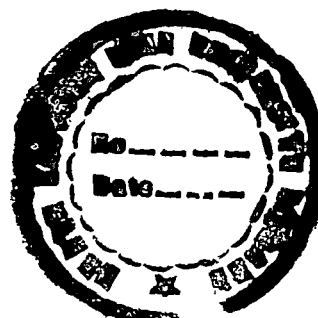


LANGUAGE CHANGE AMONG TEA GARDEN
LABOURERS : CASE STUDIES OF DIKORAI AND
PERTABGHUR TEA GARDENS OF ASSAM

PRADIP GOSWAMI



SUBMITTED
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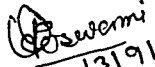
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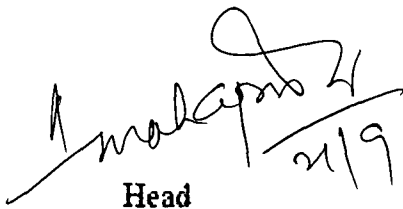
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September 2000

I, Pradip Goswami, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of my previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

This is being submitted to the North-Eastern Hill University for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Geography.


13/9/2000
Pradip Goswami
(Candidate)


Head

(A. C. Mohapatra)


Supervisor

(D. K. Nayak)

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Pradip Goswami

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CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem.

The problem of language change or language shift acquires significance among numerically smaller communities, tribes and groups who have migrated to other places. They are by and large unable to retain their cultural identities as they have to interact with the dominant cultural groups in the place to which they have migrated and are faced with the prospects and problems of assimilation or absorption. Under such a situation and as a defense mechanism, they adopt various tools in preserving their linguistic identity by way of accepting bilingualism or multilingualism or by completely switching over to a new language. However, these processes of change is neither uniform socially or spatially. Some groups or even some sections of these groups are in a position to shift to other languages but some other sections are not capable of doing so. While men and younger generations more easily adapt to language change and shift, the women, old sections may only partially respond to such changes. Moreover, location of the group in relation to market or urban centers may also act as significant influences.

The tea garden labourers of Assam who came from outside and were faced with difficult situation with regard to maintaining and preserving their culture and/or linguistic identity, made several adjustments in the process of their socio-spatial interaction in an alien environment. The present research aims at understanding the pattern of their adjustment by taking language change and shift as a clue.

1.2 Language change: The Concept

The term 'language shift' is now established in the literature on language contact. It is now a fast expanding and increasingly popular subject. However, the study of language is no longer confined to linguistic studies only. Anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists and geographers have also evinced considerable interest in the study of social, cultural and psychological processes involved in the evolution of languages and language change.

Language shift¹ in particular, is quite ambiguous in the sense that it can designate a gradual development, a shifting or the fact that a language previously employed is no longer used at all by a group or individuals.

Language is a crucial component of national identity and the acceptance of diverse languages within a society can contribute towards social equality. In Assam, a society of migrants, a continuing tension has characterised the society for a desire towards monolingualism.

Language change also means a change in main languages, the dominant languages, the language of one or more domain contactualised spheres to communication such as home, school or Church. The language may be changed by listening, speaking, reading and writing.

According to Tespaert and Kroon² (1988) language shift may be of two types.

¹ Gal, S. (1973), *Language Shift. Social Determinants of Linguistic Change in Bilingual Austria*, New York Press.

² Jespaert, K and Kroon, S. (1988) social Determinant of Language Shift by Halian in the Netherlands and Flanders. Paper delivered at the International Workshop on the Loss and Maintenance of Minority Languages Noordwijkerhout, August 1988..

(1) When social environment changes so drastically (say due to migration) that language may gradually change and easily motivate to acquiring the second language. The original inhabitants are compelled to lose their main language.

(2) The second case refers to the minority groups who use the second language among themselves as part of their integration process.

Linguistic change among the tea garden communities is quite common particularly among those who came in contact with other linguistic groups. However such a change is conspicuous from tribal to non-tribal languages. History provides many examples both within India as elsewhere in the world, whereby weaker languages have been absorbed by and assimilated into more developed languages.

Each generation inherits the language given to it historically and makes addition to it in the course of social experimentation. The historical process of development of language is closely linked to the laws of development of societies and is determined by social, economic, political and cultural history of the people.

"Linguistic change" is one of the most important fields of study of language called diachronic study. Since 'everything in the universe is perpetually in the state of change; language, like everything else, joins in the general flux. It can never be static.

1.3 Linguistic Heterogeneity in Tea Gardens of Assam

Assam is often referred to as "Indian miniature", so far as its population composition and the process of peopling are concerned. People of diverse racial, linguistic and socio-cultural origins have been coming into the region since time immemorial, to live here with little respite in the temporal scale. There has been

streams of migration from the north across the Himalayas and the south across the Patkai and Arakon Yoma and from the west from Indus-Ganga and Ganges-Brahmaputra doabs to Assam. It is those streams of immigrants that built up the population base of Assam in the pre-historic and proto-historic periods. The process further continued till the present (1991) and the state now has more than twenty million people huddled to an area of 98,523 sq. km with an arithmetic density of over 260 persons per sq.km.

The present population of Assam reveals at least four racial traits, viz. Proto-Austroloid, Mongoloid, Austro-Mongoloid and Aryo-Mongolo-Dravidian. Such a division provides three major linguistic groups, viz. one Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Chinese and Indo-European families of languages.

According to Taher³ as many as eleven streams and waves of migration took place into Assam since time immemorial. Among the eleven waves and streams, the tea garden labourers came into Assam after the annexation of Assam by the British. Several England based companies started tea gardens since 1837.

As the local people were found unwilling to work in the tea gardens as labourers, the planters recruited labourers from among the tribes of Chotanagpur area of Bihar, Northern and western Orissa, Eastern Madhya-Pradesh and Northern Andhra-Pradesh to work in the gardens of Assam. These tribal peoples were Austroloid in terms of their racial origin and were speaking Mundari dialects, a major branch of the Austro-Asiatic linguistic family. They belonged to such tribes as Munda, Santhal, Savara, Oraons Gonds etc. some of them also belonged to Oriya community who

³ Taher, M. (1993) *The Peopling of Assam and Contemporary social structure, social Structure and Regional Development*, Edited by Aizazuddin Ahmed, Rawat Publication, New Delhi.

migrated from Cuttack, Bhubaneswar, Balaswar, Ganjam, Kalahandi and Puri districts of Orissa.

Immigration of Tea garden labourers is also one of the most important factors that not only contributed to the growth of the population of the state but also significantly added to the ethno-lingual diversity. From the later part of the nineteenth century, large number of tea gardens were opened in the state. This was followed by large influx of tea garden labourers into Darrang district. As recorded in the old district Gazetteers⁴ of Darrang,⁵ there were 79,513 garden labourers born outside of Assam, in this district in 1901. An enormous rush of immigrant labourers came from Bihar and Orissa. took place during 1918-20 when 1,05,000 labourers came from Bihar and Orissa into the Gardens of Assam. Since then however recruitment of labourers to tea gardens from Bihar and Orissa began to decrease and their number stood 95,000 in 1931. The fall in time the number of tea garden labourers born outside the district may be partly attributed to local recruitment of the children of ex-tea garden labourers as well as an exodus of labourers from Karimganj area due to troubles and distress that affected the tea industry there. In the mean time the tea district Emigrant labour Act XII of 1932 was passed paving the way for a regular recruitment policy and service conditions. Thus the flow of labourers to tea garden from outside the state of Assam substantially declined and in 1961 the number of persons born in Bihar and Orissa pursuing various vocations in Darrang district (e.g. in tea gardens) stood at 67,148 persons.

The Austric speaking tea garden labourers to day speak not only their own dialects but also many other languages and dialects belonging to either Indo-Aryan or

⁴ Allen, B C (1905) *Assam District Gazetteers* Vol IV, V, Darrang, Allahabad.

⁵ Before 1980 this area was under Darrang district

Dravidian.⁶ This kind of switching over from own dialect to another is mainly due to the processes of interaction and assimilation between different linguistic groups. Such a process of language shift is a product of exploitation of resources and consequent development of urbanization and rapid development of transport network in this region.

1.4 Study Area

The two tea garden areas of the state namely Dikorai and Pertabghur Tea Estates of Sonitpur district in Assam have been selected for the present study (fig. 1.1, 1.2. & 1.3) Dikorai Tea garden is situated in the broad plains bordering Arunachal Hills on the North Bank of the mighty Brahmaputra, at a distance of 47 Km. from the district headquarter town of Tezpur. The Dikorai tea-garden lies in the East of the famous Tia Bharali river and derives the name of the river Dikorai, a tributary of Bet Dikorai which skirts the Western periphery of the garden.

Total Area of the Dikorai Tea Garden is 1415.09 hectares which supports a total of 7810 persons. This garden is located at 26.4°N latitude and 93°E longitude and is situated about 54 metres above the mean sea level. There are four divisions of the Dikorai tea garden. These are Dikorai, Monal, Gelahatinga and Diplonga in 1835-36 Dikorai Tea estate was opened by one of the agencies. The garden was merged by Williamsons Magor. The original garden was in Dhobakata which had to be abandoned.

Diplonga Division at a distance of 9 k.m. from the main division was originally at out garden of pertapghur Tea estate. It was subsequently merged with Dikorai. The present Gella Hatinga Division was originally started by an Assamese Gentleman who

⁶ Biligiri, H.S. (1969) *Problems of Tribal Language in India*, in Language and society in India; Proceedings of a Seminar, Simla, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, pp. 37-51.

LOCATION OF TEA-GROWING AREAS

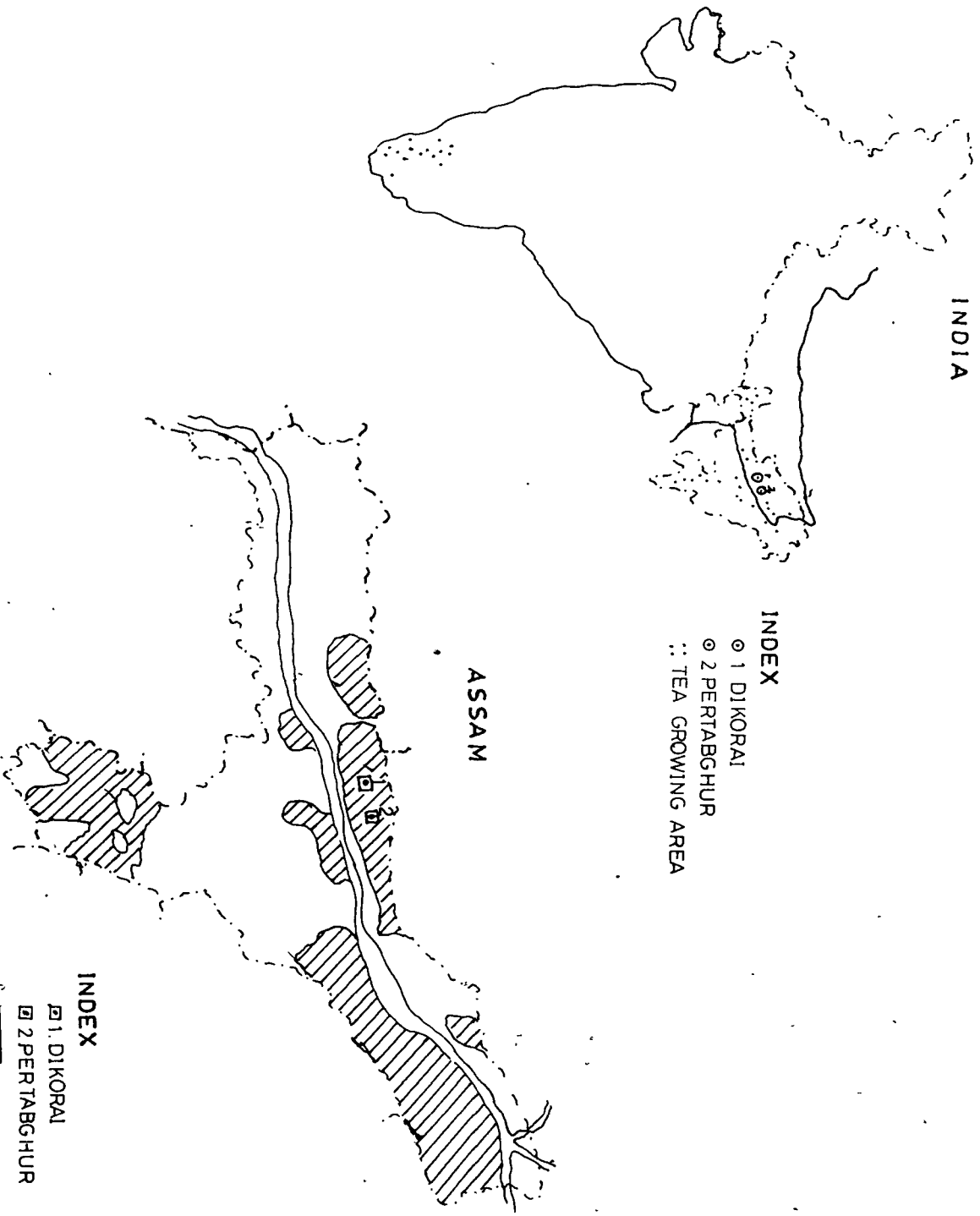
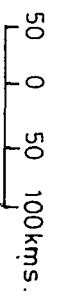


Fig. 1.1

sold the property to a Scotsman, William Rae-Phillips. The tea must have been plotted from 1830 onward. Gela-Hatinga used to have its own factory.

Morai Division was originally a private garden, owned and managed by an aristocratic Bengali family. The extension division was newly opened. Therefore this part of the garden is known as Natun Morai.

Producing some of the finest teas in the North Bank, the Dikorai garden has a good name in both the internal as well as international Market. Dikorai is today one of the prime properties of Bisulanath Tea Company and truly one of the jewels in the crown of the Williamson Magor.

1.4.1 *Dikorai Tea Garden*

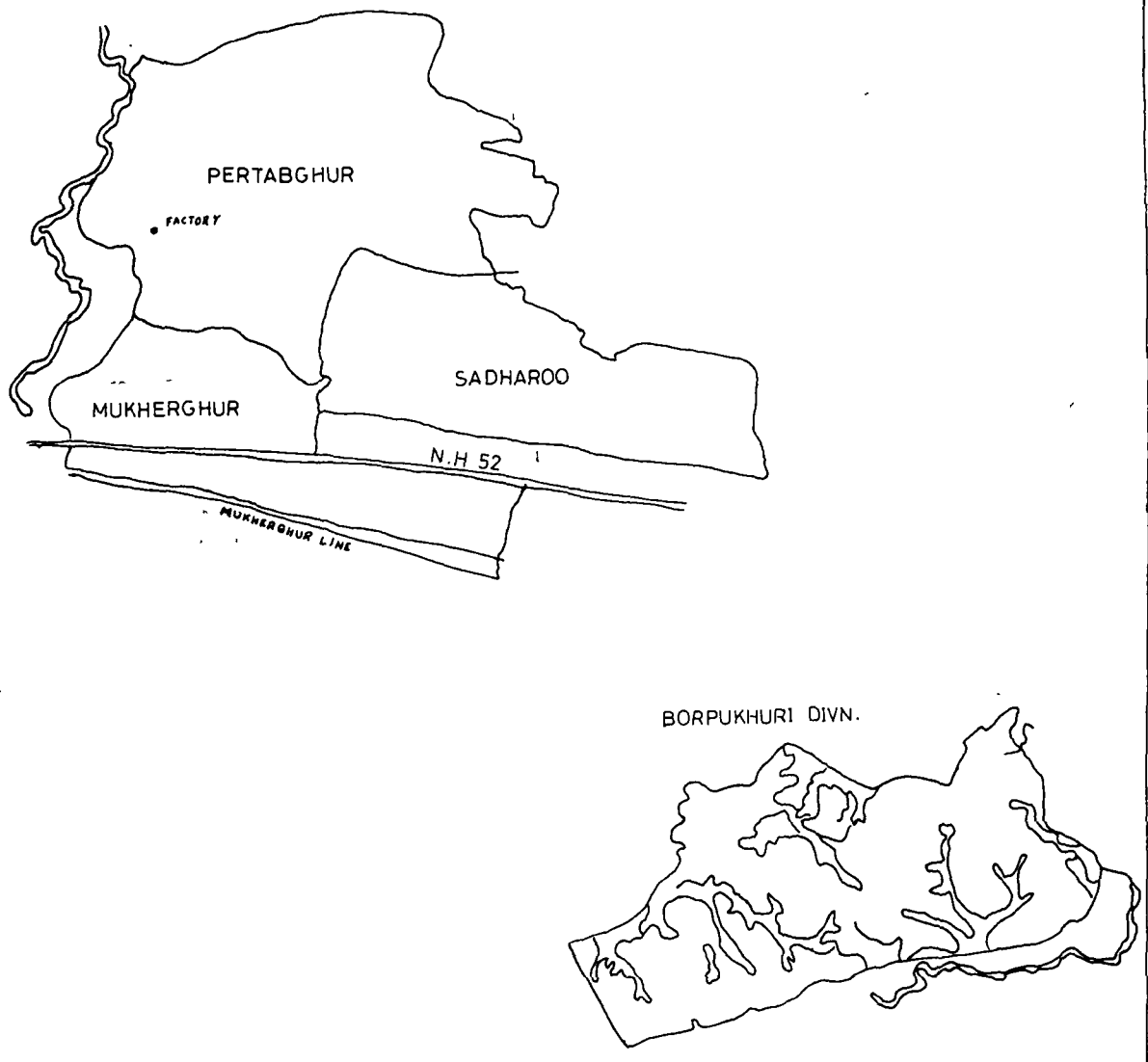
Cultivation of tea requires large number of labourers for plucking, pruning, weeding, cleaning, harvesting. These labourers were recruited from outside of Assam.

The total permanent labourers is 1888 in number and there are 834 temporary labourers. The age sex distribution of workers in this garden according to 1998 questionnaire report shows that there are 996 men 84 women, and 51 Child labourers. Total management staff including artisans, drivers and apprentices were 73.

1.4.2 *Pertabghur Tea Garden*

Pertabghur Tea garden is located on Biswanath Sub-division of Sonitpur district of Assam. The name Pertabghur is derived from its historical origin. According to Yogini Tantra, King Arimattu ruling this area at the 7th century A.D. had their capital at Pertabghur near Biswanath.

STUDY REGION
PERTABGHUR TEA ESTATES



SCALE - 1/75 inch to 1 mile

Fig. 1.2

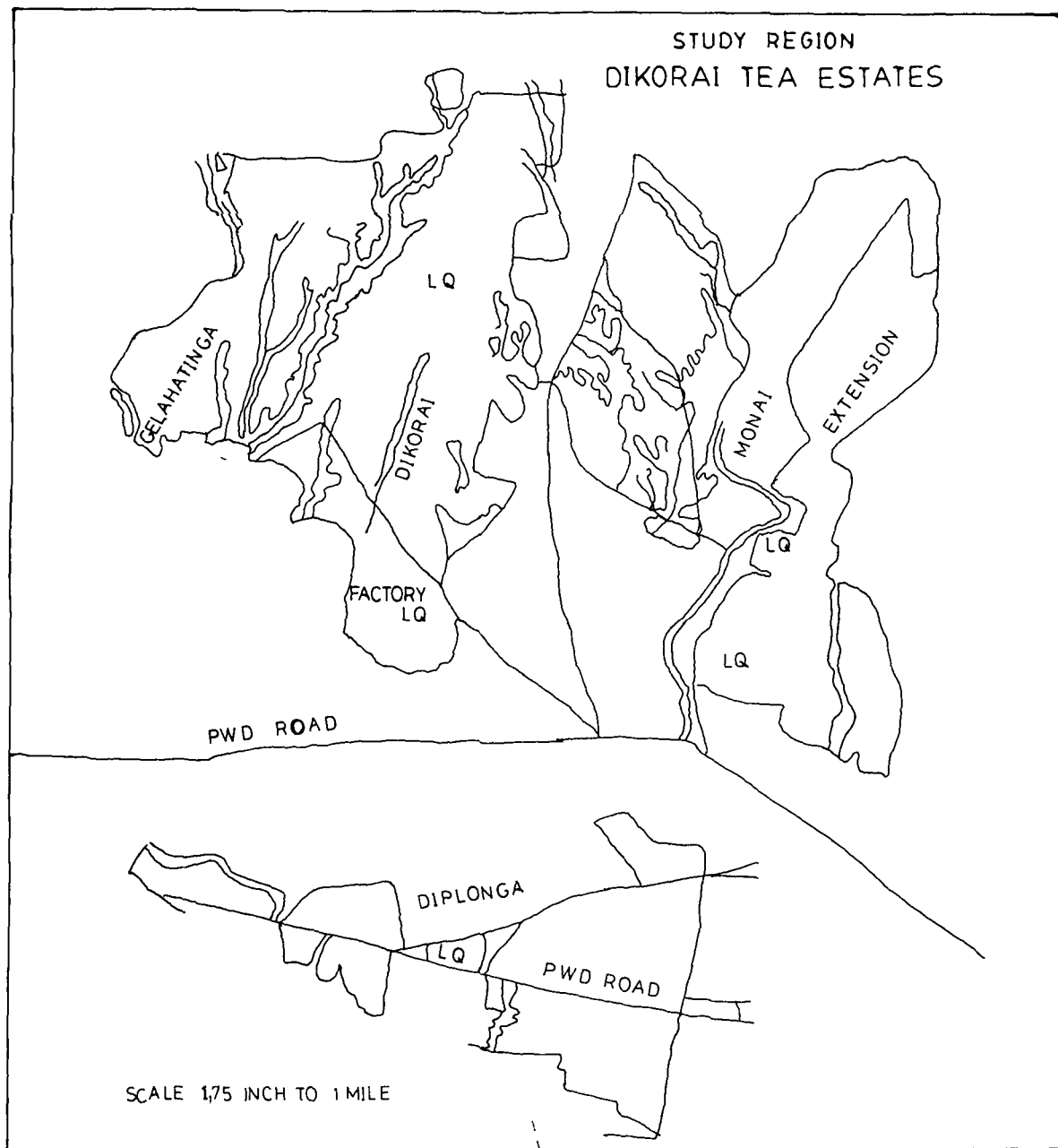


Fig. 1.3.

a) to understand the pace of language change taking place among the tea garden labourers with particular reference to development of bilingualism, Multilingualism and shift to another language.

b) to examine the propensity of language change or language shift as it varies between sex and age-groups and among communities and

c) to explain the pattern of language change in the context of social and cultural adjustment and interaction.

1.6. Research Questions

Within the framework of the broad objectives stated above, the following research questions are placed for investigation during the course of this research;

(i) To what extent does the language change reflect the tea-garden labourers' socio-economic adjustment to an alien environment ?

(ii) Do all segments of the population as differentiated by age and sex characteristics, respond similarly to language change ?

(iii) What is the role of spatial location of the migrant communities in influencing language change ?

1.7 Data Base

The study is primarily based on data collected through intensive field investigation at the two tea-gardens. Using a random sampling technique and with the help of a structured questionnaire, data on the socio-economic profile and languages spoken by different communities have been collected through interview method. Depending upon the major objectives and questions posed in the research, information has been obtained from different segments of the tea garden labourers, particularly with respect to age and sex characteristics of the population. Information has also been obtained to determine the extent of mono-lingual, bi-lingual, multilingual elements in the population.

The secondary data were also collected from garden manager's office but it is very limited in its scope. Some other published have also been collected from published books, magazines, journals and gazetteers etc. dealing with tea gardens or the area in which the gardens are located.

1.8 Methodology

From the surveyed data, various tables have been prepared according to number of families and their distribution. Tables have also been prepared by classifying the labourers into monolinguals, bilinguals and multilinguals on the basis of the information provided by the respondents.

The field survey has been done during the month of November-December 1999. The respondents were selected from different labour lines in diverse distance zones (below 10 km, , 10-20 Km and above 20 kms from the nearest town). There are 20 labour lines in Pertabghur and 16 lines in Dikorai Tea gardens. These gardens were accessible as they were situated near metal road, which is connected by national Highway No.52.

The samples of the respondents has been obtained from three age groups e.g. the young (6-18 years)the middle age group (19 to 49) and old age group of 50 years and above. The assumption was that while majority of the tea garden labourer in the first age could be in school, the other two would have preponderance of workers. The last category however may also include aged persons who may not be engaged in any economically productive activity.

Modified Sopher's disparity index⁷ has been used to measure the magnitude of male female disparity in the level of language shift among tea garden labourers. This Index may be statistically presented as given below:

$$Ds = \log \frac{X_1}{X_2} + \log \frac{200-X_2}{200-X_1}$$

where $X_1 > X_2$

Where Ds is the disparity Index

X_1 is the Male language shifting

X_2 is the female language shifting.

1.9 Review of Literature

The research in geography of Indian languages seeks to identify the main development since 1969. The year, however, is not a watershed by any means and has been chosen arbitrarily, perhaps, one can refer to the significant contribution made by demographers such as Grierson in understanding the geography of Indian languages. Apparently, the main focus here was on the "popular characteristics" of the various language data. In fact, this area has been recommended as a sub-field for future research.

There is, therefore, enough evidence to show that there has been a comprehensive lack of concern among the geographers of this country for any need to study the linguistic affiliations of Indian people as a parameter in their ethnic and social identity. Meaningful contribution on the other hand have however been made by foreign geographers and Indian non-geographers to identify the patterns of ethno-lingual identity as a spatial phenomenon and to inter connect ethno-linguistic affiliation with the process of politico-administrative re-structuring of territory and the emergence of

⁷ Kundu, A. And Rao, J.M(1983) *Inequality in Educational Development Issues, Measurement, Changing structure and its socio-Economic correlates with special Reference to India*, Occasional paper, New Delhi, NIEPA.

otherwise cohesive economic regions within the frame of the process of spatial re-organisation.

Amani's studies⁸ in the linguistic geography of India seems to be primarily concerned with the identification of map patterns of language distribution on a single time point as recorded by Indian census. He chose Bihar (1969) for the study of the spatial association of linguistic and dialectical groups with the help of the tools of combination analysis. Using the method adopted by K.Doi in his study of the Japanese prefectures, language combination region were delineated. The tribal languages, however, did not at all figure in this ranking exercise as the census suppresses all language below the level of the districts, while the tribes are concentrated in pocket of heavy majority over small areas within the district.

Among the studies of language as an element in India's political Geography, the contributions have come from Sukhwai⁹ (1971) and Das Gupta. Language becomes a point of controversy as the Government of India decided to recognise the politico administrative structure of the country on the basins of language. Sukhwai discussed the linguistic situation as part of his larger scheme of work on the international political situation of the country and has mapped language distribution without making reference to the statistical criterion chosen for this exercise. Das Gupta's work,¹⁰ although explicitly non-geographical in nature, helps substantively in the understanding of role of the language in generating group politics in India.

In a sharp departure from the studies referred to so far Sakharov's Pioneering work¹¹ (1972) on the ethnolinguistic geography of India belongs to the very core of the

⁸ Amani (1969) *Linguistic Geography of Bihar*, *Geographical Outlook*, VI, 65-72

⁹ Sukhwai, B L (1971) *India - A Political Geography*, New Delhi.

¹⁰ Dasgupta, J (1970) *Language Conflict and National Development*, Berkeley, p 293

field. The study puts the extensive census data into the right ethnic perspective and the linguistic composition of our people by arranging them into closely related ethnic groups. Sukharov in his study of language, insisted on the identification on the spatial peculiarities of ethno-linguistic groups in India. Whether ethno linguistic groups live compact or fragmented territories is of paramount importance as the distribution pattern itself and policy importance as the distribution pattern itself has policy implications. Jafri¹² (1972) attempted to trace genetic linkage between the Hindusthani dialect and Janapadas of ancient India co-relating the present day distribution of the major dialectal groups, such as Bhojpuri, Maithili, Awadhi, Khariboli, Brajbhasha, Chhatisgarhi, Bagri and Malwi with the Janapadas, they attempt to prove that the dialects are generally related to the primeval settlement of the different tribal groups in Madhyadesh. Their study provides an important historical dimension to the Problem of linguistic diversity in Hindi-Urdu region.

Among the linguistic studies an important contribution came from Khubchandani who is rightly conscious of the spatial patterning of the linguistic groups. A critical analysis of the mother-tongue data of the census of India for the year 1951 and 1961 led Khubchandani¹³ (1972) to identify two distinct divisions of India with divergent tendencies towards the assertion of social identity through language declarations; the Hindi- Punjabi- Kashmiri speaking North display a pronounced tendency of instability or fluidity in their language affiliation and rest of India characterised by stability of a higher order. In an earlier study,¹⁴ Khubchandani (1970) identified the silent features of

¹¹ .Sukharov, I.V.(1972) *Ethnolinguistic Geography of India, Facts and Problems*. Economic and Socio-Cultural Dimensions of Regionalization, Census Centenary Monograph No.7, New Delhi,pp.387-426

¹² .Jafari, Hassa, S.S. (1972) *Dialects of the Hindustani* Occasional paper, Department of Geography, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong.

¹³ .Khubchandani, L.M.(1973) *Indian Bilingualism and English*, An Analysis of the 1961 Census Data Demography India, Vol.2.No1, June,pp.160-174.

¹⁴ .Khubchandani, L.M.(1970) *Language Situation of India*, Indian and Foreign Review.

language situation in India, taking special note of our bilingualism. From the demographic point of view important contribution on Indian bi-lingualism have been made in recent years by Bose¹⁵ (1969) and Davidson¹⁶ (1969) Both have a useful Geographical content.

A significant contribution has come from the geographers working at Syracuse University, notable among these being Sopher's study¹⁷ of the association or lack of it between the distribution of Muslims and of Urdu speakers and Bennet's study¹⁸ of the morphology of language boundaries with reference to Indo-Aryan and Dravidian families.

The most noteworthy contribution in the study of bilingualism in the North-East comes from H.Lungdim's study¹⁹ of Manipur.

It is evident that geographical studies on languages continues to be a serious gap in knowledge and this is more so in the case of North-East. The present research is a humble attempt to fill this gap.

¹⁵ Bose, A. (1969) Some aspects of the Linguistic Demography of India in Language and society in India, Proceedings of a Seminar, Simla, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, pp 67-51

¹⁶ Davidson, T T L. (1969) *Indian Bilingualism and the Evidence of the Census of India, 1961* Lingua, XXII, 176-196

¹⁷ Kundu, A. and Rao, J M. op cit

¹⁸ Bennet, J Charles (1980) *The Morphology of Language Boundaries Indo-Aryan and Dravidian in peninsular India*, in David E. Sopher (ed) *An Explanation of India, General Perspectives on Society and Culture*, London, Longman, pp 234-251

¹⁹ Lungdim, H. (1994) Ethno-Lingual Diversity and Communication in North Eastern India, *Annals of the National Association of Geographers, India, Vol XIV, No 2*, pp 73-87

1.10 Chapterization.

The present research is organised into the following broad chapters:

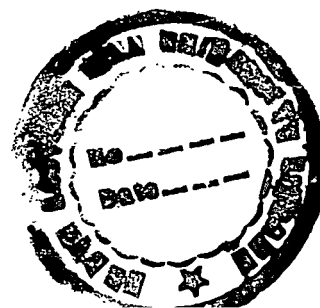
The first chapter broadly outlines the research design and includes a statement of the problem, broad objectives and research questions, methodology adopted, sources of data, brief statement on the study area and an overview of literature.

The second chapter deals with the socio economic background of the tea garden labourers mainly concerned with the origin and development of tea industry of Assam as well as the immigrant labour from chotanagpur region.

The third chapter is devoted to an understanding of the socio-linguistic characteristics of the tea garden labourers selected for study as well as in the adjacent areas. It also includes a section on the relationship between the tea-garden labourers with other ethnolinguistic communities.

In the forth chapter, an attempt has been made to analyse the nature of language change and language shift taking place in the two selected gardens. The research questions are also investigated and answers have been sought in the chapter.

The concluding chapter provides a brief summary of the research findings and suggests scope of future research in this area.



CHAPTER - II

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF TEA GARDEN LABOURERS

1.1 Introductory Statement

Socio-economic background is intimately related to differentiation in language as well as language change. Before going to study the socio-economic characteristics of the tea-garden labourers in the sample gardens, it may be necessary to describe the socio-cultural as well as economic background of the region in which the sample gardens are located.

In this context, the regional setting is delineated to be the undivided Darrang district for the purposes of study of the tea garden labourers and their society and the socio-spatial interaction.

Peoples with diverse ethno-lingual background have been living together in this district since the 18th century. Linguistic heterogeneity occurs in areas, such as Darrang district, where more than one tongue is spoken. In such a situation some diverse tongues must be favored as a *lingua franca*. When people with different languages are brought together under a common political entity (say in undivided Darrang district) generally one group is in a dominant position and enjoys a stronger position in school and the government as well as in the economy and society.

Wide range of socio-economic problems however take place between and among ethnic groups speaking different mother tongues. Some of the problems are mentioned below:

The Socio-economic forces determine how groups will adapt to the presence of others who speak different tongues. The long-range of Socio-economic factors determine whether the community will maintain multilingualism or evolve into a unilingual society. The surrender of distinctive mother tongue is a necessary step in the assimilation of ethnic groups in contact by enjoying equal socio-economic environment. The feeling of importance of particular language for an ethnic group determines the influence of social behavior. Linguistic differences, by reducing inter ethnic contacts, lowers the chances of other forms of assimilation.

1.2. Ethnic Composition of Tea Communities in Darrang District.

The tea garden labour society is inherently heterogeneous. A large number of tribes and castes are found among them. Though there are a few non-tribal labourers, generally all the sects are termed as tea-tribes. At some point of time there was a proposal to recognise the tea-tribes as schedule-tribes.

The principal tribes in tea garden labourers are those of the Mundas, Santals, Bhumij, Bawri, Tanti, Sonar, Ghasi, Kol etc. Of these tribes, the Santals and the Mundas belong to the Austric family while the Oraons and the Gonds speak Dravidian languages. Racially, almost all these tribes belong to the Austroloids. The Oraons came mainly from Ranchi, Palamau and the plateau of Chotanagpur. After their migration to these places, they accepted Mundari speech form to some extent.

The following is the brief description of the selected tribes in the tea gardens of Darrang district:

Munda: The word "Munda" is of Sanskrit origin meaning weaving headman of a village. The term "Munda" is applied to them by their Hindu neighbors while they called

themselves 'Haro-ko". The Mundas were recruited to this area from Jabalpur, Mayurbhanj, Chaibasa, Dumka, Ranchi and Medinipur area from Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal. The Mundas are divided into a number of different sects called *Kili*, such as Munda *kili*, Seo *Kili*, Haro-Nag snocin, Bhengra etc.¹

Kharias: Kharias are scattered in different gardens of this region. Most of the Kharias were Hindus. However, after the arrival of missionaries, a few of them converted into Christian faith. They are mainly bilingual. Most of them however maintain their dialect. They lived in remote part of the gardens. The Kharias came from the hills of Orissa and are divided into many sub-tribes as the Dudh Kharias, the Hill Kharias the Dalki Kharias. They belong to the Dravidian speech family.

Gonds: The Gonds are the most numerous community in tea garden areas of Assam. Compared to other tribes in the Gardens, they are backward both socially and economically. Besides working in the tea gardens most of the Gonds are agriculturist. They are also paying attention to the education of younger generation. The Gonds have their own dialects.

Kols: The Kols are the most widespread tribe of this region. The Kols migrated to the tea garden areas from Mirzapur, Varanasi and South Bihar. They are divided into seven sects. The Kols are one of the poorest tribes. Most of the Kols are ex-tea garden labourers as they were one of the firsts to be recruited during the colonial times. They have surrendered their dialects and by and large speak Assamese language and have been absorbed into Assamese culture. Spoken dialects of the Kols are Sadri and Assamese language. Some of them have converted into Assamese Baishnab religion of Srimanta Sankar Dev.

¹ Tasa, D. (1986) *Bagichar Jati - Janajati*, pp.14-15.

Korwas: Korwas are one of the most primitive tribal groups largely concentrated in the Chotnagpur region. The advance of civilization has not shaken their primitive beliefs and habits. Both economically and socially, they are extremely backward. Korwas of this region, to some extent, maintain their own dialects but some of them speak Sadri dialect too. Highest percentage of Korwas are bilingual or multi-lingual.

Oriyas: The Oriya labourers were recruited from rural areas of Orissa. They are relatively advanced both culturally and economically compared to other labourers of this region. Some of the gardens are Oriya dominated. A large section of the Oriyas is Hindu. Educationally also this group of labourers is more advanced. Generally Oriya labourers maintain Oriya languages. They have made enormous contribution to Assamese language and literature. Samir Tanti and Sananta Tanti are renowned intellectuals in Assamese literature from the Oriya labour community.

□

Santals: The Santals are called Sawtal in Assam. According to Linguistic Survey of India, Santals in Assam belong to Indo-Mongoloid origin; They are divided into twelve sects. They continue to maintain their own dialects.

1.3. Origin and Development of Tea industry:

The plantation and manufacturing of tea is the major industry of Assam covering largest area and employing largest number of labourers. Therefore, behind the introduction and expansion of plantation tea industry in this region was the European capital.

The credit for pioneering tea industry in the district of Darrang goes to Mr. Martin who, in 1854 opened plantation at Balipara and in 1837 a garden at Haleswar. The Assam Company also started its plantation at Singri Parbat and these were the only plantations till the year of 1859.² The next four years were a period of steady growth and after this the tea industry passed through a severe crisis.

The tea industry enjoyed a state of boom till the end of the first World War and hereafter faced a crisis of heavy fall in prices due to the release of tea stocks built up during the War. Around 1927, rapid development took place in the form of modernization of factories and the production techniques was vastly improved. In the early thirties. However, the world wide depression seriously affected the tea industry. Again during the World War II and a few years thereafter, the industry passed through a period of prosperity until 1952, until when tea prices fell again to an extent below the cost of production.

The Tea Auction Centre at Gauhati was opened on 25th September 1970. It was a new development for the tea industry of Assam. Marketing of tea has always been a problem for the producer of this region.

The tea industry in the district is a little more than century old and in spite of all stresses and strains that came across, the industry continues to make rapid stride both in production and quality of tea. The following table provides valuable information on tea industry of the district

² B. C. Allen, (1905) Assam District Gazetters, Vol.5. Darrang, Allahabad.

Table 2.1
Darrang District: Growth of Tea Industry, 1951-1969

Year	No. of tea Estates	Area in hectares	Arrange daily no. of labour	Production per labour in kg.
1951	-	25320	-	-
1960	-	26506	-	-
1962	97	26583	75161	391
1965	98	28106	72972	452
1969	97	30016	68935	521

Source: Tea statistics issued by Tea Board of India.

1.3.1 Problem of Labour

The Tea industry of Darrang district, in its growing period was confronted with the problems of inadequate labour supply. Labour is one of the four important factors of production and without its adequate supply, active collection, smooth production and development of any industry is impossible. Factors like unhealthy atmosphere in plantation, 'superiority complex' of the Assamese labourers, general hatred of the Assamese toward the foreign planters, comprehensively better economic condition of Assamese people due to sufficient food grains without much effort were the main constraints. Thin population density of Assam during this period was responsible for inadequate supply of labour to the infant tea industry of Assam. The local labourers always expressed their unwillingness to work under the foreign planters. In order to overcome this problem, planters first recruited Chinese labourers from British settlement in Singapore. During 1839 to 1840 several batches of Chinese labourers were recruited.³ However, in spite of the fact that the Chinese were accustomed to the art of manufacturing tea, they hardly proved themselves beneficial to the plantation. They were costly, and the planters could not control them.

³ Borpujari, H.K. (1858) *Assam in days of Company 1828-1953*, pp.229-30.

In the above circumstances the planters had faced great obstacles in the process of recruitment of labour. The problem of labour shortage continued and attractive measures for recruiting immigrant labourers had to be taken.

1.3.2 *Advent of the Immigrant labourers:*

Due to the problem of labour, the Assam tea company had to send its agent at frequent intervals to collect the labour from outside the district. Later on, the Assam Company succeeded in recruiting them at considerable expenses. Thus started the introduction of the system of importation of immigrant labourers to Assam, gradually forming the tea garden labour community of the district. These immigrant tea garden labourers were called 'Coolies',⁴ a body of legalised serfs and their lot was hardly less miserable than that of the slaves in American plantation.⁵

By the year 1859, Tea Planters Association organised a system of labour immigration and this resulted in the sudden expansion of a class of contractors who supplied labour to the tea gardens.

The mechanism of recruitment were mainly by force, fraud, kidnapping and false promises of light work for good salary. During the period of two years from 15th December 1859 to 21st November 1861, the Assam Company brought 2272 recruits from outside Assam. Out of 84,915 recruits between 1st may 1863⁶ and 1st May 1866, 30,000 had died by January 1866. This proves the prevalence of high mortality rate among the tea

⁴ The term in the official use has now been prohibited.

⁵ Borpujari *Op cit* p.231.

⁶ Sir Percival Griffiths, (1967) *The History of the Indian Tea Industry*, pp.267-270.

garden labours at the beginning stage. The death rate was 37.8 per thousand in 1882, rose to 41.3 in 1883 and 43.2 in 1884.⁷

1.3.3 Source of Tea Garden Labourers

Garden labourers were drawn mostly from the scheduled tribes belonging to the tribal catchment zone of the present state of Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. Experienced planters suggested recruitment of aboriginal tribes, because such tribes were impudent and rate of mortality was also lower among them. The planters thought that these tribal people would be able to withstand the adverse climate of Assam. In Orissa, labourers were recruited from the districts of Cuttak, Puri, Baleswar, Dhenkanal, Ganjam and Karaput as well as from the feudatory states and neighboring Sambalpur. In Bengal and Madhya Pradesh the principal catchment zone was areas in Medinipur, Nagpur, Jabalpur, Bhopal etc. Labourers were also recruited from the present state of Andhra Pradesh. During 1884-85, 44.7 per cent of the labourers recruited to the Assam plantation were from Chotanagpur, 27.2 per cent from Bengal, 21.6 per cent, from Bengal 21.6 percent from Uttar Pradesh and 0.2 per cent from Bihar (excluding Chotanagpur) 0.7 per cent from Bombay, and 0.7 per cent from Tamil nadu.

1.3.4 Development in the Post-Independent Period

In order to serve the interest of the tea industry, trade, labour and consumers, the tea Act 1950 was passed by the Government of India and it was brought into force with effect from 1st April, 1954. This act replaced both Central Tea Board act of 1943 and India Tea Control Act of 1933. The function of the two bodies, viz. the central Tea Board and the

⁷.Report from Nastional Commission of Labour, Government of India, Deptt. Of Labour and Rehabilitation 1969.

Indian Tea Licensing Committee were entrusted to a single body corporation consisting of a Chairman and 30 other members representing various categories of the members of the parliament, owners of the tea estate, the Government of tea growing states, dealers in tea, manufactures of tea, consumers and other persons who in the opinion of the Central Government, ought to be represented on the board as prescribed in sec.10 of the Tea Act, 1953. The main objective was to promote and develop the tea industry for which specific measures are to be planned in the different sphere of the programme.

The Tea Board was highly concerned about tea garden labourers as it was an unavoidable problem since labour is of the four important factors of production. The health and well-being of the labour community was considered to be an important input in the development of the Industry. The Board provided financial assistance to the following schemes: financial assistance to construct hostel and School buildings, assistance to extent to existing facilities in hospitals, encouragement of scouting and sports, assistance for setting up of welfare centres.

1.4 Levels of Education

The social advancement of a community is sometimes measured by the levels of education. The most pathetic and deplorable aspect of the garden labourers has been their educational backwardness during the period. Since its inception, the tea planters have been quite in different to the problem of education in the tea estates of this area. Educational facilities were almost nil until early part of the present century in the Gardens of this district. Most of the employers thought that education would make them alert against the limited amenities provided to the labourers. The situation has not improved even after Independence except the opening of primary schools in most of the Gardens. A number of labour legislations have been passed for the welfare of the plantation labour in exercise of

the power conferred by sub-section (1) of section 48 of the plantation labour Act 1951 (Act LXIX of 1951). The Government of Assam has prescribed under section.14 of the Assam Plantation Labour Rules (A.P.L.R.) 1956, the compulsory establishment of a Primary school in every tea gardens where the number of workers' children exceeds twenty five. The curriculum, duration, standard and syllabus of the course of instruction to be imparted shall be such as approved by the state Education Department and no fees shall be charged from the workers' children.⁸

During 1947-48 there were 87 schools in tea garden areas of Darrang district Number of students attending Primary schools were 5527. Average students per school was a little above 50. This was very low compared its population. Though the number of school going children has gradually been increasing, the low rate of school goers continues to cause concern.

The low rate of literacy characterized through out the Districts gardens. The garden authority hardly paid any attention to the school education except the opening of lower primary school and appointing a teacher for it. The tea garden school teachers have to render clerical duty in the garden office of the managers if and when called for. This system of engaging teacher in jobs other than teaching prevents them to pay sole attention to the duty of imparting education to the workers.

The parents in general thought that to be a garden labour, school education was not necessary. The parents also feared that the schooling might take their children away from their pursuit for new kind of avenues of employment outside the garden. The vital factor that acted behind the negligence of education was that the non-working children were

⁸ The Assam Plantation Labour Rules 1976 and Assam Plantation Labour (Amendment) Rules 1970, 1977, pp 15-16

required to do various household works, such as infant look-after, cattle keeping, cooking etc. during the absence of their parents.

The parents in general failed to realise the value of education. Lack of atmosphere for study was another factor. The labour could not afford to provide their children the minimum requirement of study such as reading room, a table, a chair etc. Home tuition to the children has been an unimaginable affair for the labourers. Thus the overall picture of educational standard among tea garden labourers of this district has been unbelievably worse. Same was the case with the ex-tea garden labourers. The percentage of literate among the Ex-tea garden labourers in higher standard of education was only 0.60 percent for the educational standard Matriculation and above as estimated by Phukan.⁹ The tea garden and ex-tea garden labour community of this District have possessed only the following number of qualified persons in the different important discipline in 1971.¹⁰

Ph.D.	-	2
Doctor	-	4
Engineer	-	2
Junior Engineer	-	8
Low graduate	-	12
Arts and Science graduate	-	170 (approximate)

1.4.1 *Medium of Instruction*

Medium of instruction, which has been Assamese in the Brahmaputra valley was not a factor for the low level of education. Most of the tea tribes can speak and understand Assamese well. Originally they belonged to different linguistic groups like Hindi, Oriya,

⁹ Umananda Phukan, (1984) *The Ex-Tea Garden Labour Population in Assam*, p.37.

¹⁰ Compiled from the information received from different persons belonging to the tea garden labour community.

Bengali, Bhojpuri, Santhal, Mundari, Sadri etc. The old people of this community have kept the use of their original languages even today but new generation has gradually adopted a common dialect known as *Bagen Bat* or garden languages. This dialect is also known as Sadri, a Mixture of Hindi, Oriya, Bengali, Bhojpuri, Santhali, Mundari, Assamese etc. This dialect has acquired the status of lingua franca in Assam tea gardens. But now, most of the tea garden labour have adopted Assamese as their mother tongue.¹¹

1.5 Economic Profile

Economic life of a tea garden labourer can only be understood with reference to the fringe benefits offered to them. Fringe benefits include concessions and perquisites given to the labourers in addition to wages such as land for cultivation, free supply of fuel and protective clothing, concessional supply of food stuff, benefits under statutory provident fund and pension fund scheme, sickness allowance, annual leave with wages, paid festival holidays etc. They receive these benefits in return for their different types of works which can broadly be divided into field and factory work.

Wages: The labourers of tea garden have been earning wages in two different systems, time rate system and price rate system. Under the time rate system a labour needs to complete the task allotted to them within a period of fixed hours for work. Plucking is generally carried out on a price rate system in a garden. Pruning, skiffing, cleaning out, cultivation, manuring, planting shade, uprooting bushes, cutting new drains, hoeing of different types, one carried out on a task rate basis. The task rate differs from work to work in case of factory workers, fair wages on completion of eight hours duty is given. Old members of the labour community of the plantation workers earned low wages. In 1987 the average monthly wages of an adult worker in the gardens were Rs.371.40 per month.

¹¹ Phukan op.cit, p.120, Susil Kurmi Chah Bagishar Assamiya Sampradaya(1983),p.17

Table - 2.2
Darrang District: Average Daily Wage Rates of Unskilled
abourers, 1970-83

Year	Field labour (in Rs)	Other agricultural labour(Man) (in Rs)
1970	3.7	4.2
1975	5.4	4.9
1980	6.4	6.5
1981	7.1	7.1
1982	8.6	8.7
1983	10.1	10.2
1996	26.0	-
1997	29.10	-
1998	30.60	-

Source: Souvenir of Assam Chah Mazdur Sangha 2 Dec.1998.

The minimum rate of daily wages of the plantation labour has been increasing during the recent past. The improvement in the wage rate however do not reveal the fact that the overall economic condition of the tea garden labourers has been improving. During the recent past there has also been a steep rise in all the essential commodities.

Apart from daily wages, the labourers have been provided with the following amenities by garden authority. These are mentioned below.

1.5.1 *Land for Cultivation*

Some land is allotted to the garden labourers for the purpose of cultivation. Though he land was given free of rent, a nominal rent was charged by the authority. By a notification, the Government of Assam announced the land policy in respect of surplus tea garden land

and to distribute it equitably among the landless workers and to offer rights of holdings to those labourers who were already in occupation.

1.5.2 *Housing*

The housing for accommodation in the plantation areas being offered only to the permanent labourers. There have been two types of arrangement of labour houses which were built in lines and others as clustered village. The *kutchha* houses were generally clustered as a village and semi *pucca* and *pucca* houses were built in line.

1.5.3. *Free Medical Attention*

The labourers are supplied drinking water from the taps connected with public water supply. The plantation labour Act 1951 laid down that in every plantation, " there should be provided and maintained so as to be readily available medical facilities for the workers as may be prescribed by the state government.

The birth rate, death rate, infant death rate, natural growth rate density per hector in the gardens under Assam Branch Tea Growers Association (ABITA) during 1960 to 1985 have shown much improvement in the general health of the tea garden labourer. About 25.78 percent of the couples have used family planning methods in 1985. In case of death rate it fall from 12.9 in 1960 to 9.07 in 1985.

1.5.4. *Amenities*

Motorable roads were common to all the gardens under review. But condition of the road leading to labour lines was deplorable, particularly during the rainy seasons. The tea garden labour authorities have been responsible for the maintenance of the roads.

Some of the garden authorities maintain street lights in some portion of the labour lines but not all labour houses was connected with electricity. The growth of urban areas near the plantation has affected the socio-economic life of the tea garden labour. The tea industry has given birth to many small townships in tea growing areas. The small townships sprang up as a result of opening different firms to supply various articles to the plantation.

1.5.5 *Scope of Employment*

The overall employment situation in the tea gardens of this region as a whole has also shown the same gloomy picture. The tea industry of this region which once faced the problem of shortage of labour now facing the problem of surplus labour. Due to Mechanization and other improved method of cultivation there has been a trend of gradual reduction in the labour force in the plantation of tea garden areas. The table below shows the relationship between decreasing labour and increasing tea garden area in Assam.

Table - 2.3

Assam: Areas Under Tea Plantation and Labour Employed

Year	Area in hector	Permanent labour
1978	1,95,457	4,86,304
1986	2,24,363	3,64,119
1993	2,30,363	3,50,853

1.6 Socio-economic Background of Pertabghur and Dikoroi

Assamese, Hindi, and Bengali languages in tea garden areas of Pertabghur and Dikorai were used and promoted in all of the domains such as government, local economy, military, religion, educational spheres etc.

Expansion of regional language among tea tribes in Pertabghur and Dikorai have some territorial range and functional potential. The geographic as and demographic evolution of speech communities is linked to economic development.

1.6.1 Demographic Characteristics

Language expansion is caused by the demographic growth of its speech community on the one hand and language shift, that is gaining of additional speakers from other speech community, on the other.

Table 2-4
Pertabghur and Dikorai Growth of population 1988-98

<u>Pratabghur</u>				
Year	1988	1933	1998	Growth rate
Total Popn.	7632	8464	8810	2.2%
Workers	1717 (22%)	1875 (22%)	1888 (24%)	8.5%
<u>Dikorai</u>				
Year	1988	1933	1998	Growth rate
Total Popn.	9450 (20.8%)	9975 (20.9%)	11082 (18.72%)	14.8%

In Pertabghur, the growth of total population has been 2.2 per cent in the period between 1988-98. But the growth rate of workers has been 8.5 per cent during the same period.

This shows that growth rate of the labourers is more than that of the general population of the garden.

In Dikorai, the growth rate in the general population was 14.8 per cent during the decade but the growth of labour population was only 5.4 per cent. Dikorai shows an opposite picture to Pertabghur. Here the growth of the population is more than the workers.

Following Table shows the birth rate and death rate of labourers:

Table -2.5

Pertabghur and Dikorai: Birth Rate and Death Rate

<u>Dikorai</u>				
Year	Total Birth	Birth per 1000	Total death	Death per 1000
1988	174	23	39	5
1993	182	13	33	4
1998	221	28	63	8
<u>Pertabghur</u>				
1988	176	19	34	4
1993	218	22	69	7
1998	109	10	49	4

Source: Data collecting from Pertabghur and Dikorai garden questionnaire(1978)

The birth rate is high in both the gardens. But death rate seems to be normal. This may be due to improved medical facility in the gardens, supply of safe drinking water among the labourers of Pertabghur and Dikorai tea gardens.

1.6.2 *Settlement patterns*

The workers were housed in rows of huts which the garden authority have constructed at various points in the garden, known as labour lines. The labourers belonging to the same tribes are usually clustered together. This seems a natural phenomenon because of the community life which the various tribes led. In Dikorai the Munda lines are found 2 Km

away from the factory. But other lines are not identified by a single community. In Munda lines, the labourers used to speak Mundari as their dialect, but in cosmopolitan community lines, they generally used Sadri dialect. There are sixteen lines in Pertabghur. Some houses are *pucca* and some are *kucha*.

1.6.3 Social Characteristics

The sample gardens are located in plain areas of Sonitpur district. The labourers have internal social relation within the garden and external relation outside the garden. Like many other gardens of Assam, the selected gardens are not located in remote areas. Easy communication exists with the dominant Assamese villages in and around the gardens. The ex-tea garden labour villages are found by the side of Assamese villages.

1.6.4 Religion

The aboriginal tribes had their own Gods and Goddess. The supreme being is termed as *Thakur* or *Sin Banga*, the giver of life, rain, crops and all other necessities of life. A few labourers in the gardens follow neither Hinduism nor Christianity. The main religion in the gardens under review are Hinduism and Christianity. A few Muslim labourers are found in Sonitpur district particularly in Pertabghur tea estates called Jullah Muslim.

Table - 2.6

Pertabghur and Dikorai: Religious Composition

Ethnic groups	Pertabghur		Dikorai	
	Hindu	Christian	Hindu	Christian
Oriya	93	7	91	9
Mundari	78	22	74	26
Bhumij	83	17	85	15
Khariya	69	31	72	28
Jullah Muslim	6.8 (in total Popn)		3.1 (in total Popn)	

Source: Field Survey

1.6.5 Literacy

Most of the labourer in sample gardens are illiterate. There has been some improvement in the literacy rate in recent years. Many organisation including trade union leaders encourage them for acquiring education. Comparatively, Dikorai Garden is educationally more developed in relation to other gardens. The literacy rate in different communities is presented below:

Table - 2.7
Pertabghur and Dikorai: Percentage of Literate (Male & Female)

	Pertabghur		Dikorai	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Munda	18.5	13.7	19.2	9.5
Oriya	24.4	16.3	23.7	11.5
Kaya	17.8	14.5	20.3	19.8
Oraons	19.3	11.7	78.5	10.5
Santal	14.7	8.5	15.1	9.7

Source: Field Survey

1.6.6 Sex Composition

Migration to the tea gardens is mainly family based. The tribals of the Chotanagpur region were induced to migrate with their families. The nature of production in the tea industry requires the participation of male and female labour. In plucking of tea leaves which is the most important task, women score over men both in efficiency and quality of leaves plucked. In the sample survey, 137 males and 128 females were enumerated in Pertabghur.

1.6.7 Occupational Pattern

In case of the tea garden workers, most of them work in a garden while a few of them work in other organizations. The following table shows the occupational pattern in the sample garden of Dikorai.

Table 2.8
Dikorai: Occupational patterns 1999

Occupation	Number
Teacher	6
Health Assistant	1
Contractors	3
Outdoor staff in garden	2
P.F. Clerk	1
Nursing	4
Garden labourer	2075

Source: Data Collected from Head Master of Dikorai Tea Garden, L.P. School(1999).

1.6.8. *Economic characteristics*

In the pre-Independence period the workers were largely helpless and unorganised. The Government too did nothing to protect them. In the post-1947 period the situation was more favourable for the workers as they got some protection from the Government. The remuneration of the labourer in pertabghur and Dikorai is a combination of cash and kind. The workers are paid cash wage and in addition they are entitled to rations of food grain at a subsidised rate. This subsidy forms a part of the wages. Each worker was entitled to one kilogram of rice and two and quarter kilogram of wheat every week.

The workers are given some facilities which are necessary for their type of work. These include cotton blankets or pullover, umbrella, and canvas, aprons etc. Each family is given a quota of wood for fuel.

The workers had an agrarian background and their present work was tied to agriculture, though of a different type. They practised agricultural activities adjacent to the garden. Pertabghur and Dikorai tea gardens have surplus cultivable land. This land is distributed among tea garden labourers on the basis of lease.

Weekly market is the get together point of different communities of garden labourers. Every garden has a common market. This market place is the communication point of languages for both buyers and sellers. Generally, buyers are tea garden labourers and sellers belong to different communities.

1.7. Concluding Statement

This chapter made an attempt to understand the socio-economic background of the tea-garden labourers in the region as a whole in the undivided Darrang district of Assam in which the sample gardens are located. In the second part of the chapter, the two selected sample gardens were taken up. This background was necessary to understand the socio-linguistic characteristics of the tea garden labourers taken up in the following chapter. The analysis in the present chapter leads to the following general understanding.

First, the tea gardens in Assam in general and in the selected gardens in particular have been areas where the immigrant population constitutes the majority. The process began during the colonial times and continued in the post Independence era owing to unavailability of local labour .

Second, the tea garden labourers came from diverse social, ethno-lingual and economic background from a wider region in eastern India comprising tribal areas of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Orissa and Andorra Pradesh.

Third, most of them were tribes and were brought to work in the tea gardens either by force or by fraud and were thus forced to remain tied to the gardens without much interaction, both social and spatial, with the neighboring areas or with their home and community.

Fourth, most of them continued to live in clusters of their community affiliation leading to continuation of their language and culture for a longer period than expected. However, living together within the gardens forced diverse ethno-lingual groups to develop a composite language called Sadri for inter-ethnic communication. This was possible through a mixture of all languages.

Fifth, the tea garden labourers lived a life of misery with low wages and extremely poor health and educational facilities throughout the colonial period and this further isolated them from the larger communities. While intra-garden interactions increased, their external contacts were few.

Sixth, increase in their population and with mechanization in tea gardens in the post Independent era forced many of the labourers to seek work outside the garden which provided fewer employment opportunities and this resulted in some external linkages to the tea-garden labourers.

Seventh, since much of the immigration was family based, continuation of the mother tongue was a distinct possibility. It restricted possibilities of language shift. Social relations such as marriages could still be practiced within the community.

Lastly, all these developments in the tea garden added a new ethnic type to emerge in the broad spectrum of the Assamese culture complex and the tea communities slowly adapted itself to the dominant cultures through a different route. Language change was a necessity. The labourers became bilingual and multilingual in their strive towards adjustment in this alien land.

CHAPTER -III

SOCIO-LINGUISTIC CHARACTERISTICS

3.1 Introductory Statement

Social factors are related to language birth, language death, language spread and language shifts. Language development in a society depends on those who use the language in newer contexts.

Language is a social phenomenon. without language, existence of society at any stage of human civilization is inconceivable. The social structure becomes part of individual experience only through the means of languages. The interaction between language and society therefore, has been of great importance. The most important social factors contributing to the change of a language are conquest, mass migration, colonization, official language planning, as well as traffic and trade.

To be sure, among the tea garden labourers, there are some obvious macro-social forces which operate to encourage the acquisition of Assamese as at least a second language. Knowledge of this tongue was advantageous for economic behaviour, both in terms of spatial and social mobility.

3.2. Factors Affecting Language Change :

Foundations of speaking and hearing are related to the place of the speech event in human ecology. Cultural ecology has been defined as the study of processes of

interaction between the environment and human culture and its concern with the problems of the habitat of cultural communities of every stage and conditions. So, the linguistic regions possess a certain degree of homogeneity of culture, traits and kinship organisation.

Following are some of the spatio-linguistic phenomena responsible for language change among tea garden labourers.

3.2.1. *Residential Segregation:*

The linguistic and other groups within the tea garden areas of Darrang district are highly segregated from each other. While a section of the labourers live in line quarters characterized by homogeneity in its ethnic and linguistic affiliation, some others reside in colonies which are multi-ethnic in character. Labourers living in the latter have a greater possibility to become bilingual or multilingual compared to the former. If mother tongue diversity in tea garden (T_1) is less than surrounding regions (R_1) as whole then possibility of language change is minimum i.e., if $T_1 < R_1$, then there is less language change.

If mother tongue diversity in a garden (T_2) is greater than the surrounding locality language (R_2) then language change is maximum among the tea garden labourers, i.e., if $T_2 > R_2$ then maximum language change takes place.

3.2.2. *Regional forces and language spread/change :*

Language spread in different communities among the tea garden labourers or acquiring a particular language of majority population is affected by the dominant regional ethos. The majority group, i.e. the Assamese speaking population tends to exert powerful

influences on the migrant communities to adopt the regional language as a means of communication leading to multi-lingualism.

In garden areas of these regions some minority groups shifted their language more than 48 per cent. Due to social interaction (such as marriages family relation, nearness of household) the majority groups also gradually change their languages.

3.2.3 Regional Linguistic Diversity

Some tea gardens are located in areas where the Assamese speaking people constitute a clear majority while some others are located in areas where other linguistic groups predominate. Needles to emphasize linguistic diversity in the tea garden labourer community largely depends upon the linguistic characteristics of the locality in which the gardens are located.

3.3 Language and dialects of Darrang District:

According to the 1961 Census, the people of Darrang district spoke as mother tongue as many as 79 languages and dialects (table-3.1). As many as 8,39,788 persons constituting 65.11 per cent of the total population of the district, spoke Assamese as their mother tongue. The second largest language group which spoke Bengali, formed only 9.84 percent of the total population of the district. This may be partly explained by a reference to the big waves of influence of the Bengali speaking immigrants from East Bengal since 1921. It may be presumed that many of these groups after years of association, assimilated with the indigenous people. Only 4 percent of the total population spoke Hindi and 2 per cent Mundari as their mother tongue.

Table 3.1
Darrang District: Principal languages and Dialects Spoken

	1951	1961	Percentage of the total	
			1951	1961
Assamese	7,11,110	8,39,788	77.02	65.11
Bengali	63,985	1,26,987	7.56	9.84
Nepali	29,648	68,885	3.32	5.34
Hindi	30,232	65,355	3.71	5.07
Oriya	19,014	44,083	2.32	3.41
Bodo	7,210	37,618	0.78	2.91
Mundari (Unspecified)	-	33,759	-	2.61
Kachari	-	17,859	-	1.38
Mishing	-	10,389	-	-
Oraon	-	8,232	-	0.63

Source: Census of India, 1961, District Census Hand book Darrang and Statistical Abstract of Assam 1958, pp. 25-43.

3.3.1 Bilingualism in Darrang District

Although there are numerous linguistic groups in the district, bilingual has blunted the edge of their difference and has brought about emotional integration among the people.

Hindi and English are taught in secondary schools with Assamese as the medium of instruction. Hindi however, is understood by most people living in the district and a large section of the people can speak Hindi for the purpose of conversation. According to the 1951 census, out of 7,11,110 (5.1%) people speaking Assamese as mother tongue, only

3,643 persons returned as speaking Bodo as a subsidiary language. Bengali could be spoken by 4,123(5.7) Assamese speaking people; Hindi by 3531(4.9%) and Nepali by around 400(0.56) Assamese speaking people. Out of 63,985 persons whose mother tongue was Bengali, 36,697(57.35) were bilingual of whom 36,393(56.8%) could speak Assamese, 300(6.8%) Hindi and 4 Nepali. Out of 39,643 Nepali speaking people 19,872(50.12) could speak Assamese, 504 Hindi and only 2 Bengali.

Most of the tribal people in this district know subsidiary languages besides their own. According to the 1961 Census 71,111 tribal people spoke Assamese as their mother tongue and of them only 6444 persons were bilingual of whom 3,643(56.5%) spoke Bodo as their subsidiary languages. But in the case of other tribal people speaking their own dialects as mother tongue, most know Assamese and a very few know other languages. 37,618 tribals belonging to the Boro linguistic group viz. Boro and Kachari, Kachari including Sonowal and Rabha people speak the Bodo dialect as their mother tongue and of them 33,064 were bilingual. 32,890 persons of this group know Assamese as a secondary language. The Mishing dialect was spoken by 10,389 Mishing as their mother tongue and of them 7,910(76.13%) were bilingual who spoke Assamese as a second language. 537 Hojai people spoke Mikir dialect as their mother tongue and of these people 292(54.3%) were bilingual, all speaking Assamese as their second language. 408 Deoris spoke their dialect Deori as mother tongue and of them 222(54.4%) were bilingual. Among them only 170 (41.6%) persons spoke Assamese.

From the above analysis it is clear that more than 50% of the people belonging to the scheduled tribes spoke Assamese as their mother tongue. Only small percentage of these people spoke their own dialect as mother tongue. The Bodos are however an exception. Boro dialect was spoken by more than 26 per cent of the total tribal population. Among these tribes about 46 per cent were bilingual and of them about 94 per cent spoke

Assamese as the second language. Following table (table-3.2) indicates the extent of bilingualism in the district.¹

Table 3.2

Darrang District: Bilinguals among the Scheduled Tribes

Mother Tongue	Total No. of Tribal speaking their Mothertongue	Bilinguals	Speaking as subsidiary language	
			Assamese	Boro
Assamese	71,111	6444 (9.66%)	-	3643 (5.12)
Bodo	37,618	33,064 (87.89)	32890 (87.43%)	-
Deori	408	222 (54.41%)	170 (41.66%)	-
Kachari	17,859	15,665 (87.71%)	15,605 (87.37%)	-
Mikir	637	292 (45.84%)	292 (45.84%)	-
Miri	10,389	7910 (76.13%)	7902 (76.06%)	-
Rabha	273	1764 (77.60%)	1710 (75.23%)	-

Source: Census of India 1961, Assam District Census Hand Book, Darrang.

¹ . Census of India 1961, Assam District Census Hand Book, Darrang, Gauhati 1964, pp. 335-336.

A brief account of the principal languages of the district is given below. It is but natural that scope of the analysis is so limited that a discussion on many languages and dialects, particularly those spoken by the immigrants cannot be covered here.

3.3.2 *Assamese*

The origin of Assamese which is the principal language of this district goes back to antiquity. P.C. Choudhury has observed that epigraphs, though written in Sanskrit, prove that as early as in the 7th century A.D. and later, some of the Assamese formation was found even in their present form and used in the same sense.² Several scholars including Grierson and S.K.Chatterji are of the view that Assamese, Bengali, Oriya and Bihari originated from the eastern variety of Magadhan Prakrit.³ B.K. Kakati has shown that both Assamese and Bengali "started on parallel lines with peculiar predisposition and often developed sharply contradictory idiosyncrasies."⁴ He has further illustrated how the Austric Kolerian, Malayan, Bodo and other elements have enriched Assamese vocabulary. "The substratum of both the Mon-khamer and Tibeto-Burman speak in Assamese vocabulary" observes P.C.Choudhury "points definitely to the early evaluation of their dialects."⁵ S.N. Sharmah has shown that evolution of Assamese literature on independent lines took place from the middle of the tenth century.

² P.C. Choudhury, *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.* Gauhati 1959, p.291. —

³ Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India Vol.1 Pt.1*, p.126, S.K. Chatterji, *Origin and Development Bengali languages*, pp.139-40.

⁴ B. Kakati, *Assamese - its formation and Development*, Gauhati 1972, p.7.

⁵ P.C.Choudhury, *History of Civilization of the people of Assam to the Twelfth Century, A.D.* gauhati, 1959 p.391.

⁶ S.N. Sarma, *Asiamiya sahityar Itibritya*, p.6.

The phenomenal progress which Assamese literature has made in all its branches since then has earned her a place in the constitution of India as a major regional language of India, both in respect of its depth and expansiveness.

Several tribes in Darrang district have regarded these dialects as their mother-tongue. A few of these are discussed below.

3.3.3. *Bodo:*

There are large number of people belonging to Boro Kachari in the district, as revealed in the 1961 census. P.C.Bhattacharya has observed, "The Boro (Bodo) language belongs to the western branch of Basish section under Baric division of the sino-tibetan family, as per the clarification given by Robert Shafer. The linguistic Survey of India describes the Bodo or Boro Kachari as a member of Bodo subsection under the Assam-Burman group of Tibeto-Burman Branch of Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese speech family. The bodo language of these area has at least four dialect area with a sufficient number of dialectal variations.

The Bodo literature consists of vast amount of oral literature including folksongs, folk tales, ballads and proverbs and of considerable amount of written and published literature in Assamese as well as in Roman script.

Grierson has also observed that "The language is a fairly rich one, and is remarkable for the great base with which roots can be compounded together, so as to express the most complex idea in a single "portmanteau" word. Of all the languages of the

group it is most phonetically developed, and there shows signs of the commencement of that true inflection which is strong to most agglutinative language.⁷

3.3.4 *Mishing*:

The Tibeto-Burman sub family of languages which comes under Tibeto-Chinese family has been sub-divided into three branches namely. Tibeto-Himalayan, North Assam and Assam Burmese. The Abor Miri group of language which has stemmed from the North Assam branch spoken by 56,794 persons in this district in Assam in 1911.⁸ Miri is another mother tongue spoken by 10389 Miris of Darrang district according to 1961 census. They have a wide range of pastoral ballads and folk tales most of which are yet to come out in print.

3.3.5 *Sadri or Sadhri dialects*

The tea communities of this region use a particular dialect which is called *Sadri* or *Sadhri*. *Sadri* language is the admixture of Hindi, Bengali, Oriya and Bhojpuri languages. On the basis of where they are spoken, the dialects vary in their phonetics. There are various sub-dialects among the *Sadri* colloquial. These are Madoni/*Sadri*/*Khorta* and *Kurmali* etc.⁹ They have another sub dialect which are *Murgujia*, *Domali*, *Gorali*, *Galwari*, etc. Commonly these dialects are called Nag bhasa. *Sadri* or *Nagbhasa* was aboriginal *Lingua Franca* of Chotanagpur region. These dialects are used in the whole area of Ranchi, Hazaribag, Purulia, Chaibasa, Medinipur of West Bengal where these tribes are available. According to Grierson when a tribal communicates with a non-tribal they use an Indo-European dialect which is called *Sadri* or *Sadhri*, the main Arayan language of the feudatory state of Bumra situated west of Keonjhar district of Orissa. Austric aboriginal

⁷ Grisson, Linguistic survey of India, vol.Pt..Ipp.62-3.

⁸ Census of India, 1911, Vol.III,Assam, Pt.Report, sillong, 1912 pp.96-104.

⁹ Sanjay Kumar Tanti(2000 Assomar Chah Janogoshthir Majat Prachalita Bhassha,Kacha sona, assam Chh Jana Jati Chantha.

spoke Mundari as their dialects but some of them used corrupt Aryan language which is locally known as Sadri or more correctly it is called Sadri col. In some regions it is called Sadri korwa which is a sub dialect of Chhatisgarhi. Those tea tribes have surrendered their mother tongue. This group use this dialect as their mother tongue particularly in tea garden regions of Assam. But some phonetic differences are observed in different gardens.

3.4 Racial Characteristics of different Communities in Darrang Districts

With regard to racial characteristics, the people of Darrang district can be divided into three major groups. These are Mongoloid, Indo-Aryan and Austroloid.

Tibeto-Burman Group: This group came to Assam from the North-East and East and are the people speaking Tibeto-Burman languages, especially Eastern Himalayan, North Assam, Bodo, Kachari Moran, Rabhas, Mishing, Dimasa and Karbi group of languages(table-3.3).

Table 3.3

Darrang District: Racial and Linguistic Characteristics ¹⁰

<u>Mongoloid</u>		<u>Indo-Aryan</u>	<u>Austroloid</u>
Tibeto-Burman	Siamese Chinese	Assamese	.Mundari
.Bodo	Ahom	Bengali	.Saintly
Chute		Nepal	.Khariya
Moran			.Karowa
Rabha			Gond
Miri			.Ho
Karbi			Savora

¹⁰. Grirson, Linguistic Survey of India, 1961.

Other Tribal Groups: These are racially Mongoloid people and unlike Austro-Asiatic. They set up a system of migration which has been continuing till today, especially in the east across the Eastern Himalayas and the Patkai-Arakan Yoma ranges from Tibet and Burma respectively. These groups are represented now by Mishings and Deories in eastern part and Bodos in the Western part.

Indo-Aryan language Groups: Almost at the same time as the Tibeto-Burman group came or perhaps a bit later, another group of people migrated into the plain areas of this region speaking Indo-Aryan languages. These group of languages represent Assamese, Bengali and Nepali etc.

Austro-Asiatic: These groups migrated after the annexation of the region with the British and were speaking Mundari dialects. They belong to such tribes as Munda, Ho, Santal, Saoara, Oraon, Gond etc. These groups of Austro-Asiatic migration started in about 1835 which continued up to the beginning of the second World War.

3.5 Literacy and Educational Standard:

In respect of literacy, the district of Darrang continues to occupy the lowest position since 1951 among the plains districts of Assam excluding Goalpara. In the census of 1971 the district returned 23.4 per cent of its population as literates and the percentage of literacy for the males slumped to 31.2 per cent, thus registering a slight fall. Female literacy however increased to 14.5 per cent. The table-3.4 presents the trend in the growth of literacy of the state as a whole and district during the period 1951-71.

Table- 3.4

Assam: Growth of literacy Rate

Assam			Darrang district			
Year	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1951	27.4	7.9	18.2	25.31	5.33	16.09
1961	37.7	15.7	27.5	31.7	12.7	22.9
1971	37.7	18.9	28.8	31.2	14.5	23.4

Source: Darrang District Gazetteers, 1961

An overwhelming majority of the literates were returned from the rural areas of the district. The details of the educational standard of the literates living in rural areas are not available. The figures relating to the level of education in urban areas, as per 1961 census revealed that only 338 females were matriculates or of equivalent education higher than the Secondary stage, 15 persons were technical diploma holders, 21 non-technical diploma holders and 429 degree holders. As many as 20 persons held degrees in Engineering and 24 in Medicine.

Table - 3.5

Darrang District: Schools and Colleges 1949-71

Year	Middle School	Senior Basic school	High school I	H.S. School	Colleges
1949-50	65	12	16	-	-
1960-61	154	12	50	4	2
1965-66	163	12	56	5	3
1968-69	187	12	91	8	4
1970-71	203	12	101	8	6

Source: Darrang District Gazetteers, 1961.

The bulk of the total population of the district consists of the tea garden labourers, tribal population, immigrant Muslim etc. whose progress in the field of education is very slow.

3.6 Role of Market as Socio-Linguistic Force.

Interaction with outside society-especially with the non tea-tribe was minimal. Both in Pertabghur and Dikorai, for example the labourers went out of their gardens to do their occasional marketing at the local market which took place once a week. Both the sample gardens have a market known as Bagan bazaar. This occasional market takes place on those days the workers get their pay, allowance and rations etc. The market is located in a field or in an open space in or near the garden. Local traders from different linguistic community set up their stalls of ready-made garments, rice, wheat, flour and eatables. Local workers and neighbouring peasants also sell their home produced goods like vegetables rice and fruits. There are also more organized markets which take place once a week. In pertabghur, the labourers go for marketing at Biswanath Chariali market which is a regular market area. Almost any thing, from cows and goats to common salt, is bought and sold in this market. These market places offer sufficient scope for not only exchange of goods, but also as centres for social interaction and exchange of ideas in different dialects and languages. Marital relations too are negotiated in such a place.

Traditionally, bazaar was the only means of contact for the labourers with the world outside the tea gardens. Cinema halls have sprung up in these market place where different communities come together for recreation.

3.7 Socio-linguistic link with the place of origin.

Continuous link with their place of origin could maintain their language and culture. But, such contacts have become rare over the years. Result of the household survey in pertabghur and Dikorai revealed that almost all of them were born and brought up in their respective gardens. Out of 558 workers surveyed, 530 returned their place of birth at pertabghur while 28 were born in other tea gardens in Sonitpur district. In Dikorai, out of a total of 430 workers interviewed, 417 stated their place of birth in other tea gardens and nobody at their place of origin.

The workers' link with their place of origin is almost nil. Only 12 persons at Pertabghur and 9 persons at Dikorai had been to their respective villages in Chotanagpur after migrating to the tea gardens. Only a few remember the names of their ancestral villages. However, all labourers knew that they originally came from Chotanagpur. The snapping of all contacts with the place of origin is an important factor in the gradual loss of their mother tongue as a means of communication even within the family, eventually leading to the shift in of language.

Inter tea-tribes marriages are common in most gardens. Mundas, Oroans and Khariyas could get married to each other but in such cases the body shall have to pay some fines to the *Panchayat*.

By and large, within a heterogeneous tribal population inter-community marriages are more common than expected. Mixing of communities in the settlement colonies of the labour lines too contributes to an increased inter-tribal marriages as families belonging to different tribes had to share adjacent quarters.

Interestingly, inter-community marriages are not only confined to tea-gardens only. In Pertabghur, 6 tribal boys got married with the neighbouring villages of Assamese speaking community. Such cases were reported from Dikorai Tea garden also.

3.8. Status of women as a Socio-linguistic factor.

Status of women decide male-female relation in language change or language shift. In our sample garden it was found that woman are subjected to quite a few taboos and restrictions. The patriarchal norms are quite strong and the desire for a male off-spring is near universal. However, labourers had no inhibition about women smoking, dancing and drinking, which in most cases start at an early age for both boys and girls. Smoking and drinking among women, especially among young girls, is less common nearer the urban centres than in remote labour lines.

However, it would be incorrect to assume that women enjoyed equal rights with men. Though women were free to move in their society and could exercise their choice in selecting or leaving their mates, tea tribes society remained male dominated.

The differential wage rates in the tea plantation also helped in strengthening and maintaining this unequal status. Women were paid a slightly lower wage than men. Moreover women were always in the category of daily-wage workers and never in the supervisory staff.

3.9 Concluding Statement

The above description of the socio-linguistic characteristics of the tea-gardens lead to the following broad understanding.

First, the multi-ethnic social composition of the tea-gardens has provided an ideal background for the development of bilingualism and multi-lingualism among the labourers living in conditions of semi-isolation. The residential segregation, however, contribute to the maintenance of the another tongue in some communities.

Second, the influence of the dominant regional language, i.e. Assamese, acts as a powerful influence in the process of bilingual or multi-lingual character of the tea garden labourers.

Third, socio-cultural interaction within the garden has paved the way for the growth of a new mixed language known as Sadri, acting as a *lingua franca*.

Further, the spread of literacy and education among the tea tribes in a language other than their mother-tongue has been a relentless force in the powers of language change and shift. This is particularly evident in younger generations and those who are for literate.

Fifth, the role of occasional, weekly or daily market centres have also played a significant role as a spatial factor in bringing diverse ethno-linguistic, cultural and racial groups together and creating suitable conditions for language change among the garden labourers.

Sixth, a major factor in the process of language change is the near total absence of any link of the labourers with the place of their origin and consequent culture-loss.

Seventh, inter-community marriages too have contributed in no uncertain manner in contributing to the language change among the tea-garden labourers.

Lastly, the inferior social and economic status of women can be a factor explaining sex differential in the process of language change.

CHAPTER - IV

EVIDENCE OF LANGUAGE CHANGE

4.1. Introductory Statement

Multilingual societies are found in all parts of the world, in older nations as well as newly created states, in both the present and in man's past. Diverse populations gave up their mother tongues in course of new generations in same ethnic groups but some ethnic groups among the same geographical areas kept their distinctive language for many decades.

There are two fundamental issues in order to understand inter generational mother tongue shift in multi-lingual societies.¹

The first issue is to understand the forces generating bilingualism and the second major issue is related to the forces affecting the language that bilinguals pass on to their children.

Dealing with the latter question pertaining to the language transferred by the bilinguals there are variety of factors which affect the propensity of bilingual parents to pass on their own mother-tongue to their off-spring. Among these, the most important areas are population, Government pressure, language availability for schooling, the degree of fluency in the second language and inter marriage between mother tongue groups.

Though there are many factors and pressures that affect language change, broadly

¹ Mc Cabe, Edward. J, Meeab (1978), "Domains of Language Usage and Mother-tongue Shift in Nairobi," *International Journal of the Sociology of languages*, Stanly Liberson pp.249-62.

they may be combined into two major groups. First, 'convergent change' which is an outcome of contact between societies whose members speak different languages. It is a systematic change, which involves a degree of merging of two separate groups of systems.

Second group refers to 'divergence' of ancestral prolonged language into descendant daughter language or spread of a language over a vast region where the geographical isolation leads to diversion from the core to peripheries. The emergence of dialects and new languages are suitable examples.

4.2. Geographical Location of the Tea Garden Areas

The selected tea gardens provide a fascinating area of research pertaining to language shift or language change. The region, on account of its ecological and physiographic characteristics, has remained isolated and is socially separated and economically non-integrated with the rest of the regions of Assam. Backward communication with the garden, inhospitable jungle area has isolated them from other communities internally. The region was inhabited by a number of social groups who among themselves too lived in a situation of near isolation. Only the ex-tea garden labourers who have moved out of the tea gardens have some links with the dominant groups and have developed variegated social, economic cultural relationship since their arrival.

After the migration of the tea garden labourers into these gardens, the authority deliberately kept them isolated precluding any contacts with other people in order to maintain a regular supply of labour force at any time. Therefore planters had settled them in different parts inside the garden. It is only after Independence, when their population increased many folds, that they had to be shifted from the garden due to the problems of employment.

4.3. Language Composition in the Adjoining Areas

Needless to say, the most dominant groups in and around the gardens are the Assamese speaking population. The two other groups, which are present in the region, are the Bengali and Nepali-speaking people but they are not found close to the locality of labourers. The contact with these groups is therefore not very frequent.

Table - 4.1
Assam: Linguistic Composition, 1971

Language	Percent to state's total population.
Assamese	60.89
Bengali	19.87
Hindi	5.46
Bodo	3.65
Nepali	2.42
Karbi	1.32
Mishing	1.21
Oriya	1.03

Source: R.Gopalakrishnan(1996) *The North East India, Land Economy and People*, p.124.

Table - 4.2
Darrang District: Principal languages and Dialects spoken 1961

Language	Percent to Total Population
Assamese	65.11
Bengali	9.84
Nepali	5.34
Hindi	5.04
Oriya	5.07
Bodo	6.02
Mundari	2.61
Mishing	1.32
Oraons	0.63

Source: Census of India, Assam; Darrang District

The table 4.1 and 4.2 provide a comparative picture of the language composition of the population in Assam and Darrang District.

It is evident from the both these tables (table 4.1 and 4.2) that the Assamese speaking population accounted for over 60 per cent in Assam whereas this proportion was a little over 65 per cent in Darrang. The proportion of Bengali speaking population is much less in Darrang district compared to the state average of nearly 20 per cent. The proportion of Nepali speaking population in the district is higher in the district compared to the state while the speakers of Hindi at both the state and the district level is more or less the same. A higher proportion of Mundari and Oraons population in the district is largely a reflection of their concentration in tea gardens (see fig 4.1).

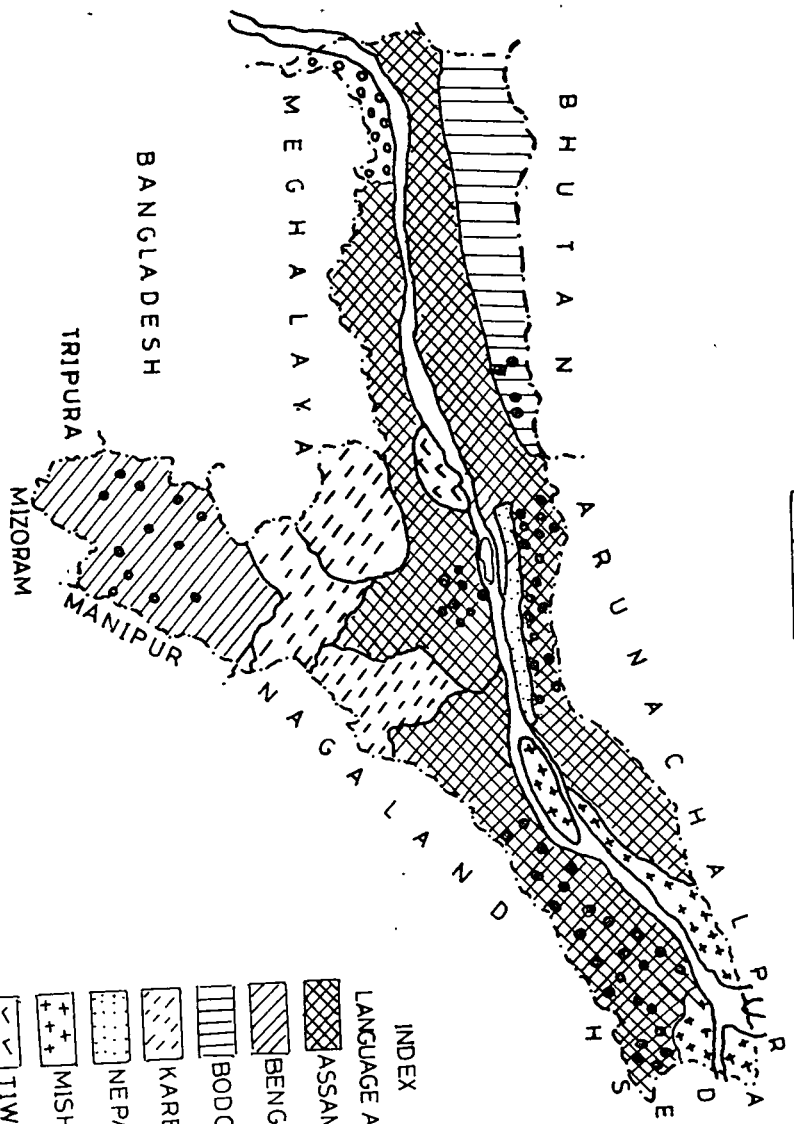
4.3.1. Ethnic Composition of the Sample Gardens

As many as 22 communities in Pertabghur and 19 communities in Dikorai Tea gardens were enumerated. Among the Austric speaking groups the labourers speak different dialects. Table 4.3 shows the numerical strength of people in the two sample gardens classified by their ethnic affiliation

It is evident that the Mundas account for the largest ethnic group in pertabghur while the Oriyas constitute the majority in Dikorai Tea estates. The second major group in Pertabghur is the Oriyas. Together the Oriyas and Mundas account for a little less than 40 per cent in Pertabghur Tea estates. Out of the remaining, the other major communities in Pertabghur are the Telies (10.17 per cent) Santali (5.78 per cent) Jullah Muslim (5.61 per cent) and Bhumij (4.38 per cent).

ASSAM DISTRIBUTION OF LINGUISTIC GROUPS

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



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 -  TIWA
 -  RABHA
 -  TEA GARDEN LABOURER
SADANI

Fig. 4.

Table - 4.3

Pertabghur and Dikorai: Distribution of Dominant Groups

Ethnic groups	Pertabghur % to total Population	Dikorai % to total population
Munda	19.29	19.7
Oriya	16.31	26.8
Khariya	3.15	5.58
Guwala	4.03	4.47
Oraons	-	7.88
Mahali	3.15	6.31
Santal	5.78	7.03
Teli	10.17	-
Bhumij	4.38	1.57
Jullah Muslim	5.61	2.06
Kaya	2.4	-
Panika	1.92	3.5
Others	23.82	25.1

Source: Field Survey

In sharp contrast, the Oraon community from Chotanagpur constitutes third largest group in Dikorai tea estates (i.e 7.88 per cent). The Santali, the Mahali and Guwala from Chotanagpur each account for 6 to 7 per cent of the population in Dikorai Tea estate.

4.4. Medium of Instruction in the Schools

The medium of instruction in the schools is a major factor in language change affecting the younger generation. In the sample gardens, every division has a primary school, one college near the two gardens. Education in all the institutions is imparted in Assamese.

Though Hindi and English are also taught as second languages, very few of them are familiar in speaking these languages.

Table - 4.4

Pertabghur and Dikorai: Educational Institutions and Medium of Instruction

Pertabghur			Dikorai		
Educational Institute	Number	Medium	Educational Institute	Number	Medium
L.P. School	7	Assamese	L.P. School	8	Assamese
M.E. School	2	Assamese	M.E. School	3	Assamese
High School	2	Assamese	High School	3	Assamese
H.S. School	1	Assamese	H.S. School	-	Assamese
College	1	Assamese & English	College	1	Assamese & English

Source: Field Survey

In Pertabghur, the economically sound and conscious parents get their children admitted into Biswanath Chariali's school for better result. But majority of the students seeks admission at the Garden's Lower Primary School and High school. Some of the students are sent to missionary school too. These missionary schools also use Assamese as the medium of instruction. English and Hindi are taught as second languages.

In recent times some private English medium schools have come up in several parts of the state. This has motivated a few pupils to acquire knowledge in English language.

There is a higher secondary school at Dikorai Centre, which imparts education in Assamese Medium. This school produced a section of educated people from among the

garden labourers of Dikorai. Most children belonging to different communities get their children admitted to this school. The performance of the school has been quite satisfactory and the labourers have benefited from these schools by educating their children who have found better jobs in recent years. In the case of higher education, it is found that they prefer Assamese medium at the Degree level too.

4.5. Inter Community Variation in Language-change and Language Shift

Language-change or language-shift is quite common in these two sample gardens. Basically they are trilingual. Most of the labourers of Pertabghur and Dikorai can speak three languages. One is their mother tongue, the second is Assamese and the last one is their *lingua franka* i.e. Sadri. Those labourers who have lost their mother tongue are bilinguals and they speak Assamese and sadri.

4.5.1 *Language Change and Shift at Pertabghur*

The table 4.5 and fig 4.2 show the extent of shifting of languages to other languages. The highest language shift is observed among the groups having small size of population; which is a complete shift of their mother tongue. Such groups include Ghasi, Modi, Jullah Muslim, Khodal and Phulenda. The Ghasis are scattered here and there in the midst of Assamese

Dwellers in Karsontala, Khodal and Phulenda are to be found in Monai division near Assamese localities. In the category where around 50 to 60 per cent population has shifted away from their mother tongue are included Khariya (55.56), (63.80) Mahali (55.56) Prajab (55.56), Kaya (57.15), Santali (55.56) and Guwala (52.18) These groups of

Pertabghur Language and Dialect Shift

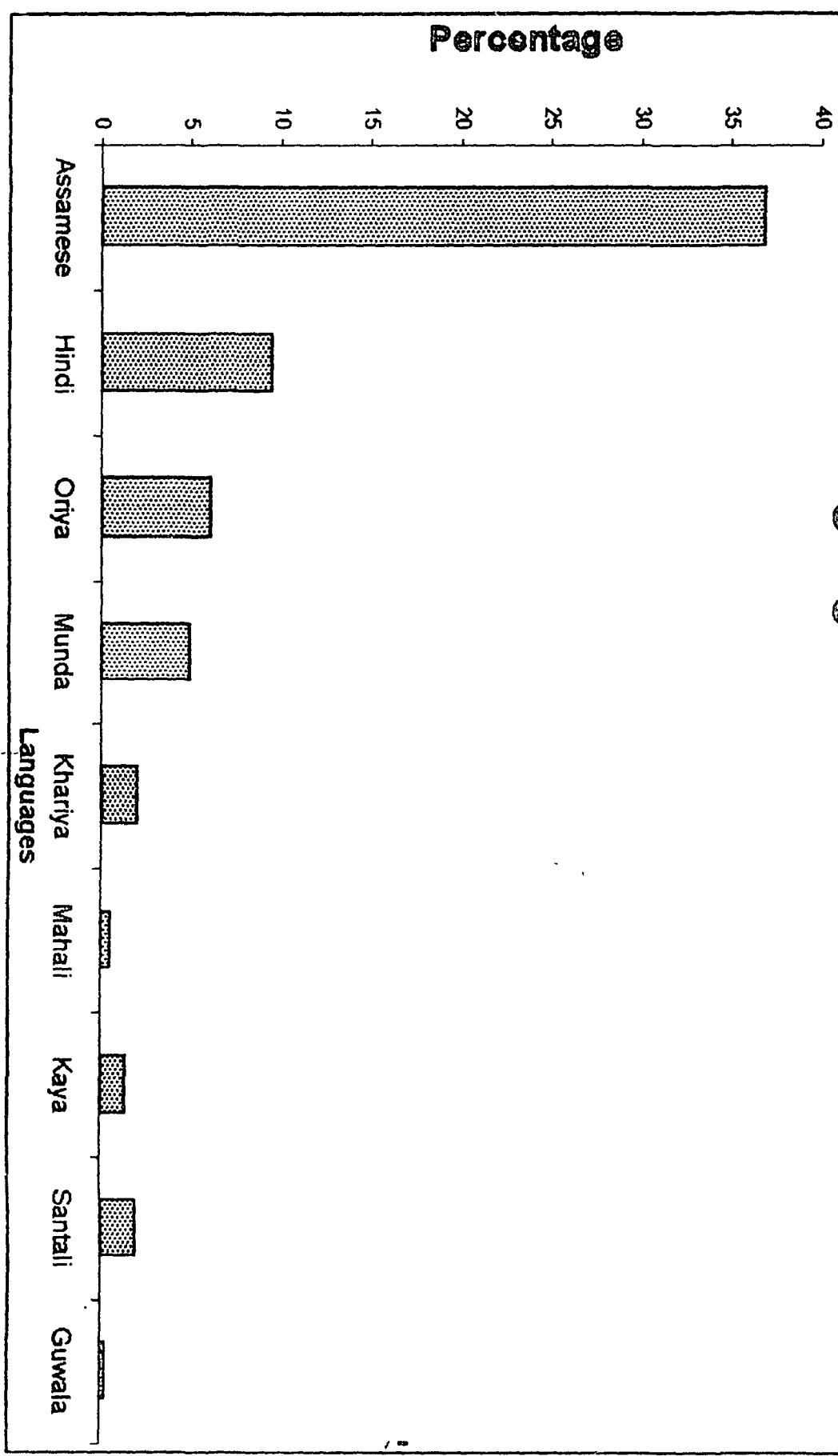


Table - 4.5

Pertabghur: Inter-Community Variation in Language Shift

Community	% of Populatrion	% who do not speak their mother tongue	% speaking other language and dialects
Munda	19.29	38.28	22.38 As, 5.45 H, 5.45 Or.
Oriya	16.3	41.94	29.99 As, 11.05H,
Bhumij	4.38	64.00	40 As, 12 Or, 8 Sa, 4 G.
Khariya	3.15	55.56	38.88 As, 11.11 Or, 5.55 M,
Teli	10.17	63.8	44.82 As, 17.07 Or, 5.07 H
Mahali	3.15	55.56	27.27 As, 16.66 H, 11.11 K.
Sabor	1.75	60.0	30 As, 20 Or, 10 M
Prajab	3.33	57.9	36.84 As, 23.39 Or, 5.26 M.
Ghasi	2.10	100	50 As, 25 Sa, 16 H, 8.33 K.
Kaya	2.45	57.15	35.71 As, 7.14 H, 7.14 Or.
Modi	1.22	100	42.85 As, 28.57 H, 28.57 G.
Santali	5.78	55.56	18.18 As, 21.12 Kh, 24.24 Or.
Guwala	4.03	52.18	34.78 As, 8.69 H, 8.69 Ma.
J.Muslim	5.61	100	46.87 As, 15.62 H, 33.12 K, 12.5 Kh
Khodal	1.4	100	50 As, 25 H, 25 Or.
Sonar	1.01	50	33.33 As, 16.66 Or,
Phulenda	0.87	100	80 As, 20 H,

Average 54.86

Source: Field Survey.

N.B. As= Assamese, H= Hindi, Or = Oriya, M = Munda, Sa = Santali, Kh = Khariya, Ma = Mahali.

Table - 4.5a

Average Shift to different languages & dialects (All Communities)

Language	Percentage
Assamese	36.83
Hindi	9.4
Oriya	6.03
Munda	4.92
Khariya	1.97
Mahali	0.51
Kaya	1.32
Santali	1.94
Guwahala	0.23

Source: Field Survey.

labourers are scattered near the factory of Pertabghur which is called Tanti line, Factory line and Prajab line etc. and some of lines are demarcated by numerical number. Though some of the lines are also marked as particular community lines, yet these communities are not found in these lines at present. But there are some exceptions. In Bukubhanga line at Pertabghur, the Khariya Communities are living in large number. Around 60-70 per cent of the population has shifted away from their mother tongue among the Sabor (60) Teli(63.80) and the Bhumij(64).

It is evident from the above tables and figures that the process of language shift among the tea-garden labourers of Pertabghur tea estate is of a high order. More than 54 per cent of the labourers have shifted away from their mother tongue and this shift is extraordinary among those groups which are small in numerical strength. The larger groups seem to have been able to retain their mother tongue in varying degrees.

An interesting feature of the shift is that while a majority of these labourers has accepted Assamese (36.83 per cent) as their mother-tongue (table 4.6), a few of them have shifted to Hindi (9.40 per cent). Significantly a section has shifted towards Oriya (6.03 per cent) Munda (6.03 per cent), Khariya (1.97 per cent) Santali(1.94 per cent) and Kaya(1.32 per cent).

It is thus important to note that the process of shift in language within the garden is not only towards the dominant regional language, it is also towards dominant labour groups which have retained their mother tongue.

4.5.2. Language Change and Shift at Dikorai

Dikorai and Pertabghur are located in the tea belt of Sonitpur district. So, the differences in language change in these two gardens are not significant. An interview of sixteen labour lines in Dikorai and of eighteen communities in the garden revealed the extent of language-shift as presented in the table 4.6.

Table - 4.6
Dikorai: Language Shift

Communities	Population size	% who do not speak their mother tongue	% speaking other language and dialect
Oriya	221(268)	51.6	31.2 As,12.01 H,4.97 G, 3.17 M.
Munda	158(19.7)	58.0	35.33 As, 8.51 H, 9.5 Ss, 45 Or.
Bhumij	13 (1.57)	61.18	52.78 As, 9.18 H,
Mahali	52(6.31)	61.54	46.15 As, 9.61 H, 5.76 M
Baraik	27(3.27)	37.08	29.62 As, 17.64 Ora
Mulli	10(1.21)	100	60 As, 40 Or,
Khariya	46(5.58)	54.38	39.13 As, 6.52 H, 4.34 Or , 3.07 Ora.
Panika	29(3.5)	100	62.06 As, 20.72 G, 10.34 H, 17.29 Or
Guwala	39(4.7)	60.38	42.63 As, 6.52H, 4.34 Or, 3.07 Ora.
Ghasi	12(1/4)	100	75 As, 25 M,
Khumbha	8(0.90)	100	75 As, 25M.
Oraons	65(7.88)	51.93	46.15 As, 7.67 Sa, 4.61 G, 3.54 H, 1.92 Or.
Santali	58(7.03)	50.00	38.46 As, 4.6Or, 3.76 H,
Rouhtia	11(1.33)	100	63.33 As, 36.36 Or,
J.Muslims	17(2.06)	100	52.94 As, 29.41 Or, 17.64 Sa.
Sabor	17(2.06)	52.95	35.29 As, 17.64 Ora.
Sonar	18(2.18)	61.62	50 As, 11.11 Or,
Ganju	23(2.49)	52.52	43.47 As, 8.6 H.
	Average	30.39	

Source: Field Survey

N.B.: Assamese = As, Hindi = H, Oriya = Or , Munda = M, Guwala= G, Santali = Sa.
Oraons = Ora.

Table-4.6a

Average shifted to other language and dialects are as follows:-

Assamese	38.85
Hindi	4.33
Oriya	7.65
Munda	3.44
Guwala	1.68
Santali	1.98
Oraons	0.98

The table 4.6 and 4.6a as well as fig 4.3 reveal the range of language and dialect shift. Much like Pertapghur, the shift is very high among the communities, which are very small in terms of numerical strength. These include the Mullis, Ghasis, Khumbas, Rouhtias and the Jullah Muslims. The only exception is found among the Panikas which is a relatively large group settled in Mahakhati in the midst of Assamese village. They are ex-tea garden labourers and are by and large assimilated into the Assamese culture. That explains their complete shift from their mother tongue to accept Assamese.

Around 60 per cent of the population belonging to Sonar Mahale, Bhumij and Guwala communities have shifted away from their mother tongue. In this case, the population size is not related to the extent of shift from their own dialect. Around 30 to 60 per cent of the population belonging to Oriya, Munda, Baraik, Khariya, Oraons, Santali, Sabor, Ganju have shifted to other languages. The lowest dialect shift among those groups is among the Baraik (i.e. 37.08 per cent).

It is evident that on an average, around 30 per cent (30.39) of the labourers have shifted to other languages in Dikorai which is much less than the extent of shift observed in

Dikorai Language and Dialect Shift

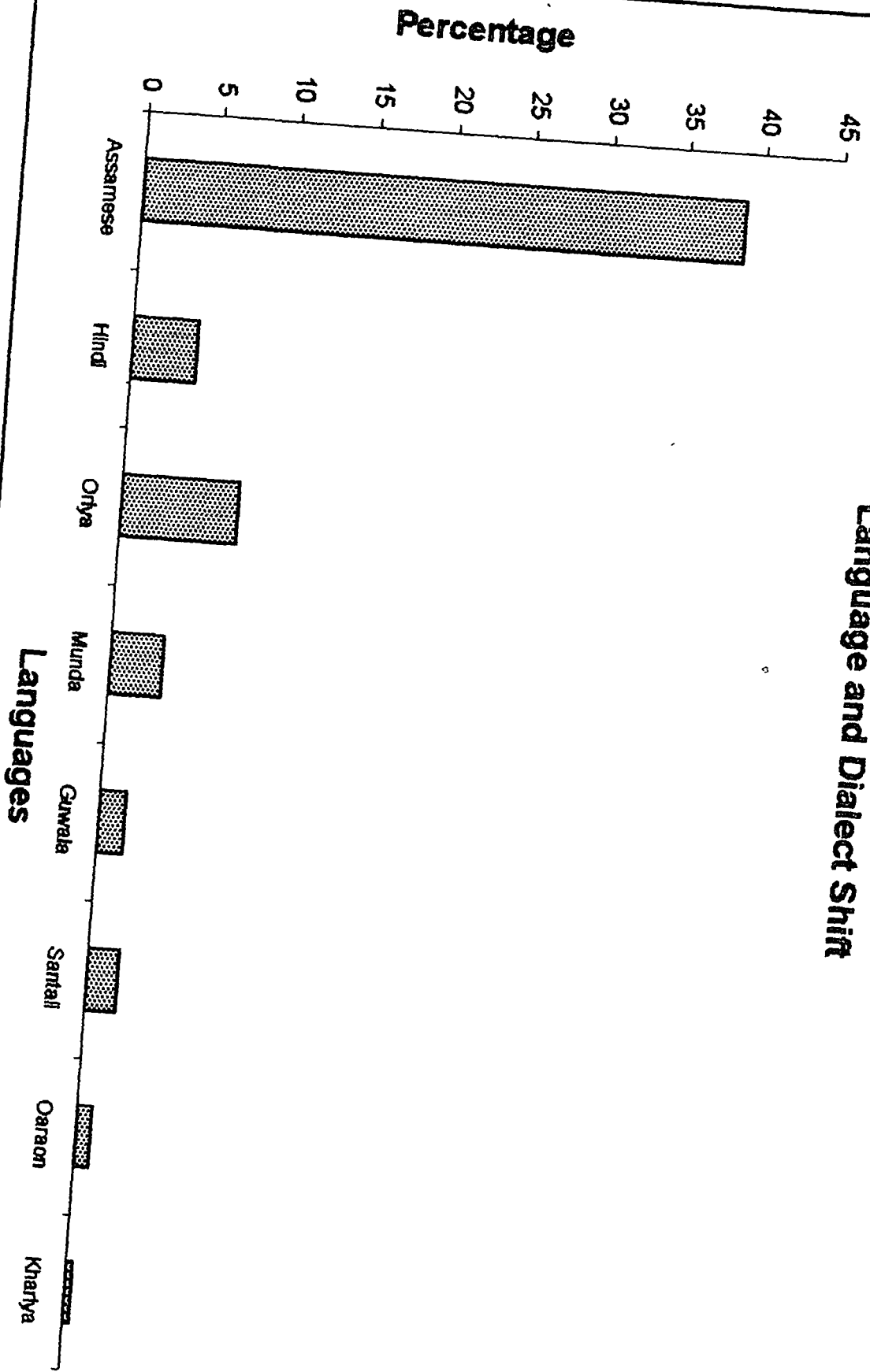


Fig. 4.3

Pertapghur. But the pattern of shift remains the same. The smaller communities have completely shifted to other languages, particularly to Assamese, while the larger communities have been able to retain their mother tongue among a sizeable segment.

Around 38.85 per cent of those who have shifted to other languages have accepted Assamese (table 4.8) while a segment have accepted non-Assamese languages spoken in the tea garden. A significant proportion of those shifted to other languages has adopted Oriya (7.65 per cent) Hindi (4.33 per cent) and Munda (3.44 per cent).

The analysis reveals a two-tier language assimilation-taking place in the tea gardens. There is a shift towards adopting intra-garden languages spoken by the dominant group and a tendency to adopt the dominant language of the region i.e. Assamese spoken outside the tea-garden areas.

Operation of both these tendencies in the tea gardens make the labourers bilingual or multi-lingual in their linguistic adjustment.

4.6. Incidence of Bilingualism.

Bilingualism may be viewed as an adaptation by individual to the presence of persons with other tongue. Although bilingualism is expected, there is no assurance that it will be a reciprocal variety in which each group learns a second language to an equal degree.

Bilingualism may be viewed as having three possible outcomes. First, it can provide the mechanism leading to the development of monolingualism. This may be associated with effective groups of small population size groups such as the Bhumij, the Modi, the Baraik etc. after they learned Sadri which is the *lingua franka* among the tea

community and used Assamese as the second language although completion of this process may have taken several generations. Clearly bilingualism was an intermediate stage between the arrival of non-Assamese-speakers and the tribals' loss of their own tongue.

Second, bilingualism may be an end product in itself. In this case, there is sufficient bilingualism to enable a population with different mother tongues to maintain the social system, but the bilingual parents do not lead the loss of mother tongue among the next generation. Rather the next generation receives the parents' first language and merely repeats the process. Under such circumstances, two populations may be in contact without the decline of either language.

The third possibility, which need not concern us here but will be mentioned merely for the sake of completeness, is that the speakers of one language may begin to use a simplified form of the other groups tongue, which in turn is passed on to the children as their first mother tongue.

In case of the tea garden labourers in the selected gardens, the first two are applicable. The third point is applicable to the Bengali populations in Assam.

The table 4.7 and fig 4.4 and 4.5 show the proportion of bilinguals among different communities in Pertapghur and Dikorai

Language Change in Pertabghnur, 1999

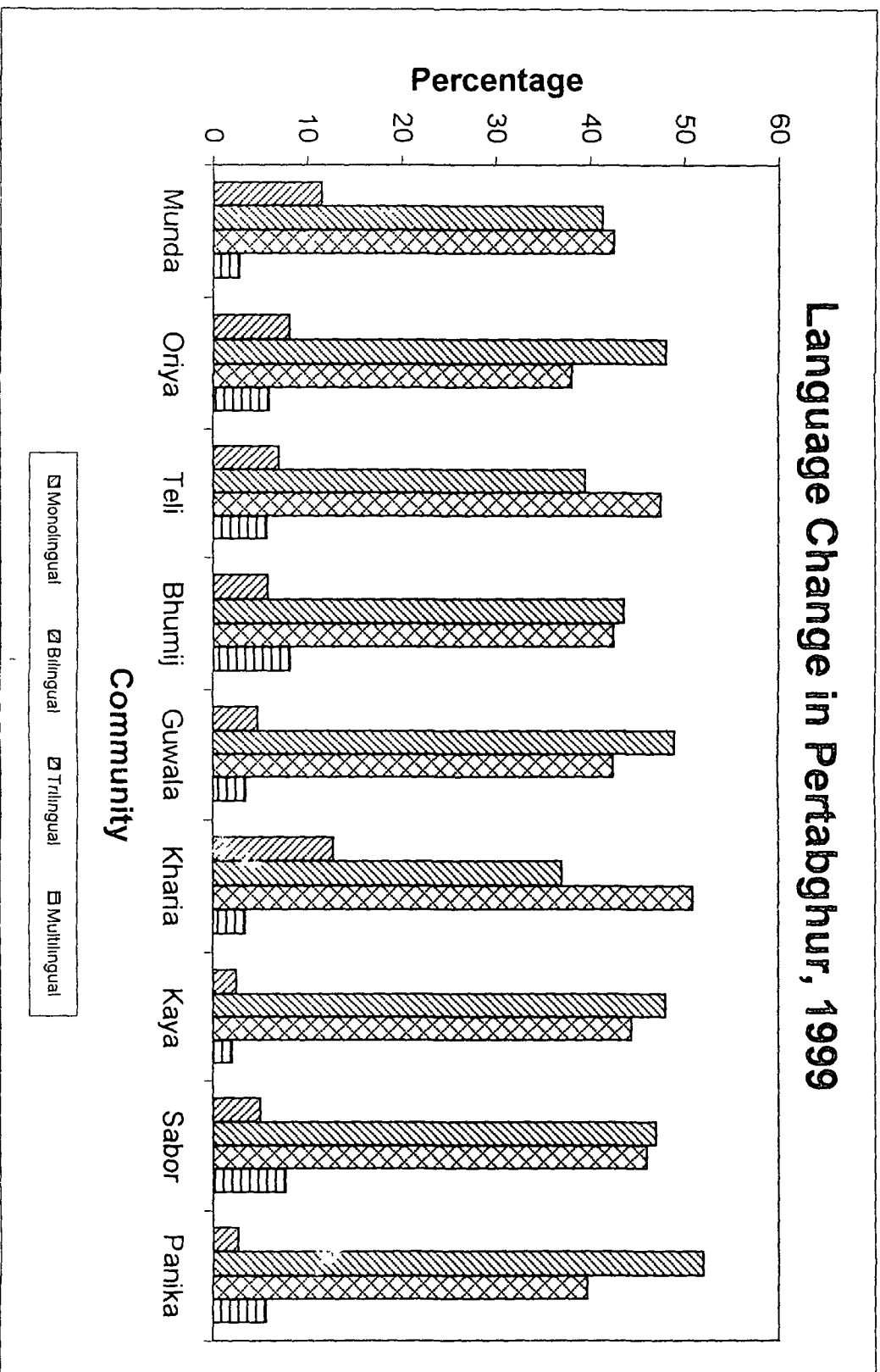


Fig. 4.4

Language Change in Dikorai, 1999

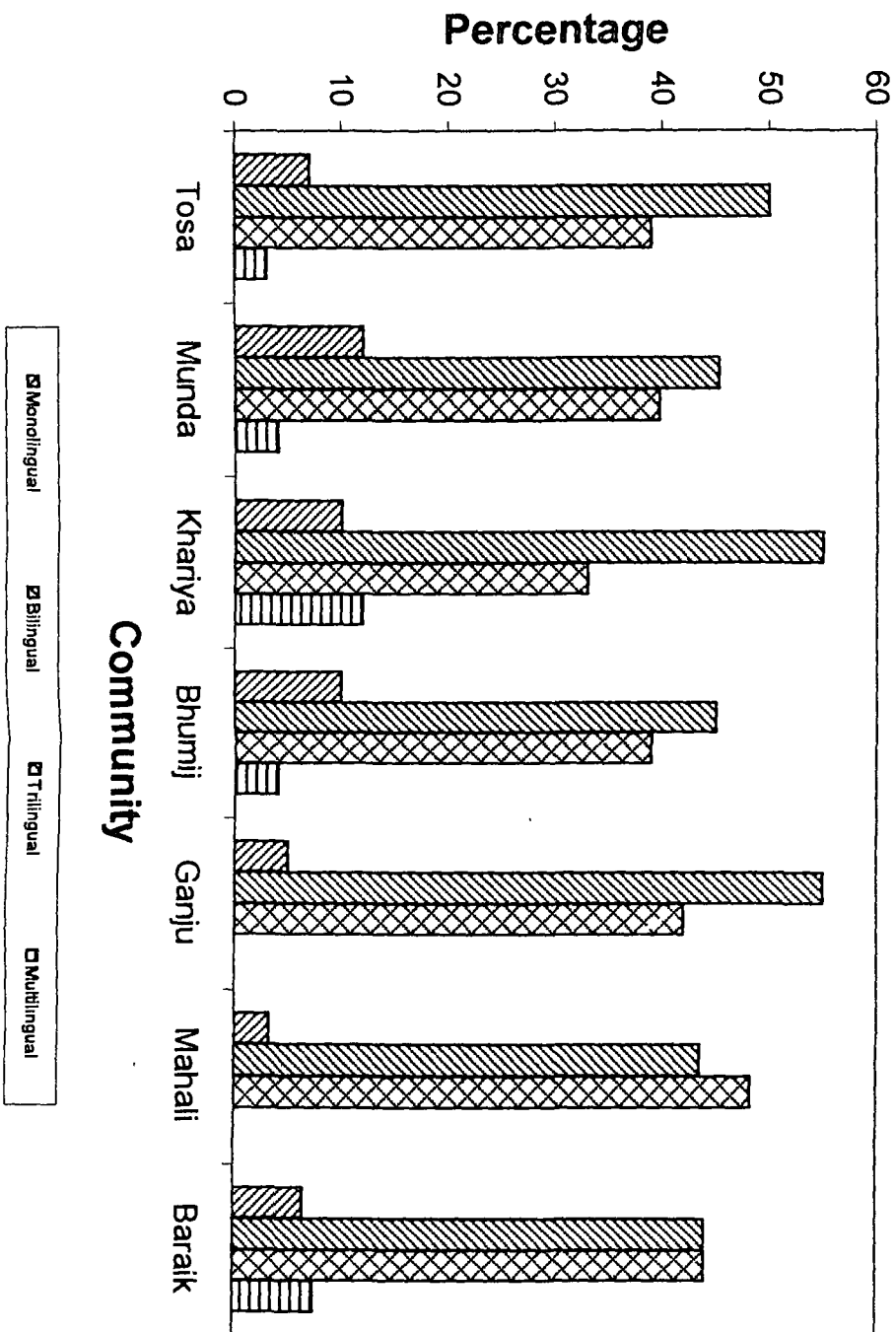


Fig. 4.5

Table- 4.7
Pertabghur and Dikorai: Distribution of Bilinguals.

Pertabghur

groups	population size	Percentage	Bilungual percentage
Munda	110	19.29	42.50
Oriya	93	16.91	49.93
Teli	58	10.17	39.50
Mahali	18	3.15	57.00
Sabar	10	1.75	47.62
Prajab	19	3.33	36/73
Kaya	14	2.45	48.39
Santali	33	5.78	52.55
Guwala	23	4.03	41.67
Sonar	6	1.05	61.25
Ghasi	12	2.10	62.36
Panika	11	1.92	65.66
Jullah Muslim	32	5.61	65.78
Khodal	8	1.40	52.39
Punlenda	5	0.87	51.31
Ghatowar	7	1.22	65.00
Modi	7	1.22	65.00
Khariya	18	3.15	48.23
Bhumij	25	4.38	42.50
	Average Bilinguals		52.40 per cent

Table - 4.7a

Dikorai

Community	Size of population	Percentage	Bilinguals
Oriya	221	26.8	48.25
Munda	158	19.7	45.23
Bhumij	13	1.57	45.15
Mahali	52	6.31	43.51
Khariya	46	5.38	55.25
Guwala	39	4.7	39.65
Oraons	65	7.88	61.25
Santali	58	7.03	52.35
Panika	29	3.5	63.25
Ghasi	12	1.4	69.25
Molli	10	1.21	64.25
Khumba	8	0.90	56.95
Rouhtia	11	1.33	65.00
Jullah Muslim	17	2.06	68.28
Baraik	27	3.27	44.24
Sabar	17	2.06	55.66
Sonar	18	2.18	65.21
Ganju	23	2.49	55.19
	Average Bilinguals		55.64

Source: Field Survey

It is evident from table 4.7 that the proportion of bilinguals is very high among the labourers living in both the gardens. The extent of bilingualism is however more pronounced in Dikorai compared to Pertabghur. The inter-ethnic variation in bilingualism is also equally striking. However, the extent of bilingualism is much higher among those labourers who belong to communities of smaller numerical strength (see table 4.7). The larger communities have been able to retain their mother tongue to a great extent while remaining mono-lingual in large proportion.

4.6.1. *Male-Female differential in Bilingualism*

There are significant variations among the male and females in both the gardens - Pertabghur and Dikorai as far as bilingualism is concerned. There are also significant ethnic variations in male-female bilinguals. In general more males are bilinguals compared to the females. This is so among the Mundas, Bhimij, Telis, Khariyas, Santalis and Guwalas in Pertabghur. However, there are more female bilinguals among the Oriyas and Mahalis in this tea garden. The male female differential in bilingualism is substantial among the Telis, Bhumijs, Guwalas and the Mundas. A very large proportion of females is bilingual among the Mahalis.

Table - 4.8

Pertabghur and Dikorai: Male-Female Variation Among Bilinguals

Community	Peratabghur			Dikorai		
	Male	Female	Difference	Male	Female	Difference
Munda	37.09	31.25	5.84	33.75	32.0	1.75
Oriya	29.06	30.95	-1.79	36.2	26.66	9.54
Bhumij	35.71	21.42	14.29	42.85	33.33	9.52
Teli	47.22	31.21	16.01	-	-	-
Khariya	36.36	27.27	9.09	36.0	38.09	-2.99
Mahali	30.00	37.5	-7.5	46.37	30.43	13.8
Santali	27.77	26.66	1.11	36.66	25.0	-11.66
Guwala	30.76	23.03	7.73	26.08	29.47	-3.41

Source: Field Data.

In Dikorai, there are more female bilinguals among the Kharias and the Guwalas, in sharp contrast to their counterparts in Pertabghur (Table - 4.8). A great differential exists in bilingualism among the sexes among the Mahalis and Oriyas where there are fewer female bilinguals.

4.7. Multilingualism:

In both the sample gardens the multilingual persons are very few. Most of them speak Assamese, Sadri and Hindi apart from their respective mother tongues. While Sadri is known to nearly all, a greater proportion is conversant in Assamese and a few in Hindi. English, Bengali, and Nepali language speakers are not found in these two sample gardens. Following table shows the proportion of multilinguals in Pertabghur and Dikorai.

Table- 4.9
Pertabghur and Dikorai: Inter-Community Variation in the
Distribution of Multilinguals

Pertabghur		Dikorai	
Community	Multilingual in %	Community	Multilingual in %
Munda	2.78	Munda	4.00
Oriya	6.33	Oriya	6.77
Bhumij	8.5	Bhumij	4.00
Mahali	3.95	Mahali	3.25
Khariya	7.5	Khariya	12.5
Guwala	4.66	Guwala	3.46

Source: Field Survey

The table 4.9 reveals that multilingual elements among the labourers are fewer in both the gardens. The percentage of such speakers does not exceed 12.5 per cent in both the gardens taken together. A very high proportion of Khariyas is multi-lingual in both the gardens. The Oriyas too have substantial proportion of multilinguals among them. The Bhumij in Pertabghur record a relatively higher proportion of multi-linguals in their population.

4.7.1. Male-Female Differential in Multilingualism

Male-female differential is greater when it concerns multi-lingualism compared to bilingualism. Generally female multilinguals are very few in the two sample gardens. Hindi is spoken by some female sections of the labourers, but other language multilinguals are not found among the females. Multi-lingual women are drawn only from educated working women employed in schools, nursing in a hospital and working or in a Church.

Table- 4.10

Pertabghur and Dikorai; Sex-Differential among Multilinguals

Community	Dikorai			Pertabghur		
	Male	Female	Difference	Male	Female	Difference
Munda	5.59	4.88	0.71	4.57	3.43	1.44
Oriya	6.88	5.19	1.71	6.03	4.00	2.03
Bhumij	4.98	3.76	1.22	5.91	4.66	1.25
Mahali	7.88	8.16	-0.28	9.11	8.69	0.42
Guwala	6.77	5.29	1.48	7.52	6.66	0.86

Source: Field Survey.

The table 4.10 reveals that except for the Mahalis, in both the gardens, the proportion of male multi-linguals is higher than their female counterparts. But the differential by sex is much less pronounced as the male multi-linguals are only marginally more than those of females.

4.8. Factors in language shift.

Every migrant community has to shift or change its mother tongue to some extent in all parts of the world. The tea garden labourers migrated to Assam 178 years ago and the time factor is one of the evidences to metamorphose their languages and dialects.

An important factor or their change of shift from the mother tongues is their size of population. Though the tea garden population constitutes 13 per cent of the total population of Assam, they are distributed in 110 communities all over Assam.

Their size of population varies greatly in each garden. There are about 1800 working labourers in each of the sample gardens, but they are divided into 20 communities or more. Except for Mundas and Oriyas, the others have not maintained their size of population. So, Oriyas and Mundas have by and large been able to maintain their mother tongues too.

Third important factor for the change and shift of their mother tongues is the influence of the dominant regional language i.e. Assamese. In the sample gardens, it is evident that most of the labourers shifted and changed their mother tongue to Assamese language. In Pertabghur the average percentage of shift from the mother tongue to Assamese is 37.96 per cent and in Dikorai it is 38.85 per cent. It shows that the influence of the regional language is considerable in the process of this shift.

Another important influence on the language of the labourers comes from Hindi. Hindi is a national language and their ancestors were familiar with this language at their original place in Chotanagpur. Influence of Hindi Cinema and other audio-visual media have encouraged the labourers to pick up Hindi as a second or third language.

The fourth important influence is social and cultural ecology of labourer lines. It was noted that the language maintenance depends upon the settlement adjustment of the labourers. Originally labourers were settled by the authority according to the community affiliation of the labourers, such as Munda line, Korowa line, Oriya line Parya line, Ghasi line etc. But at present, except for a few, most labourers are settled in mixed colonies. After their retirement from the Garden, many labourers have shifted to ex-tea garden *Bastis* inhabited by diverse communities. Such a change in the social ecology also influences change in language among the younger generations.

There are basically two types of language shift found in the sample gardens. These are "other languages" and "inter community languages" Change. "Other languages" means those who shifted to Assamese and Hindi languages and "inter community shifted" means those who shifted to Oriya, Munda, Santali etc. But the inter community mother tongue shift is very less.

Table -4.11

**Pertabghur and Dikorai: Percentage of Mother Tongue
Shift to Different Languages and Dialects**

Pertabghur		Dikorai
Community	Average % of Mother tongue shift	
Assamese	57.96	38.85
Hindi	8.32	4.33
Oriya	8.34	7.65
Munda	3.87	4.44
Santali	1.98	1.98
Guwala	2.16	1.68
Kaya	0.90	-
Oraons	-	0.98
Khariya	-	0.41

Source: Field Survey

The above table 4.11 shows that the average percentage of language shift to Assamese is higher at Pertabghur(57.96) than at Dikorai(38.85). The shift to Hindi is also higher at Pertabghur (8.32) than at Dikorai (4.33). Language shift to Oriya is nearly same in both the sample gardens.

In both the gardens complete language shift is found among communities of smaller size of population. These groups of labourers are found near Assamese villages and ex-tea garden Bastis. They are casual workers of the garden, locally known as "*faltu labour*". Some of their family members are working in the construction of roads. Some others are engaged in cattle keeping or as agricultural labourers, motor drivers and *chowkidars* etc. in nearby towns and villages. They have completely lost their mother tongue. Following are the communities who have adopted a language other than their own mother tongue.

Table - 4.12

Pertabghur and Dikorai: Communities Experiencing Complete Shift in Their Language

Pertabghur	Community	% population	Proportion speaking other Language/ dialect
1.	Ghasi	2.10	58.33 As, 25 Or, 16.66 G.
2	Panikar	1.92	100 As,
3	J.Muslim	5.61	34.78 As, 18.75 Or, 12.5 H.
4	Khodal	1.4	50As, 25 H, 25 Or.
5	Phulenda	0.87	80 As, 20 H,
Dikorai			
1	Modi	2.1	60As, 40 Or
2	Panika	3.5	60 As, 40 Or.
3	Ghasi	1.4	75 As, 25 M,
4	Rouhtia	1.33	63.63 As, 33.33 Or.
5	J.Muslim	2.06	52.94 As, 29.41 Or, 17.64 Sa

Source: Field Survey (for key to the names refer to table-4.6)

It is clear from the table 4.12 that as many as five communities each in the two gardens have completely lost their mother tongue and have shifted to the regional language or to some intra-garden tribal languages. All these communities are small in numerical strength, the only exception being the Julla Muslims

4.8.1. Male-Female variation in language shift

The male-female differences in language shift have some significant variation among the labourers of Pertabghur and Dikorai (see fig 4.6 and 4.7). The rate of language shift among males to other language is higher than that of the females.

Table - 4.13

Pertabghur: Male Female Variation in Language shift

Community	Size of Population	% who do not speak their mother tongue	% of speaking other language and dialect
Munda M	62	53.23	37.09 As, 8.04 H,
F	48	39.39	31.25 As, 8.33 Or
Oriya M	48	56.25	29.16 As
F	45	45.25	31.95 As, 7.14 H, 7.14 Or
Teli M	36	69.45	47.22 As, 8.33 H, 11.11 M
F	22	46.46	31.91 As, 9.09 H, 18.18 Or
Bhurnuj M	14	42.86	35.71 As, 8.33 H
F	11	42.60	21.42 As, 14.28 H, 7.14 M
Guwala M	13	53.83	30.76 As, 20.07 H,
F	10	46.16	23.07 As, 15.38 M, 7.69 Or
Khariya M	11	54.54	36.36 As, 18.18 H,
F	7	42.55	27.27 As, 14.28 H
Mahali M	10	60.00	51.14 As, 14.28 H, 25.57 M
F	8	62.50	37.5 As, 12.5 M, 12.5 Ka
Kaya M	7	57.15	28.57 As, 14.28 Or, 14.26 H
F	7	57.15	28.57 As, 14.26 H, 14.26 Or
Modi M	3	100	100 As
F	3	100	100 As
Panika M	7	100	78 As, 22 M,
F	6	100	66.66 As, 33.33 H
Sobor M	6	50	33.33 As, 16.66 T
F	4	33.34	33.33 As
Prajab M	5	60	40 As, 20 Or
F	4	40	40 As
Khodal M	4	100	75 As, 25 H
F	4	100	75 As, 25 H
J Muslim M	19	100	57.89 As, 1.5 H, 26.3 Or
F	13	100	57.85 As, 10.5 H, 26.3 Or
Sonar M	3	50	25 As, 25 Ma
F	2	25	
Phuland M	3	100	50 As, 25 H, 25 Or
F	2	100	50 As, 50 Or
Ghasi M	7	100	57.4 As, 28.57 H, 9.9 M
F	5	100	52.9 H, 11.78 M, 17.67 Or

Source Field Survey NE As= Assamase, H= Hindi, Or = Oriya, M= Munda,

Ka = Kaya, G= Guwala, M = Mahali

Pertabghur Male-Female Variation in Language and Dialect Shift

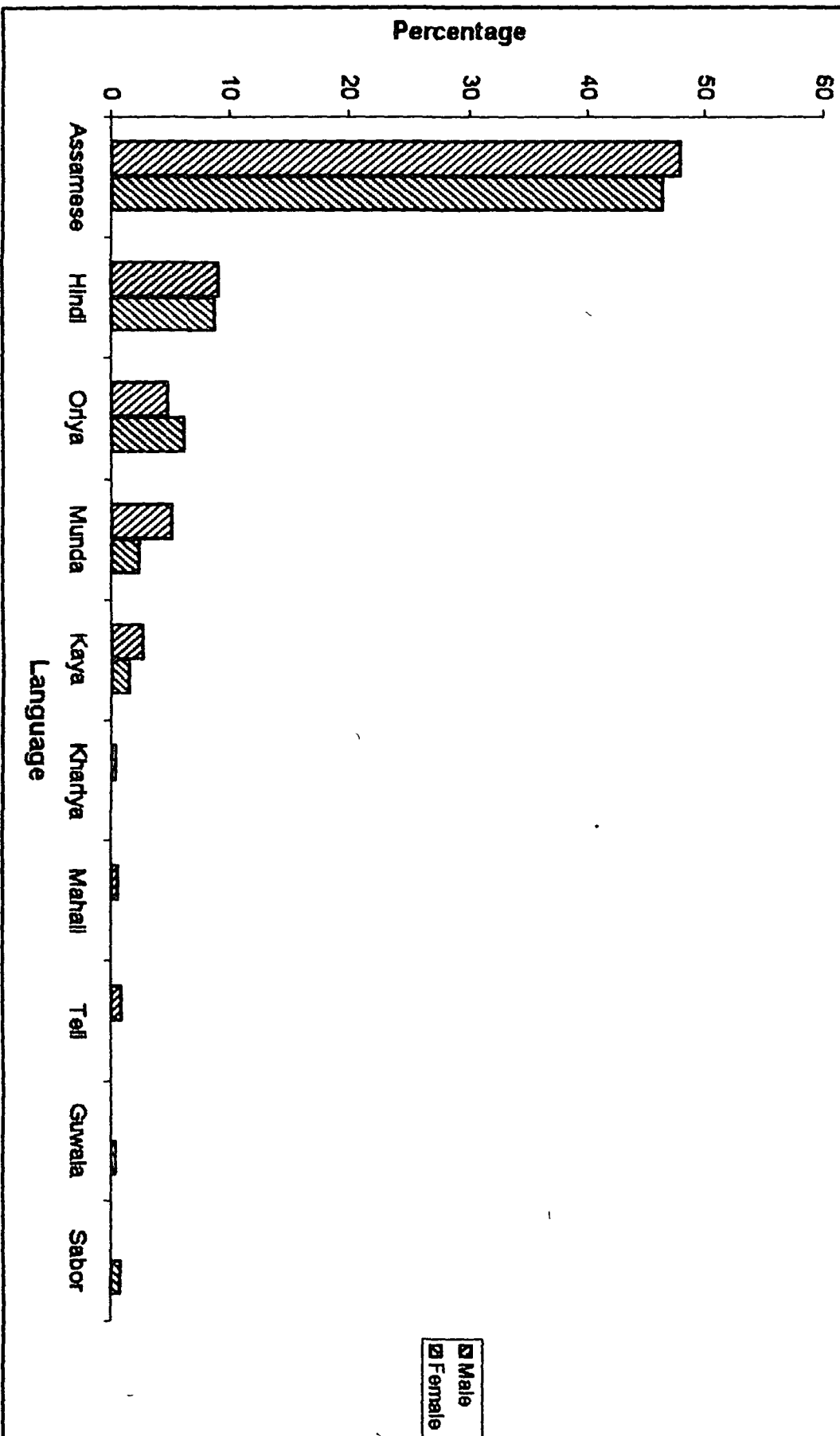


Fig.4.6

Dikori Male-Female Variation in Language and Dialect Shift

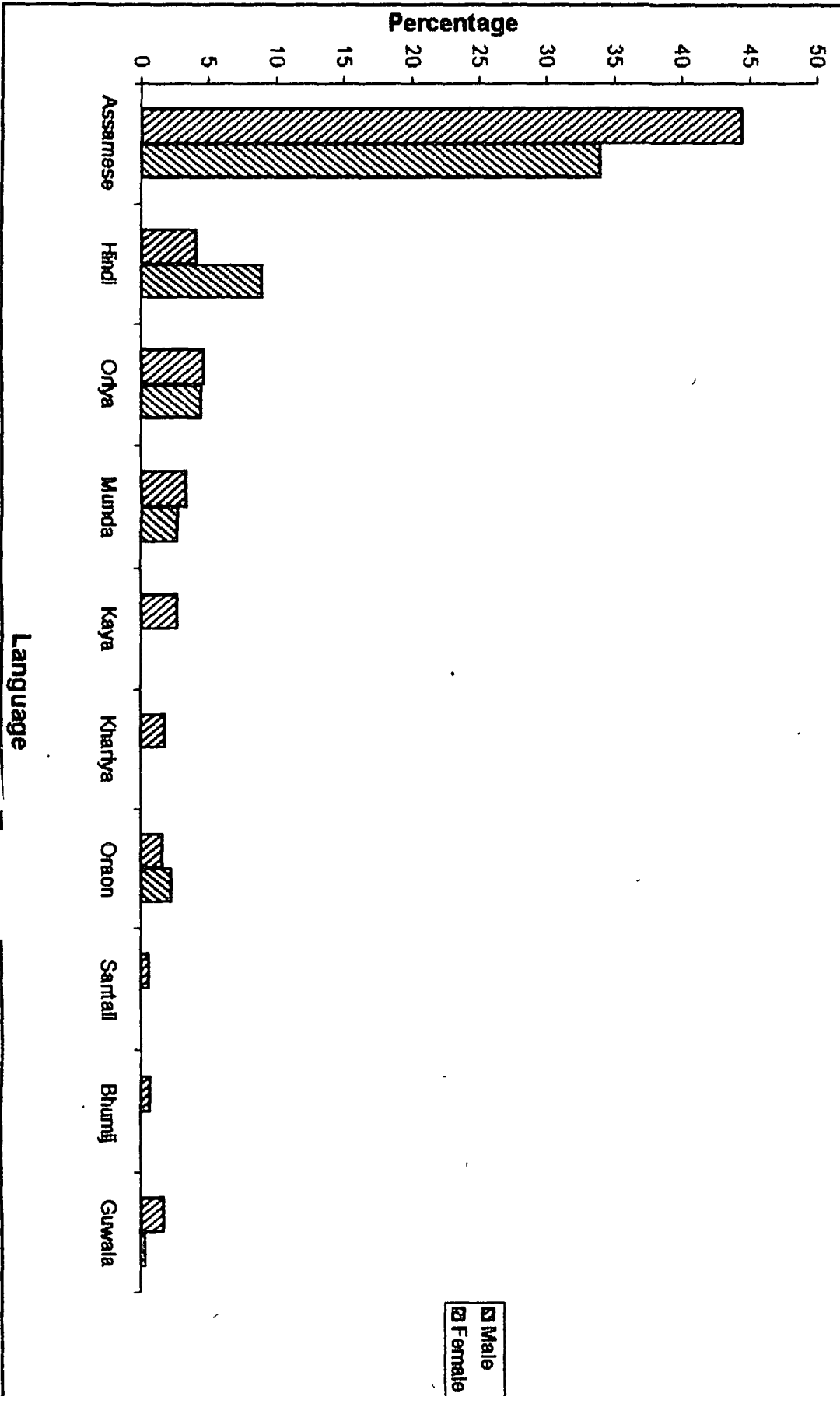


Fig.4.7

Table - 4.13a

Pertabghur % of language shift to other language and dialects (average)

Male		Female	
Assamese	47.80	Assamese	46.32
Hindi	9.07	Oriya	6.14
Oriya	4.85	Guwala	0.37
Munda	5.11	Munda	2.33
Kaya	2.63	Hindi	8.78
Khariya	0.34	Sabor	0.70
Mahali	0.58	Kaya	1.46
Teli	0.87		

Source: Field Survey.

A study of eighteen communities in Pertabghur (Table 4.13) reveals that a greater proportion of males has shifted to other languages compared to their female counterparts. This is particularly so among the Mundas, Telis, Khariyas, Oriyas, Guwalas, Sabor, Prajab, Sonar and Santals. More or less identical proportion of males and females have shifted to other languages among the Bhumij and the Kayas. Interestingly, more women have shifted to other languages among the Mahalis - a situation that seems to be an aberration. The male-female differential in shifting to other languages is more striking among communities of relatively smaller population size. It appears that the female segment is less enthusiastic in switching over to a new language. However, in extremely small communities, the shift to a new language is all pervasive, irrespective of gender.

A significant fact about the shift pertains to male-female difference in adopting a particular language. It is interesting that while a greater proportion of those males who

shifted to another language adopted Assamese, a relatively larger proportion of the females have shifted to a language spoken within the tea garden. This is particularly true of the communities of larger numerical strength. The male-female differential in accepting the dominant regional language is much less pronounced

Table - 4.14
Dikorai: Male -Female Variation in Language Shift

Community	Size of Population	% who do not speak their mother tongue	%Speaking other language and dialect
Oriya M	116	54 32	36 2 As, 6 89 M, 6 03 H, 2 58 Or 2 53 Sa
F	105	35	26 66 As, 8 57 H, 2 85 Bh,
Munda M	83	55 43	33 75 As, 7 22 Or, 6 02 Bh,
F	75	49 34	32 As, 4H, 5 33 Sa & G
Mahali M	29	65 52	41 37 As, 13 79 Or, 10 34 Bh.
F	23	39 14	30 43 As, 13 04 H, 17 39 Or
Barak M	14	71 40	34 14 As, 14 28 Kh, 14 28 Or
F	13	46 16	38 46 As, 7 69 H,
Muli M	5	100	60 As, 20 H, 20 Or
F	5	100	50 As, 33 33 H, 16 66 Or
Routhia M	6	100	50 As, 33 33H, 16 66 Or
F	5	100	100 As,
Khembha M	4	100	100 As,
F	4	100	100 As
Guwala M	22	60 87	26 08 As, 8 69 H, 13 63 Or, 8 69 M
F	17	41 18	29 61 As, 11 76 Or
Oraons M	33	40 53	24 24 As, 6 16 H, 27 27 G
F	32	57 15	34 47 As, 18 75 H, 12 5 Or, 6 25 Kh.
Bharuj M	7	57 15	42 85 As, 14 28 Or,
F	6	48 18	40 As, 8 18 Or
J Muslim M	16	100	47 05 As, 17 27 H, 11 76 M, 7 64 Or
F	6	50	33 33 As, 16 66 H,
Santali M	30	56 67	36 66 As, 6 66 H, 13 38 Kh.
F	28	50	25 As, 17 89 Ora 7 14 Or
Khariya M	25	44	36 As, 8 Or,
F	21	42 86	38 09 As, 7 4 Or
Ganju M	12	58 34	33 33 As, 25 M
F	9	45 46	36 36 As, 3 44H, 14 28 M
Sabor M	9	66 66	55 55As, 10 45H.
F	8	35 75	31 25 As, 4 5 H
Sonar M	9	44 44	33 33As, 16 66 H.
F	8	35 75	31 25 As 4 5H

M= Male, F= Female ,

NE As = Assamese, H= Hindi, Or= Oriya, M= Munda,
Sa= Santali, G = Guwala Kh = Khariya

Table - 4.14 a
The Male-Female variations in shifts to other languages and dialects
(Community Average)

Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage
Assamese	44.35	Assamese	53.97
Hindi	4.08	Hindi	8.94
Oriya	4.57	Oriya	4.38
Munda	3.27	Guwala	0.3
Oraons	1.38	Munda	2.66
Santal	0.54	Oraons	2.23
Bhumij	0.62	-	-
Kharya	1.72	-	-
Guwala	1.7	-	-

Source: Field Survey.

In Dikorai too a greater proportion of males have shifted to another language compared to the females (Table 4 - 14). However, in comparison to Pertabghur, the male-female differential is much higher, indicating that a larger proportion of females has retained their mother tongues. In extremely small communities both the males and females have completely shifted away from their mother tongues. Those who have experienced a mother tongue shift have by and large accepted the dominant regional language, but acceptance of non-Assamese language is more among the males compared to females.

It is evident that the shift to different languages is more or less similar among the males and females in Pertabghur. (Table- 4.13). But in Dikorai, a larger proportion of women has shifted to Assamese and Hindi compared to the males.

4.8.2. Impact of Towns and language change

The Process of bilingualism in Assamese among the tea garden labourers may be associated with the emergence of urban Centre. These centres come into existence in the wake of establishment of tea gardens as well as commercial and administrative activities. These urban centres have been acting as growth centres in the tea-tribes heart land. It is quite natural that their influence on the labourers living near the gardens would be greater than that of those living in far-off gardens. In this light, it is assumed that there would be a higher degree of bilingualism in Assamese among the labourers in the gardens located near the town than of those living in far-off gardens. In other words, the rate of bilingualism and distance from the town would be inversely related.

In order to examine the impact of the distance from the town on language change/shift, the tea garden labourers have been classified into three distance zones depending upon their settlement sites in relation to the town. It is evident from table 4.14 that the rate of shift of language is rather very high (i.e. 80.67 per cent) in the first distance zone (i.e. within 10 kilometers) from the town. It decreases to 72.31 per cent in the second distance zone(between 10 to 15 Kilometers and further to 61.52 per cent in the third distance zone, above 20 kilometers. This result confirms the assumption that there is an inverse or negative relationship between the degree of language shift and the distance from the town. This also indicates the vital role played by urban centres in bringing language change.

Table - 4.15

Pertabghur: Bilingualism and Distance from the Town

Total Population	Winthin 10 Km.	10-15 Km.	Above 15 Km.
Total	80.67(215)	72.31(189)	61.52(162)
Male	92.31(127)	78.52(106)	59.61(95)
Female	68.75(88)	52(86)	46.3(69)
Male-Female Disparity	0.2157	0.2828	0.3121

Source: Field Survey.

Male bilingualism is invariably higher than female bilingualism in all the three distance zones. (Table 4.15) Both males and females, however, follow a similar trend of language change over space i.e. rate of language change decreases with increasing distance from the town. The rate of decrease is, once gain, more pronounced between the last two zones of distance from the town. The male-female difference in language shift, quantitatively expressed through the disparity index, exhibit an opposite relationship with distance from the town. The disparity is 0.2157 point in the first distance zone. It increases to 0.2828 point and only marginally to 0.3121 in the second and third distance zones respectively. Thus there is a positive relationship between Male-female disparity in language change and distance from the town. It is also noticed that increasing distance from the town affects the female bilingualism more than it affects the male bilingualism.

4.8.3. Age-Sex Differential in Language Change

It is well known that language change and shift is more likely to affect the younger generation more than the aged. It is the very young and the very old people who are less

conversant with other languages while the adult segment should be able to pick up a variety of languages when the situation so demands.

In the sample gardens, the situation is no different. The table 4.16 reveals the extent of multi-lingualism in different age classes.

Table 4.16

Pertabghur and Dikorai: Multilingualism in Different Age Classes

Age	% Multilinguals
0 - 4	3.5
5- 9	10.1
10 - 14	31.0
15- 19	48.5
20 - 24	55.6
25 - 34	50.5
35-44	44.0
55 - 64	39.0
65- 69	29.0
70+	27.0

Source: Field Survey.

It is evident from Table 4.16 that the proportion of multi-linguals increases with increasing age up to 25 years of age and shows an abrupt decline after 45 years of age. This is expected as the older generation continues to retain its mother tongue to a large measure while the younger generation has established better links with outside groups both within and without.

4.8.4 Distance, Age Groups and Language Change

Distance and Age group variation indicate another dimension of variability in the rate of language change. The rate of bilingualism at any given point of time may be higher among the younger age group of population. The field data (Table-17) suggested that while the level of language change was 56.72 per cent in the old age group of the population, it was 72.55 per cent in the case of young age group. The picture indicates that the process of acquisition of regional language, i.e. Assamese and national language i.e. Hindi as subsidiary language has been strong in the case of the latter. The middle age group had, more or less, a moderate incidence of bilingualism (i.e. 62.39 per cent).

This differential rate of language shift in different age groups is related to socio-economic factors, psychological factors and the level of awareness. One may state that the propensity to learn more than one language decreases with age. Nevertheless the duration of exposure to a new mode may be responsible for higher rate of bilingualism among them.

Secondly, there is a question of "need", Need to learn the language of an alien group may be associated with the nature of a person or a group.

Thirdly, while the need to learn an alien language or take up vocation other than one's own in the initial phase may have greater elements of choice. In later stage, under the overarching impact of a new socio-economic order the freedom of choice becomes restricted.

Table - 4.17
Pertabghur: Age-Differential in Bilingualism

	Age Group of Population		
	Young 6 - 18 Yers.	Middle 19 - 49 Yers.	Old 50 years +
Total	72.55 (193)	62.39(262)	56.72(158)
Male	75.51(109)	79.63(142)	67.55(101)
Female	65.21(84)	58.63(120)	41.26(97)
Male-Female Disparity	0.0955	0.2027	0.2927

Source: Field Survey.

An interesting feature of age-differential in bilingualism is observed across the male female components. The males register a higher proportion of bilinguals among them uniformly across all the age groups compared to their female counterparts. The male-female disparity in bilingualism increases with increasing age, indicating greater proportion of monolinguals among women in advanced age group.

4.8.5 Distance from Town and Age-Differential in Language Change and Shift

Rate of bilingualism in different age groups varies significantly as the distance from the town increases.

Table - 4.18

Pertabghure : Age - Differential in Bilingualism in Distance Zone.

Age Group	Within 10 Kms	10 - 15 Kms	Above 15 Kms.
Young 6 - 18	81.21(136)	76.24(123)	63.72(108)
Middle 19-49	75.52(164)	64.81(151)	58.32(130)
Old 50 +	62.77(92)	55.97(102)	49.92(110)
Disparity	0.1255	0.0938	0.0883

Source: Field Survey

Table 4.18 reveals that while the young age-group has uniformly higher rate of bilingualism in every distance zone, it decreases with increasing distance from the town. This is so with other age groups too. But the disparity in the rate of bilingualism across the age-classes is the highest in areas closer to the town and diminishes gradually as the distance from the town increases. It may be concluded that the town has significant impact in language change among the labourers irrespective of age and sex differences

4.8.6. *Relationship between Educational Level and Language Change*

Data collected on bilingualism shows a positive association between levels of education and language change. It is quite natural that education helps in assimilation and acquisition of the languages spoken by different communities.

Those labourers who are educated in the sample gardens, have different links of communication in different aspects socio-economic as well as and cultural. Most of the tea garden labourers are illiterate.

Table - 4.19
Pertabghur: Levels of Education and Numbers of Bilinguals

Levels	Persons	Bilinguals %
B.A	7	100(7)
H.S.	16	75(12)
H.S.L.C.	22	81.81(18)
Educated up Class VII	68	41.17(28)
Technical Education	9	66.66(6)
Literate	210	70.4(148)
Illiterate	368	20.30(75)

Source: Field Survey

Table 4.19 reveals a clear picture with regard to the impact of literacy and education on language change. Only a fifth of the illiterate segment in Pertabghur reported that they are multi-linguals. The proportion is as high as 70.4 per cent in the case of the literate segment. All those who are graduates are multi-linguals, though they are few in numbers. With a decrease in the educational level, there is a significant drop in the proportion of bilinguals.

4.8.7. Relationship Between Economic Status and Language Change

It is probable that language change or shift is affected by the economic status of the labourers as indicated by their income.

Table - 4.20
Pertabghur & Dikorai : Relationship between
Monthly Income & % of Bilingual

Pertabghur		Dikorai	
Monthly Income	Bilingualism	Monthly Income	Bilingualism
500- 1000	53	500- 1000	39
1000-1500	65	1000-1500	44
1500 - 2000	72	1500 - 2000	45
2000 - 2500	83	2000 - 2500	55

Source:Field Survey

4.8.8 Pertabghur and Dikorai: Relationship between Monthly income and Percentage of Bilinguals

In the sample gardens it was amply evident that the economically sound segment is more bilingual than those who have less income (Table 4.20). It may be assumed that the economically better off segment has variegated links with different linguistic groups within and outside the tea gardens. Thus the data shows a positive relationship between proportion of multi-lingual and the economic status of the garden labourers.

4.9. Concluding Statement

The foregoing analysis of the nature of language change/shift in the selected tea-estates of Assam leads to the following broad conclusions.

First, a very large proportion of the tea-garden labourers has already shifted to other languages or is in a process of shifting. Such a process is more pronounced among communities which are of very small size. A critical population size seems imperative to retain one's own mother tongue, which appears to be lacking in these communities. The very small size of their population seems to have forced them to adopt a different language and try to assimilate with a larger group rather than aggressively maintaining their own mother tongue/dialect. On the other hand communities with larger population size have been able to retain their hold over their original mother tongue to a very great extent while becoming bilinguals or multi-linguals in the process of their adjustment to an alien cultural environment.

Thus, two separate processes are observable. One, the process of language shift among the minority groups and second, the process of bilingualism or multi-lingualism among the majority groups. In any case, language change has been a single major outcome, cutting across communities present in the gardens.

Second, the process of language shift and bilingualism/multilingualism has interesting character. In the process of changeover to other languages, there are two distinct trends observed. First, a process which is intra-garden, i.e. changing to language spoken by dominant groups within the garden and second, a process that is inter-regional i.e., accepting the dominant regional language. It is the numerically smaller groups which tends

to accept an intra-garden language much more than the dominant groups. It is obvious that the smaller communities are far more multi lingual than the dominant ones.

Third, the rate of change and shift is more among the male than that of the females, though there are some exceptions. This is true, in the case of extent of bilingualism too. More males are bilinguals. The male-female disparity in bilingualism however is less pronounced compared to the disparity in multi-lingual among males and females. A very large proportion of males is multi-linguals.

More females have accepted another language spoken within the garden while more males have adopted Assamese, the dominant regional language as their second language. More females have retained their original mother tongues than their female counterpart.

Last, the most important determinants on the rate of language change are age, sex, literacy, income and distance from the towns. The young adults have either shifted to another language or are multi-linguals than other age groups. Likewise the processes of language change invariably affect males more. Similarly, the literate segment as well as people with higher income is greatly affected by the process of language change. The sections residing in close proximity to the towns too display a greater propensity towards language change.

CHAPTER-V

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

The present research aimed at getting an insight into the processes of language change among the labourers in the tea-gardens of Assam. The problem is significant among numerically smaller communities, tribes and other such groups who have left their traditional place of residence for one reason or another. They are by and large unable to retain their cultural identity and as a consequence their linguistic identity as they have to interact with a dominant culture group in the process of their socio-spatial interaction and adjustment. Such groups are faced with the problems of assimilation or absorption. As a response to these situations and as a defense mechanism, they adopt various tools in preserving their linguistic identity by way of accepting bilingualism or multilingualism or by completely switching over to a new language. However, these processes of change is not socially or spatially uniform. There are significant variations observed among the sexes or among people of different age-groups. Likewise location of the groups in relation to market, urban centres as also their distribution in the labour lines may also act as significant influences on the process of language change.

The tea garden labourers of Assam, the subject of the present research, came from outside the region and where faced with a difficult situation with regard to maintaining and preserving their cultural and / or linguistic identity . They had to make several adjustment in the process of their socio-spatial interaction in an alien environment. The present research aimed at getting a deeper insight into the structure and content of the pattern of their adjustment by taking language change and shift as a clue.

The main objectives of the research were to understand the pace of language change taking place among the tea garden labourers, with particular reference to development of bilingualism, multi-lingualism and shift to another language. A second objective was to examine the propensity of language change or language shift as it varies between sex and age groups and among communities. Moreover, the study also made an attempt to explain the pattern of language change among the tea garden labourers in the context of their social and cultural adjustment and interaction in an alien environment to which they were forced to come a century and half earlier.

The study aimed at getting satisfactory answer to the following research questions; first, to what extent does language change reflect the tea-garden labourers' socio-economic adjustment? Second do all segments of the population as differentiated by age and sex, respond similarly to language change? and third, what is the role of spatial location of the migrant communities influencing language change.

Only two tea garden areas i.e. Dikorai and Pertabghur Tea Estates of Sonitpur district in Assam were selected for an intensive study. Dikorai tea garden is situated in the broad plains bordering Arunachal Hills on the North bank of the mighty Brahmaputra at a distance of 47 kilometers from the district headquarter town of Tezpur. Pertabghur tea garden is located on Biswanath sub-division of Sonitpur district of Assam. This region is a built up area of the river Brahmaputra.

The study is primarily based on the data collected through intensive field investigation conducted in the two selected gardens. Apart from official records available with the authorities of the two tea estates, information was collected from a large number of households in different labour lines and belonging to diverse ethnic communities as well as labourers in different age-groups and in both the sexes.

A careful analysis and interpretation of the data using suitable geographical methods and techniques permit the following broad generalizations and conclusions to be made as to the nature of language change taking place among the tea-labourers.

The tea gardens in Assam in general and in the selected gardens in particular have been the areas where the immigrant population constitutes the majority. The process began during the colonial times and continued in the post Independence era owing to unavailability of local labour. These tea garden labourers came from diverse social, ethno-lingual and economic background from a wider region in eastern India comprising tribal areas of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. Most of them were tribes and were brought to work in the tea gardens either by force or by fraud and were thus forced to remain tied to the gardens without much interaction, both social and spatial, with the neighboring areas or with their home and community. Most of them continued to live in clusters of their community affiliation leading to continuation of their language and culture for a longer period than expected. However, living together within the gardens forced diverse ethno-lingual groups to develop a composite language called Sadri for inter-ethnic communication. This was possible through a mixture of all languages. These tea garden labourers lived a life of misery with low wages and extremely poor health and educational facilities throughout the colonial period and this further isolated them from the larger communities. While intra-garden interactions increased, their external contacts were few. Increase in their population and with mechanization in tea gardens in the post Independent era forced many of them to seek work outside the garden which provided fewer employment opportunities and this resulted in some external linkages to the tea-garden labourers. Since much of the immigration was family based, continuation of the mother tongue was a distinct possibility and it restricted possibilities of language shift. Social relations such as marriages could still be practiced within the community. All these developments in the tea garden added a new ethnic type to emerge in the broad spectrum of

the Assamese culture complex and the tea communities slowly adapted itself to the dominant cultures through a different route. Language change was a necessity. The labourers became bilingual and multilingual in their strive towards adjustment in this alien land.

The socio-linguistic characteristics of the tea-gardens revealed that the multi-ethnic social composition of the tea-gardens has provided an ideal background for the development of bilingualism and multi-lingualism among the labourers living in conditions of semi-isolation. The residential segregation adopted by the colonial managers in the past, however, contributed to the maintenance of the another tongue in some communities. The influence of the dominant regional language, i.e. Assamese, acts as a powerful influence in the process of bilingual or multi-lingual character of the tea garden labourers. Socio-cultural interaction within the garden has paved the way for the growth of a new mixed language known as Sadri, acting as a *lingua franca*. The spread of literacy and education among the tea tribes in a language other than their mother-tongue has been a relentless force in the powers of language change and shift. This is particularly evident in younger generations and those who are literate. The role of occasional, weekly or daily market centres have also played a significant role as a spatial factor in bringing diverse ethno-linguistic, cultural and racial groups together and creating suitable conditions for language change among the garden labourers. A major factor in the process of language change is the near total absence of any link of the labourers with the place of their origin and consequent culture-loss. Inter-community marriages too have contributed in no uncertain manner in contributing to the language change among the tea-garden labourers.

Lastly, the inferior social and economic status of women can be a factor explaining sex differential in the process of language change.

The analysis of the nature of language change/shift in the selected tea estates of Assam revealed that a very large proportion of the tea-garden labourers have already

shifted to other languages or are in a process of shifting. Such a process is more pronounced among communities which are of very small size. A critical population size seems imperative to retain one's own mother tongue which appears to be lacking in these communities. The very small size of their population seems to have forced them to adopt a different language and try to assimilate with a larger group rather than aggressively maintaining their own mother tongue/dialect. On the other hand communities with larger population size have been able to retain their hold over their original mother tongue to a very great extent while becoming bilinguals or multi-linguals in the process of their adjustment to an alien cultural environment.

Thus two separate processes are observable. One, the process of language shift among the minority groups and second, the process of bilingualism or multi-lingualism among the majority groups. In any case, language change has been a single major outcome, cutting across communities present in the gardens.

The process of language shift and bilingualism/multilingualism has interesting character. In the process of change-over to other languages, there are two distinct trends observed. First, a process which is intra-garden, i.e. changing to language spoken by dominant groups within the garden and second, a process that is inter-regional i.e., accepting the dominant regional language. It is the numerically smaller groups which tend to accept an intra-garden language much more than the dominant groups. It is obvious that the smaller communities are far more multi lingual than the dominant ones. The rate of change and shift is more among the male than that of the females, though there are some exceptions. This is true, in the case of extent of bilingualism too. More males are bilinguals. The male-female disparity in bilingualism however is less pronounced compared to the disparity in multi-linguals among males and females. A very large proportion of males is multi-linguals. More females have accepted another language

spoken within the garden while more males have adopted Assamese, the dominant regional language as their second language. More females have retained their original mother tongues than their female counterpart.

The most important determinants on the rate of language change are age, sex, literacy, income and distance from the towns. The young adults have either shifted to another language or are multi-linguals than other age-groups. Likewise males are invariably affected more by the processes of language change. Similarly, the literate segment as well as people with higher income is greatly affected by the process of language change. The sections residing in close proximity to the towns too display a greater propensity towards language change.

It is evident from the above conclusions that the labourers in the tea gardens who were uprooted from their original community network in tribal territories located in mid-India have made strenuous efforts in adjusting to the alien socio-cultural setting both within the gardens and to the outside world. The nature of linguistic change bears testimony to this. Their identify as a community has received rude shock and is fragmented at different levels to create new ones. At one level, it has strengthened a new found bond among themselves as a distinct community contrast to the dominant regional culture of the Assamese adding an indistinguishable trait to the broader synthetic culture of Assam. At another level, they have made serious efforts to assimilate with the regional culture by identifying themselves with the language of the surrounding areas. Both the identities are simultaneously present in the cultural traditions created by the tea-communities.

Evidently such a process of socio-cultural adjustment has not been uniform across the communities nor among the sexes or all age-groups. some communities, the males and the younger generation are far more integrated into the dominant regional ethos while some

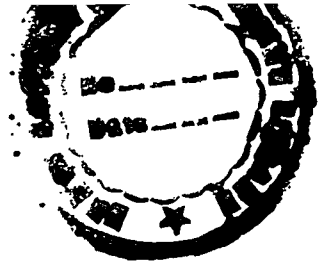
other communities, particularly those with a large population size, the females and the old continue to remain less integrated for reasons already mentioned earlier.

Socio-geographical factors in terms of location of the tea-gardens the residential pattern of the labour lines, the location of the market centre and the urban areas, spread of education and other such factors have also played significant roles in this process of socio-economic transformation which the labourers have experienced in the recent years.

The study made a humble effort in exploring some of the very general forces of socio-economic and cultural adjustment of the immigrant tea-garden labourers. There are many more specific processes which could not be undertaken under the limited scope of the present research . A major area of further research is indicated by way of implication of this study and it pertains to very small communities who have completely shifted way from their mother-tongue. Further studies are needed for these groups. Another area of research lies in the sphere of inter-community relation as it was found that many smaller communities have been absorbed into the dominant ones indicated by their acceptance of the mother tongue spoken by the latter.

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BIO-DATA

Name : Sri Pradip Goswami

Father's Name : Sri Deben ch. Mahanta

Address : Lecturer in Geography
T.H.B. College
P.O. Karsontala
Dist. Sonitpur, Assam.

Date of Birth : 1 st Sept. 1961

Educational Qualification : M.Sc. in Geography

Marital Status : Married

Experience : Working as Lecturer in Geography since 1988