea plantation workers of Sylhet district of Bangladesh. In Chapter I, I have discussed about research proposal, conceptual frame work, and objective of the study, rational of the study, Methodology, and review of literature. From the review of literature it is found that the complete ethnographical research on the tea plantation workers life has not been carried out. This study is an attempt to fulfill the requirement.

In the Chapter II, I have discussed about the socio-economic profile of the study area where it has been seen that though the Tea Estate is located near the divisional headquarters of Sylhet, yet the workers are deprived of almost all the facilities of the city life. Kamalcherra Tea Estate (under study) was established in 1854 by British Enterprenurs and after about 90 years, a Bangladeshi industrialist became its owner. The living pattern of the workers is more or less like the people of the rural and forest area under a strict control of hierarchal management. Local workers were not available and there was no local recruitment. Today, about 55% workers are Hindus, 41% workers are of ethnic groups and 4% workers are Muslims but this worker force is still considered to be an alien labour force. Because, none of them is local. They or their forefather were immigratted from different places of India.

In Chapter III it has been shown the ethnic background and settlement pattern of the workers. Most of the plantation workers were immigrant labourers from the plains and hills of Indian provinces of West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Madya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Madras. The workers were from ethnic groups as well as non-ethnic Hindus. Presently the ethnic group of workers is performing their limited faded original customs and norms under Hinduism.

In Chapter IV, I have discussed the material culture and non-material culture of the workers life. They live in the *kachcha* houses



in the workers lines. Most of them are not yet replaced by the *pukka* houses as required by the plantation labour law. They drink polluted water. Not much sufficient arrangement has yet been made for the supply of tubewell water. The rate of literacy is about 17% which is below the national average. Education to the children is discouraged. There is hardly any scope of education in the Tea Estate. The rate of literacy among the female is still worse. They are, therefore, not conscious about their rights and interests. With the passage of time their dress, housing, food, recreation etc. has been changed and the pattern of the living standard is gradually shifting to a new direction. In Chapter IV, the language of the ethnic groups has also been discussed. It has been seen that the ethnic groups have failed to retain their own dialects and with the passage of time a language shift has taken place to a great extent.

I have discussed about the health care system of tea plantation workers in Chapter IV. There is hardly any medical facility in the Tea Estate under study. Therefore, the workers suffer from various diseases and die untimely. It is evident that they have strong belief in their herbal medicine than that of the modern medicine and health care system. But when they fail to protect the life and health by their ethno-medicine, then only they start the modern medicine to save their life.

In Chapter V, I have analysed about their social organizations. The strong belief in the clan system which was very strong among the old people has lost its practices and the younger generations give less importance to those. Their kinship system has kept alive the ethnic groups to remain associated with their occupations who has come from the far distances and still occupied with the age old tea Estate workers. Through the kinship system they get work, house and food to live. And that is why when a permanent worker retires from his job he hands over his job to his own relatives. Nuclear type of family is dominant among the plantation workers under study. Due to poverty



they prefer to live together than marry and it has been seen that many of the workers get marry before their son or daughters marriage ceremony for giving legitimacy to their wards.

In chapter VI, I have described about their economic life. The rate of wage of the plantation workers are perhaps the lowest because no other industrial organizations offer such a low wage to their workers. The highest daily wage of a permanent worker of Kamalcherra Tea Estate is only Taka 28. The other categories of workers receive even a lower wage. All the categories of workers (temporary, children, etc.) except the permanent workers are deprived of all basic requirements of life and living. There is no guaranty of their jobs. The service condition empowers the management to take any action against any worker any time. His or her job is at the mercy of the management. A worker can be dismissed any time if the manager wants it. The managers are the demi-gods who maintain social distance strictly from the workers. The manager represent the owner; his principal duty is to stop any type of discontentment among the workers, agitation and rebellion of the workers by any means. The management distributes fear and favour to attain this goal and it has succeeded in attaining this goal in Kamalcherra Tea Estate. The relation between the planters and plantation workers is one of severe exploitation as found in Kamalcherra Tea Estate. The relations of production are, therefore, exploitative. The owning class thrives on the exploitation of the workers.

In Chapter VII, I have described about the political Organization of the Tea Plantation Workers. I have seen that they are not politically conscious and are not politically organized. The management also do not encourage them to involve in any political organization or politically motivated. And that is why no political leadership has grown among them. It has been seen that they have Cha Shramik Union which deals with the labour interest with the Employers Associations who is called Bangladesh Cha Shangad which brings little scope to their social and economic life. The workers have a union elected by them. The union has a charter of



demands. It was partially succeeded in increasing the rate of wage over the last few years but it has not yet been able to make a major break through. It is not very effective as it has failed to wage a class struggle so far. At the local level, it is least effective as I have seen in Kamalcherra Tea Estate. But with the development of their consciousness, they might get organized as a class for itself and then they might be able to change the existing relations of production.

In Chapter VIII, I have discussed about the system of beliefs and practices of the workers. Majority of them have embressed Hinduism since long yet they have kept the ethno-religious practices alive. The ethnic workers of Kamalcherra Tea Estate have lost their separate and distinct identity to a large extent to-day. They have been living and mixing with their fellow Hindu workers for more than a century and in this process they have lost their many traditional cultural traits, habits and rituals although still they are retaining some of the traditions and rituals. But they have also been influenced by the way of life of other groups of workers as found in Kamalcherra Tea Estate.

From the above discussion it is evident that so long, they have remained isolated, cut off from the wider society and the rest of the world. But now they are coming in contact with the wider society, though in a limited scale. This is a recent phenomenon in Kamalcherra Tea Estate. The different ethnic groups of the tea garden workers have emerged as a very important occupational group of national income earning group of Bangladesh. They are now identified more as tea plantation workers than that of a member of different ethnic groups by dint of their sincerity, hard labour and devotion to their duty.



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### Glossary of Non-English Terms

This is not an exhaustive list. As far as possible an attempt has been made to explain a local word, whenever it occurred, in the thesis. Some words, however, though explained initially, have not been explained when they occur subsequently and such words are included here. No attempt has been made to consistently follow any rigorous phonetic system.

|              |                         |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| alna         | wooden rack             |
| anand lahari | musical instrument      |
| akhra        | religious place         |
| Aswin        | name of a Bengali month |
| bachas       | culf                    |
| bagh         | tiger                   |
| bandor       | monkey                  |
| bansuri      | musical instrument      |
| barwa        | wild dog                |
| bati         | small bowl              |
| batti        | lamp                    |
| bhainsa      | buffalo                 |
| boal         | fish                    |

|               |                                                                   |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| boroi         | name of a fruit                                                   |
| boti          | chopper                                                           |
| chali bechna  | special kind of dance                                             |
| chapati       | hand made bread                                                   |
| chatu         | tongs                                                             |
| chatni        | pickle                                                            |
| cheera        | pasted rice                                                       |
| chula         | oven                                                              |
| chula phukber | a kind of bamboo stick to blow                                    |
| dag           | pot                                                               |
| damma         | musical instrument                                                |
| dhak          | musical instrument                                                |
| dhol          | musical instrument                                                |
| dhoti         | male dress                                                        |
| dumur         | fruit                                                             |
| ganta         | musical instrument                                                |
| ghardamad     | a husband after marriage<br>lives in his father-in-law's<br>house |



|               |                                                |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------|
| gilash        | drinking glass                                 |
| gupeejantra   | musical instrument                             |
| hal           | wooden plough instrument                       |
| haria         | rice beer                                      |
| heran         | black-buck                                     |
| holdimuri     | termaric plant                                 |
| huyong        | musical instrument                             |
| jadur         | name of a dance                                |
| jama          | female dress                                   |
| jati          | kinship group                                  |
| jatra kharia  | name of a dance                                |
| jeth-jatra    | name of a dance                                |
| jhanjh        | musical instrument                             |
| jhar-fuk      | a kind of treatment<br>by the quack            |
| jhumur        | name of a dance                                |
| jurdi nagra   | musical instrument                             |
| kachcha house | a house made of clay,<br>bamboo and straw etc. |

|            |                                   |
|------------|-----------------------------------|
| kathota    | bowl                              |
| karam      | tree                              |
| karai      | frying pan                        |
| karha tasa | musical instrument                |
| karkatta   | bird                              |
| karsayal   | deer                              |
| kathota    | bowl                              |
| kedari     | musical instrument                |
| khanta     | wrapper made by<br>hand stitching |
| khel       | coopertative association          |
| kukura     | dog                               |
| kuliha     | jackal                            |
| kutumb     | relative                          |
| lakri      | fire wood                         |
| larka      | tiger                             |
| lujhri     | name of a dance                   |
| mach       | match                             |



|               |                                  |
|---------------|----------------------------------|
| manjura       | musical instrument               |
| mantra        | religious recitation             |
| matki         | pitcher                          |
| mircha        | chilly                           |
| mohor         | gold coin                        |
| mongolacharan | a ritual before marriage         |
| morkuria      | peacock                          |
| muretha       | head cover                       |
| nagas         | snakes                           |
| nagor         | musical instrument               |
| ojha          | quack                            |
| panichal      | a tradition of<br>drinking water |
| pagari        | head cover made of cloth         |
| pajama        | male dress(trouser)              |
| par           | lase                             |
| piri          | a small wooden stool             |
| phagua        | festival in spring               |
| puja          | worship                          |

|              |                                 |
|--------------|---------------------------------|
| pukly        | bamboo pipe                     |
| pukka house  | a house brick and cement etc.   |
| priyaschitta | purification                    |
| richharia    | bear                            |
| rooti        | dried bread                     |
| samra        | stage for marriage              |
| samaj        | village association             |
| sal          | tree                            |
| sarangi      | musical instrument              |
| sara         | pot cover                       |
| sarhul       | festival                        |
| sari         | female dress                    |
| shahnai      | musical instrument              |
| singa        | musical instrument              |
| shakh        | musical instrument              |
| sharta       | betel nut cutting<br>instrument |
| tashla       | pot                             |
| thali        | plate                           |



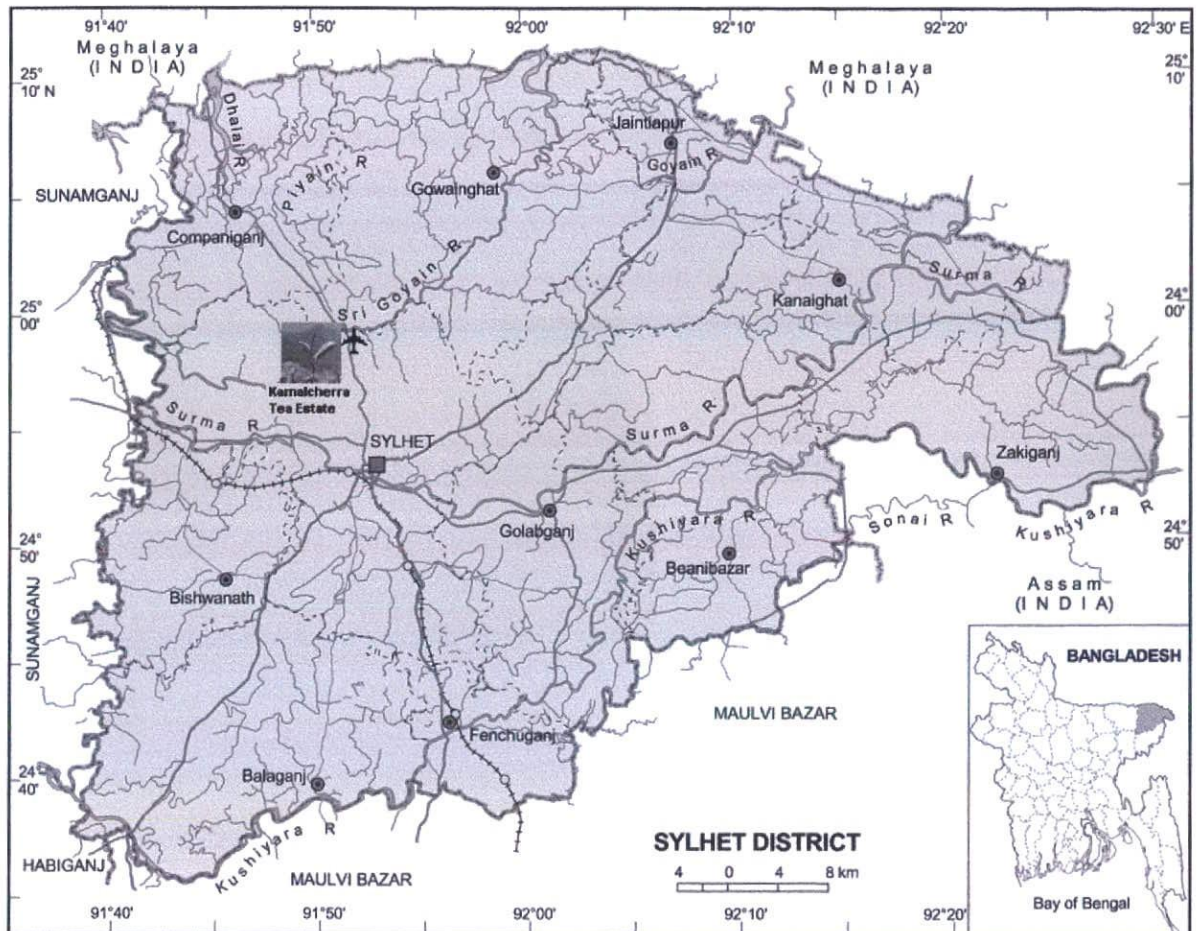
|               |                          |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| tila          | small hillock            |
| tilackboron   | a ritual during marriage |
| tirki         | young mice               |
| topno         | tortoise                 |
| tuila         | musical instrument       |
| vishya dhanki | musical instrument       |
| yarbansi      | musical instrument       |

## Acronyms

|      |   |                                        |
|------|---|----------------------------------------|
| BCSU | - | Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union            |
| BRAC | - | Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee |
| CTC  | - | Cut, Tear and Curl                     |
| GOB  | - | Government of Bangladesh               |
| ILO  | - | International Labour Organization      |
| NGO  | - | Non Governmental Organization          |
| SSC  | - | Secondary School Certificate           |
| VP   | - | Vegetative Propagated                  |



# Map of Kamalcherra Tea Estate in Sylhet District of Bangladesh



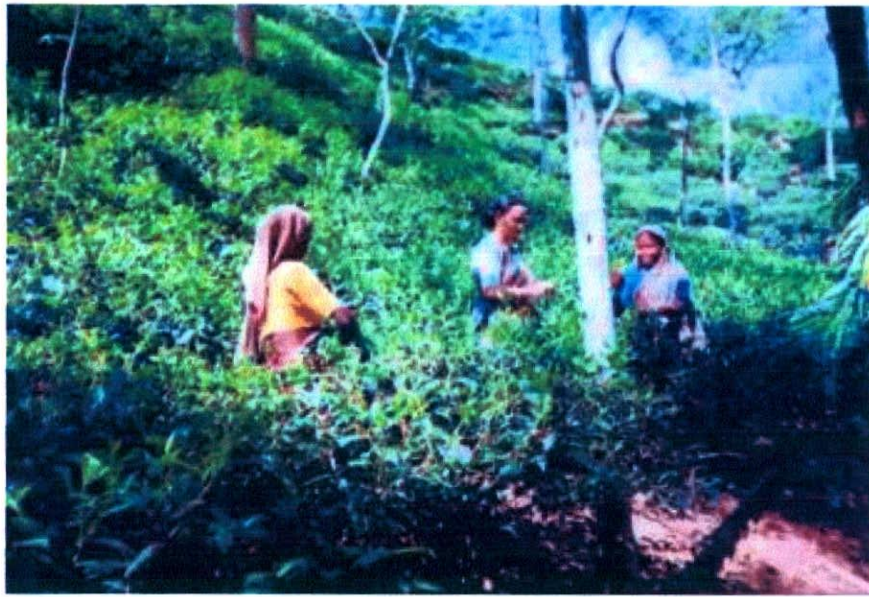


**Working in the tea garden**



**Working in the tea garden**

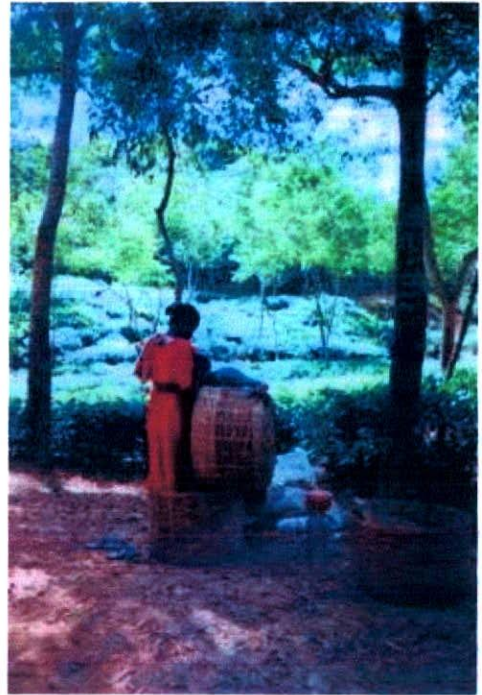




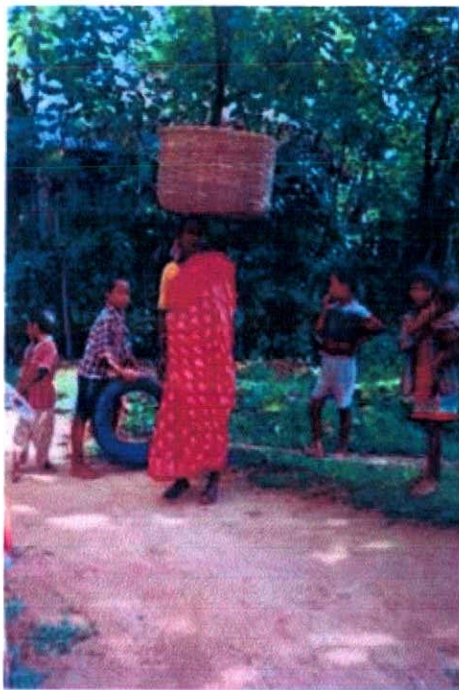
**Plucking tea leaves in the tea garden**



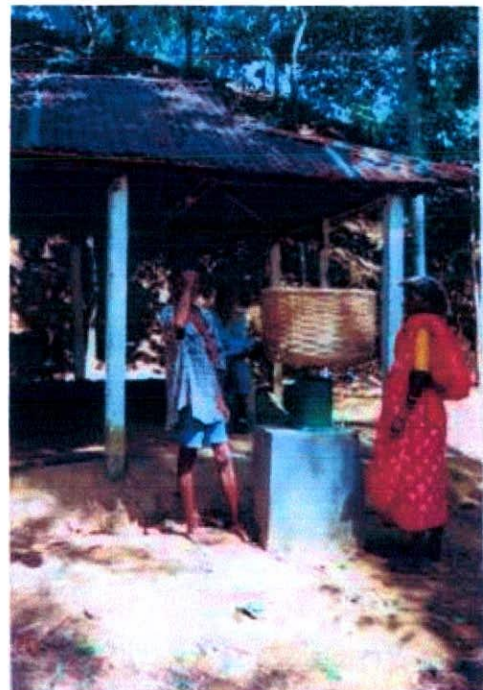
**Plucking tea leaves in the tea garden**



**After plucking the way worker keep tea leaves in the basket**

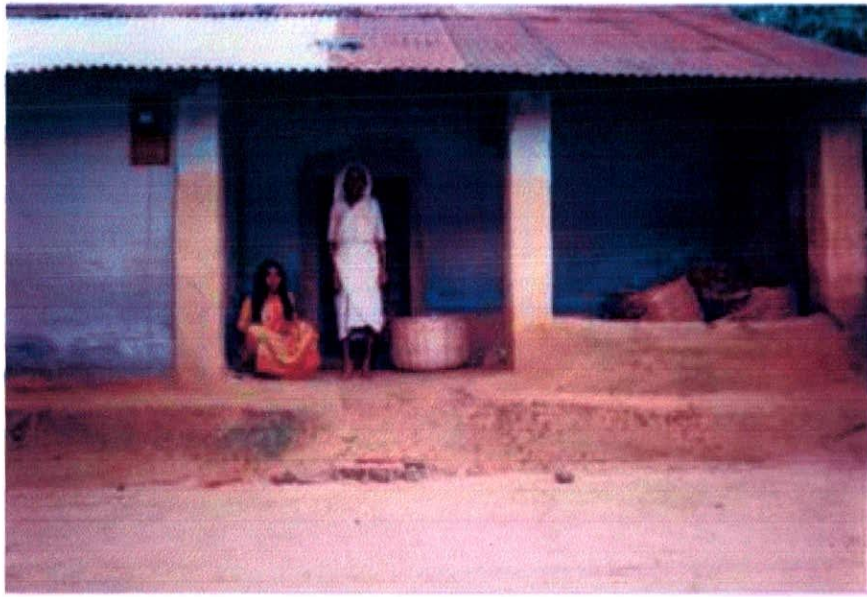


**Before weighing  
tea leaves**



**Weighing  
tea leaves**





**Women workers**



**Workers on way to work**



**Collecting water from the tap**



**Gathering tea leaves by the workers for processing**

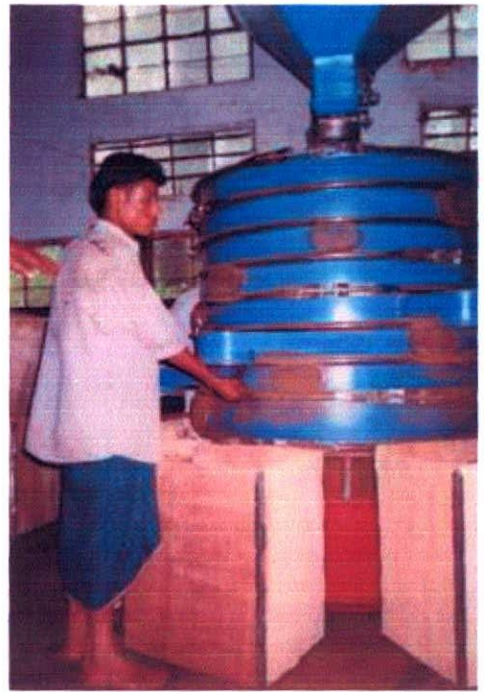
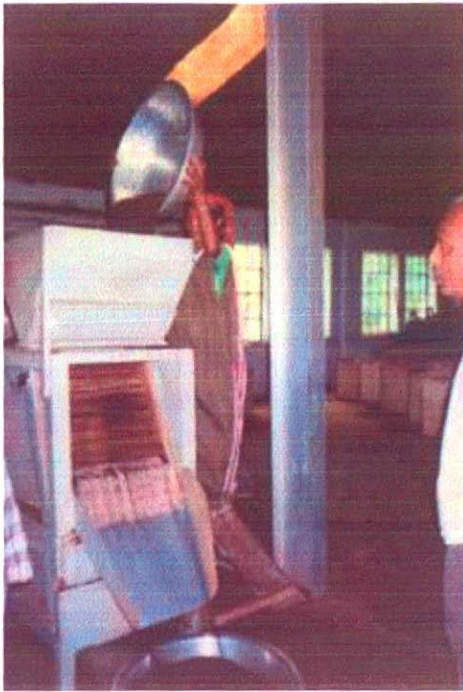




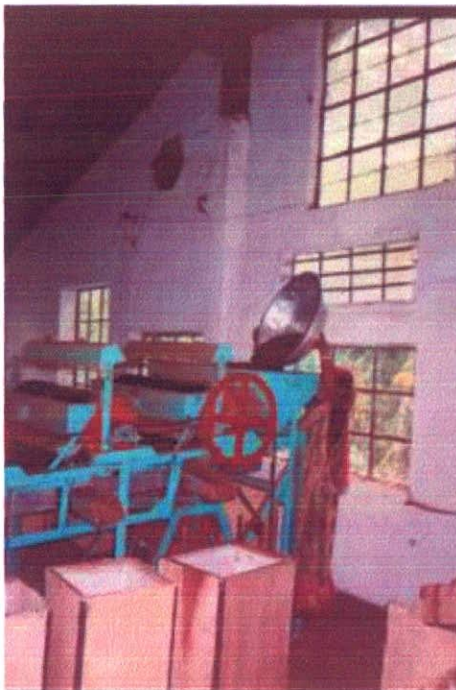
**Weighing tea leaves**



**Loading tea leaves in the vehicle**



**Workers in the tea factory**



**Working in the factory**

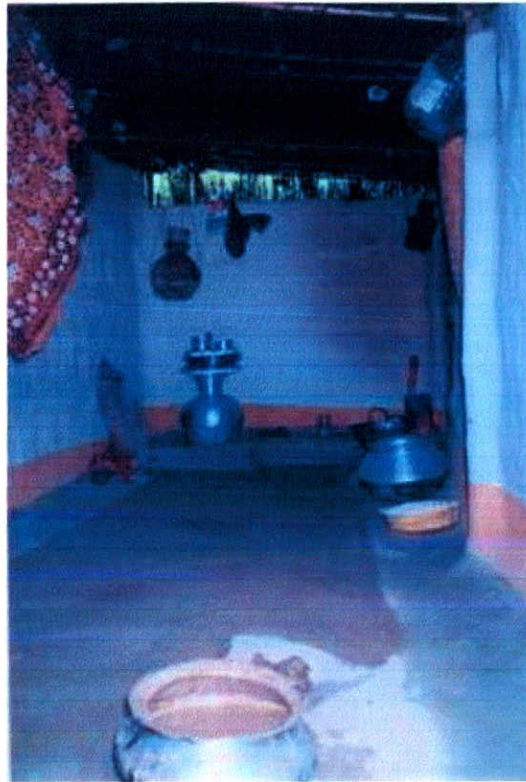




**A labour house**



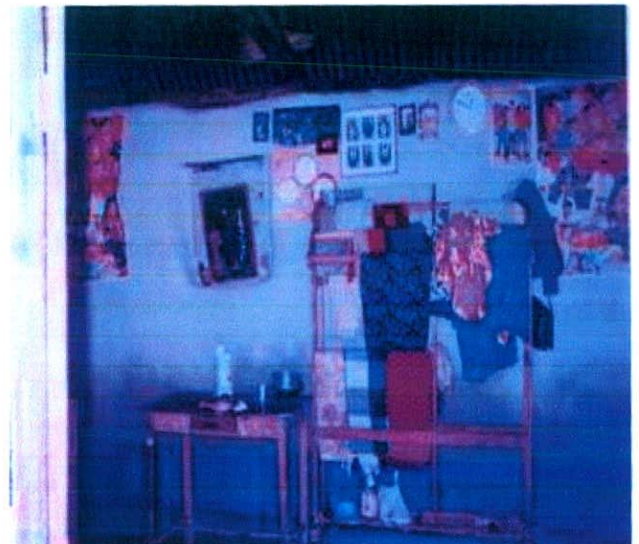
**Decorating a labour house during festival**



**Household utensils**

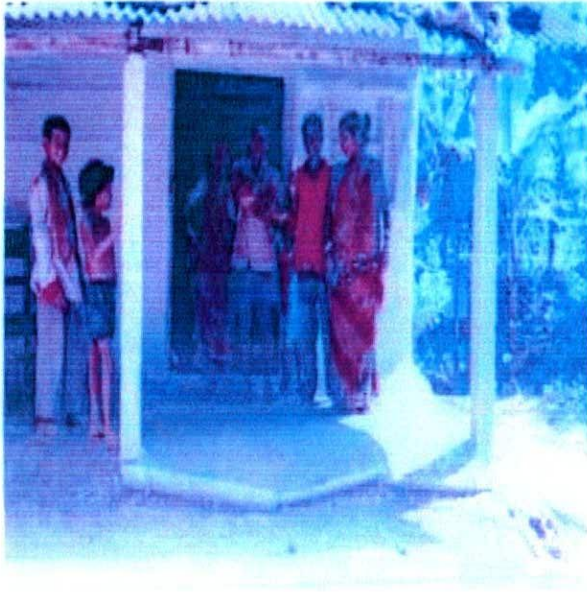


**A pakka labour house decorated before festival**

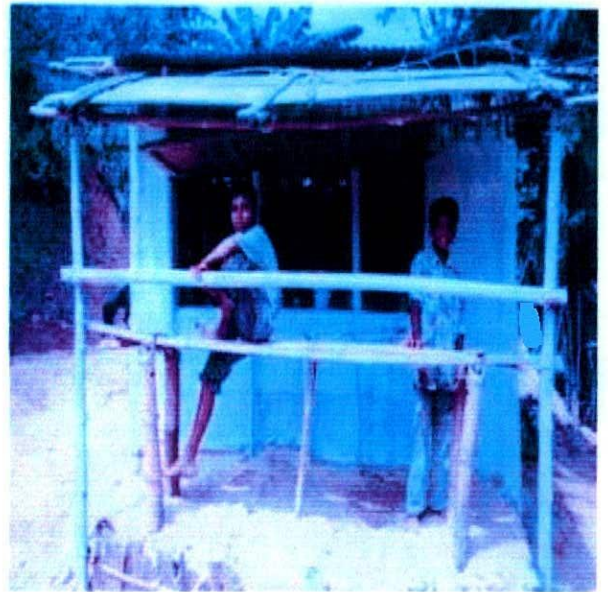


**Furniture's in a labour house**





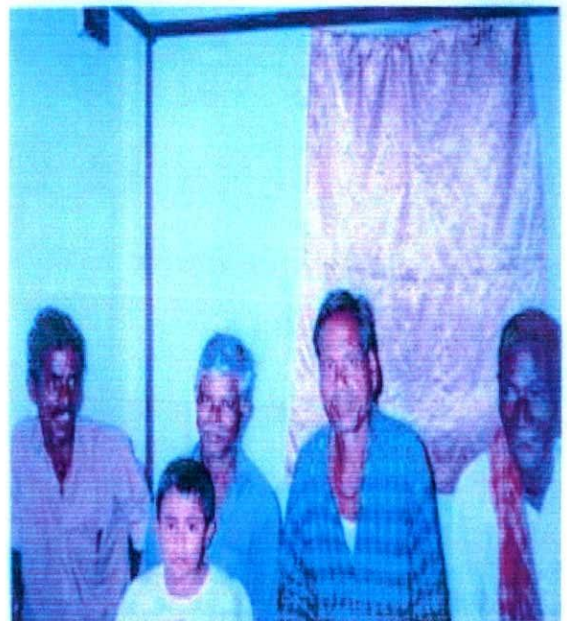
**Workers family area**



**Children of tea garden at leisure**

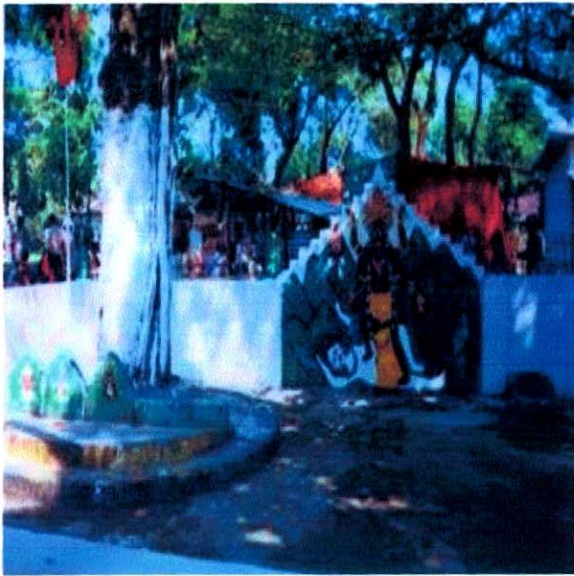


**Tea garden workers playing in off time**



**Old and young together**

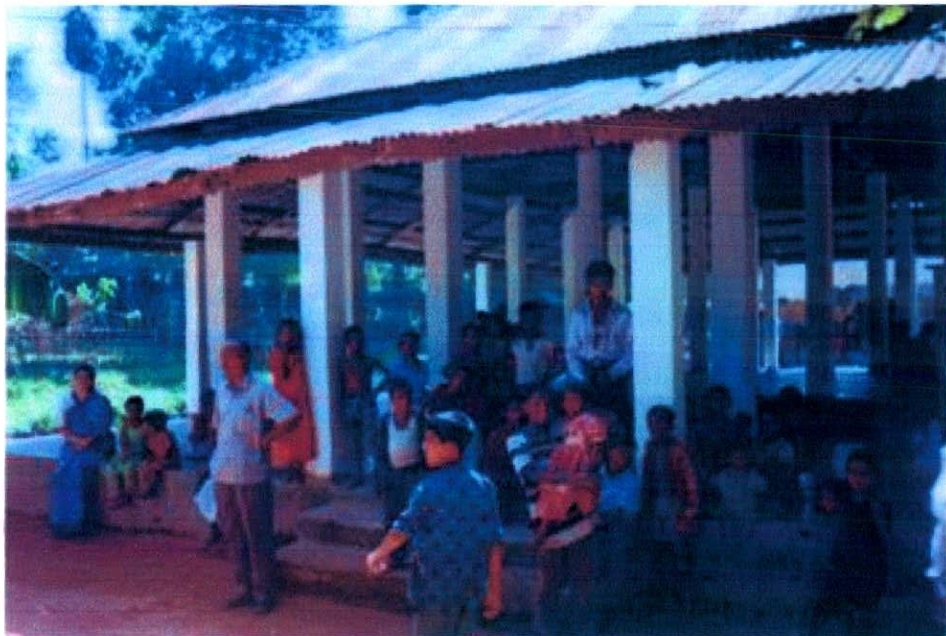




**Portrait of goddess Kali  
In the tea garden**



**Tulsi tree to worship**



**Puja mandap in the Tea garden**

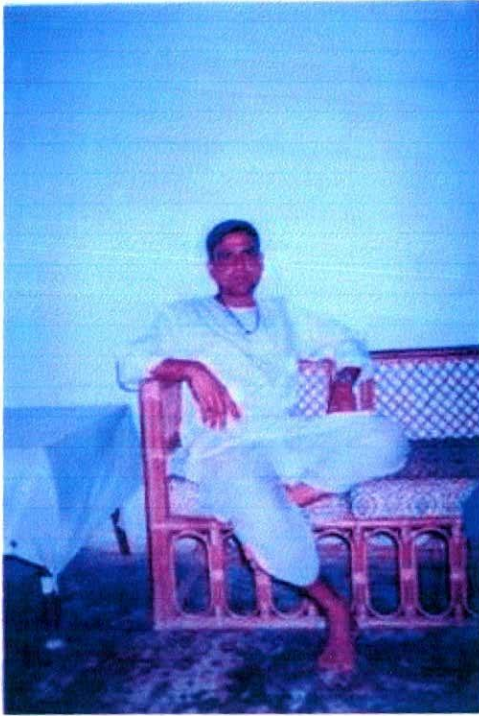




**Durga puja festival in the tea garden**



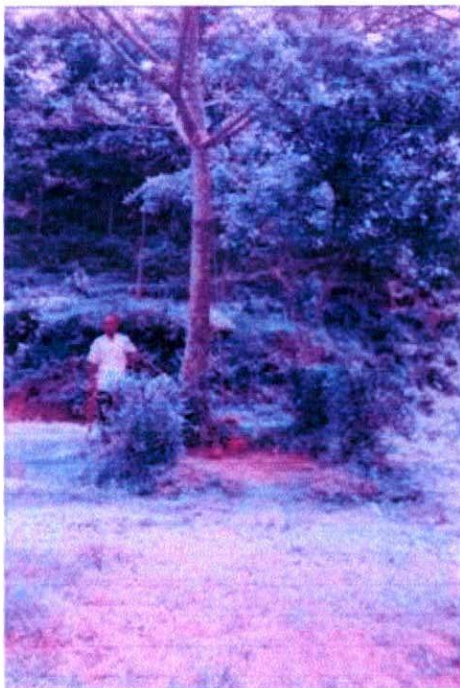
**Durga puja in the tea garden**



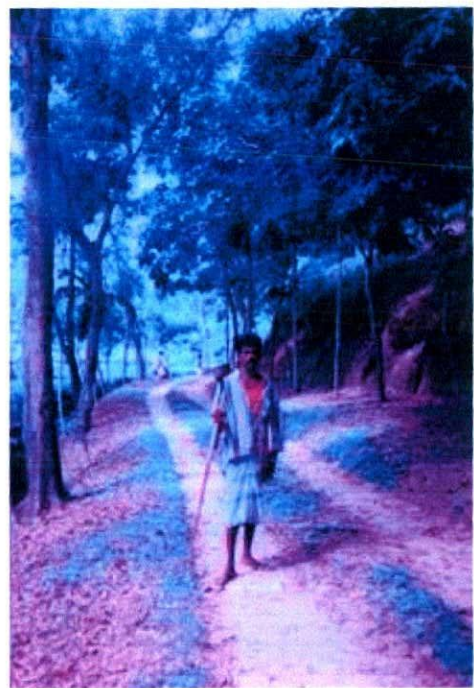
**Garden priest**



**School teacher**



**The holy tree**



**A tea garden sarder**