

## **Tea Planters and Assimilation with the Indigenous People of Assam**

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### **Abstract:**

The tea plantation scattered throughout the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys. The Upper Assam of the Brahmaputra valley beginning from Bokakhat towards the east and north east covering Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts, have occupied more than 50% of the land by tea plantations. Likewise, from Dhekiajuli to Lakhimpur in the north bank tea gardens have occupied about 30% of the total land areas. In the Barak valley the districts of Karimganj, Hailakandi districts have the largest area of plantations. The people with their different socio-cultural background living in the plantation are already assimilated to each other and formed the tea garden community. The assimilation process among those people took place very rapidly due to their common economic atmosphere in the plantations. Busy life in the plantation led them to forget their individual social orders and live common socio-cultural life. Individual rituals become common celebrations, specially, those bearing similarities.

Key words: *plantation, assimilated, socio-cultural life, Brahmaputra and Barak valleys etc.*

### **I. Introduction:**

The tea plantation scattered throughout the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys. The Upper Assam of the Brahmaputra valley beginning from Bokakhat towards the east and north east covering Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts, have occupied more than 50% of the land by tea plantations. Likewise, from Dhekiajuli to Lakhimpur in the north bank tea gardens have occupied about 30% of the total land areas. In the Barak valley the districts of Karimganj, Hailakandi districts have the largest area of plantations. All of the tea gardens of both the valleys were opened by the British tea planters, which in later period, some of them sold to the native owners. The plantations employ labourers in permanent and temporary basis. The permanent labourers are kept for free access for the whole year while the casuals who are employed only during the plucking sessions, allowed to live in the plantation with their relatives who is impermanent employee. A few others live in their

neighbourhoods. About 50% of the total population of this community lives in the plantation areas. Some 40% of their population live in the villages and are called Ex-tea garden labourers as recognized by the State Government. Other 10% of them is engaged as daily rated worker in PWD, Forests, and ONGC under contractors and in other enterprises. A very of them are also in different services. The workers who are directly related to the plantation works are easily traceable. But the Ex-tea garden labourers, living in the villages called 'bongali' village, are little difficult to recognize, if the inhabitants are of mix nature. A good number of them however mixed up with the indigenous peoples. The service holders in different organizations are scattered in accordance to their occupational areas. The people of this community are found in about whole of the State mostly in and the adjacent of the tea garden areas.

## **II. Assimilation:**

The people with their different socio-cultural background living in the plantation are already assimilated to each other and formed the tea garden community. The assimilation process among those people took place very rapidly due to their common economic atmosphere in the plantations. Busy life in the plantation led them to forget their individual social orders and live common socio-cultural life. Individual rituals become common celebrations, specially, those bearing similarities. Now a days most of their rituals only observed by the individual families.

The people who live in the distant villages in groups succeeded in keeping some of their social orders which can be seen at present also. They are the sole people to be identified as sources of their age old tradition, which, the present generation is trying to revive.

The minor groups who live with the majority of indigenous people, however, assimilated with them very rapidly. Some of them even forgotten their common language 'sadri' language and speak the indigenous languages. The social milieu of these people has been already lost.

The people who are scattered due to their employment in different organizations and enterprises have also lost their individual social identity and adopted those nearest and attached to them. Only through their titles they could be identified as belonging to the tea community. Among these people, there are also a very few educated and employed groups who use to write titles similar to the more advanced groups to avoid their identification with the tea community.

Here, education plays major role in their assimilation process. They adopted Assamese as medium of interaction with other people and educating their children in Assamese medium. The Plantation Act.1951 provided with L.P. Schools in the tea gardens most of which are of Assamese medium. A very small number, I came into contact, however, are of Hindi medium which are also now-a-days becoming bilingual. The children from their initial stages begin their education in Assamese and those who continue education are habituated with this language even at the point of forgetting the 'sadri' language. Thus, the growth of literacy in the tea garden results the increase of Assamese speaking people.

The village schools, most of which are also of Assamese medium, have same impact the tea community. The scattered small numbers, however, if settled with non-Assamese majority adopting different languages and habits through their social relations.

### **III. Culture and Celebrations:**

The tea garden community now has fully adopted the Assamese language. This helped them to understand about the Assamese society and culture. As we know that Bihu is the most popular festival of the Assamese people, these people also began to perform and enjoy with equal participation like the indigenous Assamese. Especially the Bohag-Bihu and Magh-Bihu have attracted them mostly. The festivity of the colourful Bohag-Bihu and the special occasion of the different edibles, prepared out of the new seeds, similar to the 'no-khuwa', Tushu, Usha Puja etc. during the Magh-Sankranti attracts them towards Magh-Bihu. Besides, the Nava-Vaishnav religion preached by Sri Sankardeva, similar to the Vaishnavas of Bengal and Orissa, easily attracts them in the village atmosphere. Likewise, the rural activities of the indigenous people, familiar to their own, also attract the Ex-tea garden people in their neighbours. Other activities like barbar system prevalent in the interior villages; working under a farmer as 'haluwa', etc. are also responsible for their assimilation.

The 'Karam' festival of the tea community is also responsible for bringing both the societies closer to each other. The festivity of the 'jhumoir' attracts the Assamese youths to participate and sing and dance with them. This closeness brings them so close that sometimes it results with marriage between them which is also one of the important factors for their assimilation.

The tea community living in Bodoland and Karbi Anglong districts, though educated in Assamese, is more prompt to be assimilated with them and social relationships developed thereon led them to come more and closer to each other.

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