CHAPTER 4

THE ORAL LITERATURE OF THE TEA GARDEN FOLK: PROVERBS, RIDDLES, TONGUE TWISTERS AND NARRATIVES

This chapter deals with four components of oral literature of the tea garden folks; namely, proverbs, riddles, tongue twisters and narratives. It has been attempted to understand these components from sociological approach, in the context of the tea garden society and culture. The other two components of the oral literature of the tea garden folk; namely songs and jatra (theatre) will be discussed in the chapter that follows. The English word 'literature' is derived from the Latin root 'littera' which means 'letter'. It is essentially a body of oral or written material which mirrors all aspects of life. It narrates lived experience or creates matter with imagination or intellect. Literature may mirror historical or cultural artifacts of life encompassing "Folklore" or "Folk culture", and also include many socio-economic, philosophical, psychological, theosophical contents along with old and new scientific ideas or critical contents (Choudhury 2001: 1- 2). Oral literature includes within its ambit the proverbs, riddles, music and songs, narratives, curses, jokes, slangs, folk opera and all kinds of oral communications by the unlettered traditional people. Written literature may be popular literatures which are written to inform the general readers and such works are usually very brief, without any technical language and bibliography. On the other hand, there are literary works which are scholarly or standard literature and are exclusively canonical works in the established genres which 'have pleased many and pleased long' (Johnson Crystal 2003:900). Every society has its own literature which reflects on various aspects of the society as well as its relation with the greater whole. The tea garden folks too have their own literatures, both, oral and written. This chapter is devoted to discussion of oral literature with reference to tea garden folks of Barak Valley. The written literature will be discussed in the next chapter.

Folk literature is generally oral content of the traditional knowledge, beliefs and customs which, though not written, is a component of the language and culture of a society. It codifies and reinforces the way people think, feel, believe and behave while living in their society. It portrays the compulsions of a community and grows and develops with the societal development and ceases to operate when any particular social norm or custom declines and fails to appeal to the folks of the community. Folk literature is central to folklore as it is the oral transmission of traditions down the line and consists of both prose and verse narratives, composition of poems and songs, riddles and proverbs, myths and legends, rituals and rites, tales and ballads. Folk literature is the folk effort to organize their experiences into meaningful patterns which again play a significant role in the reconstruction of social history. It is passed from one generation to another without much deviation crossing all barriers of time and space and of course embracing some additions and deletions with changes in the society but the traditional format remains more or less the same. About folk literature one can say that it begins and ends in the folk's mouth. Ritual experts like priests and other religious conductors of ceremonies and rites help in preserving the oral literature which is full of ancient wisdom.

The people of a particular community sharing commonality in their social, economic and historical environment, learn, imitate each other, experience and gain expertise in various traditional and cultural activities. Folk literary composition is as much significant for a folk society as the standard literature for an urban society. It deals with a wide range of themes covering all aspects of social life. These folk expressive traditions or folklores play a role in communicating cultural constructs and community behaviour. All kinds of situations of family life, whether pleasant or unpleasant, are depicted with honesty and frankness, which helps them release the burden of their experiences. The joy and the strain of household chores and outdoor labour undertaken by women folks, obscene, love for both animate and inanimate objects in the situation, description of different seasons, experiences of nature, fear and love of gods and mythical, historical and contemporary events are narrated and all kinds of emotions, aspirations and sentiments are expressed through various folk

compositions which are often simple, natural, unrefined and yet pregnant with meaning. We are so accustomed to consider literature as identical with books that we often forget that many of the great world poems existed, were learned, taught and recited for hundreds of years before they were put down in writing. The poems of Homer 'Illiad' and 'Odyssey' were sung by the professional reciters like Rhapsodists who roamed about from city to city reciting the portions of the poems at feasts and celebrations (Lang 1906). The Celts and the Teutons also handed down romances dealing with heroes from one generation to another orally. Even the ballads and songs of ancient Scotland were thus handed down till the 19th century. Walter Scott went out on 'raids' to collect old songs and ballads from the old women of the cottages. James Hogg wrote to Scott, "My mother is actually a living miscellany of old songs." The first long narrative poem of England, Beowulf, was sung and recited by the scops of the Northern people in accompaniment to the harp. Ballads of the 15th century like Nut Brown Maid, Chevy Chase, Robin Hood etc. were for most part unwritten and were carried in the memories of Englishmen and Scotsmen for hundreds of years. It passed from the mouth of the reciters to the ears of the listeners, who in turn recited and ultimately a ballad or song would be altered to suit local circumstances, national feeling, personal preferences and new phrases would be introduced and a large number of composers or poets worked at one song, ballad or romance. Hence, there were numerous versions of the same story which were transmitted orally through generations. Standard or modern literature is the brain product of intellectuals full of complicated thoughts and feelings of city dwellers. Oral literature is honest expression of lively, spontaneous, rejuvenating, heartfelt thoughts and feelings of the rural people. Some of the folk literature has moral or didactic message or implications for the community or society at large (Beers 1899: 46-47).

Prior to the development of writing in the beginning of BC 4000 all literature was oral; Shruti (hearing) and Smriti (memory) were the only methods of preservation of the lore of the wise in the ancient times even in India (Choudhury 2001: 8). The existence of folk literature as such was recognized for the first time in India more than two thousand years ago in the oldest available

Tamil grammar entitled Tolkappiyam composed by Tolkappiyar where the author defined and classified some of the elements of folk literature giving examples from oral sources, establishing the traditionality of folk literature (Chatterjee 1937). But in India, the collection, preservation, analysis and study of the oral literature in its truest sense began only after Independence. The English colonist did not give much importance to folk culture of India and felt that the Indians were superstitious, their beliefs were full of myths and their literature was unsophisticated as it was the product of the illiterate and unlettered mass (Sharma 1999). The British administrators and English missionaries knew it well that to capture the minds of the Indian rural mass and to rule over them it was very essential to learn their language and their ways of living. It was then that Rev. William Morton, an English missionary, initiated the study of folk literature in India by collecting, translating and enumerating 803 Bengali and 70 Sanskrit proverbs into English which was published in his book *Drishtanta Bakya Sangraha* in 1832 (Sharma 1999:5). But before Morton, Nilratan Halder published his book *Kabita Ratnakar*, a collection of Sanskrit proverbs. It needs to be mentioned here that Rabindranath Tagore along with others, established the Bangiyia Sahitya Parisad, a society for enquiring into ethnology, tradition and folklore of Bengal. It was Tagore who first initiated the extensive collection of rhymes. He collected four kinds of rhymes: lullabies, social, ritual and game rhymes. He also collected three kinds of songs: Hara Gouri, Radha Krishna and ordinary love songs (Haque 1981). The Baul songs and Kirtans were popular amongst the people of Bengal. Rev Lal Bihari Dey, another Bengali missionary collected children's tales and stressed on their social significance. These tales were published in 1883 from London titled as 'Folk Tales of Bengal' (Sharma 1999: 5). Marsmen, Thomas Carey, Ward and Grant were the Christian missionaries who studied the Bengali literature and language of Bengal (Chakraborty 2010). W.C. Acharjya, A.R. Wright, Verrier Elwin (1968), R.S Dorson (1977), Rev. Long (1840-1848) were other great scholars and critics of folk literature. But, now we have come a long way, out of the clutches of the colonial paradigm (Handoo 1989) and as Indians we can make an in depth study into the folk literature of our country unbiased and sincerely. Richard M. Dorson

(1977) has mentioned twelve theories or methods of folklore studies; viz., (i) Historical-geographical method, (ii) Historical-reconstructional method, (iii) Functional method, (iv) Psycho-analytical method, (v) Structural method, (vi) Oral formulaic method, (vii) Cross cultural method, (viii) Folk cultural method, (ix) Mass cultural method, (x) Hemispheric method, (xi) Contextual method and (xii) Ideological method (Vincent 2010 :24-30). Until 1960s literary folklorists like Archer Taylor, Francis James Child, George Lyman Kittredge, Stith Thomson and even Franz Boas in early 20th century focused on collection and categorizing numerous amounts of stories, songs etc. but, since 1960, perspective has shifted from collecting and categorizing to synthesizing and understanding people and their creations in their own terms. Such re-imagining gave birth to the performance theory. Performance theory is extremely useful and valid for contemporary folklorists, especially those working with field collected narratives. One insight of the performance theory is that it focuses on rendering textual synthesis and analysis so that artfulness of a given per formative event may be manifested on the page. The folks are thus treated as consultants and not mere informants. They are performers and partners in describing and analyzing the text (Magoulik 2009). Folklore is not static and, in recent times, the rapid changes have been perceived in the environment of the folk, leading to a shift in the mental make-up. It has not been just replacement of old ideas by the new ones but a modification of the old by the new and a unity between the old and the new (Vincent 2010:31). Cultures are neither moral examples nor living fossils but simply different and equally valued (Simmons 1988:3).

The different communities of the tea gardens of Barak Valley are the people who were uprooted from their original settings and were reset in a heterogeneous multicultural situation which was in the form of becoming. The communities hailing from different regions had its own languages and cultures which they brought along with them. Once they came here they were thrown in an unexpected and unwarranted situation which had a tremendous impact on their lives. They had a lived-experience of the past, their traditions or community cultures which they had brought with them while a new experience of the tea gardens inspired them to construct oral literature which is embedded into both

traditional and acquired culture mirrored through proverbs, riddles, tongue twisters, songs, myths, tales and narratives, traditional plays associated with various festivals, rites and rituals and ceremonies. It is thus significant for a sociological analysis and synthesis of the contents keeping in mind their history of origin and migration as well as assimilation, accommodation and acculturation in the new situations of the tea gardens. The oral folk literature in the tea garden comprises various forms; namely, proverbs, riddles, tongue twister and narratives. These forms are being discussed and analysed sociologically here.

Proverbs

Of the various forms of folk literature proverbs are believed to be the first oral literature as it was easy to memorize and use (Sharma 1999). " Proverbs are common sayings, based upon collective and long-matured experience, knowledge and wisdom, uttered often abruptly or as a matter of habit, in a briefly-set terminology, in full sentences or in small idiomatic phrases, not necessary grammatically correct, but quite clearly understandable to the people in the exact context and spirit, as tit-bits, hints, rhymes, verse-couplets, often as practices and formulae touching various aspects and pertaining to different situations of routine life and behaviour" (Arya 1984 :79). Raglan (1946) defines proverb as "The works of a deep thought by an original and highly trained mind". Champion (1977) defines, "Proverb, as an epigram, is the wisdom of many and the wit of one". Archer Taylor (1950) opines, "A proverb is a terse didactic statement that is current in tradition or as an epigram". Webster (1841) states, "A popular proverb is one which has no known or presumed particular point of origin, and which circulated orally among the unlettered, both before and after it was written down"(Arya 1984 :80). In brief, the proverbs are short and brief compositions with concealed meaning. Expressing day-to-day experience, the proverbs are most widely prevalent among women folk and involve almost every theme with directness and truth. They are more often didactic, yet, very impressive and forceful as means of communication amongst folks. Proverbs bear stamp of socio-economic, historical, political and geographical life setting and behaviour of a particular community or society. They reflect upon the family and caste structure, caste traits, caste-hierarchy, women etc. They indirectly criticize others

and have reformative quality and help in checking and controlling the behaviour and attitude of the society in a very witty and ridiculous manner without directly hurting any body's sentiment. Proverbs are often uttered in a particular situation or context.

As early as 1824, T. Rosebuck published "A Collection of Proverbs and Proverbial" in the Persian and Hindustani languages in Calcutta. In 1832 the first recorded compilation and publication of proverbs in an Indian language was 'Dristanta Bakya Sangraha' by Rev. W. Morton which included 803 Bengali and 70 Sanskrit proverbs. Rangalal Bandhapadhay's book in the 19th century was the first comparative study on 1179 proverbs of the different countries of the world. Seventy one German proverbs, 114 Italian, 97 Portuguese, 72 Denmark, 95 French, 202 Russian, 31 Chinese, 100 Malayalam, 200 Tamil, 21 Punjabi, 24 proverbs of Syrian, 7 Maharashtrian, 26 Hindi, 82 Utkal and 37 proverbs of the tribes of Nilgiris (Sharma 1999). The first collection of Tamil proverbs was made earlier than 1874, because the second edition of *Tamil Proverbs* by P. Percival was published in Madras in 1874. A collection of Punjabi proverbs was made for the first time by R.C.Temple in his article 'Some Punjabi and Other Proverbs' published in *Folklore, Vol. II* (London 1883). Telugu proverbs were compiled by M.W. Carr in his collection *Telugu and Sanskrit Proverbs* printed in London in 1868. A collection of proverbs from Kashmir was brought out for the first time in 1885 in Bombay by J.H. Knowles in his *A Dictionary of Kashmir Proverbs and Sayings.* The first collection of Sindhi proverbs was made by an Indian, Rochiram Gajumal, in his book *A Handbook of Sindhi Proverbs* published in Karachi in 1895. The book had two parts: one contained about 500 Sindhi proverbs with their English equivalents, while the other contained about 250 Sindhi proverbs which had no English equivalents as such, but their translation was made by the compiler himself. A collection of Marathi proverbs was made by A. Marwaring in his *Marathi Proverbs* published in Oxford in 1899. It is, however, not known whether this was the first collection of Marathi proverbs. It was only in the twentieth century that the attention of Indian scholars was drawn to the collection and preservation of proverbs in the regional languages and due to their efforts the number of proverbs on record has increased in every State.

About 13,000 proverbs have been collected in Bengali, so far. The actual number of Hindi proverbs published may be much greater. The use of proverbs and idioms enriches the style of writing, but today it has become rare in most of the regional languages (Chatterjee 1937).

The tea garden workers of Assam have been uprooted from their place of origin long back, yet, they too have memorized some old proverbs from their elders and are passing them on to the younger generations orally. Some of the proverbs which they still use are as follows:

I. Proverbs on Human Nature

1. *Bashboley Dom kana /Nachne ke dhang nahi*
   anganawe tera or Nachte na janle uthan beka.

It means, a bad workman quarrels with his tools, for it is only the bad or careless bamboo cutter who blindly cuts the tender bamboos. The moral preaching is that one must be careful and sincere while doing something, for it is only the inefficient man who complains of the circumstances.

2. *Chor bhagne ke bad budhi awela*

(Everybody is wise after the event and learns by experience).

3. *Dur ke dhol suhawan lagay la*

Distant music sounds better or the grass on the other side of the river is always green, reminds one to be satisfied with what a little one has and not to be enchanted by distant views.

4. *Dihey Ram lakein rakta hagai kay...*

(A Ram was bestowed but you keep it soiled).

The above saying is common amongst the tea garden people. There are many who do not know the value of things they possess and so they misuse them. Very often parents fail to recognize the virtues of their sons and so they do not take proper care of them.

There is another Oriya saying:

5. *Morketer kache dilo Saligram*

(Offering of the Vishnu idol (Saligram) to a monkey or markot) which is similar to the English proverb: "A pearl necklace in a pig's neck" which means giving of valuables to some who does not know its use or value (Source: Rabilal Tanti, Barsangan Tea Estate, Barak Valley)

6. *Ailey bondhu shash kaley*
   Hobey mor ke pakna chuley.

"You have come too late and what can I do for you, now, when my hairs have turned grey?" This is what an old generation tells the young, rather suggesting them to do the right things in the right time:

7. *Othi prithi galai doree*

It is another proverb which says that excess of anything is bad. The message it gives is that one should measure one's steps in life.

Shri Hemchandra Mirza, the Gaonbura of Borthal tea garden, rued over the indifference and lack of interest of the young generation in their cultural heritage and said:

8. *Angache anbokhala*
   Ar tahen nachey bura lakra.

It means that unknown bark of unknown tree which dances about merrily is quite content with it and not concerned about its roots of origin. The children of the present generation are not concerned about their origin and develop relationship outside their caste and community quite merrily which is disapproved by elders. Even Kroeber (1948) said that it is "the city-dwellers who float without roots but take pride in living in their era and day, and are therefore constantly subject to the play of fashion"(Ghosh 1975 :112).

Human personality is often defined by proverbs like:

9. *"Muhmein Ram bagal mein chura."*

It describes a deceitful and crooked man or the Buguta bhagat (the deceitful devout).

10. *"Khayiek le khudi*

nahe padak le bhusa".

This alludes to a boastful man who exaggerates more than what he is capable of doing. Another proverb of the same kind often used by the tea folks for those who talk much without understanding is:

11. *Thotha chana baje ghana*

(Empty vessel sounds much).

This means that a virtue less person speaks a lot. (Source: Hariprasad Dhobi, Dewan Tea Estate).

12. *Rassi tut gail lekin bal nai gail*

(The rope broke yet its twists have not gone)

(Source: Shiv Kumar, Borakhai Tea Garden, Silchar.)

The above proverb refers to an adamant and proud man who never admits defeat under any circumstance. There is a fable of a cat and a dog which establishes the above proverb. The tale is about a cat which used to live in the house of a rich farmer. The cat was envied by a stray dog which roamed about in the village filling its stomach with waste food. The cat was indeed very proud of its position and often rolled and played on top of the hay stacks especially when the dog was around to exhibit its privilege and often mocked at the dog when it was chased by the people. One day it so happened that the cat was caught by its owner while it was stealing fish and the angry owner gave it a nice thrashing and tied a rope around its neck and tied it to a pole. The dog was very happy to see the plight of the cat and questioned the cat why was it tied there. The cat did not want to cow down before its enemy and instantly said that it was not tied down but as it was tired of eating fishes it became a follower of Vishnu, the Hindu God who abstains from taking non-vegetarian food (Vaishnav) and was wearing a necklace made of basil stem (Tulsi Mala).The position of the cat

turned out to be worse than the dog for it had lost its freedom totally and yet it remained haughty and unshaken.(Source: Santosh Akura a lecturer hailing from Bagbahar Tea Garden).

II. Proverbs on Practical Life

There are innumerable proverbs dealing with social system, the family relationship, caste, marriage and status of women. In patriarchial society the father or husband is considered to be the ruling head. Family (Kula) was considered to be the fundamental unit or nucleus of society in ancient India. The deification of the householder, of a common household (Agarwala 1969).This social unit is the basis of the society. The tea garden family structure is patriarchal and patrilocal whereby the householder is placed on a pedestal higher than the other members of the household and by virtue of his superior position he makes decisions and controls resources of the household. The following is a proverb about him by the Bengali community:

13. *Kar daine khow re basa thakur chinle nai?*

It means, "Don't you recognize your benefactor, your provider?" Society is an aggregate of families, each, comprising several members under the headship of the father, or in his absence, the elder brother or son partake the responsibility and this is reflected in the following proverb:

14. *Bape beta chaair matha,*

bap naike ghare beta haila morol.

That is, in a patriarchal society a son takes over the headship of the family in the absence of the father. But, then, the mother's exceptional role in a family is expressed in the proverbs like

15. *Mashi dako, Jethi dako, Marlakhain nai.*

This explicitly brings out the importance of the mother in a family. There may be other female members in the family such as aunts but none can be compared with mother.

16. *Begharni ghar bhut ka dera.*

(A house without a wife is just like a ghost's house)

This Bhojpuri proverb brings out the significance of the women in a family (Source: Ashok Verma). However, there are derogatory remarks are also made against women through proverbs such as

17. *Aurat ke nak na hoiet to maila khayiet.*

If women had no nose, they would have tasted excreta also as women gossip about everything under the sun and are very much inquisitive by nature; nothing goes unheard of or unseen by the women folks. Such remark is often made by men folks of the tea garden belittling the women.

Superstition is embedded in the lives of rural folks of the tea garden and this is clearly explicit when they say:

18. *Tetra beti Rajrajeswari*
Tetra beta bhik mangawe
Juwa kise ka na huwa.
(Source: Shiv Kumar Borakhai tea garden)

(The third daughter is the goddess of wealth and the third son is a born-beggar who does not belong to anyone). Such sayings create a sense of neglect and make people biased. It is also detrimental to the child's mental health and also affects the relationship within a family.

In the tea gardens the women are often ill-treated by their husbands who, in most cases, squander away their money in drinks and gambling and thus the women folks retort by saying:

19. *Dudhar gai ke char latho bhala*

(It is fine if a milching cow kicks you).

20. *Udiyial satuwa Pitoron ke*

(Let the wasted barley go in the name of the forefathers).

The wise realize the benefits of education and advice the callous youth of the tea garden to get educated otherwise alphabets will look like buffaloes to them, so the proverb:

21. *Karia aksher bahish barabar.*

(Source: Ashok Verma, retired head master of Cachar High School and a writer).

22. *Hati ke mukh me jira ke foran.*

(Feeding an elephant with few seeds of cumin).

(Source: Shiv Kumar, circulation manager Prena Bharati, Borakhai Tea Garden).

In the tea gardens, the workers are paid bonus during Durga Puja which is meager compared to the rate of inflation. Hence, they utter the above proverb which points out the insufficiency of the amount of bonus.

23. *Chamre chal jai lekin damri nai jai.*

(The skin of the feet has got peeled off, yet, stinginess has not gone) (Source: ShivKumar, Borakhai Tea Garden).

The above proverb reflects on a miser who is ready to face all hardships but is unwilling to spend money for himself. He would walk bare-foot and not buy shoes for himself even when his feet are blistered.

24. *Jeetna chadar otne godhr passaral jala*

(Stretch your feet according to size of your shawl)

(Source: Shiv Kumar, Borakhai Tea Garden, Silchar.)

The above proverb suggests for stretching one's legs in such a manner while lying down, to fully cover one's feet, for if the shawl is short and one stretches his feet too much, the feet would remain uncovered. This proverb is similar to the English proverb, 'Cut your coat according to the cloth'. It needs to be applied in life by the tea garden workers, for most of them live in debts and die with debts. They are no doubt poorly paid but at the same time they spend lavishly in various rites and rituals and squander money in liquor and gambling.

III. Moral Proverbs

There are proverbs which are connected to some story or fable. Father de Clereq says, "A moral proverb is generally a synthetic formula in which the natives sum up or, as they say, abridge a moral story so that to appreciate the exact learning of the proverb you must begin by obtaining the story or parable which gives rise to it and of which it constitutes the summary"Burne 1914). There is a tale which connects with the proverb:

25. *'Aurat ke dil ke bath bateyiel thiknaikhe'*

(It is not proper to share your secrets with women).

This was related by Sukumar Bagdi of Borakhai tea garden, a Sardar, whose parents migrated from Burdwan district of today's West Bengal during the colonial rule.

The tale is: There was an officer who had a devoted and loving wife. The husband was very religious and he loved attending religious gatherings (Kathas). On one occasion he was invited to another tea garden for attending one of the Katha sessions. The priest, while reciting the Katha, was repeatedly saying, *Aurat ko dil ke bath batheyiel thikneike.* The officer was perturbed on hearing this and he could not take the saying easily, for his wife was very sincere and devoted and she took great care of him. He therefore suspected the wisdom of the priest and wanted to test the truth of the proverb for himself. Accordingly, the very next day he left for a jungle with a wood cutter to cut some wood. In the jungle he killed a goat and wrapped up the head of the goat in his towel *(gamcha)* and returned home by dusk. On reaching home he found his dear wife waiting eagerly for him. Then, he intentionally dropped a few drops of blood on the ground for his wife to see and thereafter he carried the bundle inside the house while his wife was watching him suspiciously, for she had already seen the drops of blood. He hid the bundle inside a trunk (tin box) and locked it. His wife then started enquiring as to what was there in the box. To that, the husband said that on his way to the jungle he killed a man because the man wanted to steal his wood. He asked her not to share the incident with anybody. The next morning the wife went to fetch water from the well and heard all the women gossiping about something or the

other. The wife could not resist herself as she also wanted to tell them something. So, she told them about her husband's crime and then made them promise not to tell anyone about it. But in no time the story spread like wild fire and ultimately reached the ears of the village panchayat who rushed to the officer's house with a big crowd of villagers. The panchayat asked the officer to open the trunk and show them what it contained. The officer opened the trunk and to the utter surprise of everybody there was a goat's head inside the trunk. Then, the husband related the purpose of his action which was to test whether the priest was right when he said that women are not to be trusted with secrets. He was quite ashamed of and disheartened at his wife's unfaithfulness. The tale reflects on village life where women gather by the community well for carrying water, washing clothes, bathing and gossiping. According to Max Gluckman (1936b) gossip helps maintain group unity, morality and history. The essence of gossip is constant communal evaluation and reaffirmation of behaviour by assessment against common, traditional expectations (Rapport & Overing 2000: 153). Traditionally in the male dominated society the women did not get much freedom and time to socialise with each other and thus the community wells, river banks and streams were the places where they met each other and shared their joys and sorrows and gossiped while working and thus evaluating and reconstituting their way of living. Things have changed in many villages now with the introduction of pipe lines directly to their homes but in the case of tea gardens the women still gather by the wells for it has become a sort of tradition for them to take their bath near the wells and gossiping still continues. The role of panchayat in taking action against erring members is also explicit in the tale.

Radha Krishna Gour, 65 years old retired tea worker of Borak hai garden, said:

26. *"Sarbada nari taronai lab"* (Always keep women under strict control). He related a tale correlating the proverb. There was a king who had served a snake and thus received a boon of understanding the language of the birds and beasts. The snake further said that the day the king revealed the secret to anybody else he would die. One day, the king was sitting under a tree when he saw a long line of ants busy in collecting the juice of ripe mangoes and sharing

their happiness with each other. The king could understand their language and thus started laughing loudly. The queen heard the king laughing and soon she started pestering him to tell her the reason for his laughter. The king tried to avoid sharing his secret knowledge with the queen, for he knew he would have to lose his life. But the queen would not leave him alone and she went on pestering him. So, the king finally decided to tell her about it and die. He asked his men to make a pyre for him near the river banks. He went and sat by the river bank just to soothe his ailing mind when he saw an orange coming up to the surface of the water and going down again. Next he saw a she-goat who saw the orange and was asking the he-goat to get the orange for her but the he-goat saw the depth of the water and knew he would be drowned if he tried to get the orange and thus refused and pushed away the she-goat with his horns, saying *"Sarbada nari taronai lab"*.

The king heard this and saw how the he-goat refused to give in to the she-goat's request and strictly controlled her. A new wisdom dawned upon him and he came back to his palace. He took control over his queen and strictly told her that under no circumstance would he tell her the secret she wanted to know. Thus, the king learnt a lesson from the he-goat and his life was saved.

27. *'Ratri and Jagoner lab'*. 28. *'Dusman seva karney lab'* are two other proverbs which were uttered by a Brahmin to a king according to a saying.

The king wanted to test the wisdom of the Brahmin and accordingly he disguised himself as a guard *(Chowkidar)* and discharged all the guards off their duty that particular night. Throughout the night he was roaming about when suddenly he heard a woman crying, so he went to find out why the woman was weeping thus, as he had thought that everybody in his kingdom (*Rajya*) was happy. He saw that a woman was grinding corns and weeping at the same time. On enquiry she said that she was crying because the king would be bitten by a snake on the day that was to follow and he would die.

The king in disguise asked her how she knew about it, to which she replied that she was acquainted to the language of snakes and heard a big Python saying that it was born as a snake to take revenge on the king, who was a

beautiful queen in his previous birth, while the Python itself was a Brahmin's son. And he, in his previous birth, was killed by the queen because he refused to obey the queen's command of having illicit relationship with her in her palace when the king was not there. Now, the snake was to kill the king on the very following day. The Raja realized how right the Brahmin was when he said, *"Ratri Jagoner Lab"* (It is worthy to keep awake at night). He at once remembered the proverb, *'Dusman seva karne lab'* and accordingly asked his men to clear the grass and weeds from the palace garden. He also asked them to spread a bed of flowers all the way from the jungle up to his palace. Then, he laid out bowls full of milk and bananas. Finally, he bathed and got ready for the sacrifice. In the morning when the snake came out of the jungle to the palace, it saw the whole place was full of flowers and the eatables laid out. So, without wasting much time, it filled its stomach with enough milk and bananas. Finally, it came inside the palace and found the king. The king greeted the snake and said that he was ready to make penance for the misdeeds of his past life with his death. At this, the snake was so pleased that it gave up the thought to avenge. On the contrary, it blessed the king. Then, the king understood the significance of the proverb *Dusman seva karne lab* (It is worthy to serve ones enemy). The belief in the ideology of love and that love befriends enemies is notable.

The fable of the *Tuta and Raja (Parrot and the King)* reveals the wisdom in the following proverb:

29. *"Bhabhiya koro kaj koriyia bhabhiyo na."*(Think before you act).

A king had a pet-parrot *(Tuta)* which was encaged. By birth the parrot was supposed to belong to the barber community. One morning the king saw a huge flock of parrots, landing in his palace and creating a commotion. The king went out and asked his pet the reason of such commotion, to which the pet replied that one of the parrots from his community had died and therefore they needed a barber to perform the rites of passage. Thus, the parrot appealed to the king to let it go and perform the last funeral rites of its kin and also promised that it would return back once the task was over. The kind king let the parrot go out. The parrot finished its task and, on the way back to palace, found a tree bearing

fruits which rejuvenated and made men young and immortal. To express its gratitude, the pet, took one of the fruits for its benefactor. The flight was too long so the parrot swooped down near a river to quench its thirst and placed the fruit on a stone. When the parrot was busy drinking water, a poisonous snake came out of its hole and on finding the fruit; it took a bite out of it and thus poisoned it. The bird was unaware of this and thus flew back to its master with the fruit and offered it to him. The king was pleased to see the faithfulness and gratitude of the bird. The king left the fruit on a tray, thinking that he would share it with the queen so that both of them could become young and immortal. In the meantime, a monkey came in through the window and tasted it. So it instantly died. On seeing this, the king was furious for he suspected the parrot of foul play and, without any delay, he cut it into pieces. The poisonous fruit was thrown out of the palace into the forest and everybody was informed about its deadly quality. After a few years, a big fruit tree grew out of that seed but nobody dared to eat its fruits.

In that forest there lived a poor couple who used to quarrel everyday because of their poverty. One day both of them decided to put an end to their lives by eating the fruit of the poisonous tree. So they plucked two fruits and ate them. But, to their dismay, both of them started becoming young, strong and beautiful. Soon, a new realization dawned upon them and the matter was reported to the king. The king repented for his thoughtless action of having ruthlessly killed the loyal parrot. On the incident, the royal priest (Brahman) uttered the proverb "*Bhabiyia koriyo kaj koria bhabiyo na*" (Think before you act). (Source: Radha Krishna Gour: retired worker of Borakhai tea garden). Caste heirarchy and significance of barbers in rites of passage is stamped in the above tale.

Westernisation has its effect on the mind set of the younger generation and they prefer to go out for higher education and speak in English often neglecting their own language sometimes giving rise to unwanted situation as in the case of the boy in a story circulated amongst the people of Koyah Tea Garden in the form of a joke. The story is of a boy from the village who was sent to the city for education. The boy completed his education and came back home but unfortunately fell sick. Gradually, his condition detoriated and he could not get up from his bed. One night he was asking his father for water saying; water,

water, instead of pani (which means water in Hindi).The father could not understand what his son was saying and thought he was praying to God and left him alone. The boy ultimately died without even a drop of water whereas the water was there just near the bed. It is then that the people said:

30. *Put gail bidesh siklan ultabani*

"Water, water" karte put marlan

Khatiya tare rohal pani.

(The son went to foreign land and learnt unusual language, and died uttering water, water, while water was near the bed.)

(Source: Hiralal Dusad, of Koyah Tea Garden of Hailakandi district).

There is another saying which criticises the shortsightedness of the government and illiteracy of the tea garden people resulting in wastage of paper. The tea garden people put thumb prints during elections which takes a lot of space. The people who cannot even sign their names are asked to go out of the room in English which is wrongly pronounced by the workers as "Gate out" (A misnomer of "get out"). The saying goes thus:

31. *Tinjan ke jagha chetkatara*

Bharat Sarkar ke kagaj barbad karatara

Aur 'English' bolatara "Gate out"

IV. Health related Proverbs

There are proverbs amongst the tea folks which reflect on the close communion between man and nature. The villagers derived knowledge and practical wisdom about health and wellbeing from nature and these values have been passed on to the younger generations through proverbs like:

32. *Subha ke hawa hazar rupiyia ke duwai.*

(Morning air is equivalent to thousand rupees of medicine).

(Source: Basant Lal Desai , 82yrs old man from Kathal Tea Garden, Hailakandi)

33. *Sudh rakho tum apni hawa pani,aub control karo apni bani.*

(Keep your air and water pure, and control your tongue).

(Source: Goala 2010: 39)

Similarly, there is another proverb mentioned as follows:

34. *Bhurer hawa baid bhagai*

(Morning air chases away the physician)

(Source: Abdul Rahaman, an old man of 100yrs from Borakhai Tea Garden)

One more of such proverbs is:

35. *Jaldi huto jaldi utho*

Dakhis re tor dhon koto

(Early to bed, early to rise and see the wealth you have)

(Source: Harisur Rahman, an old man of Koomber Tea Estate)

V. Caste related Proverbs

The belief in caste system and the occupations of the people according to their castes and their position in the social setup are mirrored in the different folk songs. The social system and its obligations and formalities are such that the *dhobi* (washerman) and *nai* (barber) play significant and unavoidable roles in ceremonies like naming of a new born baby, marriage and funerals etc. which accord them a social status. Yet, the folk literature has songs and narratives which contain elements of fun, derogatory and slighting remarks towards these castes. Barbers are looked down upon as greedy and demanding and this is reflected in folk sayings and slighting remarks often used to expose the status or feelings of the community such as:

36. *Admi may Nowya, Panchi may Kouwa*

which is similar to 37. *Napitang dhurtang*

The barber (nowya) is considered to be very clever and shrewd (dhurtang) like the crow (kouwa) amongst the birds (panchi). The barber is also the best gossip monger, for he gets the opportunity to visit all the houses in a village, enabling him to gather personal and secret information about the people.

38. *Saheb ki kapra, dhobi ke bichai*

(Source: Ratan Kahar, Labac Tea Garden worker).

(The Saheb's clothes are washer man's bedspread).

The content of this proverb is the same as that of the following:

39. *Raja ki razai dhobi ki bichai*

(The king's quilt is the washer man's bedspread).

In the garden the manager is referred to as '*Saheb*', the Hindi term for colonial master. Hence, instead of king (*Raja*) the term *Saheb* is used. The caste structure of the society is unraveled through such proverbs. The above content highlights the social status of a washer man who reserves the right to wash clothes of people belonging to the upper strata as well as the common people. He is a man, occupying a lower social position in the caste structure, yet, he considers himself superior and privileged, for he washes the clothes of the *Saheb*. It may be mentioned here that Hariprasad Dhobi, a retired teacher hailing from Dewan Tea Estate, a washer man by caste, said that if the people do not give in to the demands of barbers and washer men they declare 'dhobi bandh'or 'nai-bandh' as in almost all the rites and ceremonies, their services are essential. The proverb indicates the terminological change with the changing situation.

VI. Socio-Cultural Proverbs

There are proverbs relating to various themes; namely; marriage, fate, caste system, gods and goddesses, woes and lamentation of the mother of a disobedient child, joys and celebration, family, material culture, food, ornamentation and dress habits.

There are proverbs which deal with the social structure and relationship:

40. *Biya dila Kulinor bari, biyar raithe oila Baree*

The marriage was celebrated from a high caste Brahmin *(kulin)* family but on the night of marriage she became a low caste *(baree)* woman. Daughters of caste Hindus have to change their titles and take to their husband's title on the marriage night itself.

Daughters are supposed to be controlled strictly, lest they take the upper hand and get married to low caste men which tarnishes the image of the natal family. Hence, the Bhojpuri saying:

41. *Bokhanole diya dom ghare jail*

(Spare the rod and spoil the child)

(Source: Ashok Verma, a retired headmaster and a writer, originally from Lalamukh tea garden.)

The English proverbs, *Hunger is the best sauce or Hungry dogs will eat dirty pudding* is equivalent to the Bhojpuri proverb-

42. *Upas bhala na patoh ke juth bhala?*

(Hunger is good or daughter-in-law's left-over is good?)

(Source: Ashok Verma).

A daughter-in –law is often found to be ill-treated and left alone but at times of crisis the hungry in-laws forget such feelings and accept the left over from their daughter-in-law's plate. There is another proverb:

43. *Muror upre Brahma lok, nise amra Sahoo lok.*

Jaijey joto ulluk ar bhaluk

Ghore bairey kore hith,

Tare koi Purahit.

(The one who does good both at home and outside is known as the priest)

The gods reside in heaven and the human beings live on the earth. Yet, it is the Brahmins who are considered to be superior to the Sahoos (a caste amongst

the Hindus) for it is the Brahmin who works for the welfare of the society. The following problem further illustrates the hierarchical social structure of the Hindu society:

44. *Maiyar majhey kishori*

Deptar majhey Bisohori

(Joydrath Goala, a teacher from Rosekandy Tea Garden)

The maiden (kishori) amongst females (maiyar) and Bishori (name of a goddess) amongst goddesses (deptar) are held high. This proverb establishes the importance of the Goddess *Bisohari* amongst the folks of Barak Valley. The tea garden folks also believe that *Bisohari* is one amongst malevolent goddesses and therefore she is worshipped with great reverence and sacrificial offerings. The tea gardens are full of jungles and greenery mostly inhabited by deadly snakes and vipers which often bite the workers. Hence, they try to pacify *Bishari* or *Manasa* considered as one of the most powerful deities.

There are similar proverbs which point out the most preferred fish and green vegetables such as:

45. *Macher madhay koi shaker madhya pui.*

(The best amongst fishes is *koi* (Carp) and the best amongst green leaves is *pui*)

(Source: Maloti Saha, Barjelenga Tea Garden)

It may be mentioned here that Sukanta Paul (2007:129) presented a proverb which says that the *'Rui'* (Labeo Rohita) is the best amongst fishes whereas in the proverb collected from the tea garden says that *Koi* (Carp) is the best. The tea garden people are poor and as such they cannot afford to buy *Rui* fish which is very expensive whereas *Koi* fishes are available in the ponds and water bodies around the area. For that reason they have mobilized the proverb, picking the idea from their surroundings.

The English proverb, *Heaping of sorrow upon sorrow* is expressed in Bhojpuri as:

46. *Ekta giral ghach se, dusra marlas mungre*

(One has fallen from the tree and moreover he is being hit by a stud)

Some other Bhojpuri proverbs reflect the wisdom about wealth. These are as follows:

47. *Kul aigun map kare Lakshmi jekar aur*

(Money begets or money makes)

It means, one who has riches is excused from all faults as money is the symbol of power.

48. *Dudh se mukh jarjala ta matha phuk ke piya*

(Do not go by looks).

Both milk and curd milk are white in color but both are not the same, for one is taken hot while the other has to be taken cold (source: Ashok Verma).

49. *Dhir pani pathor kate*

(Slow moving water cuts deep)

It was uttered by a Bengali Muslim worker of Koomber Tea Estate while describing the unexpected elopement of her daughter with a boy from the same garden. The girl was of a very quite nature and such a behavior came as a shock to the family. Hence, the proverb was used to describe the unwarranted behavior of the girl. Family relationship, especially parent-children bond, is a never-failing one, for such relationship is natural and not made. This does not remain static, and is often affected when the children do not conform to the norms and customs of the family and community, giving rise to conflicts as in the above case.

In brief, the tea garden folks are still familiar and attached to their age-old proverbs which were carried by their forefathers years ago in their memories and have been handed down the line. Most of the proverbs were collected from the elderly people. It has been found that the youths are less concerned with the old sayings, for their concept is changing and they are against the moralising practices. The proverbs depict social values. However, some of these approve of

class-caste-hierarchy, targeting the barbers, washer men and even the Brahmins who, though belong to the higher stratum of the caste hierarchy, are exploitative. There are still other proverbs which reflect on gender, discriminating and asserting traditional male authority over the female within the caste hierarchy. Superstition is embedded in the life of rural folks, which is reflected in their proverbs like third daughter is the goddess of wealth and third son is a beggar. Proverbs like 'spare the rod and spoil the child' are instruments of social control as well.

It is noteworthy that there are proverbs among different communities in different languages which are similar in their meaning, e.g., *Mate na batiye datey, goina pindena betiye begor nate,* (The girl neither speaks out, nor does she wears ornaments without nose ring). (Ahmed 2004:101), it means the daughter who is otherwise considered to be of a quiet nature does not wear ornaments without a nose ring and reflects on the stubbornness of the otherwise quiet looking girl. It is similar to *dhir pani pathor kate* (slow moving water cuts deep). Both the proverbs denote that one cannot be judged by mere looks. The principle of guardianship of females by the male members of the family remains the central guiding ideology in marriage (Patel 2010:147) and this is found in the proverbs of the tea garden workers also. Proverbs like 'early to bed and early to rise,' 'think before you act,' 'a bad workman quarrels with his tools', 'cut your coat according to the cloth', 'empty vessels sound much' etc. are all traditional knowledge which prevails amongst the people of the mainstream as well as the tea garden folks.

Riddles

Riddles are most popular and significant amongst the folks. They are well-formulated thoughts structured as questions and answers. A riddle describes a person or an object in more obscure metaphor, calculated to exercise the intellectual skill of anyone who attempts to solve it. Thus, charading and guessing in riddles becomes a trial of wits. Each kind of riddle is associated with a characteristic occasion and has an emotional colouring or mood. Riddles are often instructive, though short. Archer Taylor (1951) defines riddle with a riddle:

When I first appear I seem mysterious
But when I am explained, I am nothing serious.

It means when questions are posed, they seem very complicated. But once they are solved, things become clear and easy.

The English word 'riddle' derives from the Anglo-Saxon root 'Readin'. Riddle thus means 'to give advice'. In German the riddle is 'Rat (h) sel' in Greek 'Ainigma'. In Sanskrit it has various names such as *Rahmoday, Pratalika, Vivad, Gurha Pranelika* etc. Many also feel that the Bengali word for riddle *'dhanda'* has come from the Sanskrit word *'dvandva'* which means doubt. In chaste Bengali, the riddle is also called *Prahelika,* from which *Heyali* is believed to have emanated meaning a puzzle or enigma. In different languages of India the riddle is known by different names. It is *Banelia* in Urdu, U*khana, Anana, Uman, Konada, Kode* etc. in Marathi, *Bidikadai, Pudur* in Tamil, *Bidikatha pod-puknthalu* in Telegu, *Pahelia* in Hindi, *Paneli* in Punjabi, *Distan* or *Pakhan* in Assamese. Again, within the same language different dialects have different names for riddles. It is *Bujbujaoli* in Khariya dialect of Madhya Pradesh and *Kudum* in Santhali. In West Bengal the riddle is known by different names in different regions. It is *Kouto* in Jhargram subdivision of West Midnapur district, and *Kahini* in some other parts of the district, where the term *Henali* is also in vogue. In Bankura riddle is named as *phadol* and in adjacent Purulia it is called *Ratkatha or Datkatha.* It is again *Henali* in Murshidabad and *Chilta* or *Chilka* in Cooch Behar. Similarly, in Bangladesh the words used for riddles in Chittagong are *Kiccha* or *Sholok* and *Chilka* in Rongpur. The term in Rajsahi and Pabna is *Maan*, and in Barisal the riddle is *Bhangani.* The *Sholok* of Chittagong becomes *Shilok* in Tagail and *Shollock* in Comilla (Basak 2006 p. 12).

Archer Taylor, Bloomfield, Andrew Lang and others expressed the view that riddles existed in ancient times but were gradually refined with civilization. Archer pointed out that the Hebrew religious texts had riddles in it. Riddles can be found in the Rig-Veda, composed one thousand years before the birth of Jesus. Stories of ancient Greece like Oedipus had riddles. In Shakespeare's works like 'Pericles' riddles were used. Antiochus and his daughter killed all the suitors who

failed to solve a rhyming riddle and when Pericles tried to solve the riddle they tried to kill him also. In 'Romeo and Juliet', Romeo proclaimed his love in a riddle and left it to his audience to interpret. Riddles in ancient times were mostly used to demonstrate the wit and wisdom (Basak 2006). Titash Choudhury insists that the oldest riddles were found in Greece. 'The oldest examples of the riddles can be found in the text books used in Babylon. The ancient riddles were linked to the Helenic, Semitic and Vedic civilizations. There used to be riddle contests in Ancient Greece and other parts of Europe, in which the defeated had to face death. Like Samson of Old Testament, Hercules also had to enter such a contest at a marriage feast. There are riddles associated with rituals, particularly marriage rituals, these riddles are posed by the bride's party to the members of the groom's party before they make their entry to the bride's house for marriage. There is the story of Sphinx whose riddles nobody could answer and faced death till Oedipus solved the riddle and killed the she-demon Sphinx, much to the relief of his countrymen (Basak 2006 : Pp14, 34).

Riddling is a universal art according to Archer Taylor (1948) . Riddles are to be found in the Puranas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Shahnama of Firdausi, Buddhist Jatakas, Arabian Night, Kathasaritsagar, works of Homer and Sophocles also. Riddles are products of society, mind stimulating and often very informative and helpful in educating young minds. Wakil Ahmed (1995) has identified sixteen characteristics of riddles: 1.Colour/ sign 2.Number/quantity 3.Mathematics/enumeration 4.Orthography 5.Challenge 6.Series 7.Dialogue 8.Soliloquy 9.Onomatopoeia 10.Repetition 11.Contrast 12.Pseudo-obscenity 13.Onomastics14.Colophon 15.Tongue twister 16.Function. In the tea gardens of Barak Valley also we often find the folks using riddles. It may be mentioned here that the riddles were collected by organising a story telling session at Borakhai Middle School in Bhoraikhai Tea Garden. The following is a riddle:

There is a green house,
And in the green house,
There is a brown house,
And in the brown house,
There is a white house,

And in the white house,

There is a pool,

(Answer: Coconut)

This rhyming riddle is found in nursery rhymes and is helpful for the children to learn and memorise. There is a similar Bhojpuri riddle on coconut:

1. *Angana Sukhal ghar me pani* (the yard is dry but there is water inside the house)

Riddles based on surroundings

(2)

Sonore chatrogon

Shisukaler kotha

Ek kuri tetul gache

Kai kuri pata

(Answer: 20trees 40 leaves)

(Source: Bhagan a worker of Kathal Tea Garden)

The above is a game riddle in Bengal through which children learn counting. When a tamarind tree is small it has two leaves only. So there will be forty leaves in twenty plants. *Kuri* means twenty.

Incident based Riddles

(3)

Sat chako to

Palaro ghota

Bibhuti bhasana

Dikhano kota

Cihilo prasad re

Dhekhili chauda bhubano

Patane tuka

Mote dhakhaiu chu

Banghi kota.

(Source: Rabilal Tanti, a worker of Kathal Tea Garden)

There is a tale associated with the above riddle, which says:

Once a man caught a fish alive in his fishing net (palaro) and brought it home. His wife smeared the fish with ash (*bibhuti bhasana*) as otherwise it becomes difficult to scale the fish. The woman could just cut off the gills of the fish when an eagle swooped down and took it off high in the sky. So, the fish was saying *Dhekhili chouda bhubano* I have seen the seventh heaven.

Then, suddenly the fish popped out of the eagle's beak and fell into a pond and was saved. So, next time when a fisherman came to bait it, the fish, as it had become wise with the experience, avoided the bait and said:

Dhekhili chauda bhubano

Patane tuka

Mote dhakhaiu chu

Banghi kota.

I already have the experience of the seventh heaven and you have come to bait me?

Sometimes it becomes difficult to solve riddles if one is not acquainted with the situation which has given rise to the riddle. Such a riddle was put to this researcher by Sukumar Bagdi which could not be solved. Later on, he narrated the incident centering round the riddle.

Once, a farmer, on returning home from his field, asks his wife to solve the following riddle:

(4)

Nai to kachey

Thakley kathai parthe,

Kalidas Pandit bole

Tamak khate khate

(Source : Sukumar Bagdi , Sardar of Borakhai Tea Garden)

The wife failed to solve the riddle. Then, the farmer explained that, one day, Kalidas saw two bullocks in the water. Fishes were nibbling at the bullocks, to which one of the bullocks reacted by hitting at the fishes with its tail whereas the other one was restlessly tolerating because it did not have a tail. Kalidas witnessed the scene and thus made this passing remark to the fishes, "you are

enjoying and nibbling at him, for it does not have one (tail). If he had, it would not have been possible".

A boy passing through a village was very thirsty. He saw a girl carrying a pot of water. So, the boy approached the girl and then there are exchanged riddles between them.

(5)

Boy: Hero go Kainyia
Tulo go phul
Pipashai buk
Fhate jai
Puskorni koto dur

Girl: Labir niche
Sunari bandha Ghat
Ghabi na kahai jol
Kalashio na hoi tal
Buddhi thakle
Khaya jao jal.
(Answer: Hand pump)

(Source: Phulo Tanti, Kathal Tea Garden).

The handle remains below the navel when a person bends down to pump out water. Moreover, the area is cemented and cows cannot drink its water, nor can we draw water dipping a pot. The girl had already hinted through the riddle that there was hand pump and it was up to the boy to understand the riddle and quench his thirst using the hand pump.

There are many ancient tales where we find riddles, and problems are charaded. How a creative and innovative thinker solves puzzles that he sees in seemingly mundane forms of cultural expression is interesting (Dunes 1980). The following is one such example:

(6)

Akhir bhitary pakhir basha

San dhublo jole

Chairpair upor na payia

Dupaiya nelo daley

Khurur khurur khur kor lo

Chatak matak sane rani,

Puchuk puchuk pani ,

Jeta tor moner katha

Sab ta ami jani.

(Source: Sukumar Bagdi)

The above riddle helped a king to solve his problem and save his life. There was king who decided to award the pundits (priests) of his village for good and new sholokas (sayings). So the pundits became busy composing riddles and proverbs. One of the pundits saw a scare crow in the paddy field and sparrows were making nests inside the hollow eyes of the scare crow, on seeing this, he immediately composed:

Akir biterey pakir basha

(A bird's nest inside the eye)

Next he saw the studs of hay stalks full of water so he said,

San dublo jaley

(The hay drowned in the water)

The pundit kept on walking and, then, he spied a buffalo rolling in the muddy water and a fish without legs was hanging on the shoulder of the buffalo, so he said.

Charpair upar na payia,

(A legless one on top of four legged one)

Next, he came back to the king's palace and saw the queen busy making dough and he immediately composed:

Chotoke motok sane Rani, puchug, puchug pani

(Making a puchug, puchug sound while preparing the dough with water)

Now, the queen was actually planning to do away with the king with the help of the barber, as the queen was in love with the barber of the royal house and wanted to marry him. The priest composed the last line:

Jeta tor moiner kath, sab to ami jani

(I know what is there in your mind)

In this he actually referred to the uneasiness of the buffalo who was scratching its back on the mud. Now, as planned by the queen, the barber arrived to shave the king. The king was sitting in his palace when he saw the sholoka on the wall. He read it and was trying to find out its meaning when he saw the barber sharpening his instrument putting little drops of water *puchug, puchug, pani.* Further, he saw the queen preparing dough and when he read the last line he became suspicious and caught hold of the barber and questioned him of his intention. The frightened barber revealed everything about the queen's plan and was finally exiled. Then, the king made his men dig a grave, and tactfully invited the queen there and suddenly pushed her down into the grave and buried her alive. Later on the king rewarded the pundit.

(7)

Kukra Shingi gai

Ghatey, ghatey pani khai

(It has a curved end and drinks water from various banks)

(Answer: fishing hook)

(Source: Hari Kumar Nunia, Tilla Babu).

Many of the school children of Koomber Tea Estate study in Morley High School at Udharbond, so they picked up some riddles from their school friends:

(8)

'Arum, kachu maney ki jane na'

Arum is a tuberous vegetable which is called as *kachu* in local parlance and the above riddle contains the answer itself.

(9)

'If jodi, is hoi,

But kintu, not noy

What mane kee?

(What means 'Kee')

In such riddles, the answer is already there in the question and is favourite among the children and youth. Some other popular riddles of the tea folks are:

(10)

Hamara panch bhai

Akey sat bhat khai.

(panch bhai – five brothers, answer: five fingers)

We are five brothers and we eat rice together. Indians prefer eating rice which is their staple food using all their five fingers which is referred to as five brothers in the riddle.

(11)

Kala Krishna

Dhola phul

Shar faleiyia

Bakol tul

Answer : Murta (Clinogyne Dichotoma)

Murta is a plant of the reed family or *patidai* which is black in colour and is used for making the cool mat (sital-pati). The outer sheath of the reed is used for the purpose and the inside pulpy portion is thrown away.

(12)

Kala kala paharey

Kala suar chare

(Answer – Lice)

(Black black hills

Black pigs roam about)

Human head has black hairs where black lice roam about is the literal meaning in English and here the lice is referred to as pigs which are as dirty as lice.

Riddles often come in the form of snap-jokes in order to spark laughter as in:

(13)

Goribe falaiadei

Dhaniye pocketey rakhey

(Source: Pratima Tanti, a student from Dolu Tea Estate)

(Answer: Snot from a running nose)

(The poor throw away

The rich stuff it in their pocket)

The poor people clean their nose by blowing it out in the open but rich people use hanky and stuff the dirty snot from their nose into their pockets.

(14)

Jaile saph

Aile gandha

(Answer: *kodal* meaning spade)

(Source: Pratima Tanti, Dolu Tea Estate)

Workers of the tea garden use spade for clearing up jungles, so the above riddle is often used which means 'you go *(jaile)* out clean *(saph)* but come *(aile)* back dirty *(gandha)*'.

The Santhals use the term 'Kudum' for riddles. They too have kudums relating to animals, insects, birds, vegetables etc.

(15) *'Pur latar cuka dah'* which means a bush with a pot of water. The answer is brinjal. (16) *'Gada gadete bati tapa'* means a bowl buried upside down on the river bank. The answer is *Hara* (tortoise). (17) *"Miditan khunti sayati duar"* means 'one pillar hundred doors', the answer is Wasps or Bee's hive. (Source: Paresh Santal ,a worker of Kathal Tea Garden).

Riddles relating to Animals and Vegetables and parts of body

Bhojpuri people of the tea gardens also have riddles relating to animals like;

(18)

Chota aison balamiyia

Lamba aison pounch

Chale lagal balamiyia

Hile lagal pounch

(Source: Ashok Verma, a retired teacher from Cachar High School who is originally from Lalamukh Tea Garden)

Here comes the small thing with a long tail which moves as it moves.

(Answer: mouse).

Riddles centering round vegetables and pulses:

(19)

Tanimuti kuinya

Patak daybo bhuiyan

Patke na phute

You are a small bead

Which when thrown hard against the ground

Does not break or crack

(Answer: Mustard seeds).

(20)

Ago laiki ke nakiya terah

There is a girl with a bend nose.

(Answer: Black gram).

(21)

Ago laiki ke karia tika

A girl with a black sticker on her forehead

(Answer: White gram).

(22)

Lal chari

Bhuiyan me gari

Sasey potah bari.

(Answer: Carrot).

The daughter in- law is above the ground and the mother- in –law is inside the earth.

(23)

Hari hari Machli

Hari hari Anda

Na bataibo ta

Khaiba danda.

Green green Fishes

Green green Eggs

If you do not answer

You will get a beating.

(Answer: Green Peas).

(24)

Kheth me upjaye

Sab koi khaye

Aur ghar me upjaye

Ghar bahaya jaye.

(Source: Ashok Verma)

Grows in farm land

Every one eats

And that which grows on roof top and

Crushes the house down.

(Answer: Pumpkin is of two varieties, one variety grows on the ground and the other variety that creeps on roof top often crushes down the thatched roof which are weak and cannot bear the weight of the pumpkin).This riddle

also highlights the socio-economic condition of the poor villagers who live in mud huts with thatched roofs.

Other Bhojpuri riddles:

(25)

Ek chariyia ratni kat

Kor boithani kat kaley

Gubur gubur hageley ghar kuni.

One piece of wood

Being bitten off and swallowed

Passing stool in a corner of the house.

(Answer: Saw).

(26)

Dilhi me dhukli

Bombai se nikal li.

Entered Delhi

Came out through Bombay

(Answer: Needle and thread).

(27)

Ek Masjid dugo duwar

Aiyia Mulah ghur phir jai.

One Masjid two doors

Enters the Mulah, to go out through the other.

(Answer: Nose, which breathes in through one nostril and breathes out through the other (Source: Ashok Verma).

(28)

Jungal ke bhut tharia me muth

(Answer: lemon)

(29)

Chota mota dobha phul phute sobha

(Answer: Boiling of rice in the rice pot and forming of bubbles)

(Source: Shiv Kumar, circulation manager, Prerna Bharati, Hindi Newspaper, Borakhai Tea Garden).

(30)

Ek sau supari gunte nai baiapari

(Hundreds of betel nuts but no traders to count)

(Answer : Stars).

(31)

Bhaiya ek din Bhauji roj roj

(Answer: Sindur- vermillion or red lead)

The above riddle reflects on one of the Hindu marriage rites where, the bridegroom puts vermillion on the parting of the bride's head on the day of the wedding and after that the bride has to continue using the vermillion as long as her husband lives. Hence the brother-in-law says brother *(Bhaiya)* one day, sister-in-law *(Bhauji)* daily.

(32)

Ego burdhi ke gota sarir par ankhee

An old woman with eyes all over her body

(Answer: Pineapple)

(Source: Shiv Kumar, circulation manager, Prerna Bharati, Hindi Newspaper, Borakhai Tea Garden).

(33)

Jar madhya manus nai

Tahar madhya manus pai

(Where there is no man you find a man)

(Answer: Mirror)

(34)

Acheta bhalo

Naithakle bhalo nai

(If you have it is good, if it is not there it is not good).

(Answer: Shame) (Source: Rita Mal, Silkuri Tea Estate).

(35)

Char paye darai

Du paye ghumai

(Stands on four legs but sleeps on two)

(Answer:Bed)

(Source: Rita Mal, Silcoorie Tea Estate)

(36)

Kun desha tara nai

(Which land has no stars).

(Answer: Suktara, a musical instrument)

Riddles are used by both young and old in the tea gardens of Barak Valley as elsewhere, which adds a flavour to their stereotyped life style. We can notice their extraordinary sense of observation, humour and practical wisdom. Moreover there are riddles which are similar and establish a bond between different people. The Bhojpuri people created riddle on mustard seed same as the riddle which the Bengali people have created on the eggs of fishes which shows that the Bengalis are fond of fishes. Most of the tea garden people may not have formal education but their riddles focus on their intelligence and presence of the mind and their perception. With rapid urbanisation men have become busy and hardly find time for leisure more over television and mobile phones keep the present generation busy and they hardly get time to communicate with family members especially elders and as such riddles are on the decline amongst the younger generations and this gap can be bridged through community education which can stir the interest of the rural populace for their traditional knowledge.

Tongue Twisters

Tongue twister is a group of words or a phrase that is difficult to articulate rapidly especially because of alliterations or similar sounding consonants or words. Way back in 1908 Terry Sullivan, the British song writer composed a tongue twister after he was inspired by the life and work of Mary Anning which is very popular:

She sells sea shells on the sea shore.
The shell she sells are sea-shells, I'm sure
For if she sells sea-shells on the sea-shore
Then I'm sure she sells sea-shore shells.

Children love using tongue twisters for fun sake like: I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice-cream! Tongue twisters are also used by the tea garden children as games like:

(1)

Bolta ko bolta nai bolta

To bolta ko kya bolta hai?

('Bolta' means 'bee'*)*

(What do you call a bee, if not a bee?)

(2)

'Pakhi paka papay kai'

('Papay'-'papaya'*)*

(The birds eat ripe papaya)

(3)

Chune jal dile chun taja hoi

(If we put lime in water it remains fresh)

Tongue twisters are favourite games for children. It is also believed that such practices make the children more centered and focussed. It may be mentioned here that the researcher collected the riddles by organising a story telling session at Borakhai Middle School in Borakhai Tea Garden.

Narratives

There are several theories on folk narratives by eminent scholars: Vladimir Propps (1928) believed in stock characters whose actions provide a structure. He said that the hero seeks something while the villain actively poses threats, the donor provides magical properties, the dispatcher sends the hero on his quest, the false hero disrupts the hero's success, the helper aids the hero, the princess acts as a reward for the hero and her father ultimately rewards the hero for his effort. Propps hypothesizes that tales are constructed of "functions". He believed that in similar tales same functions occur in the same order and this is regardless of who performs the functions or their context. Thompson (1955) on the other hand laid more emphasis on 'motif' and he classified stories according to their motifs. Tzvetan Todorov (2004) developed the equilibrium theory which believes that every narrative starts in an equilibrium which is disrupted, thus set the motion of a chain of events and ultimately resolution takes place and a new equilibrium is created.

Equilibrium>Disruption>Resolution>Requilibrium

Christopher Vogler (2007) a story analyst working for Disney, Warner Bros,20th Century Fox and other Hollywood production companies, explored the construction of narrative from a character driven perspective. His theory is called "The Heroes Journey". He claimed that there were eight Archetypes within Hollywood narratives: Hero, Mentor, Heriod, Shape Shifter, Allies, Shadow, Trickster and Threshold guardians

Levi Strauss (1983) believed that conflict arising out of binary oppositions help to drive a narration. Man against woman, white vs black ,young vs old, hero vs villain, west vs east, good vs bad are themes which are often explored in Roland Bartes (2004) dealt with codes such as enigma codes, semic code, symbolic code action code and cultural code. Enigma code is a narrative device which presents the audience with a puzzle or enigma to be solved and gain time to wind up the story with a happy ending. Symbolic code signifies binary oppositions or psychological symbols. Cultural is one with which the audience can identify themselves. Action codes are codes of behaviour that are universally

understood from de-coding of other narratives. Robert Mckee designed a simple five part structure of narrative: Inciting incident, progressive complications, crises, climax and resolution.

Narrative is defined as "a chain of events in a cause-effect relationship occurring in time" (Bordwell and Thompson, Film Art, 1980). Oxford dictionary of sociology (2009) defines narrative as, "A basic way human beings have of apprehending the world and giving it coherence." Gary Kenyon and William Randal (1977) aptly put it in their book "Restorying our lives, someone telling someone about somebody doing something" (Randal 1977) Laurel Richardson's 'Writing Strategies'(1991) has more specifically suggested five kinds of broad narratives that may be found in sociology: everyday life narratives, autobiographical narratives, biographical narratives, cultural narratives and collective stories (Gordon 2009).

Story telling is a very popular past time among the folks. Since times immemorial men have tried to imagine and formulate stories about creation, animal fables, family tales heroic tales and tales connected with rituals are common stocks among the folks all over the world. The Grimm Brothers, Jacob Grimm (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Grimm(1786-1859),were German academics, linguistic and cultural researchers who collected old folktales and published several collections of folk and fairy tales, called Grimm's fairy tales. They collected they stories from peasants and villagers around 1806. The 1st collection of fairy tales "Children and Household Tales" was published in 1812 and it contained more than 200 fairy tales. They are among the best known story tellers of European folktales. Their popular stories are 'Cindrella', 'The Frog Prince', 'Snow White', 'Sleeping Beauty', 'Hansel and Gretel' etc.(Wikipedia. org. Grimms Fairy Tales).

In India some wide and interesting range of stories emerged which had their origin many years ago like Hitopadeshsa, Jataka tales, Panchatantra, tales of Akbar and Birbal,tales of Mullah Naseruddin, Thakurmar Jhully etc. Hitopadesha was written by Narayan Pandit a thousand years ago in Sanskrit like Panchantantra and was later on translated into many languages all over the world.

The Jataka tales were written in B.C.300 and were great source of knowledge. These tales are Buddhist tales and were originally written in Pali language. The Panchatantra were composed in second century and is believed to be written by Vishnu Sharma along with many other scholars. Rabindranath Tagore went down to the villages and collected the Bengali folktales, the Thakurmar Jhuli, from the maids of various parts of Bengal which are very much popular among the children. There are folktales in every society connected with their lived experiences, their dreams, unconscious emotions, and varied imaginations. *Burhi Aair Sadhu*, *Tejimala, Bandur aru Xiyal* etc are popular folktales of Assam (Nath 2008). *The Burhi Aair Sadhu*, a collection of tales of Assam in Assamese language by Lakshminath Bezbaruah was first published in 1911. It was translated into English by Deepika Phukan titled as 'Grandmother's Tale' (Assam Tribune 2011).

The tea garden folks of Barak Valley also construct, relate and circulate stories. Many such narratives circulate amongst the tea garden people which are of unknown origin and are believed to be rooted in the past and are passed on from one generation to another by way of mouth. Myth, being a traditional story of unknown origin handed down from earliest times, has close resemblance with legend but "a myth properly deals with gods and a legend with men, myths and legends are types of folklore" (Kumar 2003). Myth is "a traditional or legendary story, usually concerned with deities or demi-gods and the creation of the world and inhabitants" (Kumar 2003). Myth implies a fabulous tale or improbable fiction and was regarded as 'the stuff of the fabulous, the marvellous, (Vernant 1996). 'Myth' as a term has been used to refer to narrations of indigenous peoples about the origins of the world and all the beings and elements that populate it. Through myths the cosmogenic events are unfolded and explored thus relate to people's particular metaphysical understanding of why things are as they are (Rapport & Overing 2000). Nand Kumar (2003) classified myths into four types: culture myths, ritual myths, nature myths and creation myths. Myths and legends prevalent among the tea communities are being discussed here.

Myth about creation

One such Santali creation myth about the origin of the earth is still narrated amongst the tea garden people. The myth is that at the initial stage the earth was covered with water. So, the God was worried as to where to accommodate man because the water was the home of many crocodiles, tortoises, fishes, crabs, frogs and worms. Thus, the God ordered them to go down deep under the water and carry soil to form land. All of them were unsuccessful and at last the crocodile planned to fill soil on the crabs back while it holds fast to the soil under water. The crocodile went on piling soil on top of the crab's back till it reached above the water and then the God planted a Karam tree on the soil which started growing firmly with its root reaching the earth under water and similarly other trees and grasses were also grown That is how land was formed for men and beasts to live in .Hence, the Karam tree is considered to be sacred by the tea tribes and is worshipped ritualistically during Karam Puja. This again accounts for the men and nature relationship (Sengupta 1995 p.208).

Myths about origin of tea and rice

The word tea is derived from 'ti'e' of Chinese Fukien dialect. The Chinese introduced it to Europe .In Cantonese, tea is known as 'Ch'a' and it is in this form the name Ch'a reached Japan, India, Russia, Iran and the Middle East. Tea drinking is believed to have originated in China, but the origin is obscured by several legendary myths (Chatterjee 2001 p.23)

One such myth goes to tell us that a devotee of the goddess Kuan Yin (Iron goddess of Mercy) cared for a ram shackled and ruined temple. The goddess, being pleased at his devotion, appeared to him in a dream and informed him of a treasure near a cave. She further asked him to share the treasure with everyone. Accordingly, the devotee visited the cave in search of the treasure but, to his great disappointment, he discovered only a small sapling. In obedience to the goddess he tended it to the fullness and thereupon discovered its golden aroma. Soon after, he began a thriving business in tea. It is believed that tea has a divine value as it is connected with a divine feminine figure, Tieh- Kuan-Yin (Chatterjee 2001 p.28).

Another myth unfolds the tale of a Buddhist monk, Dharma, who left India for Nanjing around 520 A.D. vowing to meditate for seven long years without sleep. In the fifth year the monk found it difficult to ward off sleep and while struggling hard he tore off his eye lids which fell on the earth and in turn grew into tea plants which he offered to the gods .The gods were pleased and blessed him in turn to fulfill his heart's desire to attain enlightenment. Both the myths are creation myths where heroes of same cultural background bring to man a potent beverage which is beneficial to man both as a health drink and also as an economical product (Chatterjee 2001 p. 24).

There is a myth amongst the tea garden people that Maheswara (Shiva) invented agricultural tools and gave them to Bhim to cultivate the land and grow paddy. After some time Maheswara went down to the field and asked Bhim as to how much paddy had grown. Bhim said that he could harvest only a fist full of paddy. Maheswara was annoyed and asked Bhim to burn it as it would not be sufficient for all. Thus, Bhim set the fistful of paddy on fire but to his surprise the quantity of paddy went on increasing and it became very difficult to burn them. Then Maheswara asked him to put off the fire but by the time the fire was put off some of the paddy turned black ,others brown and so on. This is how different varieties of rice originated(Binu Sonar, 70yrs, from Dewan Tea Estate).

Culture Myths

Another cultural legend offers us with the story of Lao Tzu, the traveller from Sichuan around B.C.600 who was offered a cup of tea as a gesture of hospitality by a Chinese host, which he relished and from then onwards tea is offered to guests as entertainment all over the world (Chatterjee 2001p.23).

There are narratives which involve collective psyche of the people. The folk tale of "Tell no secret to a women" circulates amongst people of different regions like Arunachal, Meghalaya, Tripura, Assam etc. The folks of Borakhai tea village narrated the story in context to a proverb, "Aurat ko dil ke bath batheil thikneike". These stories do vary to a certain extent .In the folktale of Arunachal the man kills a stray dog and the story ends with the banishment of the wife and the Singpho is set free by the king. The tea garden story as mentioned under the

proverbs refers to the slaughter of a goat, the judge is the village panchayat and the story ends with the wife full of remorse and shame (Brahma 2009 p.7).

Ritual Myths

There are varied myths woven round Karam Puja and are current amongst the tea folks. One such myth is about the beginning of Karam Puja which relates the story of two brothers, Karma and Dharma and it also brings out the significance of the saying "Work is worship" (*Karma hei Dharma*). Karam tree is believed to be the first tree on the earth and hence considered to be auspicious (source: Hariprasad Dhobi, retired teacher of Dewan Tea Estate). The myth of Karam Puja has a definite aesthetic value. Binod Mirdha, a priest and worker of Borthal tea garden, narrated that King Srivarsha first celebrated this puja as he did not have any children, then he was blessed with a son by Karam Dharam.

Karam Dharam means that work is worship. The story is that there was a cowherd who tended five cows of a milkman (goala). One day one of the cows went missing and as such he was humiliated and tortured by the owner. The cowherd was religious, and had great faith in the God. So, he offered two sugar candies (*batasha*) and lighted a candle and prayed to Sri Krishna (the lord of cows) earnestly. The Lord was pleased and appeared before the boy. The boy ran to the owner and questioned him if he had ever seen the lord, the owner refused. The boy said that he had seen and would like to prove this to him. So, the next day he went to the same spot with the owner and offered his prayers, the owner, then, saw the lord and besides him he could see his missing cow. The milkman was so happy that he gifted the cow to the boy. On the other side, Dharam and Karam had a quarrel over the issue as to who was greater, Dharam (religion) or Karam (work). Dharam left Karam and went off to heaven. Karam asked the cowherd from where he got the cow; the boy said that he got the cow for his hard work. Karam now realized that work is greater than worship and so he went out to meet his brother Dharam to apologies for his foolishness. On his way to heaven, Karam, met a widow sitting under a mango tree. The widow asked Karam where he was going and when Karam said that he was going to heaven the widow requested him to ask God why her mango tree was infested by insects. Next, Karam saw a muddy pond and a fisherman requested him to ask God why

his pond was always muddy. Then, he saw a woman with her head inside the fire pot *(chula)* and she asked Karam to ask the God as to why her head never came out of the fire pot. His next encounter was with an old man with swollen legs sitting under the sun, he asked Karam to ask the God why his legs were swollen. A dumb man also wanted to know why he could not speak, a cow asked him to find out why she could not feed her calves and the milk spilt on the ground while feeding her calves. Lastly, he met a herd of horses which kicked him. After crossing seven seas and thirteen rivers he could hear Dharam crying. Dharam had seen his brother advancing towards heaven and was worried as to how his brother Karam would cross the river before reaching heaven which was full of dangerous water animals. Thus, Dharam took the guise of a tortoise and helped his brother without his knowledge. On reaching heaven, Karam begged an apology to Dharam and told him how a cowherd gave him the knowledge that Karam was greater of the two and requested Dharam to return to the earth, but Dharam said that he would return to the earth in the month of August (Bhadra) when devotees celebrate Bhadrapurnima (full moon day in the month of August) and meet Karam. On his way back home, Karam answered all the questions. To the first, he said that no one must throw the seeds of mango near the tree after eating. To the second, he said that a fisherman had three daughters and that he should get the eldest one married off so that the water do not get muddy, for that will put an end to all the gossips. The third answer was not to kick the wood into the fire. Never kick that which gives you the light. The fourth answer was not to harm anybody with knowledge and knowledge of herbs should be properly used. The fifth one, the goldsmith was asked not to cheat any customer. The solution for the cow was to live in the house of a human being so that its milk does not go waste. The horse was asked to go to Teli's house. So, all the riddles were solved by Karam who asked everyone on earth to celebrate Bhadra Purnima in honour of Dharam. The Puja is celebrated by seven Natyake Karmate (unmarried girls) and one brother. The worshippers fast for five days and on the fifth day Dharma comes to the earth to meet his brother Karam when the devotees steep themselves in dancing and merry making. (Binod Mirdha, a priest and worker of Borthal Tea Estate).

Tusu, is also celebrated by the tea folks, especially by the Kurmi community people. Almost all religious ceremonies and festivities have a revelant folk narrative which justifies the occasion and Tusu austerities also revolve round a number of such tales. A Jharkhandi folk tale narrates how in a small village the wife of the village headman gave birth to a girl child after a lot of penance and prayers. As the child was a boon from the gods who were satisfied (Tusto) with the devotion of the woman, the girl child was named 'Tusu' or 'Tushu'. Thus, Tusu grew up and started taking part in various ceremonies and festivities of the village. On one such occasion, during Karam Puja, Tusu planted a mango and a gourd plant along with the Karma branch. Surprisingly, the saplings bore a mango and a gourd just within a day or two. On the other hand, at the same time the Nawab of the region became terribly sick and none of the medicine men could cure him. It is then that one of the medicine men pronounced that if the Nawab could be fed with mango and gourd which have not touched the ground he would be cured. After a long search the Nawab's men reached Tusu's village and came to know about the mango and gourd in Tusu's garden which they took and fed their king with. Mysteriously, the Nawab recovered and this stirred his emotion towards Tusu whom he desired to make his own. He sent his men to the village to bring Tusu to him. Getting the news of the Nawab and his men, Tusu and her father left the village immediately to save Tusu from the clutches of the Nawab. They crossed the river and reached a Santal village with the enemies behind them. There, in the village, the folks were celebrating hunting ceremony and were taking part in carnivalism and roasting their catch a pig, for the feast. Tusu and her father mingled with the Santals who promised to protect them from the enemies. The Nawab's men, who were Muslims, had to return back as they could not enter the festive ring where the Santals were roasting pigs which is a religious taboo for the Muslims. Yet, Tusu was not safe, for the Nawab's men vowed to capture her under any circumstances for their lord. Tusu was feeling insecure and did not want to lose her virginity. Hence, in the dawn of Sankranti (January13/14) she drowned herself in the river. From then, she was honoured and venerated by both the Kurmis and the Santals in the month of December/January. Hence, Tusu is celebrated. The narrative reveals the history

and power polity of that society and also upholds the religious taboos amongst the Indian social structure. It also highlights the traditional pattern of patriarchal world where the female counter part like 'Tusu' has no other option than putting an end to her life to uphold her virginity which is again appreciated as a symbol of ideal Indian woman. The feminisation of agriculture is also portrayed. This is not the only folk narrative woven round Tusu festival. There are several others. Originally, Tusu was celebrated amidst songs and dances and there was no Tusu idol. Rabindranath Samantha, a folklorist collected a tale relating to the idol worship during Tusu puja from Purkul region which relates how after the drowning of two small girls in a pond for two consecutive years the folks started believing that the Water Goddess was angry and in order to pacify her wrath and escape punishment the women of the region made idols of small girls and immersed them in the pond as an offering to the goddess. This ritual ultimately developed into Tusu Puja. (Ghosal, 1412 Bangla). Presently, in some of the tea villages of Barak Valley, Tusu idol is shaped and worshipped. In the Barsangan tea village of Cachar the Burdwanis have a different myth and they are not acquainted with tales about Tusu Puja as circulated amongst the folks back in their place of origin. The people of the Bajrangpur tea village believed that once Parvati saw Shiva riding on a bull and fell in love with him, but, before she could do anything Shiva rode away. She wanted to marry Shiva and thus she sat down in the forest itself and started praying to the Goddess Lakshmi for help. She could not find any flowers except for purple coloured flowers which bloom in the month of December /January and thus offered those flowers which are known amongst the folks as Tusu. This flower is worshipped during Tusu festival by the villagers and immersed in the river on the day of Sankranti or Magh Bihu (Reported by Shanti Tantubai, a women worker of Bajrangpur Tea Garden).

Jhumur, is a celebrated dance form amongst the tea garden folks. The tea garden folks of Barak Valley hailing from Birbhum district believe that Jhumur dance originated from Mallarpur. Centering round this dance form, there is a tale which relates that there was a shepherd whose name was Damumerh who lived in a forest near Mallarpur station. He had a daughter named Padma who could not find a suitable husband for herself and if anyone was willing to marry her, her

father did not approve it. It so happened that one fine spring she was seduced by a sanyasi (hermit) as she had come out of the river after taking her bath. Padma then conceived and her father exiled her out of anger. In her exile she gave birth to a baby boy who was named as Mallanath by the sanyasi, the father of the child. Mallanath grew up and attained scholarly wisdom from his father and was informed of some hidden treasure which he acquired and later on established his kingdom which he named as Mallarpur. Padma and her female consorts were skilled in Jhumur songs and dances for which Mallapur became famous and from then, Jhumur dance was considered to be the tradition of the notorious women of the tribe of Mallarpur. Many of the travelling 'Kabuliwalas' (Usually signify the money-lenders from Kabul) and singers used to stop at Mallarpur and join the Jhumuris. From mid- January to mid-April these folks roamed around the village singing and dancing Jhumur and by Shiva Rathri they returned to Mallarpur. Often the dancing tribes were hired by rich landowners for performance. The tale definitely has a historical significance as it unravels not only the origin of Jhumur dance but also the origin of the name Mallarpur Station in the Eastern Railway of Birbhum District (Sharma 1999).

There is a myth circulating amongst the tea garden workers of Silcoorie about a miraculous fish goddess with a gold nose stud, living, in the pond near the Baram Baba temple. It is believed that at the time of celebrations in the family, the people of the village prayed to the fish goddess for supplying them with utensils. It so happened that gold and silver utensils miraculously came up to the bank of the pond and once the function was over the utensils were kept back on the same spot which disappeared on its own. It is also believed that once somebody stole one of the silver bowls and from then onwards the goddess stopped supplying utensils to the villagers of the tea garden.

Real life narratives

There is a story that a foreigner was invited for a cup of tea at the time of his departure from India and how over a cup of tea circumstances led to his postponement of the proposed trip and finally to the wedlock with the youngest daughter of the host (Kanoi 1971p.27).

Elephants are a menace in the tea gardens of Assam. Bijoy Tanti of Duloo tea garden narrated how the people of the village made tree houses to protect themselves from wild elephants. On one occasion an elephant killed all the members of a family who were sheltering themselves in a tree house by pulling down the tree and trampling them to death, except for a little child which went unnoticed. That child grew up to be a man with the help of the other folks of the village, but, now he is living the life of a beggar (Source: Bijon Tanti, a teacher at Dolu Tea Estate).

Amongst the folks we often hear stories relating to human sacrifices at the time of construction of bridges. It is believed that the river goddess has to be satiated with human blood to receive her blessings and avert any evil. One such story was related by Budhu Bakti (62 years) of Borakhai tea garden of Silchar. It so happened that one day when Budhu was a young man and was working in the tea garden a Dwaroga (Police personnel) approached him and said that if he went to Silchar town he would get him a job of home guard. Budhu easily trusted him and thus accompanied him in a vehicle. Budhu was locked up in a dark room at Sadar Thana, Silchar, for fifteen days with hardly any food and often some men would come and take his weight. Budhu related that he was a strong young man weighing 85 kgs, then. He failed to understand the plan of his captors but luckily one day a small girl came up to the tiny window in his room and informed Budhu that he was captivated there to be sacrificed at the Barak river where a bridge was being constructed. At this information Budhu was terrified and started to make plans of escape. One day, when six men armed with sword and ropes came up to the room and opened the door to take Budhu for the sacrifice, Budhu hit them with the heavy log of wood used to latch the door (*bandha*) overpowered them took away their sword and escaped from there in the dark. He had to run for many days through forests and only after three weeks he somehow reached home. On his way back he had to beg for food and water. He further reported that one Nawa Lal of Lamba Tilla met with the same fate, but, he too was lucky enough to escape. These stories are testimony to personal belligerence and valour. It also reveals the thought system of the society at large that the inducted workers of the tea gardens are all fools and easy to trap. The inhuman and savage norm of

human sacrifice practiced in the so- called civilized society is brought to light through such real life stories, exposing the superstitious believes prevailing even amongst the urban folks. The rural folks could not trust the urban folks and often spread the news amongst them that the people of the town take away the eyes and liver and sacrificed "goats both with tails and without tails". Without tails referred to human beings. This kept the tea folks away from the urban people (Source: Budhu Bakti, a retired worker, of the Borakhai Tea Garden).

There are many other real life stories of these innocent and simple folks of the tea gardens. In the initial stage the managers of the tea gardens treated the natives very harshly. Very often the workers had to engage themselves in clearing the jungles which were full of wild animals at the risk of their lives. Botal Bakti narrated how he was attacked by a tiger on his way back home from the manager's bungalow at night after completing his job. In the manager's bungalow his task was to fan the Saheb with huge hand fans made of cane, for, in those days, there was no electricity in the tea gardens. So, one day on his way back he had to fight a tiger which mauled him badly and ultimately, a Nepali Chaukidar (guard) killed the tiger with his hand sword (*Khukri*). As the narrator was narrating his story one could easily see the pride flashing in his eyes. They also narrated how the Sahebs did not allow the workers to use umbrellas inside the tea gardens. In one such incident, a relative of Abdul Rahman Munshi, 100yrs old, had come to the Borakhai tea garden on a visit and walked up to the garden with an open umbrella. The Saheb came to know about it and immediately summoned the Munshi's relative. Munshi asked his relative to bow down (*Salam*) before the Saheb and ask for forgiveness and this pacified the Saheb who warned the Munshi to inform all his relatives about the codes of the garden (Abdul Rahman Munshi, an old man, from Borakhai tea garden).

Abhijit Chakrabarty, the head supervisor of Pathecherra tea garden narrated the tale of an Englishman named Simpson who was at the helm of affairs at Matrycherra tea garden who stayed with his wife at Bangla Tilla. It so happened that the Manager throttled his wife in a drunken mood and after that the Duftari, Khamshama, Aiya, the horse keeper (all workers in the bungalow) often reported of seeing the ghost of the dead Memsaheb roaming inside the bungalow

and finally stopped coming to work. The Manager of the garden also could not stay there any longer and had to leave the garden ultimately out of fear. The people of the tea gardens believed in ghosts and referred to such ghosts as *Banglar bhut* (The ghost of the Bungalow), *Saheber bhut* (The ghost of the Saheb), *Sectioner bhut* (The ghost of the section) , *Marapura bhut* (The ghost of the charred body), *Ghater bhut* (The ghost of the banks) etc.

Stories Highlighting the Importance of Education

The mindset of the tea garden workers has definitely shifted and nowadays they strongly believe in the benefits of education. Simple learning of alphabets is again of no use in practical life and exposure and contact with the outside world is also essential in today's situation.

Sukumar Bagdi, a Sardar, of Borakhai tea garden, narrated the story of an educated boy hailing from a village whose parents were illiterate. After the completion of his studies, the boy's parents arranged for marriage of their son with the daughter of a rich man from the city. On the wedding night, the bride wanted to test the intelligence of her husband, she also wanted to know how much he was acquainted with city life and its culture. The light in their room was on and the bride said that she would show her face to him only when the light was put off. Now, the boy hailing from a remote village was not acquainted with electricity and had no idea as how to switch off the light. So, he took a stool, climbed up and started blowing hard at the bulb. He tried and tried. When he became exhausted, he started screaming, to which the other members of the family crowded outside the room. Quite disturbed at the commotion, the boy's father asked his son to open the door so that he could do something to solve the problem. The bridegroom opened the door for his father who climbed up the stool and started blowing harder at the bulb and suddenly lost his balance and fell down. That was the climax. The bride was ashamed and did not want her other relatives to know about it. She immediately switched off the light and solved the problem. The story is tinged with humour and exposes the bitter truth and cultural lag amongst the tea folks.

Adult education is essential, especially amongst the inmates of remote tea villages, for it is only the literate parents who can encourage their children for education. There is a story which establishes this. There was a boy whose father wanted to educate him. Thus, he was sent to school. On the first day the English teacher taught him how to address his teachers in English using the world 'Sir'. When the boy went back home his father wanted to know what his teacher taught him that day. To this, the boy told his father that his teacher taught him the word 'Sir'. The father got very angry and said, "I sent you to school learn something good and here your teacher, teaches you to utter 'Shar'. (means bull in Hindi which is objectionable"). The next day the boy went to the school and the Math's teacher taught him how to find out the 'Saral' (Average). On returning home the boy was asked by his father as to what he learnt from his teacher. The boy instantly replied that he learnt 'Saral'. The father interpreted the word as 'Sara' (Rotten in Hindi). He could not control his anger and rushed to meet the teacher. He accused the teacher of teaching abuses to his son like 'Sar' and 'Sara' in the school instead of imparting proper lessons. To this, the teacher laughed and explained to the father the meaning of the terms. The father was ashamed and said "If only my parents would sent me to school, today this would not have happened" (Source: Sukumar Bagdi, a Sardar, of Borakhai Tea Garden).

There are tales of suicidal deaths due to poverty and psychological disturbances amongst the tea garden people.The story of the death of a cowherd Bhim Kurmi from Boraikhai Tea Garden reflects on the oppressive role of the Panchayat committees of the villages. Bhim Kurmi used to tend the cows of the tea garden workers who used to pay him. He was a stammerer and the children were fond of teasing him. They called him as *'Cu-Co Bhim'* which irritated him very much. Often he used to run after them with a stick. Bhim used to take great care of the cows but, unluckily, one day a man lodged a complaint against him that he hit the man's cow and injured one of its eyes, leading to blindness. The members of the Panchayat met at the Nachgarh and decided that Bhim should keep the blind cow for himself and buy a new cow for the man within fifteen days. Bhim had no right to question the judgement of the Panchyat for it demanded unquestioned obedience, although he had no capacity to buy a new

cow. After fifteen days the man came to Bhim's house and demanded the cow. Then, Bhim asked the man to come on the following day. On following day Bhim committed suicide, hanging with a towel (*gamcha*). At this, the villagers did not contest the judgement of the Panchayat, for most of them had great faith in it and the rest dared not to challenge fearing punishment. Interestingly, Anil Ree, who took over the charge of cowherd, also, committed suicide as his wage was snatched away from him by the country liquor seller, to whom he owed a lot of money. The death of both the cowherds led the people to belief that both Bhim and Anil were possessed by some evil spirits, for which they committed suicide (Source: Shiv Kumar Borakhai Tea Garden). There is another story of a mystical tree on the way to Dolu Tea Garden which could not be cut down because there is a belief that those who tried to fell it died (Source: Bijon Tanti of Dolu Tea Garden).

The narratives of the tea garden folks are interesting and at the same time informative; they do mirror the emotions and sentiments, the cultural setup, the simplicity and naturalness and uphold the success and failures of simple and unaffected folks with honesty and ease.

To sum up, by examining and critically analyzing the whole gamut of collected oral contents of the tea garden folks of Barak Valley it has been found that although they were dispersed from their original homeland 170yrs ago yet, they retained most of their folklores which were carried by their forefathers in their memories. They are still familiar and attached to their age old proverbs which have been handed down the line. Most of the proverbs were collected from the elderly group of people and it has been found that the youths are less concerned with the old sayings, for their concept is changing and they are against the moralising practices.

The proverbs are sufficient in their social values but some of them are based on class and caste hierarchy targeting the barbers, dhobis and even the Brahmins are not spared because of their exploitative nature though they belong to the higher stratum of the caste hierarchy. There are still others which reflect on gender and also asserts on traditional male authority in controlling the female from crossing the line of caste hierarchy. Superstition is embedded in the lives of

rural folks which is reflected in their proverbs like third daughter is the goddess of wealth but third son is a beggar. Proverbs like 'spare the rod and spoil the child' are instruments of social control as well. It may be mentioned here that there are proverbs among different communities in different languages which are similar in their meaning. For instance, *Mate na batiye datey, goina pindena betiye begor nate* (Does not speak out, does not wear ornaments with nose ring) (Ahmed 2004: p.101) which means the daughter who is otherwise considered to be of a quiet nature does not wear ornaments without the nose ring is similar to *dhir pani pathor kate*. Both the proverbs denote that one cannot be judged by mere looks. The principle of guardianship of the female by the male family members remains the central guiding ideology in marriage (Patel 2010:147) and this is found in the proverbs of the tea garden workers also. Proverbs like 'early to bed and early to rise,' 'think before you act,' 'a bad workman quarrels with his tools', 'cut your coat according to the cloth', empty vessels sound much etc. are all traditional knowledge which prevail amongst the people of the mainstream as well as the tea garden folks of Barak Valley.

Riddles are used by both young and old in the tea gardens of Barak Valley as elsewhere, which adds a flavor to their stereotyped life style. One can notice their extraordinary sense of observation and sense of humour and practical wisdom. Moreover, there are riddles which are similar and establish a bond between different people. The Bhojpuri people created riddle on mustard seed in the same way as the Bengali riddle created on the eggs of fishes, which shows that the Bengalis are fond of fishes. Most of the tea garden people may not have formal education but their riddles indicate their intelligence and presence of the mind and are constructed on common items. With rapid urbanisation men have become busy and hardly find time for leisure. Moreover, the electronic media keep the present generation busy and they hardly get time to communicate with family members especially elders, and, as such, riddles are on the decline amongst the younger generations and this gap can be bridged through community education which can stir the interest of the rural populace for their traditional knowledge.

Tongue twisters are mostly familiar among the children, which, they use as a game. It is believed that such practices make the children more centered and focused. In the study the riddles were collected by organising a story telling session at Borakhai Middle English School, Borakhai Tea Garden.

Narratives are best instruments used by the folks to express the real as well as imaginative episodes stirring not only interest amongst listeners but very often lead to unquestioned beliefs. Such narratives are based on collective modes of perception, of the encoding of information and of its remembrance and recall; in sharing the knowledge to produce and narrate in a particular way, members of a cultural group share ways of thinking about, of framing, schematizing and memorizing, experience and thus share a collective memory (Werbner 1991). There are stories which have been circulated amongst tea garden people which created fear in their minds and often a belief is established. For instance, the folk tale in Suresh Chandra Dwivedi's short story 'Bagal' of the English Saheb and some of the workers of the tea garden who died after cutting down of a tree correlates with the folk tale narrated by Tanti. There are tales embedded with proverbs where we get motifs of helpful and forgiving animals and birds and stories of women with suspicious character which are known as stories of "Tiriya Charittar", some of them have been cited under proverbs and these are no way different from tales in other parts of the world. The stories of women duping their husbands are amusing, yet, they reflect the esteem of women as essentially undependable (Deva 1981: p.83).Stories of courage and bravery have been related with pride and this shows the desire to acquire recognition is there among the folks. The stories like the songs of the colonial period reflect on the structure of relationship that existed at that period of time. The narratives of valour are individual and add meaning to personal moments of being. It was very difficult to collect tales from the tea gardens because it involves a lot of time and moreover it was found they have lost interest in tales nowadays and even children love to sit by the television than listening to tales. When a story telling session was organized at Borakhai Tea Garden School most of the children came prepared with Tusu songs and also Hindi songs and told the researcher *"Hamara gharme kiseko kahani nahi ata hai"* (Nobody knows stories in my home).