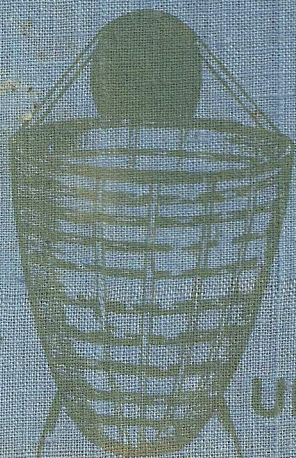


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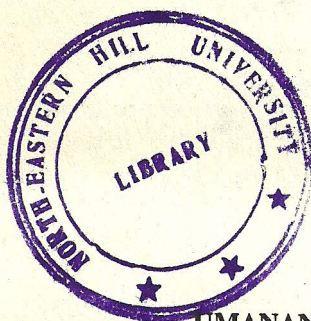


UMANAND PHUKAN

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THE EX-TEA GARDEN LABOUR POPULATION IN ASSAM

[A SOCIO-ECONOMIC STUDY]



UMANANDA PHUKAN

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FOREWORD

The Tea Garden Labourers were the first immigrants brought from outside the State by the Colonial power for the development of large scale tea estates in Assam. Although most of them belong to Chotanagpur and tribal areas of Orissa there were considerable number of labourers from Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu. Large number of labourers were induced to come to the inaccessible and inhospitable plantations of the region. Bribery, coercion and deceit were practised to bring the labour to Assam. In course of their transport by streamers and railways, the labourers suffered greatly and a considerable number of them, particularly women and children died due to disease, hunger and congestion. Thus a distinct exploited tea plantation labour class appeared in Assam along with the establishment of the tea plantations.

At present about 20 per cent of the population of Assam belong to the tea estate labourers who were brought to Assam mostly during 1850 to 1930. A large section of the tea garden labourers had abandoned barrack life in the tea estates and settled down in neighbouring areas by forming new village units. They had to seek avenues for alternative employment outside the plantations.

The Plantation Labour Enquiry of 1956 and various other studies give us information about the plantation labour in India and also in Assam. But no systematic study on the condition of the ex-tea garden labour population living in the villages was undertaken. In this context it is gratifying to note that Dr. Umananda Phukan, Research Officer, Agro-Economic Research Centre for N.E. India, Jorhat, has come forward to study the socio-economic conditions of the ex-tea garden or the ex-tea plantation labour population in Assam.

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Librarians of the State Central Library, Assam; the Gauhati University and the Assam Agricultural University;

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And to my family who indirectly financed the research project by allowing to use both my time and part of the income on

it. I must mention Soroj, my wife who made the sacrifices, Dipti my sister, Charasekhar my son and Maitrayee my daughter who took much troubles.

I remember with respect my father Late Durgaprodad Phukan who gave me valuable information on the life of tea garden labour from his long experiences as an employee of Tea Gardens.

I owe to many persons for their hospitality and help during the fieldwork I am sorry that it is not possible to give their names.

October
1983

Umananda Phukan

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ABOUT THE BOOK

An intensive socio-economic investigation of a section of what is now known as ex-tea garden labour of Assam, the book attempts to recall how labourers from different parts of the country converged here in the later half of the nineteenth century to man the various tea plantations in the state. Their number naturally grew with the passage of time and they now constitute a sizeable segment of the rural population of Assam. It also analyses the historical circumstances under which the immigrant tea-garden labour left their regular employment on the plantations and chose to settle in villages that had sprung up, thanks primarily to their efforts in the past when land was available in plenty and the population was sparse. On the basis of a field study of several such villages, the author explores the possibility of their rehabilitation in the subsistence sector.

As this labour force is drawn from varied linguistic and ethnic groups, social adjustment poses many problems, and these are discussed here in adequate detail.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in 1931, Dr. Umananda Phukan has been connected with what we may call the rural economy of North-east India for more than three decades. During his long association with the Department of Agriculture, Govt. of Assam, he had ample opportunities of knowing at first hand the problems facing rural development of the region.

Currently on the staff of Agro-Economic Research Centre for N.E. India, Jorhat, he has to his credit several research projects. In addition to contributing Papers on problems of the area, he undertakes teaching in the Department of Agricultural Economics of the Assam Agricultural University.