



Migration of tea garden labourers into Assam: Political status of women TGWS of Rajmai, Sepon, Khongea and Maskora Tea Estates, Sivasagar, Assam

Dr. Binita Chutia

Department of Political Science, Bir Lachit Bor Phukan College, Sivasagar, Assam, India

Corresponding Author: Dr. Binita Chutia

Abstract

Migration is indeed, an expression of the human aspiration for dignity, safety and better future. The term migration means the movement of people from one place to other within nations and internationally across borders looking for employment, better conditions of living, better educational facilities, shelter etc. to live a better life. Literally speaking, migration is the process of shifting of people or an individual or group of individuals from one cultural domain to another which may be permanent or temporary. Migration has been a global phenomenon which has eventually generated a wide variety of movements and situations involving people of all backgrounds and walks of life. Migration can however, be classified as intra-national migration and international ones based on political limits and the boundaries crossed such as districts, countries, state borders and international boundaries.

Assam is the meeting place of diverse ethnic groups, races of people, cultures, intermixture of various racial stocks such as Mongoloid, Indo-Burmese, Indo-Aryan, a large number of tribes like Bodo, Kachari, Karbi, Miri, Mishmi, Rabha, Moran, Muttack and many others. So, the Assam Tea Company had at first tried to employ the local tribal people like the Kacharis, the Mataks, the Kukis, the Nagas, the Apatanis etc. They were found reluctant and indolent to work such job in tea plantation because they had enormous asset in terms of land to used as sources of living specially Kacharis an indigenous tribe were unwilling because of their antagonism with the British rulers who had implemented a variety of repressive laws upon them. The British developed the tea industry in Assam. They imported labour from Bihar and other provinces to work in the tea gardens. The Assamese people living mostly in Upper Assam and cultivating one crop per year, were not interested in working as labour in the tea gardens Therefore, the British encouraged Bengali Muslim peasants from present Bangladesh to move into Lower Assam for putting virgin land under cultivation. This set in motion a movement pattern which despite changed conditions, has been continuing to this day. In this article an attempt will be made up to discuss about the migration of tea garden labourers into Assam and Political status of women TGWs of Rajmai, Sepon, Khongea and Maskora tea estates, Sivasagar, Assam.

Keywords: Migration, political status, tea garden workers, Sivasagar, Assam

Introduction

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differently and distinctly. In a nutshell, the Webster's dictionary migration has been defined as the act or an instance of moving from one country, region to settle in another. According to Theodore Laplow, "Migration is strictly speaking, a change of residence and need not necessarily involve any change of occupation, but it is closely associated with occupational shifts of one kind or another. The principal directions of migration are illustrated by more or less continuous movements from rural areas towards the city, from areas of stable population towards centres of industrial or commercial opportunity, from densely settled countries to less densely settled countries and from the centres of the cities to their suburbs." In the opinion of Barker "Migration is the act of moving from one

spatial unit to another.”

Thus migration is an uphill concept to define because it includes people who move for different reasons across different states, countries. They cross an international border to escape religious or political persecution, a jobseeker who moves to another country for better economic opportunities, a slave who is forcibly moved, or a person displaced by war or natural catastrophe. In this way, the meaning of migration has been changing simultaneously with the passage of time. Assam is the meeting place of diverse ethnic groups, races of people, cultures, intermixture of various racial stocks such as Mongoloid, Indo-Burmese, Indo-Aryan, a large number of tribes like Bodo, Kachari, Karbi, Miri, Mishmi, Rabha, Moran, Muttack and many others. So, the Assam Tea Company had at first tried to employ the local tribal people like the Kacharis, the Mataks, the Kukis, the Nagas, the Apatanis etc. They were found reluctant and indolent to work such arduous job in tea plantation because they had enormous assets in terms of land to be used as sources of living specially Kacharis an indigenous tribe were unwilling because of their antagonism with the British rulers who had implemented a variety of repressive

The objectives of the study

The basic objectives of the study have been formulated as follows-

1. To throw light on the history of Tea Garden Workers' migration into Assam.
2. To make comparative study of socio-political conditions of Tea Garden Workers' of Assam.
3. To examine the degree of political consciousness among the women TGWs.
4. Role of TGWs organization and policies of Tea Garden Management to elevate the women status.

Methodology

So far as the question of methodology is concerned the present study is based on historical-cum-analytical methods. Historical method encompasses the history of discovery of tea bushes and the history of the TGWs migration into Assam from various parts of India in the beginning of tea plantation in Tea industry in general and in Rajmai, Sepon, Khongea and Maskora Tea Estates under the Sivasagar district of the state in particular. Analytical method will be applied to examine the socio-economic development and the degree of political consciousness and participation of the TGWs in general and their women in particular. It will endeavour to look into the role of the TGWs organizations along with Tea Garden Management in serving the interest of the Tea workers and Tea owners as well. So far as the sources of information are concerned the proposed work is extensively based on the primary sources. They chiefly include relevant official records, files, and essentially field study. A questionnaire and interview method has also been applied to assess the degree of political consciousness. The secondary sources are collected from the books, journals, newspapers, website, relevant to the present work, unpublished doctoral theses and others used materials.

Explanation

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Thus, migration is an uphill concept to define because it includes people who move for different reasons across different states, countries. They cross an international border to escape religious or political persecution, a jobseeker who moves to another country for better economic opportunities, a slave who is forcibly moved, or a person displaced by war or natural catastrophe. In this way, the meaning of migration has been changing simultaneously with the passage of time. Today, both the definition and scope of migration have become more complicated. It happens due to a range of domains which can be economic, social, political, environmental etc. Migration indeed occurs owing to the result of push and pull factors. While the former means those which force a person to move away from his/her native land because of drought, lack of jobs, famine, overpopulation and civil war. On the other hand pull factors are those which encourage a person to move into another land seeking specially a chance of a better job, better standard of living.

Migration can however, be classified as intra-national migration and international ones based on political limits and the boundaries crossed such as districts, countries, state borders and international boundaries.

While intra-national migration means movement of people within a country crossing states political boundaries such as within a state or between states, from urban to rural, urban to urban, rural to rural, rural to urban. This type of migration is very common in every country and mostly witnessed at initial stages of the urbanisation.

International migration means the movement of people from one sovereign independent country to another sovereign country. Due to various regions cited above. Both the kind of migration may be permanent as well temporary in character. The international migrations can be classified as legal migration (those who move with the legal permission of the receiver), illegal migration (those who moved without

legal permission), refugees (those who crossed on international boundaries to escape persecution). Of course international migrants do not live in one country. Instead, they are dispersed across the world, with most having moved from middle-income to high-income countries. In this context an example can be cited as given below.

The British came into India initially for trade and commerce. In 1600, Queen Elizabeth I granted monopoly to East India Company for trade with East Indies and the company was established on 31 December 1600. In the beginning they were only interested for trade and commerce which became lucratively profitable for them and as such they became reluctant to leave India. However, after the company acquired political power in India by the year 1858 following the historic Sepoy Mutiny. There after the East India Company pursued a policy of deindustrialization as they soon realised that they can rule the country since the Indian kings were busy in fight each other, which helped British grow powerful by extending their helping hand to the native rulers. However, the Government of Indian Act 1858 paved the way for the British crown to assume direct control in the Indian subcontinent in the form of the new British Raj.

However, Assam came under British occupation after the treaty of Yandaboo concluded on 24 February, 1826 between the British and the Burmese king. David Scott recommended restoration of monarchy in upper Assam rather than its annexation of the British dominion in India. David Scott (1819) laid top importance of growing tea which forced him to write to Dr. Nathaniel Wallich, a Botanist of the East India Company and superintendent of Botanical Garden Calcutta through sending tea plants but all of them died. Later on the indigenous tea plant was discovered in 1823 in the land of Assam by Robert Bruce, a European. He came to Assam for trade and commerce who discovered some tea bushes in some hills near Rangpur. Moreover he also travelled Singphoe country where he also witnessed thousands of tea bushes from which he brought some of tea bushes, seeds and some sample from there. Further, the "Asiatic Journal and Register, (Volume XXI, September 10, 1836) mentioned that the tea tree grows wild all over the Singphoe country and in general used by the natives as a wholesome beverage." The tea trees, according to Mr. Bruce was known to be indigenous to these climate, about ten years ago, and during Burmese war, large quantities of the tea trees are sent to Sadiya by Beesa Gaum, a local tribal chief.

Thus, Robert Bruce learnt of the existence of wild tea bushes from an Assamese noble man named Moniram Dewan (1806-1858). It was Moniram Dewan who introduced Robert Bruce with Singpho Chief Beesa Gaum and handed over him some indigenous tea plants and seeds in 1823. It is to be remembered that Robert Bruce entered an agreement with Beesa Gaum on the matter of supply of some seeds and tea bushes during his next visit. But unfortunately Bruce died before he could collect the tea bushes but before his death. But prior to his demise, Bruce empowered his brother C.A. Bruce to make an agreement with Singpho Chief. Moreover Robert Bruce handed over some plants to his brother C.A. Bruce who sent the same to David Scott. Scott eventually offered this sample to the botanical garden, Calcutta for experimentation and

verification.

The role of the Singpho tribes in case of discovery of tea plant is significant because he (Singpho) supplied seeds and plants to C.A. Bruce. As a result for the first time tea plantation was established on a Sandbank near Brahmaputra and Kundil rivers in 1836. Most of the tea plants died but despite so C.A. Bruce somehow rescued some of them which he later on sent to Jaipur. In 1837 some of these plants were planted in the Chabua. In the meantime in 1839, the Assam Tea company was formed in London and with its headquarters in Nazira of Assam which is the oldest commercial tea company of Assam and it is still functioning.

In spite of the above, there has been a controversy in case of real discoverer of tea plants in Assam. Some quarters believed that the tea plants of Assam was first discovered by Moniram Dewan, a local Assamese nobleman. Furthermore another quarter asserts that Maniram Dewan introduced Robert Bruce to the wild tea plant who learnt about it from him. As such Moniram Dewan was the genuine discoverer of tea in Assam and also the maiden Assamese tea planter who established two tea estates namely Cinnamora, Jorhat and Senglung, Sonari. In this way, the tea plantation in Assam was formally initiated by the British masters rulers.

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As already hinted above, the indigenous peasants did not want to work as the wage labourers under British tea plantations.

Firstly, the self-sufficient nature of their economy. While enunciating the nature of peasants, a British planter Griffith^[11] mentioned, "The peasants considered it derogatory in social estimation to work for wages under outsider." Griffith^[11] thus lamented "This I have not been able to instill into the heads of the Assamese!" The absence of this "desirable trait" among the local labourers led the planters to direct their effort to recruit "Bengal Coolies."

Secondly, in 1855, there was great problem of adult population in Assam to work in the tea gardens. In this context, R.K. Kar mentions that Assam at that time was still experiencing the effect of the Mayamara rebellion (1770-1795), Burmese invasion (1819-1824) and raids of hill tribes. In this connexion a renowned historian E.A. Gait aptly emphasised "During the Burmese occupation, they had made constant raids on the helpless Assamese, carrying off

thousands as slaves and reducing the eastern part of the country to a state of almost complete depopulation. As such there was not enough adult population even to cultivate all the available lands to supply enough food grains to the state.”

The local labours numbering 10,000 continued to work in the tea plantations up to 1860, but gradually they had begun showing reluctance to work in the same and most of them left the plantation work. Hence, in order to solve this labour problem the colonial planters adopted certain steps namely abolition of slavery and imposition of heavy taxes on the local people. In Assam, during the pre-British period there was no system of land revenue and at that time taxes were collected on a personal basis. But the British introduced the land revenue system upon the peasants of Assam. And in order to force the peasantry to work as tea labourers, the land revenue rates were unexpectedly being increased. The main aim was to divert the attention of the peasants towards employment/ job in plantations.

Another British policy was the prohibition of private cultivation of opium and imposition of excise duty on the purchase of opium. The opium addicts would have to pay a higher price to buy opium. So, in order to financially enable themselves they would have to seek employment in tea plantation. This would solve the problem of labourers in plantations and also increased the government revenue, on the other hand, it was believed. Nevertheless, the reason of the indigenous labourers’ reluctance to work in the tea gardens of Assam has been described by Gouwame and Gogoi (1984) as follows---

“The importation of people to work in the gardens from densely populated areas, became necessary indolence of the indigenous people as is alleged by some writers, including census Superintendents, but because of a number of factors such as depopulation of Assam caused by the civil wars and of the Burmese insurrections during the later half of the 18th and early part of 19th century, the non-existence of a class of landless cultivators, self sufficiency and of lack of demand for case, the inhuman treatment meted out to the garden labours by planters etc. Nonetheless, the tea industry grew so fast that there was urgently required a large number of labours. But the problem could not be fulfilled from the local labourers as they had gradually been showing reluctance to work as labourers.

Besides, the tea industries faced great problems from the local indigenous people as they were found to be lazy, uninterested and indolent in their work and did not allow the women and children in the gardens and the peasants were also unskilled. The British Planters might have also thought to prefer uprooted labourers to be easily controlled, regulated and exploited. So they might have also been reluctant to employ local peoples. Under this situation the British started recruiting labourers from other provinces of India. In order to facilitate the labour recruitment process the planters appointed agents like *Arkatti* and *Sirder*. They are appointed as commissioned agents in Calcutta to supply labourers.

In this context, it may be noted that the first tea company *viz.* Assam Tea Company (ATC) recruited labourers from China for its business because the originally tea manufacturing in Assam was done by Chinese experts brought for the purpose and they taught others how to

manufacture finished tea out of green tea leaves. So the ATC had recruited skilled Chinese labourers from their settlement in Singapore, Batavia and Penang through their agents in 1839 and 1840. But the recruitment of Chinese labour was most expensive and their remuneration was more than the indigenous labourers. For example a Chinese tea maker’s remuneration was Rs. 40 whereas the indigenous received only Rs.10 per month. Besides, an ordinary Chinese labourer on contract for a period of three years demanded Rs.16 a month, while Assamese labour got only Rs. 4 a month.

For the reasons already hinted above, the Assam Tea Company was unable to resolve the problem of capacity of tea labourers to work in their tea plantations. As an alternative way they therefore, decided to recruit cheap labourers from different provinces of India. During this period the government passed the transport of Native Labourers Act of 1863 for licensing recruiters and regularising this system. As noted above, the Tea planters already appointed agents like *Arkati* and *Sirder* for recruiting labourers. They are appointed as commissioned agent in Calcutta to supply labourers. So there are mainly two system of recruiting labourers from the different provinces i.e. the contractual system (from 1859-1915) and the Sardari System (from 1870-1959).

According to contractual system the labourers were recruited on the basis of a contract/agreement. The tea labour recruitments with effect from 1841-1870 was entrusted in the hands of contractors who are known as Calcutta Contractors or *Arkatti*. Since 1841, onwards the labourers of the tea plantation were appointed by contractors who were known as *Arkatti* who acted as the recruiting agents of the tea company. In this system, the labourers were basically being ignorant and impoverished were recruited and were registered as labourers under contractors in the tea gardens. Once this was done, the labourers had to live like slaves far away from public gaze. The planters literally exploited labourers by way of low remuneration, physical torture and even throwing the dead body of workers in rivers, while bringing to Assam.

This type of labour recruitment was also called indenture system. The indenture system united the labourers to the plantation through a penal-contract system and those who fled away were awarded rigorous punishments by the planters. The life of the labourers were miserably harsh and dismal. The contractors also brought a substantial number of women and families to the tea gardens who also used the tactics of recruiting labourers belonging to the poor and ignorant. By and large, the planters used to persuade the village had men for this purpose.

Under the indenture system, the workers had to enter agreement to work in the plantation for a specific period of time and were entitled to return home after the expiry of contract term. But they were in practice unable to return home after the end of the given period eventually due to long distance and financial paucity caused by low wages paid by the planters. Hence, they were not in an affordable position to return to the land of their origin.

While reporting on this pathetic condition of the labourers, the Assam Labour enquiry commission of 1906 aptly stated that “Contractors collected coolies by the hundred on false promises of high pay and light work and despatched them to

the tea districts without taking any sanitary precautions for their welfare on the journey. The result was shocking mortality on their voyage into Assam. Many of the immigrants precluded all hope of their surviving many months in the jungles of Assam. Between 15 December 1859 and 21st November 1861, the Assam Company brought 2,272 coolies of which 250 perished in transit. Between April, 1861 and February 1862, the company recruited 2569 coolies of which 135 died on the way and 103 absconded. Of the 84,915 workers landed in Assam between May 1863 to 1866, 30,000 had died by June 1866. It was a story of death and misery unparalleled in the colonial history in any part of the world”.

Anyway as per the Amended Act of 1959 “Licensed Contractor system was introduced in 1865 and licenses empowered to the contractors for recruiting labourers. This Act reduced contract term from 5 to 3 years.” Furthermore contract attracted the people for earning money after the end of the contract. But their contract was not fruitful after the expiry of the contract. Besides, they did not know where to go or how to they reach their native home because they had no money to return home once they left. Some of them either re-entered into fresh contract or went towards the neighbouring villages in search of livelihood.

However, this Act was again amended in 1870 and it is essentially related to Sardari system of Recruitment. This Act known as “Tea District Emigration Act 1883 which permitted free recruitment from outside the province where the term did not exceed one year. Since then a series of Acts were passed to protect the recruits and the Act of 1914 put an end to contractor system and newly established the Sardari system of recruitment. Apart from this, the transport of Native Labourers Act of 1863 was amended in 1870 which stopped recruitment system through Arkattis. In fact, while two system of recruitments like Sardari and Arkattis were practised by planters till 1915, another amendment in 1873 came into being which permitted free recruitment.

According to the Assam Labour and Emigration Act of 1915, the Arkattis system was declared unlawful and the only system of Sardari retained in the tea gardens. Likewise the *Tea District Labour Supply Association* was too organised in 1917 and laid importance on recruitment through Sardari system. Through this Association a number of tea plantation association got amalgated with an objective of recruiting labourers through the Sardari (Agent) system. So the planters recruited the cheap labourers through Sardari system. In Sardari system, the garden Sardars who happened to be an employee of tea garden was formally entitled to recruit cheap labourers. As such used to visit different places outside Assam especially the tribal areas of north India. They gave priority to mostly seven colonial provinces like Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Central provinces, United Provinces, Madras and Bombay, which were economically underdeveloped, backward, impoverished places.

On the whole, the tribal labourers were persuaded to come to Assam in the hope of a better livelihood. They were also forced to migrate as labourers due to natural calamities like floods, droughts, famine etc. taken place in the lands of their origin. The garden Sardars also recruited these labourers giving a fake assurance of a better livelihood. And as a part of tactics they used to induce men and women to recruit in the tea garden by assuring all the advantages of work,

settlement in independent holdings. In a sence, the landless poor tribal people of north and middle portions of India were made victims in the hands of garden Sardars.

However, a part from, the Assam Tea Company (ATC) recruited labourers straightly from different cultural linguistic and ethnic heritages from different states since 1841. They mainly the Munda and Gond from Chotnagpur (Bihar) and Orissa, Savara from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, Goala from Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, Lohar from Bihar, Orissa Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, Khond from Andhra Pradesh, Boya from Tamil Nadu.

In this context, Gitanjali Baruah in her book titled “*Social change and tea labour community*”, mentions that from different ethnic background the tea labourers had to struggle for adjustment to a completely new environment of the tea garden in respect of their pattern and condition of work, mode of accommodation and housing pattern family and individual relationship, leisure activities, health and sanitation etc. So the labourers had to adjust with new ecology and new working situation. The labourers in the gardens are accommodated in small houses built one near the other and arranged in either lines or blocks. These quarters are allotted to the regulation of the industrial management and not on ethnic consideration. In this condition re-grouping is not possible in terms of similar tribe or caste. Thus in these quarters labourers met labourers from different state wholly unrelated to each other. Besides, members of each line from a separate entity in relation to social contact. Hence the labourer’s line exists as a distinct social unit in day-to-day affairs as well as in matter of social organization.

In the first batch, the planters recruited labourers from Chotnagpur in 1841. But a large number of them while died in travelling. Amalendu Guha, a social scientist has mentioned that no of tea labourers in Assam increased from 44.7 to 50 percent in Chotnagpur in 1884-85 and in 1889. Chotnagpur was the homeland of Munda and Oraon peoples. In addition, these tribal groups had inexplicably suffered during their migration from homeland to Assam. Because the route was by boats and steamers to Assam and many could not stand the exertion of the voyage.

From this batch of recruits, many of them did not return to their native place after the expiry of contractual period because there was no arrangement from the authority of the tea gardens for their return journey.

Dibyananda Chetia^[30] in his work on Human development and tea labourers of Assam (2009) has stated that from September 1, 1859 to August 31st as many as 2049 labourers were recruited and during 1860-61 not less than 3081, were recruited. In 1853 the Assam Tea Company (ATC) had recruited labourers from Bengal. Similarly from December 1859 to November, 1861 the Assam Tea Company (ATC) brought 2,272 labourers out of which 250 died while on travel. From April 1861 to February 1862, 2,569 labourers recruited out of which 135 died on the way to Assam and 103 absconded. Between May 1863 to May 1866, the company recruited 84,915 labourers and 30,000 had died on the way.

In view of the above development, a Plethora of Acts were enacted for the welfare of labourers. In 1861 the Government of Bengal formed an enquiry commission to

investigate into the working of free contract system of recruitment. In 1880 the Bengal Government appointed a labour commission to look after the recruitment of labourers and on the basis of Commission's report the Bengal Act (1) of 1882 was passed which is also known as Dhubri system. The same Act abolished the contractor system. In order to amend Inland Emigration Act 1 of 1882, the Act of 1893 was passed. This commission led to the passing of Act III (Bengal Government Judicial) of 1863 which was the first legal Act dealing with labour migration to Assam.

Following the formulation of the Acts the recruitment system got not improved despite the amendment Act of 1901 in 1908 and passage of Act of 1915. A striking feature of this Act of 1915 was abolition of the contractor system of recruitment. After independence, for the development of tea garden labourers another Act was passed which is known as the Plantation Labour Act (PLA) of 1951. Specially the Plantations Labour Act, 1951 provides the management and regulation conditions of the labourers. Similarly, Assam Plantation Labourer Rules (APLR) 1956 gave importance on the holistic measures for welfare and employment condition of labourers.

It may be mentioned that in 1870 the number of labourers were 8,000, which in 1872 to 1880 increase 26,321. Likewise in 1882 the number rose to 40,000, during 1905-06 were 4,17,262, in 1923 were 5,27,000. But after 1931 the recruited labourers gradually declined. In 1931 there were about 14 million tea labourers of which 9,00,000 were in Tea Plantation and 5,00,000 were peasants. Besides, during 1946-47 about 43,007 migrated to Assam, 1951-52 about 38,477, 1954-55 about 24,829 and in 1971, it increased to 22,40,000 in Assam.

The tea labourers must live like slave. Some of them suffered from mal-adjustment, some of them died, some of fled away before the expiry of this contract but a large number of them remained in Assam and permanently settled in the new habitat, new economy far from their original home. These tea labourers are known as Ex-Tea labourers who lived in the tea garden after retirement or expiry of their contract period.

This tea labourers known along with Ex-tea labourers living in the tea gardens after retirement. Some of the Tea and Ex-Tea Tribes who were origin as such Bhumij, Bhuyan, Bhil, Binjhia, Biljia, Bansfor, Bauri, Bhakta, beldar, baraik, bagti, Bamol, Banda, Dhatta, Basor, Asur, Aryamala, Chamar, Chero, Chikboraik, Dhanwar, Dandari, Dhopi, Dam, Dosadh, Daandasi, Dhanuk, Denghar, Ghashi, Ganda, Gorraitte, Gour, Ghatowar, Gowla, Gonju, Harri Halwai, Jallah, Jogi, Koiri, Kheriah, Kalahandi, Kamar, Karmali, Karwa, Kol, Kumhar, Kherwar, Khond, Khandal, Koyah, Kanhar, Kisan, Kurmi, Keot, Lodhi, Ladha, mali, Mirdha, Modia, Mehtar, Munda, Malhar, Madgi, Majwar, Nunnia, Nagashia, Napit, Nayak, Patnayak, Naidu, Oraon, Parja, Pantati, Pradhan, Pashi, Paidi, Panika, Patratanti, Panpatar, Patwa, Paik, Rajwar, Rajwal, Reily, Reddy, Rajbongshi, Rautia, Santhal, Savar, Sawara, Sundhri, Samashi, Tongia, Tanti, Tasa, Toto, Telenga etc.

All these Tea and Ex-Tea population constitute a large portion of Assam's total population. The tea garden labourers performed different types of works in the garden. They mainly works such as plucking the leaves, processing and preparing of the tea beds, preparing, seeding and

maintain the nursery, pruning and aforking weeding and digging, manuring, spraying and pest control etc. in the tea gardens.

Thus, it may be concluded that the Tea Community people were brought to Assam chiefly to work in tea plantation to serve the interests of the British colonial masters. But while bringing the cheap tribal labourers (Tea & Ex-tea Community) to Assam they had suffered and witnessed the untold difficulties as well. After the expiry of their contractual period, the lion's share of the Tea Labourers decided not to go back to the land of origin basically owing to financial stringency. This is due course led them to emerge as a numerically strong group of Assam's total population. More specifically in the post colonial Assam there emerged and enlightened elite among the tea labour community who became conscious of their diametrical backwardness. As a sequence they started organising their people which resulted in the foundation of various organisations for their holistic development. After all, the Tea Garden workers (TGWs) Community obviously made a substantial impact on the politics of state of Assam including the periodical elections.

Political status of women TGWs of Rajmai, Sepon, Khongea and Maskora Tea Estates:

In a Democratic dispersion like India each and every citizen as per the constitution is entitled to play equal right in participating the electoral process of the country. No citizen is deprived of voting right on the ground of gender, education, religion, economic etc. as such no distinction is made between men and women so far as the exercise of voting right is concerned. What does a man do or does a woman do there is no margin between them in the event of voting right exercise. This is the basic characteristic of a constitutional democratic setup.

Our state, a constituent part, is also not exception to this provision according to which all people regardless of all their distinctions are equal and democratic. The state of Assam is not opposed to the constitution of India and its various provisions carrying all sorts of democratic norms and values. The state of Assam, being an inextricable part of India, has been glorifying this democratic dispensation ever since the decolonisation of the country. Keeping all this view, this chapter is devoted to study the TGWs working and leaving in the vicinity of tea garden after superannuation who constitute a sizable segments of states aggregate population. Despite so they have remain backward and many respects deliberately discriminated for which they keep themselves away from contesting election. The women TGWs are even more backward and as such debarred from such critical affairs. In a nutshell the TGWs specially women TGWs of the Sivasagar district inclusive of Rajmai, Sepon, khongea and Maskora Tea Estates are very steadily coming up for the participation in the Panchayat elections in which their role has been increasing year by year. In this context it is worthwhile to mention that the 73rd Amendment Act granted constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj institutions which facilitated the Government of Assam to pass Assam Panchayat Raj Act of 1994.

This Act provided the Tea works to participate in the Panchayats election. Thus, the TGWs of the state got the opportunity to elect Goan Panchayat President, Anchalik

Panchayat and Zilla Parishad members and also Ward members of Goan Panchayats. These provisions rendered them the right to elect their own representatives and to be elected in these grass-root level political bodies including the TGWs of Rajmai, Sepon, khongea and Maskora Tea Estates. Consequently, degree of the participation of TGWs of Rajmai, Sepon, khongea and Maskora Tea Estates began to increase conspicuously compared to earlier ones.

It may however be mentioned that all the above mentioned democratic institutions fall under the 'Thowra' ALA constituency. In fact there are four Zilla parishad seats, twenty Goan panchayat seats and two hundred ward members seats. Some areas of the Rajmai, khongea and Maskora Tea Estates fall under the jurisdiction of 'Athabari Goan panchayat' where as the rests fall under the jurisdiction of 'Khorahat Gaon panchayat'. But the entire portion of Rajmai, khongea, and Maskora Tea Estates fall under the same Zilla Parishad seats i.e. Thowra Zilla Parishad. Consequently, the TGWs of the Rajmai Tea Estate get the scope to contest and participate in the election at the grass-root level of the state and to interact with the political leaders of the constituency as well as Sivasagar district. At the same time a minuscule section of upcoming Women TGWs are seen coming for participating in election politics. Panchayat election held in 2002, the President of Khorahat

Gaon Panchayat was elected from Rajmai tea estate, who happened to be woman TGWs lady named Mrs. *Binapani Manki* as the Congress (I) party nominee, whereas there was two ward members from the TGWs community of Rajmai Tea Estate named Mr. *Dukham Ghasi* and Mr. *Joinath Pailei* for Khorahat and Athabari Goan Panchayat respectively. Of course, their term had been over in 2007. As such the election commission has made announcement for holding the next Panchayat elections at four phases in the state.

Likewise, panchayat election proposed to be holding in December 2007 the contestants from Rajmai Tea Estate for the post of member of Thowra Zilla parishad are—(i) *Hemawati Telenga* (BJP). (ii) *Swarnamoni Bonia* (Samaj Nikash Moncha). Similarly for the members of khorahat Anchalik Panchayat is – (i) Rajmai Lakwa (samaj Bikash Moncha), for the 8 No. Ward member under Kharahat goan panchayat are –(i) *Bina Munda* (INC), (ii) *Rajani Ghasi* (BJP) (iii) *Junmoni Munda* (samaj Bikash Moncha, independent) and for the 6 No Ward member under Athabari Goan Panchayat is *Dudhnath Ghasi* (INC). All these candidates for different posts of Panchayat election are the permanent residents of Rajmai Tea estate, among them Mr. *Dudhnath Ghasi* and Mr. *Maneshawar Ghatowar* are the permanent workers of the Rajmai Tea Estate.

Table 1: Sepon Goan Panchayat under Sonari Anchalik Panchayt, election falling under Sepon Tea Estate held in 2003-2008.

| President of Goan Panchayat | Member of Anchalik Panchayat | Ward Members |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Mr. Thakurdas Pan Tanti. | Muni Chutia | 1 No Ward Member: Joymoti Tanti. |
| | | 2 No Ward Member: Gourango Tanti. |
| | | 3 No Ward Member: Panchom Kormokar. |
| | | 4 No Ward Member: Susari Harange. |
| | | 5 No Ward Member: Sukram Barzo. |
| | | 6 No Ward Member: Lila Dey. |
| | | 7 No Ward Member: Amor Das. |
| | | 8 No Ward Member: Meera Konwar. |
| | | 9 No Ward Member: Sibchoran Mohali. |

Table 2: Sepon Goan Panchayat under Sonari Anchalik Panchayt, election falling under Sepon Tea Estate held in 2008-2013.

| President of Goan Panchayat | Member of Anchalik Panchayat | Ward Members |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Mrs. Anu Phukan ^[8] | Mr. Election Tanti. | 1 No ward Member: Umesh Chawra. |
| | | 2 No ward Member: Nitu Robi Das. |
| | | 3 No ward Member: Romesh Kumari. |
| | | 4 No ward Member: Bindia Mahanti Ghatuwar. |
| | | 5 No ward Member: Jushila Hasda. |
| | | 6 No ward Member: Depa Koya. |
| | | 7 No ward Member: Anup Mozumder. |
| | | 8 No ward Member: Khukon Dey. |
| | | 9 No ward Member: Komola Boruah. |
| | | 10 No ward Member: Sumitra Bahadur. |

Table 3: Sepon Goan Panchayat under Sonari Anchalik Panchayt, election falling under Sepon Tea Estate held in 2013-2018.

| President of Goan Panchayat | Member of Anchalik Panchayat | Ward Members |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Mr. Munindro Nayak. | Mrs. Anu Phukan. ^[8] | 1 No ward Member: Pinky Chawra. |
| | | 2 No ward Member: Denash Tanti. |
| | | 3 No ward Member: Tutumoni Kahar. |
| | | 4 No ward Member: Kedav Mahanti. |
| | | 5 No ward Member: Jusila Hasda. |
| | | 6 No ward Member: Jakir Hussain. |
| | | 7 No ward Member: Jorgeena Begum. |
| | | 8 No ward Member: Aruna Saikia. |
| | | 9 No ward Member: Mustak Ali. |
| | | 10 No ward Member: Sibcharon Mahali |

Table 4: Sepon Goan Panchayat under Sonari Anchalik Panchayat, election falling under Sepon Tea Estate held in 2018 till now

| President of Goan Panchayat | Member of Anchalik Panchayat | Ward Members |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Mrs. Jugomaya Phukan. ^[8] | Mr. Tuffan Molik. | 1 No ward Member: Suresh Chawra. |
| | | 2 No ward Member: Sorita Medha. |
| | | 3 No ward Member: Sorju Porja. |
| | | 4 No ward Member: Parboti Munda. |
| | | 5 No ward Member: Marcush Kasyab. |
| | | 6 No ward Member: Najma Begum. |
| | | 7 No ward Member: Rajib Das. |
| | | 8 No ward Member: Tinku Dey. |
| | | 9 No ward Member: Juli Mohan. |
| | | 10 No ward Member: Sumitra Bahadur. |

Table 5: Similarly, Athabari Goan Panchayat under Demow Anchalik Panchayat election wise held on 05-12-2018 can be displayed as given below

| Contesting candidates (Members) | Party | Winner |
|---------------------------------------|-------|---------|
| Mrs. Salmi Sawra Mridha | AGP | X |
| Mrs. Jayalaxhi Chetia ^[30] | BJP | Elected |
| Mrs. Mandira Gogoi | INC | X |

Table 6: Khorahat Goan Panchayat under Demow Anchalik Panchayat election, 05-12-2018.

| Contesting candidates (Members) | Party | Winner |
|---------------------------------|-------|---------|
| Sri. Jibon Das | INC | X |
| Sri. Puren manki | BJP | Elected |
| Sri. Harish Das | AGP | X |

Table 7: Khorahat Goan Panchayat election calling under Krongea T.E. held on 05-12-2018.

| Contesting candidates (President) | Party | Winner |
|-----------------------------------|-------|---------|
| Mrs. Asha Machua. | INC | X |
| Mrs. Jyoti Handique | AGP | X |
| Mrs. Binapani Manki | BJP | Elected |

Table 8: Demow Goan Panchayat under Demow Anchalik Panchayat Election falling under Maskora Tea Estate held on 05-12-2018.)

| Contesting candidates(President) | Party | Winner |
|----------------------------------|-------|---------|
| Sri. Nipen Boruah | AGP | X |
| Mrs. Sudarshan Gorh | BJP | Elected |

Table 9: Candidates contesting from Demow Anchalik Panchayat under khongea Tea Estate in 2018.

| Contesting candidates (Members) | Party | Winner |
|---------------------------------|-------|---------|
| Mrs. Binita Gogoi | BJP | Elected |
| Mrs. Mouchumi Boruah | INC | X |

Table 10: Athabari Goan Panchayat under Rajmai Tea Estate in 2018

| Contesting candidates (President) | Party | Winner |
|------------------------------------|-------|---------|
| Sri. Atul Panika | INC | X |
| Mrs. Geeta Rajgarh | BJP | Elected |
| Sri. Haren Chetia. ^[30] | AGP | X |

Among the above list of contesting candidates to of them belong to TGWs and one among them Mrs. Geeta Rajgarh belong to the women TGWs who happened to be elected candidate as a BJP nominee, the remaining two candidates one Mr. Atual Panika—a man TGW and Mr. Haren Chetia—a non-TGW got defeated. In other words there was no reservation of Goan Panchayat seat for not to speak of

women TGWs but the entire TGWs community at large. Thus, the above data show that the level of participation of the Rajmai TGWs in the Panchayat election is increasing late especially after 2006. Interestingly, it is also found that the TGWs seem to have cast their votes as per the direction given by their garden authority or sometimes by their labour leaders. During the visit in the garden though the workers were found talking about the panchayat election but their level of election discussion was not up to the mark. No discussion generally takes place among the TGWs of Rajmai, Sepon, khongea and Maskora Tea Estates regarding the party manifesto, work and achievement of the party among workers, corruption and activities of the existing persons, personality and education of the candidate etc. Again, there is no ideological commitment, no logical argument in favour of a particular party or a candidate. These may be due to mass illiteracy, fixed schedule of their works in the garden, paucity of social and political awareness etc. the only remedy to these problems from the TGWs community is universalisation of education and creation of healthy atmosphere by the NGOs or other social organisations so that the workers can ameliorate their outlook and develop healthy political culture. However, it is as known fact that the TGWs are directly or indirectly contributing to work upliftment and enriching of the Rajmai, Sepon, Khongea and Maskora Tea Estates despite so they play less participation in the politics of both to the legislature and Panchayat election of Assam. It is evident that from since the first election of ALA held in 1952 and to the last election of 2016, no TGW candidate got elected from the above tea estates. Of course, in 1985, Barki Prasad ^[18] Telenga from AGP got elected to the ALA representing the Thowra constituency in which Rajmai Tea Estate also belongs to. It is seen that in the last Panchayat election held in 2019 a woman TGW named Bina Manki elected as a President of Khorahat Gaon Panchayat, Khongea. In the Panchayat election, her victory demonstrates that women TGWs of Khongea tea estate is not required to confine to only household works, garden works and give birth children but also they have equal right with men in the electoral politics. In case of Sepon Tea Estate, it is witnessed that the surrounding areas are inhabited by the Assamese people. Hence, if we notice the last Panchayat election held in 2019 both Assamese and TGWs candidates are elected as the president and members in Sepon Gaon Panchayat. A woman named Jugamaya Phukan ^[17] is elected as a President of Sepon Gaon Panchayat and other members of this panchayat is Suresh Chawra, Sorita Medha, Sorju Porja, Parboti

Munda, Marcush Kasyab, Najma Begum, Rajib Das, Tinku Dey, Juli Mohan, Sumitra Bahadur . Thus, winning a woman TGW from Tea estates including nearby village is a sign of escalating the degree of political consciousness.

Ever since the maiden general election of Assam Legislative Assembly held in 1952, the TGWs community has been playing a significant role. Because they constituted a sizeable section of state's total population which is a vital factor in a democratic political dispensation. In this respect however, they came under the influence of the Indian National Congress (later on Indira Congress) under whose initiative the Indian national Trade Union Congress (INTUC) was formed in order to look after the welfare of labour communities. Similarly, in a bid to look after the tea plantation labourers in Assam a separate tea trade union viz. ASSAM CHAH MAZDOOR ^[28] SANGHA (ACMS) was floated on 9 August 1958 at Dibrugarh and was affiliated to the INTUC. The ACMS in due course emerged as the most vibrant and powerful organization among the TGWs of Assam.

Rudraman Thapa ^[28] in his an article "*Politics of tea trade union: A study of Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha*" mentioned the reasons for the participation of Tea garden Workers community in election politics. The TGWs numerical strength is greater in number and it is well known that democracy is based on majority support. Hence, due to their numerical strength, the Indian National Congress gives importance on the TGWs and even help them to organize Labour union. The illiterate TGWs thought that only INC can solve their problems and reduce their sufferings and which they had faced since a long time. Hence, a sizeable number of TGWs exercise their right of franchise without knowing its meaning. If course, now a days due to spread of education, the educated TGWs exercise their right. Besides the TGWs leaders are also involved in the political field through attending meeting campaigning, voting, mobilizing public opinion etc. Some of the TGWs leaders are also contesting elections whether Assam Legislative Assembly or Panchayat election.

According to an official report the most cited reason of out of schooling was poverty, 47.4% of out of school children dropped out or did not enrol in school at all due to parents inability to meet the financial needs of schooling or the demand for child labour for house hold works. A portion of the children (TGWs) nearby 16%, majority of whom are essentially girls were kept out of school because they were required to work at home. Generally, the poorer households need child labour for survival. The poverty related reasons were cited more for the children aged between 11-15 years than the those aged 6-10 years.

So far as social awareness in concerned it is admitted that most of male and 60 percent of female member (of TGWs) are used to have country bear (Laupani and Haria) after they come back from their routine work.

Similarly, Purnendu Kumar mentions in his article "socio-economic and political conditions of tea garden labour of Cachar District" that due to illiteracy and isolated garden like, the level of political consciousness among the tea garden worker is dismal and they have no any possibility of interaction with the outside of the garden area who are politically more conscious but gradually women TGWs are conscious about their political rights. In this case TGWs

organizations play significant role to promote political awareness among the tea workers. In Assam, due to discrimination of education among the TGWs a range of the TGWs organizations came into being numbering more than forty in Assam including the militant outfits which are exclusively dominated by their male members. No prominent office is permitted to be represented by the women TGWs in such organization of the TGWs. In this way the women TGWs seem to have tactfully been deprived, sidelined and marginalized in the TGWs society. Of course, in present of their constitutional regulation, gender is not a factor by which women TGWs are sought to be under estimated rather their women appear to be disinclined to come forward for leading and outfit primarily because of a illiteracy and ignorance. On the other hand, the emerging enlightened women TGWs seem to have been deliberately dispossessed of playing a leading role of their socio-cultural and political outfit.

"Of course, it is seen that there has been a tradition among the women TGWs should be kept themselves confined only do household affairs and aloof from politics but it seems that of late women TGWs of Rajmai, Sepon, Khongea and Maskora tea estates are coming forward to participate in grass root level electoral politics. It is hoped that due to gradual spread of education the women TGWs have become conscious of the electoral politics.

Thus, similar is the case with the Rajmai, Sepon, Khongea and Maskora Tea Estates women TGWs who are preoccupied with work schedule while the semi literate women TGWs prefer to keep themselves in looking for a better means of living instead of getting involved in the organizational work. During the time of interviewing one hundred women TGWs of the above tea estates, not a single of them was involving in organizational work. On the other hand, they are busy with their day to day plantation work and their organizations were quite indifferent to the TGWs. Of course, all the TGWs of the above the tea estates are registered as the members of Assam Chah Mazdoor ^[28] Sangha, the most popular tea trade union of Assam. The main aim of the ACMS is to look after the TGWs manifold problems. Like any other tea garden of Assam, the meetings of the ACMS are regularly held in the Rajmai, Sepon, Khongea and Maskora tea estates. Thus both the men and women are familiarized with these trade union. It is important to mention that the entire expenditure of the ACMS office and salaries of the office holders are to be managed by the TGWs of Assam including Rajmai, Sepon, Khongea and Maskora Tea Estates.

Likewise, if we look at the women TGWs in Assam, compared to other segment of women population of state have remained much lagging behind in this respect. However, it may be repeated that the women TGWs working in the tea plantations are illiterate and also semi-literate, hence they have no idea about the utility or futility of women working for organizations for which they fail to manage time for the organizational work due to their regular hard work in the tea plantations. Of course it is seen that a tiny section of women TGWs not working in any tea plantation lately initiated the process of organizing the women with an objective of ameliorating women pathetic socio-economic plights. This process culminated in the formation of a few number of organizations viz. (1) Asom

Chah Janajati Mahila Samiti, (2) Chah Mazdoor^[28] Mahila Samiti (2007) and (3) Adivasi Mahila Sanstha. But none of these organizations have been capable of opening their branches among the women TGWs in Assam. Thus, it becomes evident from the fact that none of the per fifty working women TGWs of Sepon, Rajmai, Khongea and Maskora tea estates. While interviewing it may be said about the existence of any of the above mentioned women organizations. Over and above, it is quite clear that not only the women TGWs of the above tea estates but the entire Assam even to-day remains backward and disorganized and hence their overall status too remains unchanged.

So far as the women TGWs of Sepon, Rajmai, khongea and Maskora tea estates are concerned it is sad to state that more than 90 percent of interviewed respondents expressed their ignorance regarding the existence of the tea trade union and any political organization and party. More importantly, a section of them even could not say the name of our country, state or district they are living in and working since generation together. Out of 50 respondents only 8 could answer the name of our Chief Minister and Prime Minister and among them 4 were capable of saying the name of the president of our country. Some of the factors that can be held responsible for this pathetic condition of the women TGWs of the aforesaid tea estates primarily include illiteracy and lack of awareness supplemented by overburdened with physical work both in plantation and household. Besides, it may be mentioned that the role played by their husbands in the family is also equally responsible for this women TGWs indescribable state of affairs as they cannot afford time to go outside the four walls of the house and attend any public gathering that could have definitely been instrumental in generating socio-political awareness in them. Under such circumstances, how could the women TGWs of these tea estates be expected to play an active role in electoral politics either in state as well as grass-root level. As a consequence they have easily been vulnerable to subjugation, domination and suppression by the male TGWs as well as the non-TGWs and tea garden management.

However, overall pathetic condition of women TGWs of the above Tea Estates, a number of suggestions are tentatively extended for the removal of their pathetic condition of TGWs. These are as follows –

Firstly, admission into the educational institution must be made compulsory among the TGWs children (both girls and boys). As they start growing up, they should be taught that education is not only meant for employment but for generating awareness leading to all-round development subsequently.

Secondly, inculcating in them a sense that liquor consumption is the most detrimental not only to health but also the root cause of lot of problems for their economic backwardness. In short, liquor consumption must be statutorily prohibited among the TGWs.

Thirdly, as the TGWs population is growing fast without sufficient employment scope in tea estates, the tea trade union initiate steps for opening co-operative agriculture and other self-employment schemes especially for accommodating the women TGWs.

Fourthly, the working women TGWs could be taught as how to save mandatorily at least a portion of their income to

meet any pressing need in future that might keep them away from money lenders.

Fifthly, women should be accorded more scopes to participate in the electoral politics so as to enable them to serve the women related problems.

Sixthly, initiative must be taken up for organizing the women TGWs so as to assert their rights against the man-made injustice, in every plantation including the Rajmai, Sepon, khongea and Maskora Tea Estates.

In conclusion it may be reiterated that women TGWs play significant role in the Tea garden. Women constituted more than 50 percent of the total work force of Assam Tea Estates. The women earn money basically to meet the basic requirements of her family. A Woman TGW has to prepare the family budget and fulfil family needs for which she has to invest the entire amount of her income, even many times she cannot spend a small amount of her income without the prior consent of her husband, while male TGWs are generally seen to be indifferent to such affairs. It is seen, almost 90 percent of the men TGWs have their habit of regularly taking vodka at night after doing non-stop work all the day, and also take away the remuneration forcefully from her wife for drinking vodka. However, it is needless to say that the women TGWs are not only contributing to the economic life but also to the maintenance of the family by looking after their children and discharging the household activities. The women TGWs get tired and go to the bed 7.30 to 8.00 pm. They do not have time to take care of themselves and their children. They indeed, devote all the time for their family.

Besides, while working even outside the tea plantation they are forced not to be aware of their social position and status. In fact, women TGWs' economic contribution to their families is unavoidable and mandatory, whereas in many cases male TGWs seem to be indifferent towards their prime responsibility. Under such situation a woman TGW is bound to lose her capacity to think of her social position and status. In order to shoulder her family accountabilities as well as tea garden duties from every morning to till evening. Despite so they are subjugated, marginalized, tortured by the men counterparts. Economically also, the women TGWs are marginalized and dispossessed by their men counterpart. They remain dominated, depressed, suppressed and subjugated both to their male counter parts as well as the society at large. In fact, every type of domination or suppression is inherent to their lives.

On the other hand, women TGWs are educationally also the most backward and as such they easily get into the trap of the male TGWs in terms of perpetual subjugation and exploitation that result in lowering their social position and status. Due to their illiteracy, women TGWs involvement into electoral politics is seen to be quite indifferent and disinterested. Perhaps for this reason it was found that they are also equally reluctant to play an active role in organizational work of electoral politics. Of late, a minuscule portion of women TGWs have steadily been politically conscious and assertive of their overall emancipation from the male dominated society. It is seen that a gradual change is taking place among them. These unprecedented changes among the TGWs girls community have marked the rise of a new generation by dint of education. This has entered them into a new world different

from the existing order of garden life. Consequently, instead of manual workers many of them prefer middle class jobs in various government, semi-government offices and if possible in the tea garden offices. Thus it seems that the budding educated girls of TGWs have been capable of understanding the importance of education as the only effective means of putting themselves as par with other section of the society. Indeed, they seem to believe that education would only enable girls TGWs to emancipate from male domination and suppression by way of asserting their constitutional rights. However, this section of the educated girls of TGWs community is profoundly convinced that education would help them in order to erase and eradicate the traditionally accepted various socio-cultural prejudices and superstitions prevailing in the TGWs society. They have also understood how an educated woman can lead a healthy family and in turn a healthy society where women are more likely to share in family's decisions regarding how to manage the family budget, how to save money for future use, how to bring their children up, how to improve their quality of family and society. So in the long run, it can be said that education would serve as the most powerful instrument of empowerment among the upcoming educated girls of the TGWs community in Assam. That would ultimately uphold the overall position and status of their women TGWs community at large. Gradually, the educated women TGWs who have received higher education, they realized the development of the TGWs community. Hence, these elite have come forward to lead the TGWs community in the political field of the state under the banners of different political parties and organizations also. The over whelming support from the common TGWs people, the elite women TGWs has got encouraged and as a result more and more leaders of TGWs community emerged and were compelled to pay special interest on the state politics. Now, the TGWs community under the leadership of various regional as well as national level political parties have been gradually capable of occupying an important place in the electoral politics of Assam.

Likewise in the last general election of the Assam Legislative Assembly were held in two phases on 4 April and 11 April 2016, the leaders selected from different constituency irrespective of party affiliation. It may be specially mentioned that the congress (I) member include and BJP members include as well as from Assam Gana Parishad. Besides another famous TGWs leaders Paban Shing Ghatowar has been elected as a member of parliament and in 2019, Kamakhya Prashad Tasa have won MP from Assam. Hence, it is clear that TGWs have now become a strong political force in Assam. The TGWs leaders take importance place in the political sphere and they try to solve the different problems of TGWs like how they are exploited by their owner and deprive of facilities from the government. Now, the TGWs leaders not only play significant role in panchayat level election but state level also. In a sense none of the women TGWs have been able to reach the highest political echelon in the country so far. Rather they are getting politically confined to grass-root levels i.e. Panchayat level of politics. But it is an undeniable fact that a section of the women TGWs have already begun to enter state level politics though in small number.

Summary and Conclusion

Migration today has been a global phenomenon. Like today the initiation in tea plantation by the British colonial rulers paved the way the migration of Tea Garden Labourers (workers) for getting themselves trapped in to their colonial hands. As a result, the newly discovered wild tea proved to be a fertile area of trade and commerce by way of tea plantation and manufacture of the same in a lucrative way. The colonial therefore begun to require tea poor tribal inhabitants of Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Present Jharkhand states to work in Assam's tea plantation. On the other hand, due to lack of drought, paucity of jobs, famine over population and civil war in own states forced them to move away from their native lands. On the other hand, the British rulers were in need of labour force to work in their newly established tea plantations. Bring tempted by the British tea planters the tribal labourers came to Assam in large number who in course of time constituted a substantial number of states total Population. Despite so in overall TGWs were by this way or that kept deliberately backward and disorganised. Even than by dint of population growth and discrimination of education and growing organizational capability the TGWs enabled to get themselves organised and assertive. It eventually culminated in the proliferation of a host of socio-cultural and socio-political outfits. Some of them include the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS, 1958) ^[28], All Tea Tribes Students Association (Attasa, 1947 Assam Chah Janajati Yuva Chatra Parishad 1972), Assam Labour Party Chah Janajati Surakhya Samiti, Assom (2001), Assam Chah Jana Janagosthi Pragati Samiti (1993), Assam Chah Mazdoor Adivasi Party (2010) ^[28], Birsa Commando Force, Adivasi Cobra Militant Of Assam (1996), All Adivasi National Liberation Army (2003), and many others. But despite constituting more than half of TGWs their women were far lagging behind than their male counterpart. It may be evident from the fact that there are only two women TGWs are formed so far. They are Asom Chah Ganajati Mahila Samiti (2017) and Chah Mazdoor Mahila Samiti (2007) ^[28]. Further, these two women TGWs seem to be lacking of weakly organised and are not popular among the women TGWs in Assam. In fact they appear to remain in paper only not in existence and actions.

As a result, the women TGWs are almost similarly all over the state of Assam have remained under same condition. For instance, they have no substantive economic liberty in spite of being the backbone of tea plantations. These are Plantation Labour Act, 1951 and Assam Plantation Labour Rules which are formulated for the welfare of TGWs both men and women. Indeed they have not been instrumental in improving women TGWs pathetic condition but also the TGWs community at large. In addition, the women TGWs have also remained educationally backward which gets reflected in holding white-colour jobs by the TGWs both men and women. Likewise the ACMS the most powerful tea trade union (affiliated to INTUC) is apparently committed to be messiah of TGWs both men and women instead of looking after in 'Labour Welfare' which is thus contributing towards the backwardness of the TGWs. Other prime factor equally responsible for the pathetic state of affairs of the TGWs is the traditional prejudices and unscientific superstitions strongly prevalent among the TGWs ever since time immemorial.

As stated above the TGWs consist of not only men TGWs but also the women TGWs who were almost more than equally committed to the plantation ever since inception in Assam. As a matter of fact, the women TGWs are inextricable part of the entire TGWs in the state. But compared to the men TGWs their women counterparts have been deliberately subordinated, subjugated and marginalised all over the tea plantation in Assam essentially due to the reasons cited earlier. In a sense, such sort of situation among the TGWs is vividly witnessed in all tea gardens of Assam. Therefore, it may be stated that the women TGWs are virtually deprived of socio-economic and political entitlements and thereby relegated them to the position of more and more backwardness and marginalisation even in their own society and state. In other words, both the TGWs social system at large and the tea management too are accountable for the women TGWs undescrivable socio-economic and political status. In fact, the women TGWs have remained backward educationally, socially, economically and mostly politically.

So far as the electoral political domain is concerned it can be mentioned that only two congress (I) women TGWs who represented the TGWs community named Rupam Kurmi (Mariani Legislative Assembly) and Jibontara Ghatowar (Moran Legislative Assembly) more than once. To-day, there is developing a trend that the women TGWs specially the upcoming girls who are witnessed to be interested in pursuing higher education. It might have enabled them to participate in socio-economic and political game inclusive of grass-root electoral politics in Assam. It is evident from the abovementioned study areas in which almost equal number of women TGWs have got elected with that non-TGWs women. This can evidently be called an optimistic sign/symptom in case of women TGWs which might be strong and instrumental source of inspiration for the prospective women TGWs to get themselves involved into electoral politics in Assam. Otherwise the women TGWs would remain the most vulnerable chunk of Assam and Assamese society for all times to come. It may therefore be concluded that it is the education which would definitely help them to inherit the power of assertion in all fronts of their lives. So in order to embolden and empower women TGWs of the aforesaid tea estates urgently need to be educated and enlightened which would make them obviously and squarely assertive and organised. Otherwise they would remain lagging behind and deprived of sorts of rights enshrined in the constitution.

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