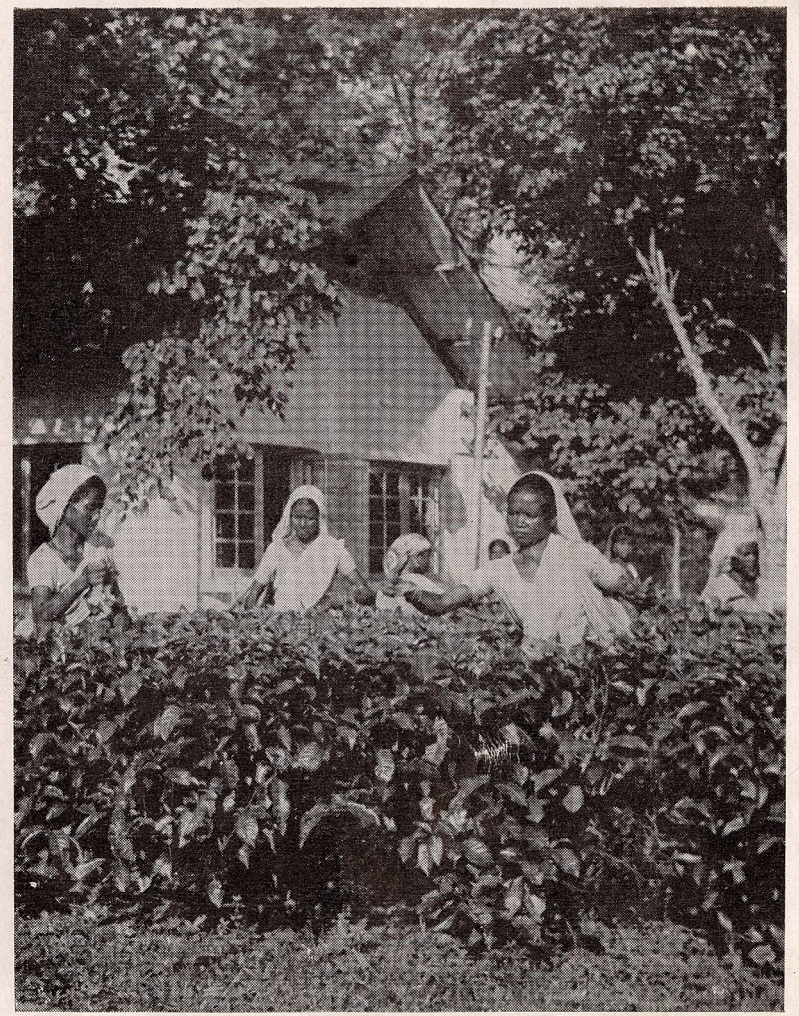
LANDMARKS IN INDIAN ANTHROPOLOGY



LAND MARKS IN INDIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

THE SAVARAS OF MANCOTTA

A Study on the Effects of Tea Industry on the Tribal Life.

KAR R.K.

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PREFACE

I am indebted to many scholars, directly and indirectly. Many of them will be found mentioned in the 'References'. If I have inadvertently adopted or adapted where I should have sought permission, I hope it will be excused as oversight or ignorance.

My direct indebtedness must be attached to my reverend guide, Dr. B. M. Das, Professor and Head of the Department of Anthropology, Dibrugarh University, but for whom the dream of completing this discourse would not have come to a reality. Weighted inspiration intoxicated with valuable information and assiduous guidance of Prof. Das all through my work—as the safety lamp belted in the head of the miner leads him to the search of hidden treasure of nature—have led me to this day of writing this acknowledgement. In all my activities I have always found him one source of sustained strength and constant encouragement.

My thankful memory should hot fail to recollect the valuable help and cooperation I have received from Dr. A. C. Bhagabati, Reader in Anthropology, Gauhati University, Dr. N. C. Choudhury, offg Director, Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta, and Dr. A. K. Das, Deputy Director, Cultural Research Institute, West Bengal in plucking books and materials of reference that have a substantial impact over my entire arena of works. Banking on their vast scholarship and stimulating experience, I profited to my heart's content.

It is high time, if not late, to mention at this stage the warm sincerity and active cooperation of the people of Mancotta tea estate; my beloved subjects of study. While I express my deep sense of respect and gratitude to these frank and sincere people, I record a thankful note of Mr. Sharma and Mr. Singh, the two consecutive Managers of Mancotta tea estate and the staff of the office, for their respective levels of

assistance, cooperation and guidance in collecting the relevant information for the (present) study. My special thanks should, however, go to Shri N. K. Ghosh of Mancotta tea estate but for whose active cooperation, the start of my field work would not have been so easier as it has actually been. At this stage, I do also owe my grateful thanks to Nature, which conspired with the people of Mancotta to provide the right degree of rain and sunshine to match the exact climate of my field work.

My undying gratitude to my beloved teacher, Dr. R. P. Srivastava, at present Reader in Anthropology, Karnatak University, Dharwar, who germinated the very discipline in me and instilled in me the quest for better understanding of human nature.

While I dip my respectful salute to Shri J. N. Das, Vice-Chancellor, Dibrugarh University for his constant patronization in conducting research work, I recall with equal note of appreciation the valuable financial assistance extended by the University Grants Commission in prosecuting the entire programme.

My thanks are also reserved for Dr. (Mrs.) I. Barua, U.G.C research fellow, Department of Anthropology, Dibrugarh University for her kind allowance in utilising her Ph D. thesis as an object of reference, and to Shri R. Deka, her direct colleague, for giving me maximum company in academic dialogues and discussions. At the same time, I thank all my colleagues who either inspired me to move faster or helped me to reconsolidate my determination to move faster, towards the attainment of my cherished goal.

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I like to register my special thanks to Dr. M. N. Bora, Head of Assamese Department, Dibrugarh University, who obliged me with his occasional but significant suggestions.

Finally, I remember my very personal intellectual mate, Shri A. B. Ghosh Biswas, M. Sc. He has long been a catalytic agent in my academic aspirations. With a sense of reverence, I do remember him.

There are still many who came to my way in the course of my activity, and extended their selfless cooperation, sincere help and valuable assistance. If my poor memory fails to recollect all those great minds, my sense of gratitude and thankfulness shall never fail to pay my due appreciation to all of them.

In conclusion, but for the ungrudging and sincere cooperation of Shri B. C. Gogoi, and Shri P. K. Gogoi, the thesis would not have come out in its present format in such record time, and I tender them my greteful thanks.

Dated, Dibrugarh University
the 3 December, 1975

RAMENDRA KUMAR KAR

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A.I Tea Plantation in Assam

India's place in the world tea market is now unquestionably very high. India exports about 40% of the world's total exports by weight but over 50% by value.

The leading provinces in respect of tea industry are Assam and West Bengal. The area devoted for this purpose in Assam is 182,325 hectares (51%) and in West Bengal is 88,499 hectares (25%), the total all India figure being 356,519 hectares as it stood in 1971.[1] In fact we find that the cultivation of tea is practically restricted to the table land of Assam with its two adjacent districts Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri of West Bengal and to the elevated regions of Malabar Coast and Nilgiri regions of South India.

Detailed literatures discussing the origin and stages of development of tea industry in India and Assam is not available. Nevertheless an overall and a pictorial idea of the development of this industry in this country has been presented here on the basis of the writings of Crawford (1924), Das (1931), Bhuiyan (1960), Mukherjee (1961), Kapur (1961), Danda (1962), Desai (1962), Banerjee (1963), Barua (1963) Das and Banerjee (1964), Kidwai (1964), Griffiths (1967) and some other sources like newspapers, tea publications, and census publications etc.

1. *Tea statistics* 1972-'73.

The origin of tea plantation in India can be traced as back as to 1774. At that time when China tea seeds began to arrive in India, Warren Hastings made a selection of them and sent to George Bogle, the then British emissary in Bhutan. No practical results seem to have followed. In 1778 he asked Sir Joseph Banks to prepare a series of notes for the East India Company on the cultivation of new crops, and there he advocated the cultivation of tea in India. After a series of prolonged discussions, they arrived at the conclusion that black tea grew best between the 26th and 30th parallel of latitude, and green tea between the 30th and 35th.

Banks gave priority to tea as 'an article of the greatest national importance' to Britain. But, nothing happened for a long time, and many thought that the East India Company, having the monopoly of China tea trade, did not take sincere interest in the possibility of tea growing in India and indeed discouraged any such development. In 1793 a mission was sent to China to obtain detailed information about the cultivation and manufacture of tea. But nothing substantial came out

The next 2 or 3 decades formed a troublous period when the administrators were pre-occupied with other important matters. Nevertheless, in 1815 Colonel Latter noticed the tea-drinking habits of Assam tribes, and in 1816 the British resident at Kathmandu in Nepal sent to Calcutta what he described as a tea plant. Very surprisingly, it took some 18 years for the recognition of this, Assam tea to be a genuine and indigenous variety. This probably leads some people to claim that the home of this shrub is the province of Assam from where it spread to China in the 3rd century A.D. and to Europe by the Dutch and to England around 1645 (Seligman, 1957). Bhuiyan (1960) claims that Moniram Dewan first informed C.A. Bruce of the tea plant in Assam. In 1823 when they chased the Man towards Patkai, Moniram Dewan and C.A. Bruce found two tea plants with Bisagam in Singpho kingdom. It will not be irrelevant to note here th t the hills and forest of Assam (in places like Sadiva Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Tezpur, and Mongoldai etc.) had wild tea plants since long. The Singphos used to call

it *Fanpe*, and the English called it Tea, word tea originates probably from the Chinese *Thea*, (some maintain that in China it was called *Cha* or *Tscha*). Any way, after sometime C.A Bruce (colonel surgent), Moniram Dewan, Bholanath Parbatia Phookan, Badingfield (*Birimfil*) went to Singpho land to re-organize Sadiya. There, Baningfield offered a cup of Chinese tea to Bisagam, and then again, at the request of Moniram Dewan, the Bisagam collected some tea plants from the forest and gave those to Badingfield. It is said that in Assam the use of tea liquor as medicine in cold and fever was in practice long before. It was Moniram Dewan who tried to convince the *Shaheb* that the tea plantation in Assam needs proper care. Lord Bentinck, the then Governer General of India, formed a Tea Committee to make a detailed investigation in Assam. In December 1834, the committee announced, "the tea shrub is beyond all doubt indigenous in Upper Assam. . . within the territories, from Sadiya and Beesa. . . ."[2]

The committee was then determined to follow up the Assam discovery with vigour and formed a scientific panel that was deputed to proceed to Assam. In 1836 they searched systematically for tea jungles, they analysed soils, and collected seeds. Tea was found to be far more widely scattered in Assam than had been realized and the new discoveries were set forth in *Asiatic Journal*, 1836.

But, the committee soon was divided on various issues, viz., selection of seeds and plants (Chinese or Assamese or the hybridized ones), selection of the most suitable localities in India for the growing of tea, the variety of tea (quality) to be grown and manufactured at the initial stage, etc.

The Government of India, confronted with this conflict of expert views, decided to try all the areas that had been suggested, and the available China seeds were divided in the sub-Himalayn areas, Upper Assam, and South India. The results in (*i*) South India were unsuccessful, (*ii*) the Sub-Himalayan

2. Cited in *The History of the Indian Tea Industry* (Griffiths, 1967:40)

areas were reasonably successful, but it was in Assam that the most satisfactory results were obtained.

The seeds from China were planted experimentally in Botanical Garden in Calcutta, in Nainital, and at a site some 28 km away from Dibrugarh. That site was named *Cha-Bua* (place where tea was planted) and now the name of the place has been Chabua. The seeds were planted in Chabua in 1837.

At that time Mr. Bruce (brother of Major Bruce) was appointed as the Superintendent of tea gardens in Assam. In 1839, a sample of 12 chests of green tea sent to London could be put to auction on January 10, and with this successful manufacture of tea in Assam by the Chinese technique, the experimental stage was considered to be at an end.

By that time (1839) there were nurseries planted with China seeds at places like Jaipur, Chabua, Chota Tingri, Hukanpukuri, Jorhat, Nazira, and Gavru. One nursery with indigenous plant was established at Sadiya, near the official China nursery. At the same time, tracts of indigenous tea had been discovered in many parts of Upper Assam, and native Chiefs had been encouraged to care for them. In all one hundred and twenty tracts of indigenous tea had been discovered by that time.

In the beginning Mr. Bruce took help of some Chinese workers to open the gardens, to pluck the leaves, and to manufacture finished tea. At that time all the stages were worked with hand. No factory developed. Further, the labourers were also not brought from other places. The local Assamese people were working in the tea gardens. They were called *Chah-Takela*. Occasionally the Nagas also worked in tea gardens.

However, the high prices fetched by the tea sent home in 1838-39 at once attracted the attention of enterprising businessmen alike in Calcutta and London. Early in 1839 the Bengal Tea Association was formed in Calcutta and a few weeks later preliminary steps were taken by a separate group of individuals for the formation of the Assam Company in London.

The two concerns did not remain separate; they at once decided to amalgamate. A deed of settlement regulating the constitution of the company in the meantime, was executed. According to this deed, the Calcutta directors were to be

responsible for 'superintending and conducting all the business af the company in India' subject to any directions for their guidance given by the London directors. At the end company was incorporated in India under an Act of the Indian Legislature and it was not until 1865 that it was incorporated in the United Kingdom, so that, in effect, a rupee company then became a sterling company and control definltely passed to London.

In march 1840 practically all the East India Company's plantations, except those at Chabua and Dinjoy and two other small gardens were handed over to the Assam Company, rent free for 10 years. The East India Campany already had tea in stock ready for sale. In March 1841, the first government sale of tea in India took place. The auction was held in Calcutta by Mackenzie Lyall and Company and it appears that the sale consisted of 35 chests manufactured by the Singpho Chiefs and 95 chests produced on the government tea plantations in Assam in the season 1840.

The Assam Company now divided its properties into a Northern and Southern Division, and placed these division under the charge of C.A. Bruce, and J.W. Masters respectively. In addition to cultivating the plantations handed over by the government, the Assam Company took leases from the government of jungle lands containing tea bushes, and set to work to prune and recondition them. The leases were presumably taken under the Assam Waste Rule of 1838, which provided for 20 years' rent-free occupation, to be followed by an increasing scale of rent for the next 25 years, at the end of which period the land would be assessed at a rate not higher than that of the neighbouring rice lands.

It was soon necessary to create a new Eastern Division, and one J. Parker was placed in charge of it. By 1842 there were 1,645 acres of tea in the Southern Division, and 666 acres in the Northern and Eastern Divisions.

The company's first troubles arose from their attempts to import labour. It was stated in the company's reports of 1840 that all Bruce's exertions had been checked and baffled by the want of labourers.

Despite these difficulties early results seemed not unhopeful.

In 1840 the area under tea was 2,638 acres, and 10,202 lbs of tea were shipped to London on the *Helen May*. The estimated production by 1845 was 320,000 lbs.

In August 1841, Buckland became the first secretary of the tea company in India. But, the output being too much below the expectations, drastic retrenchment was now undertaken and certain gardens were closed. In 1846 an unjustifiable dividend was paid, presumably to boost the morale of the share holders.

In 1847 one Mr. Stephen was appointed as Superintendent in Assam, and it seems after that the company's fortunes rapidly began to improve. The company made a profit in 1848, in the following year Tingri and other gardens were reopened. By 1850, the company's debt was cleared. A true dividend was paid in 1852 and at last it had been shown that tea in Assam could be made to pay even though yields averaged only about 200 lbs/acre.

In 1849, the East India Company sold its remaining gardens to a Chinese employed at Chabua who resold Chabua (and presumably the other small gardens started by East India Company) to James Warren, the founder of a distinguished family of tea proprietors.

Till 1853 tea-plantation was confined to Sibsagar and Dibrugarh districts only. Private gardens were also started by 1850-51, and by 1853 there were 3 private gardens in Sibsagar and 6 near Dibrugarh.

In 1853 George Williamson Senior and his cousins, two brothers George Williamson Junior and Captain J.H. Williamson applied for a lease of 720 acres of land at Cinnemara and began cultivation at once although the formal lease was not taken until 1856. By 1857, 200 acres of tea were in production with a yield of 45,000 lbs. But, again and again in the early days labour was to prove the limiting factor in production.

Nevertheless by 1859 there were in Assam 51 tea gardens owned by private individuals or private firms—10 in Dibrugarh, 15 in Sibsagar, 3 in Darrang, and the remaining in Kamrup and Nowgong. These developments naturally drew the attention of the government of Bengal (which then included Assam) to the conditions under which waste lands were to be leased

for clearance and cultivation. It resulted into the formation of the *Old Assam Waste Land Rules, 1854*. The rules were revised and a new set of rules, known as *The Fee Simple Rules* were published in 1862, at the time of Lord Canning. But, the agitation against this system was so effective that in 1864 government reverted to the earlier system of leases.

In 1858 preliminary steps were taken for the establishment of a second tea company in India. The Jorhat Tea Company was incorporated in 1859 with a capital of £ 60,000, and chose William Roberts as its first chairman. In the beginning it purchased Cinnemara, Oating, and Kaliabar gardens. Tea cultivation in Cachar district was started in 1855 or 1856.

The company made a remarkable development in first five years, and it experienced no difficulty in increasing its capital in 1862. By this time annual tea production in Assam had risen to 1,250,000 lbs. 57 private individuals or private companies and 5 public companies owned 160 gardens. The public companies were the Assam company, the Jorhat Tea Campany, The East India Tea Company, the Lower Assam Tea Company, and the Central Assam Tea Company.

By today (*Tea statistics* 1972-'73), there are 750 tea gardens in Assam (all India total is 12,015) with the total yield of 223.7 million kgs of tea (all India figure is 435.5 million kgs).

The foregoing account makes it clear that tea industry in India in general, and in Assam in particular has passed through the different phases of boom and slump period to reach the present stage which may be considered somewhat steady. The chief contributing factors for such fluctuations are weather condition, labour supply, and market price. Our national government has given proper attention to develop this plantation industry. In May 1962, government of India appointed an Investigation Committee under the leadership of Shri Rajaram Rao to investigate the various difficulties which stood as a bar against the development of this industry. Due consideration has been given to the recommendations made by this Committee.

A. II Method of recruitment of tea plantation labourers in Assam at different periods

It has already been pointed out that all the exertions to expand tea industry in early days had been checked and baffled by the want of labourers. In the first half of the 19th century, the lands now occupied by the Assam tea plantations were mainly dense and uninhabitable jungles. In the clearings of these jungles, the local people were reluctant to take employment as they enjoyed an economy that was almost self-sufficient, while the population of the more developed parts of Assam were usually neither inclined nor compelled by circumstances to leave home in search of work. Consequently, the labourers were recruited from various cultural, linguistic, and ethnic heritages from many other provinces; mainly from Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Madras. And the desperate poverty of the countryside probably made available this supply of huge labour group that was eager to move into any sort of industry, as opportunity appeared.

In 1841 the Assam Company first attempted to import labour from Chotanagpur. An outbreak of cholera proved disastrous and none of the recruits reached the company's gardens. Further attempts to obtain local labourers were also not successful.

These attempts had been going on sporadically ever since 1841. During those days "the general plan of recruitment was that certain persons were appointed by the planters as recruiting agents in certain localities. These persons were known as *arkatis*.* The localities chosen were those places where labour would be easy to procure. These places were known as labour recruiting districts. Chotanagpur, the Santal Parganas etc., were noted for famines and acute food scarcity, which were partly due to natural calamities, but mainly to the oppressive system of land revenue adopted by the government to enhance its own revenue. This compelled a major section of the people to live in a 'floating condition'. They could

* Literally means pilot

neither maintain themselves on their land nor get any alternative source of livelihood. Most of them, before finally being compelled to give up their lands, had to incur heavy debts which always hung on their necks, even after they had become complete paupers (Bose, 1954:69). These people were the main targets of the *arkatis*.

The labourers recruited through the *arkatis* were transported to the plantations at the expense of the planters. At the time the health condition prevailing in the newly cleared plantations was extremely bad. The report of the Commissioner for the year 1862 shows that in some tea plantations of Nowgong, the death rate was as high as 413.33 per thousand. It is, therefore, quite expected that the labourers were not always very enthusiastic about their new situations.

In order to stimulate recruiting, the planters appear to have fixed Rs. 5.00 per month as the wage of an imported labour in comaprison with the figure of Rs. 2.50 which had prevailed a few years earlier. By that time the practice of importing labour was growing and in 1858 and 1859, 400 labourers were imported into Cachar from Benares, Ghazipore, Chotanagpur, and Bihar.

In 1859, the government enacted the Workmen's Breach of Contract Act (Act XIII of 1859) whose preamble runs as follows:

"Whereas much loss and inconvenience are sustained by manufacturers, tradesmen and others in several Presidency towns of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay and in other places, from fundamental breach of contract on the part of the artificers, workmen and labourers who have received money in advance on account of work which they have contracted to perform and whereas the remedy by suit in the Civil Courts for the recovery of damages is wholly insufficient, and it is just and proper that persons guilty of such fraudulent breach of contract should be subject to punishment" (cited in Bose, 1959: 69-70).

As all categories of labour fell under the scope of this Act, the planters took advantage of it to compel their labourers to work even against their will.

The Act thus rendered the labourer liable to prosecution

for any breach of contract, but gave him no protection against the employer and laid down no conditions with regard to the arrangements for his transit to the tea districts.

Soon after the boom of 1859, the Tea Planters Association was formed for this purpose and about the same time the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal advised the planters to adopt an organized system of recruitment. But they failed to respond to this suggestion and to adopt any definite policy. As a result various systems of recruitment developed. This may be considered under two general headings, namely, the contractor's system and the *sardari* system.

The contractor system

The earliest recruiting of labour for Assam tea gardens was done by contractors. Since there was no restriction upon the contractors, the system became known as the free contractor's system. It led, however, to some gross abuses, such as deception in recruitment, insanitary conditions at the depot and on steamers and countryboats, and heavy mortality on the way to labour districts. "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 the voyage up, while many of the immigrants were of caste or constitution which precluded all hope of their surviving many months in the jungles of Assam".[3]

In 1861, an Enquiry Committee was formed by the government of Bengal to investigate into the unsatisfactory state of affairs in labour recruitment. It was found that mortality on the voyage to Assam commonly reached 10 to 12%. While on one occasion it had been as high as 50%, and as the contractors seem to have been paid in full even when the coolies* died on the way, most of them made no attempt to secure cleanliness or provide satisfactory food.

3 Vide report of Assam Labour Enquiry Committee 1906

* The word 'coolie' is now considered derogatory and has been replaced in official documents, but not in common parlanee, by 'labourer' or *mazdoor*.

As a result of this inquiry, the first Inland Emigration Act, Bengal Act III of 1863, was passed to control emigration to Assam. This Act provided that all recruiters should be licensed, that every intending emigrant should be produced before the magistrate of his own district, should be examined as to his willingness and physical fitness to emigrate, and then should be sent to a central depot, where he was put under contract (not exceeding a period of four years). The steamers and boats carrying the coolies to the labour districts were also licensed. The Act did not apply to a labourer who came to Assam without the intervention of a recruiter or contractor, but this exception meant little in practice.

But, the Act did not protect the labourer after his arrival on the garden, nor did it give the employer any remedy other than recourse to Act XIII of 1859, or Section 492 of I.P.C., or the ordinary civil law against a coolie who, having been recruited at considerable expense, refused to work, or left the garden. The Act was, in fact, soon found to be inadequate, particularly when the tea mania of the early sixties temporarily attracted to the tea industry a low and often unscrupulous type of European, against whom the labourer clearly needed protection. It was found that even the licensed recruiters employed a horde of unlicensed sub-recruiters, and labourers were induced to emigrate by misrepresentation, that registration in the district of recruitment was not an effective check on the abuses. Thus, after a short experience of garden life many labourers wished to leave. The planter, however, was bound by his grant to clear 1/8th of his land within 5 years and usually could not afford to lose labour. Compulsion was therefore applied to unwilling coolies. Short work was punished with flogging and absconders, when recovered, were also flogged.

Bengal Act III of 1863 was amended to Bengal Act VI in 1865. It prescribed minimum wages, limited hours of work (9 hours per day, and 6 days per week), and laid down that contracts with immigrant labour must not extend beyond three years. Every estate was required to maintain a hospital. A protector and an Inspector of labourers were appointed and empowered to visit gardens to supervise everything including the authority-labour relation.

This Act also did not work satisfactorily, and in 1868 a Commission of Enquiry was appointed by the government of Bengal to examine the state and prospects of tea cultivation in Assam (including Sylhet). It found that coolies were still induced to emigrate by misrepresentation. Though cases of gross cruelty were becoming rare, the death rate on many gardens as a result of bad housing, overcrowding, impure water, and insufficient or unsuitable food was appalling.

The commissioners made an important and constructive proposal. They advocated recruitments by gardens themselves, through the agency of garden *sardars* sent to the recruiting districts.

The complete freedom recommended by the commission for *sardari* recuiting was not accepted by the government of Bengal. Bengal Act II of 1870 indeed recognized *sardari* recruiting, but continued the provisions of the Act of 1863 and 1865 regarding medical examination, the signing of the contract before the coolie was despatched to the tea districts, and supervision of conditions of transit to the tea gardens. The minimum wage provisions of the Act of 1865 were abolished, but the arrangement for inspection of labour conditions on tea gardens was continued. From the passing of this Act up to 1915, there thus continued only those two methods (contractor's and *sardari* system) for recruiting labour-force in tea-plantations in Assam.

Progressive views were gradually gaining ground and the distrust of contractors was growing. The enlightened planters soon came to favour *sardari* recruitment. Simultaneously, attempts to recruit local labour continued. Recruits began to be available in increasing numbers from immigrants who had decided not to return home at the expiration of their contract and had settled down permanently in the tea districts. These local labourers were in fact what are now known in Assam as *faltus*—casual outside labourers, employed when required.

At that time, recruiting through garden sardars was growing in popularity and the sardars usually brought recruits to the tea districts under no contract. After they arrived on the garden, a contract enforceable under Act XIII of 1859 was executed. Although this practice was illegal, the authorities

did not consider it unsound and Bengal Act VII of 1873 therefore permitted free recruitment outside the provisions of the Act, provided the relevant contract did not extend over a term of more then one year.

Another commisston was appointed by the government of India to examine the working of Bengal Act VII of 1873 and to consider methods of fostering emigration to Assam. It reported in January 1881. The commission was much impressed with the desirability of freer recruiting; Assam no longer remained a *terra incognita*.

The commissioners' Report led to the passing of Bengal Act I, 1882. The Act introduced 3 useful changes in the law, *i*) it introduced a statutory minimum wage, subject to completion of the daily task, *ii*) it gave Inspectors power to reduce scheduled tasks, and *iii*) it provided for payment of subsistence allowance in case of sickness. This Act came to be known as 'Dhubri System' under which contractors could escape from all the obligations of the Act by sending their coolies to Dhubri* and recruiting them there.

The object of the Act of 1882 was to do away with the contractor's system. It had, however, the opposite effect and gave rise to many abuses. In order to remove some of these evils, the Government of Bengal enacted the Act of 1889 empowering local governments to prescribe routes of travel, accommodation, food supplies and other arrangements for labourers *enroute* to labour district in Assam. Abuses, however, continued to exist and even to increase. In 1895, the Commission, appointed by the government of Bengal to enquire into labour supply for large industries, recommended the abolition of the free contractor's system and the introduction of the system of initial registration in all recruiting districts.

The Act of 1901 giving effect to these recommennations made licensing and registration more definite by the following provisions : (*1*) closing of any area to recruitment by unlicensed contractors, (*2*) examination of intending emigrants as to

* Dhubri is the headquarters of Goalpara district in Assam.

their free consent to come to Assam without any coercion, undue influence, fraud, misrepresentation or mistake, and (*3*) enquiry as to the consent of husband, lawful guardians or other relatives in case of a woman.

In 1906, the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee found that the most unprincipled of the recruiters were the up-country men who were responsible for most of the abuses in connection with recruitment. The Committee recommended that a certificate should be taken from contractors as to the character of the recruiters working under them, and that only the native of a district should be licensed for recruiting in that locality. As a result of these recommendations recruitment by unlicensed contractors was abolished by the governments of Assam and Bangladesh (erstwhile East Bengal) in 1908.

In 1915, a radical change was made by Act VIII of that year, which abolished the contractor and the *arkatti* and made garden *sardars* the only recruiting agents in the recruiting districts.

The garden sardari system

The *sardar* is only known by that name during the time he is employed in the recruiting districts; he is in fact nothing more than a garden coolie, and on return to his garden reverts to his work as a coolie, and beyond being paid a commission on the persons he recruits he has no further interest in them.

Garden *sardars*, including both men and women were sent out by planters every year in the recruiting season, which generally began in November and lasted for 3 to 4 months. They induced men and women to come to tea-gardens in Assam, showing all the advantages of work and prospects of ultimate settlement in independent holdings. Some of the prospective emigrants desired to join their relatives already in tea-gardens, whilst others were forced to do so by poverty and scarcity at home. There were still others who came as adventurers. Planters preferred labourers to come with their families as in that case they were more likely to stay permanently on gardens.

"The remuneration of the *sardar* formerly consisted of a bonus varying from Rs. 5.00 to Rs. 40.00 according to the custom of the garden and the class of labourers recruited, but

he generally received no pay while in recruiting districts. While recruiting, he received from the local agent a first advance, generally amounting to Rs. 10.00. As a rule no account was given of how this money was spent, as it was considered a necessary preliminary to enable the *sardar* to show some hospitality in his village. Subsequent advances, generally Rs. 10.00, were made when the recruitment was going on, care being taken that the total of advances, excluding the preliminary advance, should not greatly exceed Rs. 10.00 per head of the emigrants brought in. In some cases the debts of intending immigrants were paid up, but this was usually done by local agents. An account of the advances given and other expenditure incurred was then made up and sent to garden, so as to enable the garden to settle up with the *sardar*. On return to the garden, the *sardar* received his bonus, minus the advances made to him. If the advances paid to him exceeded the bonus he should receive, the balance was not generally recorded." (Das 1931 : 70-78).

But the Act of 1915 was criticised by the planters on several grounds. Some of these have been indicated in the report of Rege Committee. "The Act of 1915 . . . limited recruiting to garden *sardars* holding a certificate from their employers and working under a licensed local agent. An estate wishing to obtain a collection from a district from which it had not previously recruited, had no option but to send down a garden *sardar*, who would be a stranger to the district and could not be depended on to bring in labour . . . . The Act of 1915 had successfully removed the contractor from the scene, but the limitations it imposed on the method of recruitment were undesirable and not in the best interests of either of the tea industry or the labourer."[4]

The Act XII of 1920 limited the period of local contract to one year. The annual contract under this Act involved an annual advance or bonus, which was naturally regarded with favour by labour. In some cases the payments were recoverable advances, but frequently there were just bonuses, in con-

4. Report of the Labour Investigation Committee, 1944 : 23.

sideration of renewal of agreement. They became known as *Girmit* (agreement) bonuses.

By 1921-22, some 270,000 labourers were working in Assam, and by 1926 some 600,000 ex-tea garden labourers had been able to settle on government land. "In spite of frank criticism of the less satisfactory features of tea-garden life, they regarded migration to Assam as in many cases an avenue of escape from destitution and even servitude". (Griffith 1967 : 283).

In 1926 the Royal Commission on Labour was appointed and among many other recommendations, the Commission opined that collective arrangements for forwarding were essential and if some estates were not willing to join the Tea District Labour Association, there would be no objection to the formation of other similar associations. In some areas they considered that even restrictions on forwarding could be removed and they recommended that the government of India should consider this possibility in areas not inhabited by aborigines.

The Commission also proposed that the Assam Labour Board—whose functions were confined to recruiting and forwarding—should be replaced by a Controller of Emigrant Labour, who would be concerned not only with these matters, but also with the welfare of the immigrants in Assam.

Act XXII of 1932 followed the general scheme of the Commission's recommendations. The main objects of the Act were to ensure that—

(*a*) recruits were volunteers,
(*b*) they knew the conditions of service and that estates adhered to the conditions of service set before the recruits,
(*c*) reasonable arrangements were made for forwarding the labourer from his home to Assam,
(*d*) the labourer was, unless he wished otherwise, repatriated to his home at the cost of the estate after three year's service.

Within the framework of the Act, recruitment was carried on through the Tea District Labour Association.

Labour recruiting organizations

Adequate material for the detailed history of the recruiting organizations has not been found. All that exists are a few sketchy details. It is clear from the foregone discussion that in 1859 a planters association was formed, and in the next few decades various recruiting organizations—including the Longai Valley Employers' Association, the General Coolie Recruiting Association, the Assam Labour Association (founded at an indeterminate date by eight tea companies), and a number of private recruiting firms—came into being. In 1892 Tea District Labour Supply Association was formed and took over some of the existing agencies, though the Assam Labour Association still continued to work independently. In 1917 the Assam Labour Association and the Tea Districts Labour Supply Association were amalgamated to form the Tea Districts Labour Association (T.D.L.A.). From 1920 onwards the T.D.L.A. was the only organization concerned with supervision of recruiting.

It is, however, important to remember again that in the early days, recruiters for Assam had acquired a bad reputation and the term 'Coolie-Catcher' had become a byword. To put an end to these abuses the industry established responsible, well-run recruiting organizations, the excellence of whose work was generally acknowledged.

In 1953 the question of recruitment of labour in Assam was raised from a wholly different angle. The government of Assam, seriously perturbed at the growth of unemployment and at the shortage of foodstuffs, suggested that recruitment of labour from outside the state of Assam should be curtailed or discontinued and that attempts should be made to induce labour from over-laboured estates to transfer to estates requiring additional labour. The Indian Tea Association, while not sanguine as to the results of such a scheme, shared the government's wishes and offered to co-operate in it. But, it was soon realised that there was a big gap between demand and supply from within the state. The government, therefore, permitted the recruitment of some 11,000 labourers in 1955.

By about 1959 recruitment from outside Assam had been reduced to almost negligible proportions and in 1960 recruit-

ment from outside was discontinued. The T.D.L.A. had no further functions to perform, and on Ist December, 1960 it was put into liquidation and thereby closing a chapter. According to 1971* census the average number of labour employed in the tea industries in Assam in a day was 397,370 (51.8% of the all India figure 766, 593).

B. The Problem

It is a truism in anthropology to say that changes have been occurring in all the societies and cultures since time immemorial. These changes, of course, have many shapes and may take place in various situations.

Without denying the relevance of self-propelled evolutionistic trends, we find that various factors have been playing their role in bringing about these changes. Barring social movements, emerging pattern of leadership etc., the changes may also be brought about due to contact with other communities, due to the effect of different welfare measures, etc. Industrialization may be considered as an important factor to initiate changes in the life of many societies, especially of the simpler ones.

Study of simpler (tribal) societies, in their contact with modern life and industry, provides an interesting phenomenon for anthropological study. It became a major concern of the students of social sciences only during the last two decades or so. It got a tremendous impetus from the UNESCO's consistent interest in the subject. The latter not only sponsored a series of regional surveys but set up some regional centres to study systematically the impact of industrialization on the traditional culture of the area.

Industrialization may be considered as a process of modernization in terms of economic growth (Moore 1963:91). Industry refers to orderly production of goods, to extractive and manufacturing activities, ordinarily involving the use of mechanical power (Moore 1964 : 15-6). Parson (1951 : 58) observes that an industrialized society is characterized by the preponderance of achievement standards in the distribution of

* Provisional.

economic roles and objects, universalistic criteria in this distribution process, and economic roles are typically functionally specific. In contrast, a non-industrial or tradition-oriented society exhibits the features of ascription, particularism, and functional diffuseness in the corresponding field of social action. Smelser (1963 : 33) observes that industrialization and economic growth give rise to the following ideal type structural changes, which have ramifications throughout the society :

(*i*) Structural differentiation, or the establishment of more specialized and more autonomous social units. It occurs in different spheres of economy, family, religion and stratification.

(*ii*) Integration, which changes its character as the old social order is made obsolete by the process of differentiation. The state of law, political groupings, and other associations are particularly salient in this integration, and

(*iii*) Social disturbances—mass hysteria, outbursts of violence, religious and political movements etc., which reflect the uneven advances of differentiation and integration respectively.

It is a general assumption that with the introduction of industry in non-industrial societies, social change takes place in the form of a chain reaction across time and space. Moore (1963 : 93-105) makes a series of generalizations in respect of changes in economic organization, and demographic, ecological, and social structure, as a direct consequence of destructive industrialization to some degree, and uniformly of extended kinship system, and traditional modes of social stratification. A number of frameworks for the analysis of the impact of industrialization and modernization on the social order, and on the person have emerged. Among these are the distinction between 'organic' and 'mechanical' solidarity (*Durkheim 1893), between 'community' and 'society' (*Tonnis 1897), and between 'folk' and 'urban' ways of life (*Redfield 1930, *Worth 1938). The chief effects of industrial living on

* Cited in Smelser's 'Mechanisms of change and Adjustment to change' in *Industrialization and Society* (ed. Hoselitz, B. F., and W. E. Moore), Mouton- UNESCO, 1963: 209

personal level are, probably, discernible in the changed nature of the interpersonal relations, and in the relative flexibility of personal patterns of behaviour. On the cultural and social level they are to be found in the changed nature of the forces making for cohesion, in the changed genesis and function of social institution, and in the changed structure and role of government.

The effect of industry on society, particularly in the newly developing countries, has been widely varied. Let us cite a few cases; in Africa, money wages and industrial work have been accompanied by the separation of the wage earner from his village, with his consequent removal from the sanctions and social controls of tribal society (Nash, 1958 : 113). For instance, marriage has become more a matter of personal choice rather than arrangement between groups in which the elders have a dominant say. Cash has substituted partly or wholly all the gifts or services included in the marriage formalities (Mair, 1953 : 1-171).

Nash (1955 : 271-77), relying on a wide survey of the effects of village industrialization in South and East Asia holds that, "Social disruption and cultural disintegration have been regular concomitants of industrial production in that part of the world". He, of course, maintains that sources of social stress cannot be ascribed to the factory as such; there are other political and ideological factors which alongwith urban-bred notions of personal relations accompany the industry in rural areas and bring the consequent changes in the peasant life.

Nash's (1958) study of the effects of industrialization in a Guatemalan community at Cantel is unparallel in several respects. It is the study of a single factory in a pre-dominant rural setting. The study shows that the introduction of factories in peasant societies may not necessarily bring "drastic chain of social, cultural and psychological consequences implied in the concept of revolution". Although the life of Cantel has changed since the introduction of the factory, by and large it has remained tradition-oriented.

The social implication of industrialization is worth studying in a country like India where, on the one hand about

80% of the population depend on agriculture even today as their base economy, and on the other hand, India, since independence, has been giving enough stress on the industrial development of the country for the betterment of the economic system, and for making the country self-sufficient in every respect as far as possible. Thus, the entire economic structure of an industrially under-developed country like India is supposed to be modified to a certain extent due to this unfamiliar pressure of industrialization. At the initial stage it definitely disturbs the socio-religious and economic life of the local inhabitants of those places. Secondly, it brings so many new persons of different castes and creeds through employment in contact with one another and with the people of the surrounding localities, resulting in a drastic change in their corporate living.

Specific studies bearing upon this problem in India are singularly rare. Whatever has been done in this field appears to be concerned with the labour situation, labour performance and the industrial development *per se* rather than to codify the impact of industry on the society.

For example, Morris De Morris, in a study of the industrial workers of the iron and steel factory at Jamshedpur and the textile workers of Bombay, remarks, "The shift from traditional, rural agricultural occupations to modern, urban, industrial occupations has not been difficult as has usually been assumed" (1960 : 184-85). In general he finds caste was un-important in the industry. Wherever caste appeared as a category, it was structurally different from that in the village. In the transition from village to factory the institution seems to have undergone a major transformation which lumped all clean-caste Hindus together and pitted them against all untouchable caste groups (Morris 1965 : 202). In the factory situation, it appears, the language, the region and the religion are operationally more relevant criteria than the caste, to make distinctions within the work-force (ibid : 202).

While Morris's concern has been primarily to refute the view that traditionalism is an impediment to the industrial development in India, Bose is directly interested in the social conse-

quences of this phenomenon. He holds that with the shift in the hereditary occupational base of the caste system, under the impact of industrialization, the edifice of the traditional caste system is bound to disintegrate.

"It is here suggested that, precisely because the impact of the modern world came to India chiefly in the form of an alternative system of production (no matter that it was colonial in character and subject to the dominant interests of British imperialism), the chief basis of loyalty to the caste system was demolished very nearly to completeness" (Bose, 1958 : 410).

Lambert, after studying five factories in Poona, concludes that the full hierarchy of caste is poorly reflected in the factory rankings. It appears, a shift from the ascribed to the achieved status, as the basis of hierarchical ranking, has taken place. Similarly, there has been a rise in the aspiration levels and the tendency to tie aspirations to job performance (Lambert, 1963 : 215).

As regards the effects of industry in general, and tea industry in particular, on the life of the tribals, it may be mentioned that very few studies have been made in this direction. The census publication of 1961 on social and economic processes in tea plantations with special reference to tribal labourers,[5] the report of the project, "Impact of Technology on some Aboriginal Peoples of Bihar", by the Department of Anthropology, Lucknow University,[6] and by the Department of Anthropology Ranchi University (*Socio-cultural implications of industrialisation in India* : *Tribal Bihar—a case study* by Vidyarthi, L.P.), and Das and Banerjee's (1962, 1964) reports on the impact of industrialization and tea industry respectively on the life of the tribals of West Bengal do not deal with any specific group or with details of behaviour. These are general survey type accounts of the socio-economic changes that were supposed to have taken place in the economic, social and psychological spheres of the tribal cultures of the areas.

5. Vol I, part VII A.
6. Cited in *Industrialization and Society*, by Hoselitz, B. F. and W. E. Moore (ed), Mouton : UNESCO, 1963 : 420.

Dasgupta (1964) finds that though the Santals of Chittaranjan area have taken to industrial jobs (mostly as unskilled labourers), the industry has not yet altered the basic features of Santal culture. Sarma (1962), in an article on tribal community in the industrial context of Jamshedpur, mentions that the tribals have a preference for slum living and social segregation and greater ethnic consciousness. He finds that the basic formal Mundari socio-cultural system is still functioning in the industrial milieu. All these studies have been rather sketchy.

Bose, in an article on industrialization and its effects on the tribal life, makes some very pertinent observations :

"As tribal communities are brought rapidly under the influence of industrialization in contrast to the slower transformation under the influence of the caste, they thus first become comparatively individualized and then communally minded in order to protect their economic interest. In Chotanagpur, this has been leading to an increased awareness of their separateness from the aliens or Dikku, and also to a slower process of consolidation among the various Adivasi communities themselves. The latter is like the growth of a national unity among tribal people" (1962 ; 8).

Orans' study (1958, 1965) of the industrial Santals of Jamshedpur substantially corroborates the view of Bose. His studies show that the industrial employment, followed by increased educational facilities, separate income plus migration, the dispersal of the community, and inappropriate facilities in the urban environment, has led to weaken the traditional solidarity of the tribe. "Education becomes a mechanism of change", says M. Mead (1943:9). She continues, "Primitive education was a process by which continuity was maintained between parents and children . . . . Modern education includes a heavy emphasis upon the function of education to create discontinuities to turn the child of the peasant into a clerk, the farmer into a lawyer. . . ." With the weakening of kinship and village ties, individualism appears to be on the increase, particularly in the matter of spending the cash earnings and in the sphere of marriage. There has been a distinct shift from the arranged to unarranged marriages. On the positive side, there has been an increased emphasis on work, study

and rank attainment, and a concomitant discouragement of 'pleasure'. According to Orans industrial employment has resulted in the increased emulation of Hindu ideals and the consequent decrease in the traditional solidarity.

But this is only half of the picture of the industrial scene at Jamshedpur. A new solidarity, fostered by political democracy, has emerged and is trying to create a new direct bond among all the Santals, and the other tribals of the area (1958: 435-44, 47-122).

Thus, it is apparent that our knowledge about the impact of tea industry is still very limited. Hardly a few tribes have been touched upon though a huge number of them have been known to work in industrial establishment for quite some time. Regarding the impact of tea industry in particular, no other published works than those of Das and Banerjee (1964) and the census department, Government of India[7] could be made available during the course of the present study.

Recently, the Anthropological Survey of India has taken up a large-scale project in this direction which proposes to make a series of studies that will cover the lives of the tribals in cement factory, iron mine, coal mine, and tea plantation (Choudhury and Dasgupta, 1968 : 191).

Regarding the impact of the agro-based tea industry on the peoples involved in the process, it should specifically be noted that the fairly old tea-industry exerts some unique influence on the life of the people. It accommodates the unskilled labourers more or less permanently and encourages them to settle down over there. As this agro-based industry does not require technical specialists at every step of its technological operations, a large number of unskilled labourers including the tribals are found to be provided either permanently or temporarily in every cropping season in different operations like the preparation of land, manuring, transplanting, weeding, pruning, plucking, sorting, storing etc. Thus we find a considerable number of tribes and castes who migrated from different parts of the country some generations

7. 1961, Vol I, part VII-A.

ago, have now become fully settled and live in the rent-free quarters provided by the tea garden authorities. Most of these people were mere landless cultivators with no security of job for every day throughout the whole year. Moreover, it does not necessarily disturb the community life of the local inhabitants by ousting them, as its field of operation is usually situated far away from the habitable sites on the damp, marshy hill slopes. Even if it does so, this industry has the scope of providing the displaced persons with employment in the industry. They usually find themselves somewhat comfortable in working in this industry as it is quite akin to agriculture to which they are familiar for generations.

Since the middle of the 18th century, i.e., at the initial stage of this industry, a huge number of manual labourers from different tribal belts of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa used to be callected every season by simply alluring them with the help of 'brokers'. Only those peoples who did not have secured economy were initially tempted to participate in this sort of migration, and only very few of them could manage to go back. The rest of them were indirectly forced or tempted to settle down in the tea garden areas, and keeping thereby the manpower secured for the industry. Some people settled in the garden voluntarily for security of service only. It may be noted here that the labour force in Mancotta, the tea industry where the present work has been carried out, does not contain any local people.

Now, in the cases of those families settled in the tea garden for generations, and specially of those families who are permanently settled here for security of service, one may very reasonably be intellectually pre-occupied with certain pertinent queries : To what extent is the socio-economic life being influenced by the change in their economy, and also by the close and constant interactions on both social and economic levels with the peoples ; primarily of varied cultures and heritages through employment in tea garden ? How is the interpersonal relationship between the household members, as well as the family life moulded when every one in the family, including the females and minors, works in the plantation to earn their livelihood ? Does the routine bound duty stand

against the traditional rearing of children ? Is the traditional command of the father over the members of the family being affected ? Are the members of the family in particular and society in general, becoming individualistic ? Are the elderly members of the society losing their former respect and regard ? Have the people developed any new (non-traditional) pattern of spending the cash money, and if so, how does it influence the family economy, and family life as a whole ? Is there any impact of the economic independence on their moral life, specially with regard to sex and marriage ? What has happened to their traditional religious beliefs, sentiments, and practices in the context of their pre-occupation with industrial routine work ?

The present study has been undertaken to seek the possible answers of these 'pertinent queries' through an intensive empirical study among the Savaras in the setting of Mancotta tea industry in Assam, India. Where changes have been observed, attempts have been made to assess the direction and magnitude of the same.

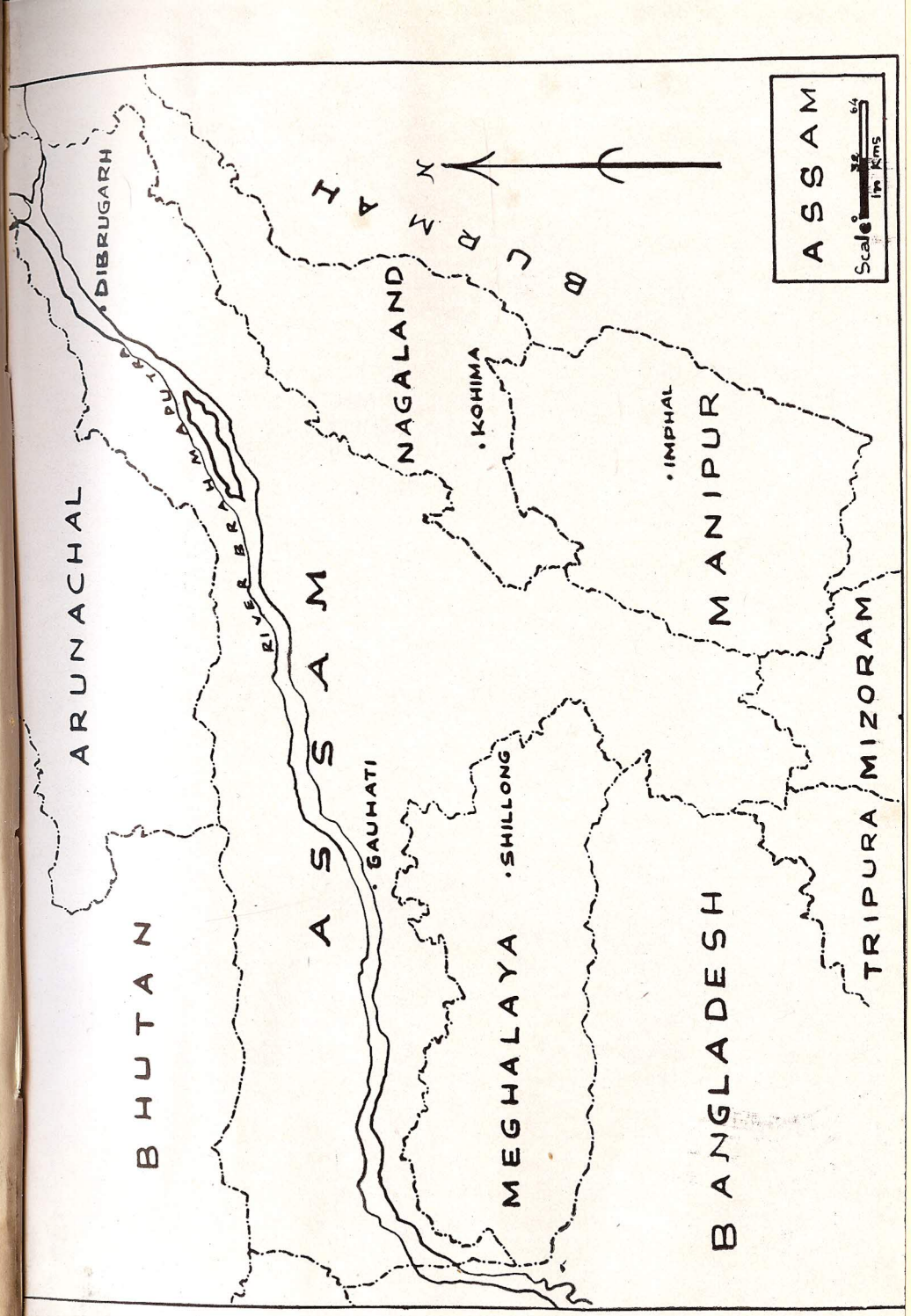
The plantation stands 5 km south of Dibrugarh town and is located approximately at 27°28' N latitude and 94°35' E longitude and 342' or 120.6 metres above the mean sea level.

There are 32 different tribe and caste groups, and 383 families that compose the total labour population of Mancotta. 53% of the households and 50.4% of the total population belong to the Savara tribe, and many of them have been in this garden for last 3 generations. Originally, they are a Dravidian speaking people, and inhabit mainly Orissa Considering the absolute majority and the substantial size of the Savara population, the study is directed to be focussed around the assessment of the detailed changes that have occurred in this tribal group due to the influence of the tea industry.

The study essentially will make an endeavour to know as to :

(*i*) The life of the immigrant tribal labour group in the tea industry,

(*ii*) The extent, the socio-economic life of the people is being influenced by the change in their economy, i.e., from agricultural economy to cash economy and also by the close and constant interactions on both social and economic levels



with the peoples, primarily of varied cultures and heritages through employment in the plantation,

(*iii*) The extent, their traditional leadership has been affected in the present context, and

(*iv*) The extent, this industrialization has helped the people to come out of the threshold of economic deprivation.

Mancotta has been chosen as the field of study mainly because ;

(*i*) The numerical strength of one particular group (the Savara) is reasonably large to allow us to conduct a study of the present type, and

(*ii*) establishment of rapport is expected to be easier because of earlier contact.

Besides, there are some physical conveniences to work in this garden ;

(*a*) it is nearer to Dibrugarh, the place where I work as a full-time teacher

(*b*) there are better means of transport and communication to approach it, and

(*c*) it is easily accessible even during rainy season, because of its location and having better communication means.

C. Methodology

Thanks to science and industrial revolution, the transformation of human society all over the world has acquired a speed for which there is no parallel in the past. We who are involved in these changes and are ourselves getting changed, find it naturally difficult to conceptualise the direction and rate of this transformation, just as passengers in a fast-moving plane lose the sense of speed in the absence of stationary objects within sight. Those who have lived sufficiently long are better able than younger people to comprehend the changes because they have landmarks in time against which to compare their experiences. If we have well documented social histories, our perception of change will be further refined.

The tribal scene in India, since independence, has changed in a manner which the future historian would consider revolutionary. In the following chapters an attempt is made to get an idea of some of these social changes that have occurred in

the life of a tribe under the impact of tea industry. In order to bring the theme to a focus, the field of observation is limited to the smallest possible unit, namely one of the immigrant tribal groups in Mancotta, a tea garden in Dibrugarh district, Assam, India.

Subject, however, to the obvious limitations, the general pattern of the dynamics of social change observed in our delimited field or 'representative microcosm' in Lloyd Warner's words, is valid for the tribal life in tea industry.

The present study on the 'impact of tea industry on the tribal life' is thus, methodologically a study of a single tribe in a particular tea garden. Since the economics has played very significant role in all the states and phases of the observed changes, a great deal of space has been devoted to the various aspects of the economic activities of the group.

A real measure of change cannot be obtained unless there are studies at two different points in time. One way the situation can be handled in a single study is to ask the individuals of the changes that they have made over a given period of time. Another (particularly with regard to non-material changes) is to fall back on literature, both impressionistic and systematic, to indicate the changes in a group of people. All that can be done in single studies is to present the data and indicate the trends rather than to make definite assertions about the changes that have taken place among the people.

The base line for the purpose of the present study has been constructed on the basis of :

(*i*) Oral traditions and memories of the people, in so far as they do not concern themes pertaining to family glory and personal pride, or those involving subjective idealization. The older and recently (comparatively) immigrated people were contacted for the purpose,

(*ii*) Elwin's (1955) ethnographic account of the people reflecting conditions of life and living in their traditional setting, and

(*iii*) reference materials as to the native Savaras recorded in some Government of India (census department) publications and some other occasional publications (in bits) by some anthropologists and scholars with allied orientation.

With regard to the forces of change, the procedures will be to present the data, and then to discuss the various genuine and tentative factors that might have brought about the change. But, in general, the force has been labelled as the 'impact of tea industry' as it is the primary force that led the people to be exposed to the influence of other related forces.

All the materials and also the changing trends, occasionally, alongwith the possible forces responsible for the particular situation, have conveniently been presented in a consolidated form.

Further, in the attempt to construct a complete picture of the people in the present setting, I have touched upon facets of contacts, direct and indirect, which they have experienced.

In the present study many methods have been combined to get as extensive information as possible of the group studied. The methods employed are, (*a*) observation both participant and non-participant, as conditions permitted, (*b*) Interviews, both individual and group, structured and unstructured, (*c*) filling in preliminary census forms for each family of the labour force (including the non-Savaras) giving vital statistics about demographic features and social structure, (*d*) Collecting genealogies, (*e*) studies of case histories and recording of the biography of some important people of the group. The use of combined methods, I feel, has helped in getting a deeper understanding of the community.

Field work procedures

The field of study being selected, I visited the garden for a couple of days, spending considerable periods of time just getting acquainted with the people. These initial contacts were used to inform the people about the nature of the study and to give some indications as to the type of questions they might have to answer. These preliminary procedures and a peripheral identification contributed much to obtaining a good entry and rapport in the field.

To proceed with the investigation, at first, a complete census of the labour force of the plantation was made; the schedule included questions on demography, income, occupa-

tion, education, land-holding, emigration, some aspects of social structure, and valuable material possession including livestock.

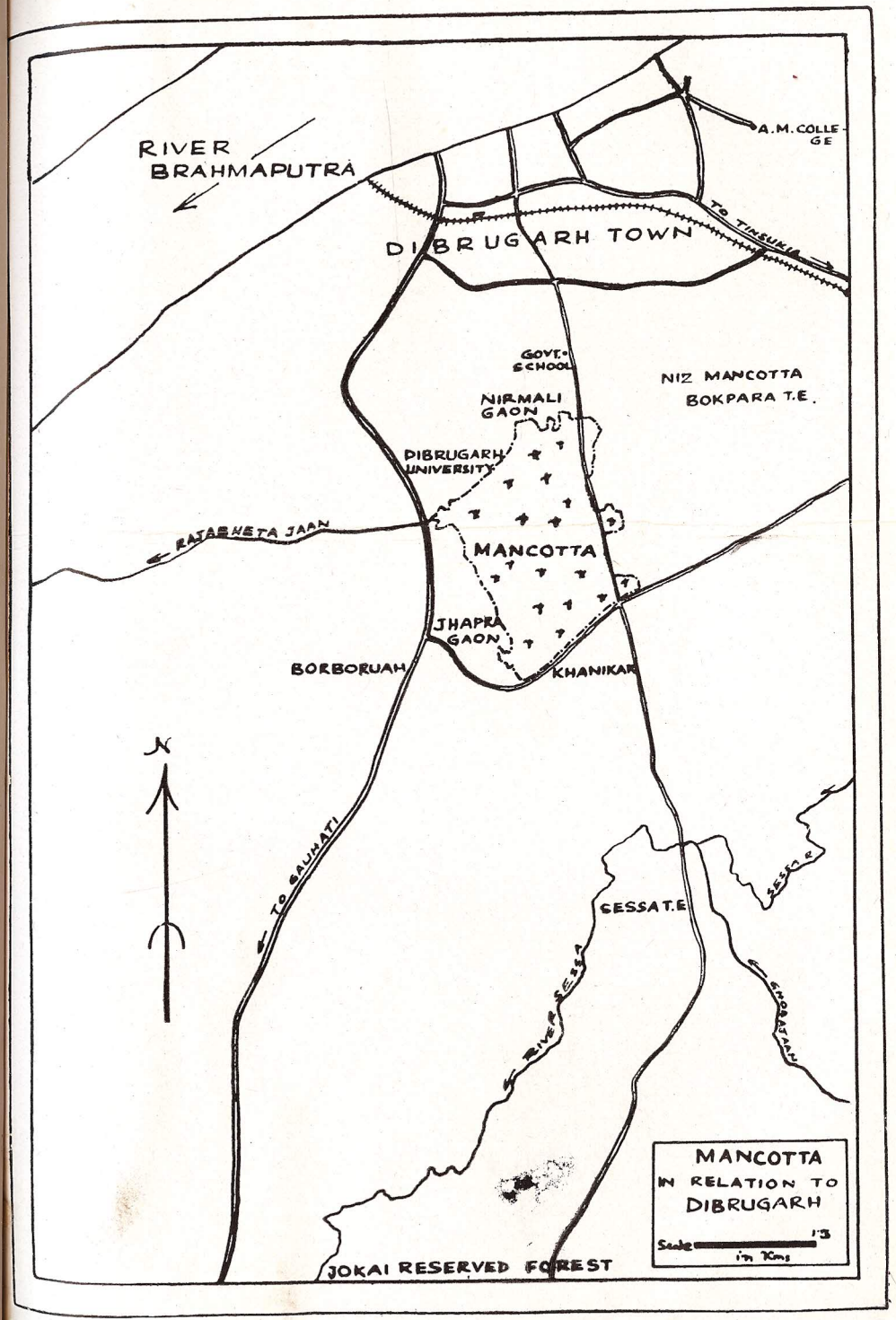
During the course of the field work, occasionally, I stayed with one of my friends in the plantation area when it became late in the night to complete the day's work in the field.

As mentioned above, the work was started with a census of the entire labour force of the industry. By the time the census work was over, I had contact with all people and many of them were curious as to the purpose of the work, and eager to talk to and establish friendship with me.

Establishing rapport with the people was not, however, without its amusing interludes. In the beginning many people suspected me to be a man from government for imposing taxation, to have excise duty for their domestic fermentation of liquor etc. An old man, whom during an interview I asked about his livestock said me angrily, "Are you going to tax my cattle ? I feel I had better sold them away". A visitor (a labourer from some other tea plantation) to the garden started with initial opposition and suspicion and said to me, "I could not understand why are you taking all these information from these people ?" His tone was aggressive. The *Line* Chowkidar helped me to convince him of the purpose of my study. Later on, he seemed to understand the affair and take us in good spirit. One person considered me to be a ranked government officer and promised to bribe me Rs. 100.00 if I could influence the garden authorities to give him a lift in his job in the factory. In the course of time, however, I was accepted by most of the people as a friend and well-wisher. I attended a few festivals and watched their activities on the occasions.

After getting a statistical idea of the general demographic, economic, educational situation and ethnic affiliations of the labour force as a whole, I worked with a schedule having a number of questions on various aspects of their social, cultural and economic life, and also on the culture change problems of the people. Most of the Savara families were again personally interviewed more than once. In some cases of general interest group interviews were also conducted.

The interviews were conducted with the aid of an interpreter, usually the *Line* Chowkidar. Many of the elderly



people, particularly the women folk do not understand proper Assamese, and the interpreter was essential in those cases. Some genuine difficulties were faced while interviewing the people :

(*i*) People are so much pre-occupied with their work assignments that neither in the morning nor in the afternoon, they are available at random. So, the interview was conducted wherever individuals were available: in quarters, on roads or in fields. Often a person had to be visited more than once to complete one interview, because, most of them are unable to spare enough time in one sitting.

(*ii*) Some people were reluctant to co-operate.

(*iii*) Some people did not bother to reply to the questions as the previous studies had not helped the people in any way,* and

(*iv*) Some could realise that the study was purely academic and hence there was no binding on their part to co-operate.

In the early stages, however, many people gave some more time. As more and more interviews were completed, it seemed, they got bored and as such it became very difficult to meet the people. To take the biography of Sambaria Savara of *Line* No 1, for example, I had to renew my appointment with him for 3 days when he made himself available.

Apart from the schedules, much information has been elicited through informal cenversations. On some days no schedules were taken to the garden. To understand the outlook and behaviour of the people, it was felt that at times it would be good just to sit around and talk with the people in an informal atmosphere. A major part of the information on 'community feeling,' 'factions', and 'leadership' is based on such discussions. The schedule was a necessity as it provided a frame of reference to proceed on. The informal discussions prevented being overbound by the frame of reference. The necessary information that used to come out from the informal

* The post-graduate students of Anthropology and Sociology departments, Dibrugarh University sometimes carry on anthropological sociological studies among them, for their M.A. M. Sc., dissertation.

discussion was noted immediately after leaving their company, in either my friend's house at Mancotta or in my own residence at Dibrugarh. The local people and the members of the garden office-staff also provided a great deal of background information of the Savaras of Mancotta.

Information regarding land-possession, occupation and income had to be verified from the office records, and those regarding the activities of the labour union were verified from the unit office of the Union, situated at Dibrugarh.

Besides the methods already discussed in most of the cases concrete case histories, and some selected biographies were collected. A requisite number of cases were collected from different individuals which were subject to careful secutiny before drawing conclusion.

Genealogies were also collected to observe a wide range of persons under as many varied situations as are possible, since the angle of observation or vision is different from person to person. The genealogical method was used in collecting kinship terminology, laws regulating descent and inheritance, and also to find out the duties and privileges of the kin and lineage members.

The genealogical and case history methods were supplemented by other observational techniques. Many of the rituals and festivals held during the period of investigation have been observed by me. The observations were mostly non-porticipant although a certain amount of participation was warranted in in some of the festivals. But, in any case it was accompanied or followed by some open-ended interview of some pepole.

Regarding total time-requirement, in the beginning, it was planned to observe the people in the field for a continuous period of one year. But, in practice, the period had to be extended for a few more months as some data (based on observation) on certain rituals and ceremonies could not be collected during the planned period. The field work continued from May' 74 to August' 75.

Presentation of data

The data have been carefully checked and arranged in different chapters in a systematic way. Broadly, the book may be

divided into three major parts, dealing with the purposes outlined below;

(*i*) Introducing the problem, the land, and the people (Chapters I, II, III)

(*ii*) Presenting the data on various aspects of their socio-cultural life in the present setting (Chapters IV, V, VI, VII, VII)

and

(*iii*) Analysing the findings to discuss the changing trends, and summarising the whole work (Chapters IX, X)

In recording the cases in appropriate contexts, the names of the Savara indivduals have been noted by initials only, for example S.S. stands for S. Savara. In case of non-Savaras the surname, which also indicates their group affiliation has been given in full, for example B. Tanti means the person B is Tanti by caste, K. Santhal indicates that the person is Santhal by tribe and so on.