

The Paradox Of Indigeneity And Question Of Identity Of The Adivasi Community Of Assam

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Abstract

The Adivasi in India and Assam are traditionally known as the first people or indigenous people since pre-historic (stone) age migrating in different periods of time from different regions. However, Adivasi were among the first group of people to arrive in India before any other communities such as the Aryans, Dravidians, and Mongolians etc. The schedule tribe's status for the Adivasi in Assam which has been a longstanding struggle in India offers certain rights –based legal benefits in the form of political representation, reservation and socio-economic subsidies. The most common perception against granting Schedule Tribes status to the Adivasi in Assam is their migratory history, however, in the tea gardens the fact that they came into the state as indentured labourers to work and their contribution to the economy of the state of Assam has been substantial. The Adivasi of Assam, branded as the Tea Garden Tribes, generally prefer to be called as Tea Tribes. Embracing Adivasi nomenclature is a deliberate move on the part of the tea tribes to assert their tribal identity as also to represent their collective demand for indigenous rights, including the recognition for achieving the status of 'Schedule Tribe'. The paper is a modest attempt to address this debate.

Key Words: Adivasi, Identity, Indigeneity, Social position, Nomenclature.

Introduction:

The politics of equal recognition, accelerating various forms of demands for the equal status and preserving identity of various cultures and of groups has become a major challenge in

democracy. In the modern world it will always be the case that not all those living as citizens under a certain jurisdiction will belong to the national group thus favoured. Social Identity is the part of a person self –concept derived from perceived membership in a related social group. Identity issue is one of the major issues in Assam in particular and North East India in general. However, one of the factors for such concern is the increasing allegation of different ethnic group for recognition and its impact on the state politics. Various ethnic groups in Assam which represents both non tribal and tribal groups have been demanding either for an entity or for Schedule Tribes (ST) status (Goswami, 2004). There are also some developing communities and tribes in Assam who has been trying to preserve the distinct socio cultural identity of their communities.

In Assam since independence the issue of identity has become a burning issue with political development as well as raising aspiration of the tribes. The meaning of Adivasi is- ‘Adi’ means first (original) and ‘Vasi’ means inhabitants and consequently Adivasi means first inhabitants or original inhabitants (R.S.Basu, 2011). However, having worked for around 170 years, centring the tea industry, they are the biggest contributors to unorganized workforce as well as to the economy of Assam both directly and indirectly. Despite all, they are still the most deprived and backward section, facing the problem of assimilation not only among themselves but also with the greater Assamese society¹.

Objective of the paper:

1. The paper is a modest attempt to examine the feasibility of the demand of the Adivasi (Tea Tribes) community as the original inhabitant of Assam.
2. To address the social identification of Adivasi population the paper also attempts to analyze the problem of exclusion that has further raised the question of identity and its impact in reframing the political membership of Assam.

¹ Pulloppillil, T. (2005). *Identity of Adivasis in Assam*. Guwahati: Don Bosco Publications.

Methodology:

The nature of the proposed study is Descriptive and historical. It is substantiated by Qualitative method. Data has been collected only from secondary sources like book, research journals, newspaper, magazine, article and other existing literature. Different valid literature and related literatures have been consulted to examine the proposed work in a scientific way. In the secondary data the characteristics such as reliability of data, suitability of data and adequacy of data have been considered.

Besides various websites are also searched and consulted for gathering relevant information in this regard. The present study is theoretical one and as such no field study is conducted. All the gathered information is studied analytically in order to deal with the issue which is further articulated by three theories that basically fall within the domain of the research work. First one is 'The theory of Relative Deprivation', second is 'The theory of Identity Movement' and third is 'The theory of Cultural Hegemony'.

Discussion:**The Paradox of Indigeneity of the Adivasis:**

This paper particularly focuses upon the issue of social identification of Adivasis who were migrated to Assam during the colonial rule as an indentured labour for the purpose of tea plantation in the land of Assam as well as the social status of their descendents. However in order to understand this question of original inhabitant of the Adivasi community it is imperative to analyse the history of this community. Perhaps, a common belief about the history of Adivasi in Assam is simultaneous with the history of Tea Gardens. The Sociologist and Historians never tried to connect the community beyond the tea Industry. However, there is enough proof that Adivasi are connected to North East India even before the organization of tea industries in Assam (Kerketta R. , 2005). In fact, in the Santhal colonies of West Assam, Adivasi settled before the production of tea started and thus were not brought to Assam only for tea production. The link and relation of Adivasi in Assam and North East can be traced back to immemorial dates.

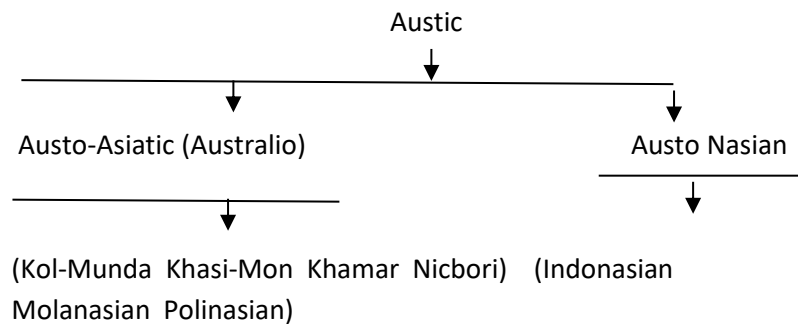
However, the first settlers of Assam were the Khasis and Synteng (Asomiya Jatir Itibrito, 1995). In an article namely *The Races of North east India*, Stephen Fuchs argues that these tribes linguistically belong to the Austro-Asiatic or Mon-Khamer (K.Sebastian, 1999). Through their language they shaped a relation between the Munda tribe of further West in Central India as well as many other tribes in Burma and Indo-China border. However, there are also some cultural similarities with the Hos and Mundas of Chotanagpur, who also erected stone monuments in the name of their dead ancestors. It has also been argued that Khasis and Kol-Mundas were living together in the North East, and the Khasis has adopted the language of Kol-Mundas. In fact, some believe that the Khasis were not cultivators and so, Mundas called them 'Ka -si', in Mundari meaning not ploughing-non cultivator class. (Topno, 2015) .

J.H. Millsa in his book, *Assam Review*, has mentioned that Assam is the main path of migration of human beings and it has identified different groups who had migrated to ancient Assam at different times (Topno, 2008). J.P. Mills and J.H. Hutan are the anthologists who has identified that some Pallid tribes are the groups of major Nagrito group and this group has identified amongst some tribal groups of Assam. The ancient migrants groups of Assam and Northeast are Austic group and the ancient tribes of greater North East India such as Khasis and Syntang represents this group. However, the last migrants groups to Assam were Indo Aryan groups who had migrated to Assam from North Bihar. In this regard, Prafulla Baruah in his book, *Bharat Buranji*, has explained about the Adivasi in Assam (Borah, 2017). The people of this group are short in height, black colour and bend nose and they like to live in forest and hills and they had no scripts and their language was totally separated from Aryan language and the language of Dravidian race. Dr. Lakhi Devi in the book, *Assam History*, has opined that the first original inhabitants of Assam were Khasis and Syntengs and these two groups represents Austic race and so far as their language is concerned has similarity with the Munda community of Chotanagpur of India. Hamlet Bareh in his book, *The History and culture of the Khasi People*, says that there are some evidences of similarities among Ho, Munda and Khasi people and there are some similarities of their language and traditions (Bareh, 1997). Sir Edward Gait in his book, *A History of Assam*, has opined that a peculiar feature of this country is furnished by the curious

monoliths which the Khasi and Syntengs use to erect in memory of their dead people. Similar monoliths are found amongst the Hos and Mundas in Chotanagpur who speak dialects belonging to the same family of language (Gait, 1997). In this regard, Dr. Lila Gogoi has pointed out towards this community that in ancient period especially in hilly areas cave-dwellers have some specific areas and in those areas some instrument has been found and it can be generalized that those people were from Austic Race (Thapa, 2001). Generally it can be known that the colour of those people were black, bend nose, red eyes and the colour of hair was like copper and interestingly, the major tribes of Adivasi i.e. the Santali people of Kokrajhar District, in Assam have some similarities with those said people. In this regard, the people who are engaged in Tea gardens are having some similarities with the communities of Austic race².

Perhaps the sub groups of Austic race are divided into Austo-Asiatic and Austo Nasian groups. A Chart is given below to identify the details of sub groups of Austic race (W.Topno, 2012).

The Austic race can be divided into the following groups:



Assam is one of the prominent states of entire north east India and is a home to different tribal groups and sub-groups. Each and every tribal group of this region has their own history, culture, language and these are mainly Bodo, Mishing, Karbi, Garo, Rabha, Dimasa, Tewa, Mhar, Deuri, Kuki, Sema, Tripuri, Jami, Tae Phakes, Khamtis, Singphos, Khelmas, Tea tribes (Adivasis), Sonowal Kacharis etc. The political history and culture of Assam is largely characterized by the

² Topno, W. (2008). Adivasi janagustir Buranji. *Adivasi Awaz*, viii, 18-23.

influences of Tibeto- Burma, Indo Aryan and Austro-Asiatic cultures.

However, the people of Assam use various languages as their mother tongue. The classification of languages in Assam can be mentioned in the following family group (T.C.Kalita, 2006). These are:

- (a) Indo- Aryan- it is found in Indo-European Language group.
- (b) Tibeto-Burma -it is found in the language of Sub family of Sino-Tibetan language group.
- (c) Siamese- Chinese- it is seen in the language of Sub family of Sino-Tibetan language group.
- (d) Mon-Khmer- it is found in Austro-Asiatic Language group
- (e) Tea tribes- it is found in Dravidian, Indo-Aryan and the Austro-Asiatic language.
- (f) Adivasi- it is found in Dravidian and Austro-Asiatic language.

Dr. Lila Gogoi has explained about the aboriginal people of Assam in particular and North East India in general. Dr. Gogoi argues that the Khasis are basically from Mongolian races but their language is Kolarian or Australian and before the migration of Khasis, Kol-Munda were the aborigines of greater Assam. The Khasis has adopted Australian language from kol and Mundas who are the major tribes of Adivasis in Assam. The book *Asomiyar Jatir Etibiti* has identified clearly that Australio were the inhabitants before the migration of Khasis. The Khasis has adopted Kolarian language from the major tribes of this community (*Asomiya Jatir Itibiti*, 1985). It has also been argued by the historians that the dominance of Mongolian race has gradually spread in the then greater Assam and as an outcome the Tea Tribes Adivasi was compelled to quit Assam. On the basis of secondary data, it is seen that King Ban and Narakasur of Assam were Munda tribes and after their death the process of Aryanization has started and hence, due to that reason the Austic race was compelled to give up their Sarna religion (Kerketta R. , 2005). However, it is seen that on the basis of the nature of their work they are divided into different low castes which are Komar, Tati, Teli, Moira, Sonar, Sundi, Rajwar etc. and gradually they had changed from Austic group to low caste Aryan (Pulloppillil, 2005). It has found that they had failed to change their artificial castes as given by Aryans and as an outcome they had settled in Jharkhand. Moreover, Adivasi societies have also settled in different places of India such as Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra,

Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and some other North Eastern States and also in Andaman and Nicobar Island³. Thus it can be argued that the Adivasi are not only the original habitants of India but also of Assam. In spite of this, the Adivasi of Assam are being called as Tea labour, Tea Tribes, Tea garden tribes, etc., and a very wrong concept has been entrenched in the mindset of common people that they are mere migrants to Assam.

Immigration of Adivasi to Assam during British Period:

After the annexation of Assam from Burma (Myanmar), the British colonial administration started tea plantations on a large scale in the region. Soon in 1837, the first tea garden was established at Chabua in Dibrugarh district of Upper Assam, and in 1840 the Assam Tea Company started production of tea on a commercial basis (A.K.Dutta, 1996). With the rapid expansion of industry and its highly labour intensive nature meant that a large source of laborers were required. While initially some workers were derived from the native people of the land (from Boro- Kachari tribes), but with the native people engaged in independent farming a labour class seeking wage employment on a regular basis was not available locally (Guha, 2012). The British in fact tried abolishing certain local agricultural means of production and imposed heavy taxes on the subsistence farming of local peasants, but it was ultimately felt that uprooted labour would be far easier to control and exploit. This is where the import of labour began in the 1840s primarily from the Adivasi regions of Central and Eastern India. The brutality of this process can be understood from the fact that the first batch of labourers in 1841 from the Chotanagpur division of Bihar brought by the Assam Company, all died en-route due to malnutrition and illness (Pulloppillil, 2005). Recruitment carried on through highly abusive contractual networks and numerous episodes of fraud, forcible recruitment, kidnapping, and torture have been recorded as frequently occurring during the recruitment process. There is even the rumour that the British orchestrated a famine in the Chotanagpur Santhal Paragana areas by stopping food supplies from reaching there so that the Adivasis would jump

³ Gogoi, R. (2001). *Saah Janagostir Cinta Cetana*. Jorhat: Assam Sahitya Sabha.

at the opportunity to work in the tea gardens of Assam. They had come to Assam not only for the purpose of tea cultivation but also for making of Rail line, Wood industry, Coal industry etc. In the Adivasis area, some movement against British government took place like Santhal's movement, movement led by Birsa Munda and movement against British imperialism and therefore, British government started divide and rule policy and huge number of Adivasi labours from Sautal Porgana and Chottanagpur has been brought to Assam and now they are the permanent settler and part of a greater Assamese society (Harlaka, 1975).

In colonial period, two systems of recruitment were used. One of them was Contract system and another one was Sardari system. The people who had the license to supply labourers to tea gardens were known as contractors and individual persons who themselves employees of an tea garden and labourers and who had license to recruit other labourers for an estate were known as 'Sardars' (Ghatowar, 1975). Later on in 1871 these contract and sardari systems were changed into —The District Labour Association. So, many Adivasis like the Oraons, Hos, Kharias, Santhals, and Mundas from Chotanagpur were recruited for working in the Tea gardens of Assam through both the process⁴. The British government also made legal provisions to import laborers under the 'Workmen's Breach of Contract Act of 1859' and 'Transport of Native Labours Act of 1863' (Goswami, 2004). In 1867-68, 22,800 tea labourers were migrated to Assam and in 1880, 76,041 tea labourers were migrated to Assam. In the year 1921, the total population of Assam has grown up to 1,33,000 as per the Government of India survey (Guha, 2012). Thus the Britishers continued to import labourer's till 1860. However some of the recruits did not stay in the tea gardens. They settled in government khas land or unused tea garden land in the vicinity of the tea estates so that they could earn their living as casual labourers in the tea gardens and also by cultivating land. This led to the creation of Ex- Tea garden tribes. The tea tribe community in Assam trace their immediate history through this torturous route of indentured, immigrant labour brought in to work in the tea gardens and it is precisely this labour

⁴ Guha, A. (2012). *From Planters Raj to Swaraj*. Guwahati: Tulika books.

that has resulted in the now legendary Assam tea. Indeed DR. B.B. Das writes in his paper Migration and Settlement of Tea Garden Labourers in North East India, 'Tea is the product of the cumulative toil of the labourers. It is mainly because of their hardships that we have the golden brew which cheers thousands' (Kerketta, 2005). Over the years, the number of tea gardens has increased by leaps and bounds, and today there are more than 850 tea estates and more than 2500 tea gardens in Assam that cover thousands of acres of land. Besides at present, about 25% of the workers of Assam are engaged in tea gardens (Ahmed, 2013).

Viewing Adivasi from the perspective of their Nomenclature:

The life style of Adivasi in Assam is quite different from other tribes of Assam. There are different tribes of Adivasi whose tradition, economy and complexity of social organization are different from others. Besides this, the different tribes of Adivasi have wide differences in their customs and institutions from the other ethnic groups. The Adivasi are very serious regarding their traditional customs and beliefs. Some groups of Adivasi like Goorh, Kondh, Saura, Sauthal, Karua and Gonju follow their strict social rules and religions till today (Gogoi, 2001). Generally, some tribes of Adivasi like to name their residing area according to their affiliations to the community, like- Uriya bastis, Munda line etc. This community consists of different tribes which are not described as Tea tribes in the central list of Indian Government. They are categorized and included under OBC list of the State of Assam and they are described as Tea garden labours, Tea garden tribes, Ex -tea garden labours or Ex- tea garden tribes (Saharia, 2005).

Festivals are directly connected with the identity of a community. Generally festivals are related with the working pattern of a community. The festivals of Adivasi are related with the agriculture or hunting seasons. The Adivasi are rich in celebrating their culture. The main festival of Adivasi in Assam is Sarhul puja and Karam puja (Tasa, 1981). Adivasi consider many trees sacred and worshipped them. Generally every village where Adivasi people live has religious temples and sacred ground for community to worship. The different festivals of Adivasi are Baha/ sarhul, karam, Tusu, Sohrai, Maghe Parab, Pagu, Haku, Hon-ba, Kadleta, Hero bonga porob, Kolom sing Paus jatras, Jom nawa and Hariari etc. On the other hand, there are some musical instruments being used by

Adivasis in Assam (Borah, 2017). These are Mandar, Nagara, Rapka, Dhol, Dhak, Sahnai, Kendra, Dug dugi, Kartal, Bassi, Susun tuhila, Matuka, Morli, Veri, Kartal, Jhang, Ghungru, Banam, Tuila, Kendra, Rutu, Gubgubi, Tharki, Sagoi and Dhapla. The Adivasi perform different dances which are Jhumur, Santhali, Chhahu dance, Karam naach, Sambal puria, Damcah and Kharang danch. Karam festival is their main festivals and it is very important part of life of the Adivasi people (Tasa, 1981). Throughout the year they celebrate different festivals during different seasons. The Hindu Adivasi almost celebrates all the Hindu festivals and moreover the Christian Adivasi celebrates all the Christian festivals like Good Friday, charismas etc. The festivals which are celebrated by all Adivasi people are Durga puja, Tusu puja, Holi, Lakshmi puja, Maha shivrati, Karam puja, Sarhul, Bhugali bihu and Charismas (Ghatowar, 1975). Jhumur dance is an important folk dance of Adivasi and they are identified in Assam through Jhumur dance. Besides Jhumur dance they performed Santhali dance, Chhau dance, Karam naach and Sambal puria dance. Therefore, it is found that this community is one of the well-known communities not only of India but also of Assam.

Analyzing the debates on Social Identification and Assimilation of the Adivasi:

Social position is one of the crucial factors that play an important role in the construction of social identity of a community. The way in which the migrated population is named, affects their social position and placed them at the bottom of the social hierarchy of the society in Assam. Even in some places local people call them as Tea Tribes which further degrades their status. Use of such derogatory terms by other communities is no way acceptable. Everyone under the Constitution of India is entitled to lead a dignified life by being a citizen of the country. There is no ground of justification to identify these Adivasi people on the basis of their occupation. Kamal Kumar Tanti, a promising voice in the field of Assamese poetry showed his dissatisfaction in this regard and raises the question, 'Is there any community in this World named after a commodity?' (Karmakar, 2013). According to Tanti it is an example of the colonial domination of the British and later the internal colonialism taken over by power-hungry, middle-class. He further added that the mainstream middle-class of Assam is yet to consider them as a part of greater Assamese nationality, though

from time to time, they claim they are. True to his words, such an act of using spiteful words for identification can be regarded as illogical and irrational. If it is not then why the people that are involved in the cultivation of Jute are not considered as Jute Tribe⁵. However, tea was discovered by British in Assam almost 200 years ago. Before that there was no identity like Tea Tribe. So the question is what was their identity before the discovery of Tea in Assam? In other States of India there was no malicious term like Tea Tribe; it is applicable only in Assam. In places from where they have migrated, these people have their original identity as Adivasi, so why not in case of Assam? Due to such derogatory identity their level of confidence decreases and often they feel awkward to introduce themselves to the rest and they develop a sense of insecurity which further affects the process of social assimilation. Common usages of the identity Tea Tribes of Assam meant both the Tea Garden Labour (TGL) and Ex-Tea Garden Labour (Ex-TGL) (Thapa, 2001). Now a query arose that if Tea Tribe derived their identity for their involvement in the occupation of tea cultivation in colonial era so how one can identify their descendents who are now engaged in some other occupations like teaching, business etc. as Ex-Tea Tribe. Though the term “Ex” is there but still it contains the term “Tea Tribe” which should in no way be acceptable one (Borah, 2017).

An important barrier in the process of this assimilation of Adivasi with the greater Assamese community is that of the language spoken among the community. Among the community the most popular language is the ‘Pach Pargana’, language which is originated in Jharkhand. But the tea tribe community when came to Assam, this language got modified with the inclusion of various languages in it. Within the community itself the Munda, Urao, Tanti, Kurmi has their separate mother tongue. Besides ‘Sadri’ language acts as a medium of communication among the tea tribe community. However it is spoken only by 20% of the tea tribe people of Assam (Kurmi, 2013). Just because the languages used by the Adivasis did not evolve scripts (except in few cases), does not mean that they do not have any significant imaginative

⁵ Kerketta, R. (2005). *Adivasis in Assam: Their Past, Present and Future*. Guwahati: Don Bosco Publications.

literature. All the literature is a valuable cultural heritage to Assam (G.N.Devy, 2008). But neither any language has been recognized either by the government or by the Assamese community. In schools and colleges and also in universities the languages of the tea tribe has never been studied or researched. All this has brought a feeling of exclusion and they often practise their own cultures, languages and traditions within secluded enclaves outside the purview of the larger Assamese society.

However the one, who should also be blamed for the isolation of the tea tribe community from the main stream, is the stratified class structure of the Assamese community and the suppression by the elite classes which has hampered the assimilation process. For instance the Ahoms (a tribe of Assam, has its origin in Thailand), were able to assimilate with the greater Assamese society as they were once the rulers. But the tea tribe community were always the exploited class and hence their assimilation process was never completed. As assimilation is not a one way process and the tea tribe community has never been seen by the Assamese Community as a part of the developmental process. The closed mindset of the Assamese middle class and also the racial discriminatory attitude has created a huge gap and its impact can be seen in the community when it is still recognised either as a migrant or as a coolie (Karmakar, 2013). The socio- economic conditions of the tea tribe community also lay credence to the process of assimilation. Some basic human development indices such as access to health care and educational facilities remain abysmally low in tea garden areas. Provisions of the Plantation Labour Act are yet to be made fully operational in many tea gardens. They are disproportionately affected by natural disasters with erosions and floods frequently taking away their small farms. The government's ex-gratia in the event of these disasters is insufficient, while exploitation through usury is rampant⁶. Their land is often usurped by the state or private players because of lack of proper documentation. A disturbing trend is that, due to continued disenfranchisement and oppression, self-exploitation is on the rise with the fairly rampant spread of alcoholism among the

⁶ Saharia, D. U. (2005). *Tea labourers of Assam*. Dibrugarh: Kasturba Publication.

community and the trafficking of women and children to work as domestic workers or sex workers in cities like Kolkata and Mumbai. Another curious thing is that despite having a decisive role in the State politics, the tea community has fallen short of producing a true leader, who could have brought about much needed transformation into the lives of the community.

Results and Findings:

The Adivasi is one of the important communities of Assam. They have come to Assam during different periods and it is not true that they have only come to Assam for the purpose of tea cultivation. An historical analysis about this community has proved that some tribes of Adivasi community are one of the oldest communities in Assam. The Khasis which are the first inhabitants of greater Assam are basically Mongolian origin but their language is Kolarian or Australian. The Kol, Munda had come to Assam before the migration of Khasis. The Khasi community has adopted Kolarian or Australian language from the major tribes of Adivasi like Kol, Munda (Bareh, 1997). Before India's independence they were recognized as Tea garden coolie tribes under constitutional safeguards and accordingly four (4) seats were reserved for this community in the Assembly elections of Assam. But after 1950s they have been de scheduled and were recognized as outsiders (Borah, 2017).

The Adivasi were not only brought to Assam by the British tea planters but came during the pre Ahom period. In fact before the signing of the Yandaboo treaty (1826) between British and the Burmese (ended the first Anglo-Burmese War), Adivasi were present in Assam (Gait, 1997). The existence of Adivasi before the coming of the Britishers in Assam can be seen when Gohai Kamal Alee a road that starts from Coochbihar to Narayanpur was built by Santhals of Adivasi community which was constructed during the reign of great monarchs of Assam, King Naranarayan and Chilarai (R.S.Basu, 2011).

The paper also finds that there are differences between Tea tribes and Adivasi. They are known as the Tea Tribes in Assam but this term has no meaning in the other States of India. In order to give a collective identification of these tribes, they were named as Tea tribes. Thus the term 'Tea Tribe' is illogical and a community

cannot be recognized with a commodity. Moreover, the discovery of tea was before 200 years and as this community existed before the coming of the Britishers to Assam, and then what was the identity of these tribes before discovery of tea. The study also finds that the issues of disenfranchisement that the Adivasi face, both in and out of the tea gardens are numerous and deeply entrenched. Some of the more prominent Adivasi organisations like the All Adivasi Students Association of Assam (AASAA) as well as groups active with tea garden workers like the Assam Tea Tribes Students Association (ATTSA) point to a particular policy feature that is historically missing here in Assam, which is the granting of Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to the Adivasi (Kerketta R. , 2005). The granting of this status is something these groups feel would go great lengths in ameliorating the historically oppressed condition of the Adivasi in Assam, and it is often the central, if not only, point of many of their campaigns. Overall it can be said that all these problems has created an atmosphere of separation, rather than assimilation of the tea tribe community with the Assamese community.

Conclusion:

The Indian Tea Board has a nice 'tea restaurant', in the Oxford Street of London. It was found that during working hours a lot of people visit the restaurant for a cup of tea. This establishment helped to spread the message of qualitative superiority of Darjeeling and Assam tea Gardens. But none has ever thought or praised the sweat and labour of the tea tribes involved in this taste. As Amartya Sen has rightly argued that justice cannot be indifferent to the lives that people can actually live, so it is necessary that the lives of the tea tribe people be improved in order to establish justice in the society (Sen, 2009). Therefore it is the call of the hour to get together as a great Assamese Society despite small differences to face all odds unitedly. Here elite community must lend support to the backward and deprived community for their all round development. We should not forget that when the Reorganisation of States took place in 1956, the Assamese language would have not got the legal status, if the tea tribe community have not recognised it. But the greatest tragedy is that still this community is recognised after a commodity. However, the State Machinery has taken different welfare policies to promote and protect the identity of this community with a

welfare vision. Recently the central government has announced that this community will get ST status and the government has done all the formalities to scheduling this community under ST category. Different high level meetings and discussion takes place among the members of this community, representatives of both the government at different periods of time for granting this community under ST status. This community has welcomed the welfare policies which are taken by the Government for the collective development of this community. However to what extent granting of the ST status can protect and preserve the identity of this community, is still a big question. Moreover, it is also necessary that the mindset of the people of Assam should be changed. It is time to develop brotherhood among various communities living for centuries in Assam, as we should not forget that when the Reorganisation of States took place in India in 1956, the Assamese language would have not got the legal status, if the tea tribe community have not recognised it. As such our vision should be to make strong and prosperous Assam and this is possible if every community not only the tea tribe come together and work in unison.

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