CHAPTER 3

THE CULTURAL WORLD OF KOOMBER TEA ESTATE

Considering its large size and multi-cultural character, Koomber Tea Estate of Cachar district was found suitable field for the purpose of studying the folk culture of tea gardens in Barak valley of Assam, which varies from garden to garden as number and size of cultural communities are different in all the gardens. Koomber Tea Estate is one of 780 registered tea estates in the state of Assam. China and Assam are the only two regions in the world with native tea plant. In North-East India, tea is grown in Assam (480 million kg), Tripura (7.5 million kg), Arunachal Pradesh (2.34 million kg), Nagaland (0.20 million kg), Sikkim (0.16 million kg), Manipur (0.11 million kg), Meghalaya (0.10 million kg) and Mizoram (0.07 million kg). Assam has the largest tea growing area in the world with 2.7 lakh hectares and it produces more black tea than Sri Lanka and Kenya. There are 50,000 small growers of tea, out of which only 3,000 growers are registered with tea board. Assam tea board has a regional office at Guwahati headed by an executive director (Tea Board of India 2007). Assam, a land of plains and river valleys, has three principal physical regions; namely the Brahmaputra Valley in the north, the Barak Valley in the south and the hilly region of the districts of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao lying between the two valleys. The total population of Assam is 31,269,272 as per Census 2011. The male population is 15,954,927 (51.02%) and the female population is 15,214,345 (48.68%). Tea is grown in both the valleys of the state. The Barak Valley comprising of three districts, Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj is blessed by the river Barak and its tributaries such as the Jiri, Chiri, Madhura, Ghagra, Jatinga, Katakhal, Sonai, Dhaleswari and the Harang. The river, Barak, divides into two courses; namely, the Surma and the Kushiara near Katigorah and enters into Bangladesh via Karimganj.The major hills of the valley are the Barail range, Bhuban range, Saraspur and the Chatacurra. Barak Valley in the south-east forms an extensive lowland area that is important for agriculture and supports a

relatively dense population of 36, 12, 581 people (Census 2012). Historically, the significance of the valley lies in the fact that Khaspur, a village in the Silchar subdivision of Cachar district, was the capital of the Kachari Rajas of Cachar from the beginning of the 18th Century upto the death of the last Raja, Gobinda Chandra, in 1830. The total number of villages in Barak Valley is 2307, out of which 1040 villages are in Cachar, 936 villages in Karimganj and 331 villages are in Hailakandi (Census 2011). Eighty percent of the population of Barak Valley is Bengali and there is also a large size of Hindi speaking and Assamese speaking people. The valley is also the natural home of a number of ethnic groups like Kuki, Naga, Mikir, Hmar, Khasi, Manipuri, Dimasa etc. The people of the valley are mainly Indo-Arayans. The Mikirs and Kacharis are mainly Hindus. There is a considerable concentration of Christian population as well. Most of the populations in Hailakandi are Muslims. Migration from other states of India like West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Rajasthan, Manipur, Tamil Nadu, U.P, and Jharkhand acted as a catalyst for social, political and ecological transformation of the valley. Barak Valley has a legacy of composite race, culture and religion and that contributes to its exquisite cultural richness and human wealth (Utsav 2005).

Geologically, Barak valley lies on alluvial sediments and the soil is not at all suitable for agriculture. Moreover, the climate of the valley is humid with heavy rainfall. Tea, paddy, betel nuts, betel leaves, chillies, pineapple, jute, pumpkin, potatoes, sugarcane, ginger, turmeric, jackfruit, mangoes, papaya, black pepper, coconut, mustard, linseed and bamboo are the agricultural products. There are valuable trees in the region like Jarulov Ajhar, Cham, Rata, Sundi, Gomari and Gundroi but the bulk of trade is in Tula and other soft woods which are used for tea boxes. The rural areas of Barak Valley are impregnated with rich indigenous artistry and craftsmanship. A good number of men and women practice handicrafts like pottery making, weaving, and furniture making etc.The Manipuris are well known for their Laichampi (quilt) making. Sitalpati (coolmat) made of cane is also a unique craft amongst the people of the valley (Chatterjee 2000). Wild animals are no longer common in the valley but, monkeys, elephants, bisons, buffaloes, tigers, leopards, bears and various kinds of deer are

still found in the wilder parts and in the hills.It is also the home of varieties of birds.

Educationally the valley has been progressive with a total literacy rate of 64.28%.The male literacy rate is 71.93% where as the female literacy rate is only 56.03%. The district of Cachar has a literacy rate of 74.62%, Karimganj has a literacy rate of 73.49% and the literacy rate of Hailakandi is 68.54% (Census 2011). In the valley there are 8 Pre-primary schools, 2 each, in Cachar and Hailakandi districts and 4 in Karimganj district.Total number of Primary schools in Barak Valley is 4242 with 1402 in Karimganj, 1127 in Hailakandi and 1713 in Cachar district.There are 1017 Middle schools, out of which 347 are in Karimganj, 260 in Hailakandi and 410 in Cachar district.The total number of High schools in the valley 279 with 92 in Karimganj district,40 in Hailakandi and 147 in Cachar district.There are 62 Higher Secondary schools in Barak Valley, out of which 25 are in Karimganj district, 9 in Hailakandi and 28 in Cachar district. There is a Central university at Dargakona near Silchar, the National Institute of Technology at Silchar, the Rajiv Gandhi National Institute at Ambikapatty,1 Polytechnic College, the Silchar Medical College at Ghungoor, 4 Industrial Training Institutes: 2 in Cachar and 1 each in Karimganj and Hailakandi. There are two Law Colleges, one each in Silchar and Karimganj and 6 B.Ed Colleges 3 in Cachar, 2 in Karimganj and 1 in Hailakandi. There are more than thirty colleges all over the valley (assam govt. inedu in Assam 2011; Koiri 2010).

Barak Valley looks like a mini-India because of its composite culture. Rabindranath Tagore referred to it as Sreebhumi because of its distinct geographical, cultural and historical significance (Choudhury1991). The culture of the valley is a rich tapestry woven with multicoloured yarns of heritage. Its heavenliness can be judged by the serene and composed environment. The people of the valley are religious and god- believing which can be witnessed by the existing temples, churches, gurudwaras and mosques. The valley is connected with the outer world by rail, road and air. Silchar which is situated on the basin of the river Barak is the main town of Cachar district and came into existence in 1832-33. Haranchandra Raha in his novel 'Rana Chandi' which was published in

the year 1283 (Bangabda) wrote, "At present this place is known as Silchar and this is the main station of Cachar". He has also mentioned that the place was earlier known as Silachal and it was the British Government which named it as Silchar. Silchar town offers passage to Mizoram, Manipur, and N.C Hills and is also connected with Tripura and Bangladesh border by road. Silchar, beautifully located, commands a charming view down the Barak which is lined with groves of areca-37656palms, lush green tea gardens and dotted with the sails of native craft (Bhattarcharjee 2004). There are 97 registered Tea Estates in Barak Valley with a total population of 1,77,418 inclusive of children and non-workers residing in these Estates.Out of this population there are 76,270 workers of which 45,025 are permanent and 31,245 are temporary workers.The total male workers is 37,656 of which 23,750 are permanent and 13,906 are temporary. There are 38,614 female workers out of which 21,275 are permanent and 17,339 are temporary workers (Tea Board 2011).

The Cachar District

Before India's partition the whole of today's Barak valley constituted a single district of Cachar, which was officially annexed by the British in 1832, ending the Dimasa rule forever. Some historians have opined that the remains of the Bhuban Hill give an evidence of Pala influence. It has also been learnt that the Nidanpur Copper inscriptions issued by the King Bhaskara Varma of Kamrup is evidence to the fact that Karimganj region was a part of Chandrapur Vishaya (Choudhury 2003; Chatterjee 2000). The people of the valley played significant role in Swadeshi, Non-cooperation and Quit India movements and the region was visited by Mahatma Gandhi, Bipin Chandra Pal, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Jawahar Lal Nehru. Today's Cachar district in the valley covers an area of 3786 sq. km with a total population of 17, 36,319 (Census 2011). The entire valley is full of tourist attractions in and around Silchar, both, of historical and religious significance like Khaspur, Bhuban Hills, Maniharan tunnel, Salganga, Kachakanti temple, Ramnagar Anowa, Gandhi Bag, Dolu, Sonai, Dalur Ulum and Labac. Hailakandi, the smallest district of Assam, covering an area of 1,327sq.km with a total population of 6,59,260 (Census 2011). The Pirbadi, the Dargah of Sufi saint, the Siddeswar Temple, Adi Kali Mandir and the Hazarat

Shah Adam Khaki's Dargah attract people from all over the world as it is one of the 360 Aolias. Karimganj covers an area of 1809 sq.km and lies on the border of India and Bangladesh and has a population of 12, 17,002 (Census 2011). The Badarpur Fort of Karimgamj district is of great historical significance as it was constructed by Ali-Kuli-Beg, a Mughal Foujdar of Sylhet, in 1740. The treaty of Badarpur was also signed there. There is also the Nootyd Khal, a canal which is known as the Suez of Barak. Apart from these water bodies there are Ishabeel and Shonbeel lakes. The Shonbeel is famous for its migratory birds. Latu is another place of historical significance as during the Sepoy Mutiny a fierce battle was fought between the Sepoy rebels and the Britishers around this hillock (Barak Utsav 2005).

The Koomber Tea Estate

The Koomber tea village is situated in the foothills of N.C. Hills of the Barail Range. Its eastern division is known as Lunglacherra and the west side division is known as Teckulpar. The main division is called Koomber and another division is named as Burrathal, apart from Lunglacherra and Techulpar. Koomber Tea Estate forms the southern boundary with Silchar Airport at Kumbhirgram, 25 kms from Silchar town. The Tea Estate was established in 1880, under the Jatinga Valley Tea Company. The Estate was registered with the Tea Board of India on 6th April 1953, against registration number 2653 (Tea Board of India 2007). The name of the garden has been derived from the Kachari word *Kumbha* which means cotton. The garden land was full of cotton trees (Simul) from which it received its name. The Britishers started pronouncing *Kumbha* as *Koomber*. Even now, a lot of cotton trees can be seen in the plateau areas of Koomber Tea Estate. Till 1977, the garden was under the Jatinga Valley Tea Company and from 1st January 1978 it was handed over to Koomber Tea Company. The present Koomber Tea Estate is run by the Goodricke Group of Companies (Tusnail 1995). The company had British managers up to 1964 and after 1964 the company was headed by Indian managers.The following administered the plantation from 1925 : Mr A.F.Stuart 1925-1935; Mr.C.W.Morley 1935-1951; Mr.W.T.Sturrock 1951-1955; Mr.A.M.Shaw 1955-1964; Mr.J.K.Dunlop 1964-1968; Mr.S.K.Bhasin 1968 -1977; Mr. C.Singh1977-1979; Mr.V.K.Sharma 1979-

1981; Mr.DilipSyam 1981-1994; Mr. K.Panchanan-1998 (Udharbond 2000). The present manager is Mr. S.N. Singh who has been in the company since 2003. According to Annual Return Form No. 12, submitted by the senior manager to the local inspector and Chief Inspector of Labour, the total registered area of Koomber Tea Estate is 1382.90 hectares. The total area under cultivation is 818.02 hectares. The garden has seven Bunglows for managers and a guest house. The total workers' population of the Koomber tea garden is 1297 with 638 females (49.19%) and 659 males (50.81%), apart from 25 adolescents, 15 artisans and 21 clerical, medical and supervisory staff (2012 Annual Return). There is a record of receiving awards for highest tea yield by Koomber Tea Estate in 1966, 1972 and 1973. According to Production Report 2011, Dewan Tea Garden ranks first with a production of 83,265 kgs of tea, Ainakhal stands second with a total of 71,211 kgs, Sephinjuri Bheel ranks third with 67,725 kgs and Koomber holds the fourth position with 66,317 kgs of tea (2011 Annual Return).

The Settlement of the Koomber Tea Estate

Taking the Koomber office as the central point, one finds the Hospital, Factory, Market, Nachghar, Labour Club and Crèche are on the eastern side; the Staff Club, Happy Valley Club and the Tennis Lawn are to the south- east; Post Office, L.P. School and Bus Stand are in the north- east ; the Bungalows are on the east, west, north-east and south-east and the Football ground and the Golf field are on the northern side while the Silchar Airport lies to the south.

There are altogether 11 lanes (referred as *lines* by the tea garden people) in the Koomber tea village where the workers reside in 843 households. The names of the lanes are Bazar Line, Nachghar Line, Factory Line (Chaghar Line), Dusnambar Line, Sonpatty Line, Satnambar Line, Hospital Line, Baronambar Line, Indira Colony, Goraith Line, Ranchi Line, Gilgal Line and Staff Line. The workers' population comprises Hindu communities, Muslims, Christians and Tea Tribes (See table 3.1, Appendix I). The Hindus, Muslims and Christians in the village belong to Bhojpuri, Assamese, Kuki, Santal, Munda, Farsi, Nepali, Manipuri, Bengali and Oriya linguistic communities.

Koomber Tea Garden is a big settlement area of Barak valley with 1382.90 hectares of land which belongs to the tea garden authority and comprises residential area mainly as there are no agricultural lands. It has 843 houses with a total population of 1297 consisting of tribals and non-tribals (Annual Return 2011). At the time of migration the different communities settled down in one particular area and this is existing even today.The field study reveals that almost all workers belonging to the Goraith community live in the Goraith lane , most of the Mundas live in the Ranchi lane, Gilgal lane consists of only six families who came to settle inside the Koomber Tea Estate after their village at Joypur was ravaged by extremists and out of the six families three belong to Teli community and the other three belong to Biswas community. All the people of the Muslim community reside in the Bazar lane, except two families, one each, living in the Hospital lane and Indira Colony. All the Oriya Christians live in the Sonpatty lane, most of the Hindustani Hindus reside in the Lane No. 7 and Sonpatty lane. The Bengali and Oriya Hindus are not residing in one lane but are scattered over different lanes.

The People

Human migration is physical movement by humans from one area to another, sometimes over long distances or in large groups. Migratory movements are products of the social, cultural, economic, political or physical circumstances in which individuals and societies find themselves. Historically, this movement was nomadic, often causing significant conflict with the indigenous population and their displacement or cultural assimilation. Historical evidence (Koiri 2010) reveals that the tea garden workers both tribes and non-tribes migrated from Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Madras and Chotonagpur of the present Jharkhand. Migration also results in basic social change. The sample of study consists of 85 families from Koomber Tea Estate, out of which over three fifths of the families migrated to the garden before Independence and near about two fifths have migrated after Independence from their native places (See table 3.2, Appendix I). The largest segment (34.12%) of the tea garden labourers belong to the 3rd generation and are not even aware of their place of origin. Of the rest (65.78%) of the migrated families, 21.19% have migrated from Ranchi and

16.47% from Odishsa, and the rest have come from Madras, Habiganj (Bangladesh),UttarPradesh, Bankura (WestBengal), Nepal, Chhatisgarh, and Sikkim (See Table 3.3, Appendix I).

The population of the garden is of two categories; namely, the tribal and the non-tribal. The tea tribes in Assam have been listed as Tea-Garden and Ex-Tea Garden Tribes (Koiri 2010: 54); however, they do not get any benefits which are accorded to those from North- East India who are listed as Scheduled Tribes, because the state did not consider them sons of the soil. The socio-cultural characterics of the sample are discussed here. The sample of the study has 85 households comprising 375 persons: Males-210 (56%) and females-165 (44%), which shows adverse sex ratio in the garden (See Table 3.4, Appendix I)

In the garden most of the population comprise the non-tribals (72.95%). But the tribal population consisting of 27.05% also forms a highly significant portion in the settlement (See table 3.5, Appendix I). The backward class is a collective term, used by the Government of India, for castes which are economically and socially disadvantaged. They typically include the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). On the other hand the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and the Scheduled Tribes (STs) are two groupings of historically disadvantaged people that are given recognition in the Constitution. During the period of British rule in the Indian sub-continent they were known as the depressed classes. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes make up around 15% and 7.5% respectively of the population of India, or around 24% altogether, according to the 2001 Census. The proportion of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the country's population has steadily risen since Independence. The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 lists 1,108 castes across 25 states in its First Schedule, while the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950, lists 744 tribes across 22 states in its First Schedule. Since Independence, the Scheduled Castes have benefited from the Reservation policy (Sinha 2009). But in Assam the tea tribes did not get the status of ST on the reason of migration and the Assam Government stated that they are not sons of the soil. The 85 familes taken as sample for the study belong to different social categories; namely, Most Other Backward Classes (31.76%),

Other Backward Classes (58.83%), Scheduled Castes (4.7%) and GeneralCastes (4.7%). (See table 3.6, Appendix I).

The Castes and Religious Groups

Caste is hierarchical system of social stratification in India. Historically, the castes system in India divided communities into thousands of endogamous hereditary groups called Jatis. The Jatis were grouped by the Brahminical texts under the four well known caste categories (the varnas); viz, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Certain people were excluded altogether, ostracized by all other castes and treated as untouchables. Caste is commonly thought of as an ancient fact of Hindu life. Andre Beteille (1965) describes a caste as 'a small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership and specific style of life which sometimes include the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and is usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system, based on concepts of purity and pollution'.

The non-tribes belong to various caste categories and among their linguistic / religious groups they have adopted various titles such as: **Hindustani Hindus**: Goala, Kurmi, Bin, Patowa, Singh, Rikiasan, Mahato, Mala, Panika, Yadav, Pasi, Gaur, Rajgaur, Goswami, Rabidas, Dusad, Bhuyan, Koiri, Dubey, Pandey, Gonju, Chasa, Kahar, Baigthi, Nagbangshi, Rajbangshi, Lohar, Mal, Ri, Teli, Bawri, Ghatwar, Bania, Phulmali, Baliarsingh and Thakur. **Hindustani and Bengali Muslim:** Laskar, Rahman, Ali, Hussain, Mia, Talukdar, Barbhuiya, Choudhury and Mazumdar. **Assamese:** Deka and Rabha. **Nepali:** Thapa and Chetri. **Manipuri:** Methei (Singha), Bishnupriya (Sinha). **Bengali Hindus:** Paul, Ghosh, Bhattacharjee, Das, Nath, Suklabaida, Deb Roy, Banik, Seal, Chanda, Dutta, Dhar, Malakar, Karmakar, Sabar, Saha, Roy, Ravidas, Chakraborty. **Oriya:** Pradhan, Mahapatra, Patra, Tanti, Senapati and Bardhan.(See table 3.7, Appendix I). Various religious groups in the non-tribal population of Koomber Tea Estate are Bengali Muslim, Bengali Christian, Bengali Hindu, Nepali Christian, Nepali Hindu, Oriya Hindu, Hindustani Hindu, Oriya Christian and Hindustani Christian. (See table 3.8, Appendix I).

There are twenty seven major tribes in Koomber Tea Estate; viz., Santal, Mura, Tirki, Kaldulna, Kol, Aind, Goraith, Naik, Kondo, Kohar, Bengra, Bhumij, Teli, Kalindi, Oraon, Kurku, Barla, Biswas, Bakti, Bin, Tanti, Kurmi, Ganju, Rikiasan, Patuwa, Rabha and Tantubai. There is also a Kuki from Changsan family.. In the sample of 85 households taken for study there are people belonging to eighteen tribes; namely, Santhal, Mura, Tirki, Kol, Kalduna, Aind, Goraith, Naik, Kondu, Kohar, Bengra, Bhumij, Teli, Kalindi, Oraon, Kurku, Barla and Biswas. (See table 3.9, Appendix I). The tribes are mainly animists except for the converted Christians and Hindus.The tribes have their own clans and even sub-clans. A clan is a group of people united by actual or perceived kinship and descent. Clans in indigenous societies are likely to be exogamous, meaning that their members cannot marry one another. So, a clan is a unilineal kin group which is usually exogamous, claiming descent from a common ancestor, and is often represented by a totem of animals and birds usually and sometimes metals also which they hold as sacred and avoid killing, harming or using. Clans are of either matrilineal or patrilineal descent, recruiting the children of either male or female members. A clan is usually segmented into lineages, which are the branches of descent from a common ancestor.All the 18 tribes from the sample families have their own clans like Soren, Hen, Nag, Kerkata, Indur, Topoyar, Chorkata, Kachhap, Treesa, Telisap, Shankha, Tirki, Kharko, Bete, Borga, Sarna, Sib Gotra, Sal Gotra, Kishab, Agni, Ruki, Shingi etc. (See table 3.10, Appendix I).

Family

The family is an intimate domestic group made up of people related to one another by bonds of blood, sexual mating, or legal ties. In human context, a family is a group of people affiliated by consanguinity, affinity, or co-residence. In most societies it is the principal institution for socialization of children. The most common form of family is joint and nuclear family. Traditionally migrated tea garden labourers mostly belong to the nuclear family. Most of the families (90. 58%) are nuclear and less than one tenth of the families (9.42%) are joint. This indicates the impact of modernization on the life style of the tea garden workers (See table 3.11, Appendix I). The data reveal that over a half of the

families have medium size (5-8 members), followed by small size (1-4 members). However, large size families are still significantly present among them (See table 3.12, Appendix I). Of the 85 families, 4.27% have cases of underage marriages (See table 3.13, Appendix I).

Polity

The Koomber Tea Estate has a Bagan Panchayat which has ten members. Sri Junas Raj Gour is the President and Sri Pol Saha is the Secretary. The members are Biful Karmakar, Sushil Goala, Babul Saha, Mongal Bakti, Bapu Rikiason, Niranjan Tanti, Philip Mahapatro, Brinda Tanti, Tinu Kurmi and Anita Kalindi. The body of Bagan Panchayat is elected democratically by the permanent workers. The Bagan Panchayat functions as intermediatory body beween the Management and the Trade Union, on one hand, and the workers, on the other. The Bagan Panchayat sorts out all kinds of problems faced by the workers, labour welfare disputes, disputes related to marriage, land, loans and advances and also settle disputes and misunderstandings between different communities and also acts as a mediator in a family conflicts.

Besides the Bagan Panchayat, there is a Goan Panchayat.The Koomber Tea Estate comes under the Udharbond Gaon Panchayat. It was first constituted in 1994. It has ten members in all. Sri Pradip Tanti is the present President and Sri Muktalal Bhattacharjee is the Secretary.The other members are Rajen Tanti, Amush Tanti, Gita Karmokar, Sunil Goraith, Kashinath Keot, Chittaranjan Goala, Shenbor Khasia, Sumi Goala, Bahadur Panika and Mitu Tanti. Goan Panchayat undertakes relief and developmental functions under various government and non- government schemes. There are also ten local self-help groups in the village.

Other political organizations are labour trade unions; viz., the Cachar Cha Sramik Union and Cachar Tea Employees Union which are affiliated to Indian National Trade Union Congress. There are existing community panchayats which function across villages. Such Panchayats take responsibilities on matters related to births, deaths and marriages in the community and also settles disputes in case of adultery, incest, displacement, inter-religious marriages and widow re-marriage. Tribes of Koomber Tea Estates have their own community panchayats

which consist of headman, assistant headman, messenger and the priest.

Politics is integral part of life everywhere in the world. It is universal phenomenon of the society. The political dimension of a community lies in allocation of power, exertion of influence and decision making. It includes different types of government machinery and also management systems.In some societies like the tea gardens traditional bureaucratic authority prevails along with other Government Political Institutions. In Koomber Tea Estate, all the tea workers have cast their votes during the last Gaon Panchayat, State Assembly and Parliamentary elections. The tea garden workers are left with very little choice because of power politics and vote-banking, lack of leadership and nexus between the trade union leaders and political agents. The National Congress Party has a very strong hold among the workers of the Koomber Tea Estate.

Economy

The tea garden economic activity comprises tea leaves plucking; tea processing and manufacturing by engaging labour. The tea tribes are basically involved in seasonal tea plucking, which lasts from March to December. There are two kinds of tea plantation workers; viz, permanent and casual. Out of 375 people in the 85 families; most (76.48%) are casual workers whereas only 23.52 % are permanent workers in the tea garden. (See table 3.14, Appendix I). Every worker earns money from the tea plucking per day or per kilogram.The tea garden workers of Assam Valley earn Rs 84/- per day whereas in Barak Valley they earn Rs 68/- This highlights the unequal wage structure in the State of Assam. (See table 3.15, Appendix I). Over a half of the families have monthly income ranging from Rs.1000 to Rs. 2000 from tea plucking and 16.47% and 12.94% have the income of Rs. 2001 - Rs. 3000 and Rs.3001-Rs.4000 respectively. On the other hand, less than one tenth (9.42%) of the families have monthly income of Rs. 5000 and above. Thus, tea plucking is the major source of income in the Koomber tea village. (See table 3.16, Appendix I).

The tea labourers did not believe in savings because of their low income and also due to lack of awareness they rather thought of the present and were not bothered about their future.Yet, a good number of private and government

agencies have contacts with the Koomber Tea Estate and as such 40% of the workers have savings with banks, 15% have savings with Post office, 13% save with Sahara India, 15% have invested in other private Insurance Companies like Rose Valley etc. and 5% have policies with Life Insurance Companies.The rest of 12% follow the traditional method of saving in their own Piggy Banks (Hundi) or inside bamboo poles at home. The permanent workers have their Provident Fund account also. (See table 3.17, Appendix I).The only post office in the Koomber tea village was established in the year 1868 and is now 144 years old. There is one sub-center of the State Bank of India in Koomber Tea Estate catering to the needs of the people.

Gadgets

Household gadgets play a vital role in gauging the living standard of the consumers and also the process of continuity and change. It therefore needs to find out about the household gadgets of the workers in Koomber Tea Estate. Most of the villagers (above 60%) have bicycle, scooter, and motor cycle, (78.82%) have dish TV, (90.58%) have mobile phone, (56.47%) have cooking gas, (69.41%) have wall clock, (100%) torch, and (87.05%) have kerosene stove. Nearly two-fifths of the villagers have water purifier /water filter, refrigerator, VCD player/ VCR/ PVC, pressure cooker, inverter, dressing table, telephone (land), tape recorder, steel almirah, good night / All out. (See table 3.18, Appendix I).

Occupations

Besides the tea garden occupation, the garden people are engaged in other means of livelihood. There are also 10 Self-Help Groups functioning in the village which help the workers to generate funds and carry out small projects for sustainable development. Out of 375, only 12% of the individuals are doing other jobs like teaching (1.86%), business (1.86%), day labourers (0.26%) Gaon Panchayat Staff (1.86%), government servant (0.8%) and very few are working as carpenters, priest, Asha workers, as agents for Life Insurance Companies, Grade IV employee in Indian Oil, and Supervisors under Gaon Panchyat as Security Personals in Private Companies, as Supervisors under the Sarva Shiksha

Abhijan, Driver, and Contractor. (See table 3.19, Appendix I).

In Koomber settlement area, most of the people are engaged in tea-plucking, factory workers, shopkeeping, tailoring, barbers, artisans, T.V. mechanics, goldsmith, blacksmith, clerks, teachers, contractors, drivers, carpenters, priests etc. Koomber tea garden does not have any agricultural land for the people.

Weekly Markets and Shops

Koomber tea village is located in a remote area, far away from the main town, and therefore the weekly village market is very significant in the lives of the people. The weekly market is held once a week at Koomber, ie; on Tuesdays. Most of the products are taken from the town and some of the raw products like betel nuts, lime, beetle leaves and vegetables are sold by the villagers from the surrounding villages *(Punjis)*. Old clothes are brought down in trucks, apart from that fish, meat, sweets, oil, fire wood, spices, tobacco, broomsticks, fruits, rice, cereals, dry fish, goats, etc are sold in the market. Shoe repairing shops, cheap aluminum and plastic utensils, and other vessels, cane products are also sold. Vendors set up small outlets full of colorful clips, ribbons and cosmetic products, photographs of god and goddess, cheap chocolates and toys for children. Barbers set up their saloons. Tea stalls are also put up. Some of the local tea garden people buy the products especially vegetables at wholesale rate and sell them at retail price. The weekly market is the centre for attraction and fun amongst the Koomber Tea Estate people where women and children are found to be visiting in bright and colorful clothes. Altogether there are 53 shops in Koomber Tea Estate. These include two cycle repairing shop, twenty grocery shops, fourteen pan shops, shops selling homemade liquor, one saloon, four tea stalls, one stationery shop, one canteen, one electronic goods shop, one goldsmith, one tent house, one pharmacy, one chat house, three tailoring shops, one T.V. mechanic shop and five dry fish shops.

Education

Education in its general sense is a means for inculcating habits and refinement in the lives of a group of people which is further transmitted from one

generation to the other. It is in fact transfering of knowledge. Generally, it occurs through any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts. In its narrow, technical sense, education is the formal process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills, customs and values from one generation to another, e.g., instruction in schools. Education can be formal or informal. Traditionally, tea garden workers were illiterate but, now, situation is somewhat different as, with the intervention of the government and non-government agencies, schools have been set up in every nook and corner of the country even in the remotest villages in order to eradicate illiteracy. In the Koomber Tea Estate it has been found that the garden has one government lower primary school from class I to IV which was taken up by the state Government in 1968 and presently it is run by Sarva Siksha Ahbijan in collaboration with the government. The other existing school is a venture middle school from VI to VIII. The Primary school building is Assam Type with five classrooms. There is a playground in front of the school. The total enrolment in March 2011 was 309 children with 156 boys and 153 girls. The annual return of 2011 does not mention the total number of children between 4 years and 12 years, number of pupils enrolled and number of teachers. The school record shows zero dropout rates but the school attendance registers on the 12th November 2011 showed that the total number of pupils present on an average is 174 daily and there are about 75 dropouts. It has also been found that there are four teachers at present in the L.P. School.

About four fifths (78.40%) of the people are literate and the rest (21.60%) are illiterate. It also indicates also that 10.93% tea garden workers are educated upto high school, 32.27% upto primary school education, 11.73% upto pre-primary education and 8.80% and 14.67% upto higher secondary and graduation respectively. (See table 3.20, Appendix I). Education always helps develop the quality of life and create awareness regarding health and hygiene in the society.

Health and Sanitation

There is a 30 bed hospital in Koomber Tea Estate established in 1951. It comprises one dispensary, four detention beds, one qualified medical practitioner, one pharmacist, one qualified nurse, one mid-wife; one trained nursing attendant and one Health Assistant. The number of outdoor patients treated in the year 2011 was 12,600 and 456 patients were given indoor treatment during the year 2010-2011. Serious patients of Koomber tea garden are referred to and treated at Silchar Medical College and Hospital. There is also an ambulance under the National Rural Health Mission scheme which is used for pregnant women and new born babies transportation. From the government's birth and death registration it has been found that a high magnitude of undernutrition and anemia cases exists in the tea garden. From the year 2007 to 2011, out of 188 deaths, 139 patients have expired due to acute anemia and cardio-respiratory failure, a number of them died due to liver cirrhosis and yet there are others who had suffered from hypertension. Worm infestation, diarrhea, skin infections and underweight are some of the common diseases prevailing among the tea garden inmates. As regards sterilization and laparoscopic programmes the health assistant said that patients from Koomber garden are sent to Udharbond Public Health Centre but on enquiry it was found that since the last 3 to 4 years camps were not organized in the Koomber Hospital and the workers are not given leave to go to Udharbond for sterilization. Most of the money sanctioned for referral transportation and awareness programmes remained unutilized in the year 2010-2011 (Office Records 2011).

Koomber Tea Estate is considered as endemic area for malaria. The permanent workers are the main beneficiaries and casual workers get very little service and those who are out of work do not get any service or medicine from the hospital. The tea garden report shows that there is crèche facility in the garden. On visit to the garden it was found out that there was a crèche but it had remained closed for more than two years. Except for a baby cradle and a hospital bed the room was empty and left unused for long. There was a broken and rusted slide; swing and a merry-go-round as claimed in the management report. On interviewing the workers of Koomber Tea Estate it came to light that they were

facing sibling care problem and their children had to be left unattended and unfed when parents went for work. Even two years ago when the crèche was open, the children were given a lick of boiled gruel *(ek chatu kichuri)* and none of the children were provided with uniforms or towel as claimed in the annual report 2010 - 2012. There are 5 Anganwadi centers: Number 5 in Indira Colony, number 6 in Kumbha lane, number 7 in Bazar lane, number 145 in Sonpatty lane and another in Haribashar lane which does not have a number. The people drink water from taps as well as bore-wells. There are in all 300 borewells and 40 points of Public Health Engineering water supply in the village.As regards the mode of treatment out of the 85 families about three fourths (74.11%) take allopathic treatment; one tenth take homeopathic treatment, 4.52% take both allopathic and homeopathic treatment and the rest (3.52%) depend on their traditional medicines which consist of herbs, roots and also magical therapies *(jadu tuna and jharphuk kabaz)* etc. (See table 3.21, Appendix I).

Water

Water is the basic necessity of life. In order to enjoy good health and well-being pure and clean water is essential. Today, India is facing an acute shortage of freshwater leading to health hazards.Thus, sources of water in the settlement is an important aspect for study. The tea garden labourers collect water from common source.In Koomber Tea Estate most (87.05%) of the families use water supplied by the Public Health & Engineering department for drinking, nearly half (48.23%) of the families use pond water for bathing and washing clothes, over half of them (52.94%) use both supply and well water for drinking, washing and bathing, nearly two fifths use well water. (See table3.22, Appendix I).

Conservancy facility is also part of health and it contributes to health, hygiene and proper living.In the garden, out of the 85 families (92.95%) have latrine facility in their homes and only 7.06 % of the tea populace don't have latrine in their homes hence use open fields for defeacation.(See table 3.23, Appendix I). Of the 85 families more than half (54.12%) have bathrooms and the rest do not have. (See table 3.24, Appendix I).

Nachgarh, Community Hall, Clubs and Recreation Facilities

The village has one Nachgarh and one Community Hall where meetings and various kinds of celebrations are organized. Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Sitala Puja and various festival dances are also performed. The community hall is tin-roofed with pucca floor. During Durga Puja and Diwali festivals, films are screened and orchestra is organized as the villagers no longer have interest in Jatra (folk dramas) which were once very popular in Koomber. There are three clubs in the village: Staff club, Shramik (workers) club and the Managers' club which is named as Happy Valley Club. There is also Table Tennis and Lawn Tennis grounds and golf field for managers and a football ground for the workers. The garden has seven bungalows for managers and a guest house.

Many important personalities have visited Koomber Tea Estate, some of whom are the Governor of Meghalaya and Assam, Mr.Cherotra in the year 1982, the entire Cricket Team under the Captainship of Azaharuddin, including Sachin Tendulkar in the year1994, East Bengal Team under the captainship of Baichung Bhutia visited Koomber in 2010, when they came to play Sontosh Trophy Match at Silchar. Kapil Dev, the winner of World Cup 1983, visited Koomber Tea Estate in 1997 and stayed in the Guest House, when he had come to Silchar for election campaign in favour of Sri Santosh Mohon Dev, the ex -M.P.from Silchar. Koomber Tea Garden won World Social Award in 1995 for its outstanding social commitment towards Cachar district, the award was received by Mr. Dilip Shyam, Dy. Gen. Manager and Koomber T.E. from London. There is a record of receiving awards for highest tea yield by Koomber Tea Estate in 1966, 1972 and 1973.

Places of Worship

Religion is a collection of cultural systems, belief systems, and world views that relate humanity to spirituality and, sometimes, to moral values. Many religions have narratives, symbols, traditions and sacred histories that are intended to give meaning to life or to explain the origin of life or the universe. They tend to derive a sense of morality, ethics, religious laws or a preferred lifestyle from their ideas about the cosmos and nature. The practice of religion may also include sermons, commemoration of the activities of god or gods, sacrifices, festivals, feasts, trance, initiations, funeral services, matrimonial services, meditation, music, art, dance, public service, or other aspects of human culture. However, there are examples of religions in which some or many of these aspects of structure, belief, or practices are absent as in the case of Christians of the Koomber Tea Estate. Most (50.59%) of the 85 tea garden families are Hindu and the rest are Animists (27.60), Christians (11.76%) and Muslims (10.59%).Each religious group has its own religious place like temple, church, maszid and jaherthan.(See table 3.25, Appendix 1). Koomber Tea Estate has 7 prayer houses for Christians and 8 Hindu temples but there is no Maszid for Muslims and so the Muslims have to go to the Airport campus for offering prayers.The tribes do not have any established place for worship yet, they offer prayers at the Jaherthan (a sacred grove) and Manjhithan (a small mud mound) of course nowsdays some of them offer puja to the Shakti (Goddess Kali) but they do not worship any idol. Yet the process of Sanskritization is marked. All the communities except the Christians and Muslims take part in Hindu festivals also. (See table 3.26, Appendix I).

Religious Ceremonies

Every religion is expressed through religious ceremonies. The Hindu tea garden workers practice their own religious ceremonies which are commonly organized in their respective villages or families. The family level religious celebrations are Laxmi Puja and Saraswati Puja held in the month of October/November and February/March respectively. Community level celebrations are Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Charak Puja, Basanti Puja, Chatt Puja,

Tusu Puja and Karam Puja. These are organized in the month of August/September, October/November and February/March respectively (details of worships are given in Chapter 2). The Christians celebrate Christmas, Easter Sunday and Good Friday, Christ the King Feast (last Sunday of the ordinary year),Ash Wednesday (Lenten season),Palm Sunday, and masses on Sundays .They solemnize seven sacraments namely, Baptism, Holy Communion, ,Confirmation, marriage etc. in the Churches. Advent (liturgical New Year), Confession, Saints days (feast days) are held only in Catholic Churches in the gardens.The Muslims visit Mosques at the airport campus to offer prayers, as there is no mosque in Koomber Tea Estate. (See table 3.27 Appendix 1).

Priest Invitation

As among the Hindu castes, invitation to priest on every occasion has a great importance among the tea garden workers. So, all the Hindu workers of Koomber Tea Estate invite Bengali or Hindustani priest (Purohit) on the occasion of worship, marriage, rice feeding ceremony, funeral rites etc. The role of Hindu priest on the religious ceremonies depends on their respective sects. The tea tribes like the Santhals and Mundas have their own priests known as the Naike. The Christians have their own Pastors and the Muslims have their Mullahs who organize their community prayers and ceremonies and the Kajis perform the marriage *(Nika)*.

In the garden about one fifth (19.99) of the families belonged to Christianity, out of which 10.58% are Presbyterian, 4.70% Baptist, 2.35% follow the Salvation Army,1.18% are North Indian Catholics and 1.18% are Roman Catholics. The Hindu families are the followers of different sects of Hinduism like Thakur Anukul Chandra (10.58%), Ramkrishna (5.88%) and Vaishnavs (3.52%). The rest (57.65%) do not have any sect and dharmaguru. (See table 3.28, Appendix I).

Language

Language may refer either to the specifically human capacity for acquiring and using complex symbol systems of communication, or to a specific instance of such a system of communication. Through language human beings

express and transmit their social needs from one person to the other. In the Koomber Tea Estate the migrated tribes and non- tribes commonly use Sadri language which is a mixture of Hindi, Bengali, Bhojpuri and Oriya. It is common to all of them and is also known as *bagani bhasha*. They also speak in Sylethi, the Bengali dialect used by the people of Barak Valley. The Santhals and the Mundas speak Santhali and Farsi language amongst themselves. In the 85 families, almost three fifths (58.82%) use Sylethi, 24.71% speak Bhojpuri and out of the rest (14.70%) speak Oriya and (2.35%) speak in Nepali. A large size of the population is Hindi speaking (See table 3.29, Appendix I).

Dress and Ornaments

The people of the Koomber Tea Estate, especially the tribes have their traditional dresses and ornaments which they used to wear on religious ceremonies and special occasions but, now, except for a few men and women, most of them do not possess such traditional dresses and ornaments. On enquiry just one or two pieces of their ornaments, made of silver, could be found .Some of the workers said that they sold them off and others complained of theft.Their long stay in the garden made them to adopt the Bengali dress culture.Men have taken to shirts and pants and only on special occasions, they wear dhotis of normal length as compared to the past when, they used to wear long yards of clothes as dhotis.The elderly men still tie turbans on religious ceremonies and carry a piece of cloth as a shawl over the shoulder. Men generally wear pants, shirt, jeans and T-shirt, trousers and kurta, but, at farm, they generally full pants, half pants and full shirts, half shirts, banyan, trousers or lungi. Old men wear dhotis and Panjabis. Within the settlement, generally at home, youths wear half pants, lungi, trousers and shirts, while old men wear light cotton towels *(gamcha)* and dhoti. The small boys wear half pants and half/full shirts and on special occasions they wear kurta and pyjamas, jeans and T.shirts and in schools they wear uniforms.The small girls wear frocks, skirts and tops,legins,churidars and even pants and tops.

In the settlement, women generally wear sari, blouse and petticoat, nighty (maxi), salwar-kurta, trousers, top and frock. Nowadays, barring the aged

women, all the women wear sarees with pleats and also wear blouses unlike in the past. The Hindu widows wear white saree, white blouses and white petticoats in all the places.The Christian men do not wear dhoti, they wear shirts and pants and have special dress code when they go to Church. In Church they usually wear black pant and white shirt and women wear blue saree and blue blouse. Both men and women wear the Holy Cross on chains of various metals or beads, hanging from their necks. The tea garden women are fond of ornaments and decorate themselves with hairpins, ribbons of bright colours, ear-rings, necklets, necklaces, armlets, wristlets and rings made of brass. Young women and girls love to use lipstick of bright colours. The men generally wear finger rings and chain made of cheap metals etc. It needs to be pointed out that the Muslim women in Koomber Tea Estate do not wear Burkha (a garment which is all covered from head to toe) but men dorn their caps when they to Mosque to offer prayers.

Diet

Food is one of the basic needs of human being. Without food one cannot survive in the world. Items considered as food may be sourced from plants and animals. Traditionally tea garden workers are non-vegetarian and eat fish and meat, including pork. Their staple food is rice and seasonal vegetables. They use mustard oil for cooking. They have various food items like rice, roti, flattened rice, puffed rice dal, mixed vegetable curry, fish curry, red meat or chicken curry, egg curry, milk etc in their daily diet. They also eat magi (noodles), biscuits, cakes, kurkure (potato granules), polao, chowmein chat and soft drinks, frooti (fruit juice), coco-cola, fanta, lichi etc. which are of cosmopolitan nature. The youths prefer wine to home made *haria* (hooch) nowadays.The Hindus do not eat beef and the Muslims abstain from taking pork.The Christians do not have such taboos.They also chew tobacco and betel nuts.

Toiletries

The people of Koomber Tea Estate use both traditional and modern toileteries .Most of the tea garden workers use soap and shampoo but, among the 85 families almost four fifth (77.65%) use modern soaps and shampoos like Lux,

Vivel, Rexona soap and Clinic plus, All Clear shampoo etc. and 21.17% of the families use traditional soap and shampoo like tree leaves, soil and various ayurvedic products. The rest (1.17%) of the families do not use any soap and shampoo. Further nearly four fifth (77.65%) of the families use tooth paste like Colgate, Pepsodent and also use tooth brush and the rest(22.35%) use traditional products like charcoal, neem stick, oil, salt etc. (See table 3.30, Appendix I).

Transport and Communication

Communication is fundamental to the socio-economic life and transport for the progress and development in every society. The people of tea gardens generally use three means of transport; namely, bi-cycle, bus and taxi. Of 375 individuals in 85 households nearly two fifths (37.86%) use bus, over one fourth (26.13%) use taxi, over one fifth (21.06%) use bi-cycle and the rest (14.93%) walk for the purpose of visiting Silchar town, Udharband market, relatives etc. But, bus is the most common means of transport among the tea garden workers as it is cheap and thereby affordable for the people as most of them are poor (See table 3.31, Appendix I).

Mass Media Exposure

Media and Telecommunication have immense impact in the lives of the people as it helps people to connect and communicate with the outer world. It is also a part of informal education and caters significantly to social upliftment and progress. Radio, telephones, internet, television, newspapers etc play a definite and meaningful role especially in the rural sectors which are far removed from the main stream population. Radio, the cheapest and oldest means of communication is found amongst the workers of the Koomber Tea Estate. It exposes the people to the outer world, as they use it to spend their leisure time by listening to film songs, news, sports news etc. Out of 85 families more than half (54.11%) of the families listen to news, sports news and film songs, almost one fourth (28.23%) enjoy film songs and sports news and the rest (17.64%) listen to film songs only. Thus, all the families enjoy film songs and 82.36% listen to news on radio. (See table 3.32, Appendix I).

Of the 85 families only (78.82%) households watch television, nearly half (46.26%) of the families enjoyed films and serials, nearly two fifth (38.81%) families watched news, sports and film songs and only 14.92% of the families witnessed sports & listened to film songs. Thus, all the television viewers watch films and 61.18% watch serials. (See table 3.33, Appendix I).

Among the modern means of communication the land phones and mobile phones help the tea garden people to contact their relatives and friends living within and outside the villages and those who are working in the garden office use it for official purposes. Most (90.58%) of the families use mobile phone and the rest (9.42%) use land phone. It is quite clear that mobile phone is popular means of communication in the garden. (See table 3.34, Appendix I).

The purpose of using phones by the tea garden workers is varied; nearly half (49.42%) of the families make call to their relatives, over two fifths (44.70%) to their friends and the rest (5.88%) of the families/individuals use for tea garden office as well as working place. (See table 3.35, Appendix I).

Newspapers Reading

Besides radio, the newspaper is used by literate and educated people to keep them in touch with the outside world. Out of 375 individuals in the 85 families only 294 individuals are literate, out of which only 43.19% read Bengali newspapers like Dainik Yugashankhya, Samayik Prasanga etc., in the Club office, market and tea shops and the rest 56.81% who are the unlettered workers do not read newspapers (See table 3.36, Appendix I).

Folklore and Folk Literature

The Koomber Tea Estate people have a whole gamut of folklore and oral literature like narratives, songs, proverbs, rhymes, riddles and dances associated with various customary rites and rituals and chapter 4 and 5 are devoted to detailed discussion on them.

In sum,

1. The Koomber Tea Estate consists of workers whose forefathers had come to the garden from different states of India. Over four fifths of tea garden labourers migrated before Independence and nearly two fifths migrated after

Independence from their native places. At present, most (34.12%) of the workers belong to the 3rd generation and are not even aware of their place of origin and of the remaining migrated families, 21.19% have migrated from Ranchi and 16.47% from Odishsa, the rest have come from Madras, Habiganj (Bangladesh), Uttar Pradesh, Bankura (WestBengal), Nepal, Chhatisgarh, and Sikkim.

2. The population of Koomber tea garden comprises (72.95%) of non-tribal yet, the tribal population (27.05%) also forms a highly significant portion in the settlement.

3. Out of total population 56% are male and the rest are female (44%). This indicates a huge difference in the sex ratio.

4. Tribes in Koomber tea garden belong to eighteen communities. Non-tribal population comprises of various linguistic, religious groups and castes. Both the tribal and non-tribal have their own clans.

5. Only 4.27% of the population married under age and 70.66% married as per the legal age of marriage.

6. Most of the families (90. 58%) are nuclear and less than one tenth of the families (9.42%) are joint. Over two fifths (41.17%) of the families have 5 to 6 members, nearly two fifths (37.65%) have 1 to 4 members and one fifth of the families have more than 6 members.

7. The tea garden workers are still being exploited and are left with very little choice because of power politics and vote- banking, lack of leadership and nexus between the trade union leaders and political agencies. The National Congress Party has a very strong hold among the workers of the Koomber Tea Garden. The conservancy facility shows that most (92.95%) of the families have latrine in their houses and only 7.06 % of the tea populace don't have latrine in their houses. More than half (54.12%) of the houses have bathrooms and the rest do not have one.

8. Economically, the tea garden workers belong to the poorer section of the population. Most (76.48%) of the people are casual workers whereas only 23.52 % are permanent workers in the tea garden. Every worker earns money

from the tea plucking per day or per kilogram. The workers of Barak Valley are paid lower wages than those in the Brahmaputra Valley which is a gross violation of labour rules.

9. More than half of the families have monthly income ranging from Rs.1000 to Rs. 2000 from tea plucking and 16.47% and 12.94% have the income of Rs. 2001 - Rs. 3000 and Rs.3001-Rs.4000 respectively. On the other hand, less than one tenth (9.42%) of the families have monthly income of Rs. 5000 and above. Thus, tea plucking is the major source of income in the Koomber tea garden.

10. A change is found in the mental setup of the workers with regards to saving in the Koomber tea garden. Previously, they were used to rear goats and cows, keep ducks and hens which they sold off in times of financial crises. Nowadays, a good number of private and government sector agencies have started visiting the garden and as such 40% of the workers have savings with banks, 15% have savings with Post Office,13% save with Sahara India Company, 15% have invested in other private insurance companies and 5% have policies with Life Insurance Companies. The rest of 12% follow the traditional method of saving in their own Piggy Banks (Hundi) or inside bamboo poles at home and also invest in livestock. The permanent workers have their Provident Fund account also.

11. Most of the people are engaged in tea-plucking and works in the factory, occupational mobility is low in the garden and only 12% of the individuals are doing other jobs like teaching (1.86%), business (1.86%), day labourers (0.26%) Gaon Panchayat Staff (1.86%), government servant is only 0.8% and very few are working as carpenters, priest, as agents for life insurance companies, Grade IV employee in Indian Oil and supervisors under Gaon Panchayat as Security Personnel in private companies, as Supervisors under the Sarva Shiksha Abhijan, driver, contractor. shopkeeping, tailoring, barbers, artisans, T.V. mechanics, goldsmith, blacksmith, etc. Koomber tea garden does not have any agricultural land unlike other tea gardens because it is situated in the hilly terrain.

12. A significant cultural change is marked in the standard of living of the workers in the tea garden. Majority of the villagers (above 60%) have bicycle, scooter, and motor cycle, dish T.V, mobile phone, cooking gas, wall clock, torch, and kerosene stove. Nearly two-fifths of the villagers have water purifier /water filter, refrigerator, VCD player/VCR/PVC, pressure cooker, inverter, dressing table, telephone (land), tape recorder, steel almirah, good night/all out. Over three fourths (77.65%) of the families use modern soap and shampoos like Lux, Vivel, Rexona soap and Clinic plus, All Clear Shampoo etc., 21.17% of the families use traditional soap made of leaves of trees , soil and various ayurvedic products and the rest (1.17%) of the families do not use any soap and shampoo. Further, (77.65%) of the families use tooth paste like Colgate, Pepsodent and also use tooth brush and the rest(22.35%) use traditional products like coal, neem stick, soil, oil and salt etc .About three fourths (74.11%) of the families take allopathic treatment; one tenth take homeopathic treatment , 4.52% take both allopathic and homeopathic treatment and the rest (3.52%) depend on their traditional medicines which consists of herbs , roots etc.

13. Nearly four fifths (78.40%) are literate and the rest (21.60 %) are illiterate. 10.93% of the tea garden worker are educated upto high school, 32.27% upto primary school, 11.73% have pre-primary education and 8.80% and 14.67% have education upto higher secondary and graduation respectively.

14. Most (50.59%) of the tea garden workers are Hindu and the rest are animists (27.60), Christians (11.76%) and Muslims (10.59%). Each religious group has its own religious places like temple, church, maszid and jaherthan. About one fifth (19.99) of the families belonged to Christianity out of which 10.58% are Presbyterian, 4.70% Baptist,2.35% follow the Salvation Army,1.18% are North Indian Catholics and 1.18% are Roman Catholics. There are no Sikhs or Buddhists in the garden. The Hindus are the followers of different sects of Hinduism like Thakur Anukul Chandra (10.58%) , RamKrishna (5.88%) and 3.52% are Vaishnavs. The rest (57.65%) do not have any sect and Dharmaguru. Nearly three fifths (58.82%) use local Bengali dialect, 24.71% speak in Bhojpuri and the rest (14.70% and 2.35%)

speak Oriya and Nepali respectively. Apart from these languages all the tea garden workers speak Sadri and a large size of the population are Hindi speaking.

15. Nearly two fifths (37.86%) use bus, more than one fourth (26.13%) use taxi, (21.06%) use bicycle and the rest (14.93%) walk for the purpose of visiting Silchar town, Udharband market, relatives etc. But, bus is the common transport for all the tea garden workers.

16. The tea garden workers have radio, television and phones which connects them with the outer world. More than half (54.11%) of the families listen to news, sports news and film songs, almost one fourth (28.23%) enjoy film songs and sports news and the rest (17.64%) listen to film songs only and 78.82% households watch television and out of 67 families, nearly half (46.26%) of the families enjoyed films and serials, nearly two fifth (38.81%) families watched news, sports and film songs and only 14.92% of the families witnessed sports & listened to film songs.

17. Most (90.58%) of the families use mobile phone and rest (9.42%) of families use land phone and nearly half (49.42%) of families would like to call their relative, over two fifth (44.70%) of the families make call to their friends and rest (5.88%) of the families/individuals use for tea garden office as well as working place. Among the literates only 43.19% of the tea garden workers read newspapers namely Bengali newspaper like Dainik Yugashankhya, Samayik Prasanga etc., in the Club office, market and tea shops and rest 56.81% of the literate workers do not read newspapers.

Thus, different cultural communities within the tea gardens have assimilated and created for themselves a new society after a lot of interactions, adoptions and acculturations, yet they follow many of their traditional practices. Despite their interactions with urban people, folk tradition rules the roost of their life and it is very much expressed in their oral and written literatures as discussed in the chapters that follow.