CHAPTER 5

THE ORAL LITERATURE OF THE TEA GARDEN FOLK: SONGS AND JATRAS

This chapter analyses other two components of the oral literature of the tea garden folk in Barak Valley. The components such as proverbs, riddles, tongue twisters and narratives have been discussed in the preceding chapter.

Folk Songs

Folk songs are spontaneous and most appealing form of folk literature. Songs are essential part of rituals, ceremonies and traditional celebrations of joys and sorrows. Songs are often accompanied by dances which reflect upon the lives and cultural complex of the folks. They are initiated on almost all occasions starting from child-birth to death and funeral. European administrators like G.A. Grierson collected and published Indian folk songs of the Bihar region as early as 1886. He even translated them. W.G. Archer (1974), Verrier Elwin (1946), A.G. Sherrif (1898) also showed interest and collected the folk songs. Of the Indian folklorist, Achyut Charan Choudhury (1856-1953) was the first amongst the folk song collectors. He collected the *Gaur Govindo* folk songs *Pagal Thakurer Chora* in the 15th to 16th century (Sharma 1999). Md. Asraf Hussain (1892-1965) classified folklore into thirty seven divisions, in which he mentions *Baromashigan, Lacharigan, Poi* (small poems) *Baulgan* (spiritual songs), *Marphatigan* (religious songs), *Sarigan* (boatman's songs or songs that men sing while at work), *Gajirgan* (boatman's song), *Ullirgan* (holi songs), *Dhukargan* (sorrowful songs), *Bharatbibarangan* (songs with Indian nationalistic fervour),*Takkargan* (argumentative songs), *Acharitagan* (songs creating wonder), *Bayan* (descriptive) *Morchiyagan,Shikhamulakgan* (songs imparting moral lessons), *Kathar katha* (proverbial songs), *Bandhagan and Jarigan*. Md. Asaddar Ali(1995p:18) also mentioned songs like *Arigan,Haziratgan* (magic incantations) *Paccher katha* (tongue twisters) *Heyali Anka* (mental arithmetic) *Biyargan* (marriage songs), *Bhatiyali* (songs of Bhatiland), *Meghorgan* (songs sung in association to rain) , *Foukraligan, Mantrageet* (chants) ,*Chaiya* (rhyming songs)

Ghatugan, Phaki katha (cheating songs), *Bhanganishilok* (riddles) etc. (Sharma1999). Kamaluddin Ahmed (1960 Pp: 38-65) elaborately discussed most of the songs in his *Sanskritir Rong-Rup.* Trilochon Pandey (1981) has mentioned some of the ritual songs of the Hindi speaking areas, which are related to the whole span of human life from one's birth to death; viz., *Sohar* (birth), *Mundan* (tonsure), *Jeneya* (sacred thread ceremony), *Mangal* (marriage), *Gari* (abuses of love), *Ghori* (horse riding), *Bunera* (bridegroom) and *Gauna* (parting ceremony) songs. Birendranath Dutta (1994) has classified the body of song materials of Assam into songs of religious and devotional content, songs of ceremonies and festivals, songs of love and yearning. The enduring passion, lullabies, nursery rhymes, children's game songs, songs of jests and humour, ballads and other narrative songs. Songs of the folks are not only ethnological data but are essential tools for analysing individual and social psyche, the social actions and behavioural patterns. Verrier Elwin's (1946) folk songs of Chattisgarh, folk song of Maikhal Hills, songs of the forest and W.G.Archer's *The Blue Grove (1940), The Dove and the Leopard (1948)* and *The Hill of the Flutes(1974)* are significant contribution to the folk literature of India. The tea gardens of Barak Valley echo with songs in various folk languages, especially those related to their age-old traditions and customs. Their songs express the hidden layers of their unconscious desires and fears. The local credibility far outweighs the historical account. The folks of the tea gardens are living amidst inconveniences and hardhips, yet they are arcadian and contended with their lot, explicitly visible in their expressive mood. They sing songs almost in every occasion, whether it is birth, marriage, death or funeral, religious ceremonies, while at work or even while expressing day-to-day joys and sorrows. Their songs are being discussed here.

Birth Songs

Women take part in care and nursing of an infant from the neo-natal to the baby delivery stage and also celebrate the birth of a child singing and merry-making. Birth of an infant involves songs of nativity which is full of celebration and gaiety as the following Bhojpuri song reveals:

(1)

Chandan kere chowkiaya

Matia lagal jhaloreyia ho

Lalana sehee charhi

Nahan to Sita sundari bihosita ho.

Hansi, hansi, sakhilog puchele

Shakhi kaun bidiyia

Karle ta Rama bor piayele?

Bhukhi rahila akadeshiya

Duwadeshiya paran ho!

Lalana bidhise

Bukhila atawar

Ta Ramo boro paili, ho!

Kartika masho nahayeela

Suriya paiyan parile ho!

Lalana tulasike

Deepaka jaraile

Ta Ramo bor paili ho!

Magheeya maswa me nahayeela

Panchwe pandit ka

Bhog lagai le,

Lalana bidhise

Bukila atawar

(Parbati Goala, a retired worker of Silcoorie Tea Estate)

"Shakhi kaun bidiyia karle ta Rama bor piayele?" - What austerities did you perform to be blessed with Rama. Rama is believed to be the incarnation of the God and the most obedient son. The Hindustanis are patriarchials who give much importance to sons as they are believed to sustain the line of forefathers, and are identified with Rama. They also believe that only a pure and religious woman can be the mother of a son. The friends were imploring the mother of the new – born infant to tell them what she did to beget a son and accordingly the mother relates the various practices, fasting and sacrifices she had to undergo to beget a son. The various rituals for purification of the mind and body and making space for the new one are correlative.

Sohar are songs sung just after the birth of the infant and are continued for a period of twelve days. Sohar is sung only when a male child is born in a family. The above song expresses the intense desire of the women to get a male child without which she considers herself as futile as the Hindustani (Hindi speaking) community is patrilineal and a woman without a male issue is often looked down upon by all. She performs all the possible rites and austerities to beget a male child. The Bhojpuri community women sing songs and make merry for twelve long days in case of a male child, and only one day and sometimes they do not sing at all in case of a female child . This reflects on the practice of gender discrimation amongst the Bhojpuris. The infant makes a mess of everything for its habits are not disciplined, yet, the baby is pampered and loved by all.The following Sadri (Bagani) song is evidence to this:

(2)

Chela muthey kada korey

Jar ghorey chela nai

Tar mon kamon go,

Chela muthey kada korey

(Source: Sheela Thapa, a retired worker from KoomberTea Estate and a folksinger).

The song reflects on motherly love and affection and the difficulties one undergoes to rear a child. The mother and the elderly members of the family compromise with all odds. It also paints the picture of a rural home where the house is made of mud (*kutcha*). Hence it becomes muddy (*kada*) when the child pisses (*muthey*).

(3)

Kaisana Ram janam lihale

Ram janam bhala bhaile

Duniya ananda hoile

Tab ailey nai

Tab ailey babhan pandita kaise

Ram janam lihale

Chouda baras ke jab Ram hoitey

Tab banke sundariya

Anganey khonaila piaari matia

Lalana jaike jagawua kaliya

Maike sebak

kaisan janam lihale

(Annapurna Devi, wife of Ashok Verma and a writer)

That the barber plays an important role in all ceremonies and rituals is reflected in the above song. The barber has to file nails first and then comes the role of the Brahmin. Earth digging ceremony is essential as the mother earth is considered to be a symbol of fertility cult. Hence, she has to be venerated and thanked. The Goddess Kali is also invoked to bless the new born infant.

There are songs which are sarcastic, abusing the Brahmins also:

(4)

Chalatbari auro babhan hali! hali!

Ved udcharan dhuwawa kare beyakul

Puta mera baddi

Chalte sukuwari babhan jaldi! jaldi!

Ved udcharan dhuwawa kare beyakul

Jaise babhanake mooch

Waise kukurake poonch.

(Source: Phulmati Yadav, an old woman of Dewan Tea Estate)

The old granny abuses the Brahmin for taking time to finish the recitation of the Vedas as the sacrificial fire was emitting a lot of smoke which is harmful to the little baby (*putha*). A simile is used to compare the Brahmin's moustache *(babhanake moonch)* to the dog's tail (*kukurake poonch).*

Another such narrative sung in unison by the women folk, clapping their hands full of bangles making sounds *(kariyayi jham jham kare)* and thereby inviting others to join them to fetch water from the river or pond (traditionally the folks used to collect water from the Jamuna river) for the mother and the new born's purification bath is as follows:

(5)

Nitey achchey nitey jai

Hai hai Jamuna kinarey

Aisan ka ha go munni nadiya kinarey

Kariyayi jham jham kare

(Source: Janu Karmakar, a worker of Koomber Tea Estate)

Venerating Songs

The folk life is never divorced from its natural surroundings. Man has a close affinity with the world and its elements and this mutuality of relationship is abundantly visible in their folksongs. The Basil or the Tulsi plant (known Ocimum sanctum in Latin) is very sacred to the Hindus and is worshipped in every Hindu household.Tulasivrindavana is the name of the square pedestal planted with Tulsi before the entrance of a Hindu house. Tulasi means matchless

and refers to Lakshmi, Vishnu's consort.The plant is believed to have the unique property of curbing thirst (Gandhi 2000 Pp: 143-144).The plant also has great medicinal value as its leaves and seeds are useful in cough and colds and is a very good anti -bacterial. The Hindu communities in the tea gardens worship it and even sing songs in its honour such as:

(1)

Jaun hama janatai duare

Hamre aiheiy Ram

Rachi, rachi jawana banayia rakte

Anganaiye beech Tulasi lagai rakhto,

Jaun hama janatai duare

Hamre aikeiy Ram

Rachi, rachi phulowake shajai lagai rakto

Anganaiye beech Tulasi lagai rakhto.

(Source: Manu Kurmi, a worker in Kumbha Tea Estate)

The plant Tulsi symbolises Rama or Vishnu in the song and, as such, various flowers, fruits and sweets are also offered in their names to the plant.

(2)

Gachmadhai Tulsi

Patha madhya paan,

Stri madhya Radhika,

Pati bhagawan.

(Source: Joydrath Goala, teacher and writer hailing from Rosekandy Tea Estate)

This song brings out the significance of the Basil plant, the betel leaves, Radhika amongst women and the husband amongst male folks. The husband is considered as the God head *(Pati bhagawan)* by the Indian women and the above

song is also a reminder by the Bhojpuris to their daughters about the role of husband in their lives as protector and benefactor.

Similarly Neem Tree (Azadirachta Indica) known to have great medicinal property is also considered to be essential by the tea garden villagers and its leaves are grinded and used as poultice when anyone suffers from chicken pox. The first two lines of one such song are given below:

(3)

Nimiyia ke darh mayia laweli hilorowa-ke jhuli jhuli na

Maiyia gaweli geetiya ke jhuli jhuli na....

The Bhojpuri community believes that the Neem tree is the favourite haunt of the Goddess of pox; she resides there, swings from its branches and sings all day long.

Marriage Songs

Marriage is a socially established and sanctioned union between man and woman and also a basis for formation of a family which is the smallest social unit. Wedding is celebrated amidst singing and dancing. Marriage songs are an important component in human society. These songs socialise the bride and the groom into their newly acquired status. Most of the songs are directed to the bride. The songs trace the origin and the very purpose of marriage and also involve various rituals and social formalities like farewell from parental home to acceptance by the in-laws. Thus, a strain of conflict is also inherent in the songs, the conflict between the husband and the wife, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law and other members of her husband's family. Prafulla Goswami (1965) elucidates the marriage ceremony of the Assamese with songs sung at different rites and rituals; viz., *telar bhar* or *joron* rites songs, parting songs, *joranam* and *khicha geet* (lampooning songs). Amalendu Bhattacharjee (1985) has made an elaborate analysis of the marriage songs of the Bengali Hindus in his article *Marriage Songs of the Bengali Hindus of Cachar District of Assam*. He classified the songs into descriptive order, songs pertaining to general rites, songs expressing deep feelings and emotions on the separation of the bride

from her parents and family, love between bride and bridegroom, songs containing humour and jokes, songs pertaining to different light works related to marriages and other songs.

The tea garden folks of Barak Valley also organise marriage amidst great pomp and joy and weave songs centering round different rites and ceremonies of marriage.

Tilak Songs

Engagement songs or *tilak* songs are sung by *Mundas* of the tea gardens some which are as follows:

(1)

Tahereta nanatarna

Harakena udunganei

Kumar beta

Hareguype matar munda

Atangtype bati handi

Nuntype bati handi

Harogype ruper mumdam

Tahereta nana terna

Udungete kumar beti

Atangtype bati handi

Nuntype bati handi

Harogype ruper mumdam

Tahereta nana terna

(Source: Arati Santal, a worker of Nisthal Tea Garden)

The above song (as transcribed by the consultant in Bengali) welcomes the bridegroom (kumar beta) and the bride (kumar beti) to the marriage arena. The country wine (*handi*) is placed in a bowl (*bati*), worshipped and offered to

the *Majhi* and then it is offered to the others present. The bride and the groom then exchange silver rings (*ruper mumdam*) followed by the pronouncement of the engagement by the *Majhi* (Headman of the community). *Lagre* or marriage songs are sung in accompaniment of the drum (*madal)*, anklet (*nipur)* and tribal drums (*nagra)*. The *Marengburu* (God) is invoked by the Santals, seeking blessings for the bride and groom to lead a happy married life. The gusto increases with the sound of anklets (*nipur*), attracting the attention of one and all in the village.Amidst a huge gathering they sing as follows:

(2)

Marengburu re sade kan

Whoding buru re tamak sade kan

Najam mayse nale rachare nipur sade kan

Najam mayse jihu, chare, nale rachare

Nipur sade kan.

(Source: Arati Santal, a worker of Nisthal Tea Garden)

The following song (transcribed by the consultant in Bengali) is sung during turmeric-oil smearing *(haldi-tel ceremony)* by the Oriyas of the tea gardens of Barak Valley when the bride is taken out to the empty paddy field to be smeared with mustard oil and turmeric powder which seeps down to the Mother Earth. It is believed that this ritual increases the fertility of the earth. Robert Brifault explains this primitive notion and says "that which fertilize the earth are also thought to fertilize women and vice versa" (Choudhury 2003 p90)

(3)

Haldi batile

Basoro batile

Hiro todre gola mino.

(Source: Bharat Tanti, a worker in Barsangan Tea Estate)

The Bhojpuri community also smears *haldi* (turmeric) and *chandan* (sandalwood paste) on the bride and all the female members of the family participate in the ritual but the widows are kept out of such auspicious ceremonies and rites which is explicit in the following song:

(4)

Soneke katora se agar chandan

Rupeke katora se hari hari debo

Uptan lag rahe hai.

Haldi laganeke liye Amma suhagan

Mor beta hari hari debo

Uptan lag rahe hai.

Soneke katora se agar chandan

Rupeke katora se hari hari debo

Haldi laganeke liye Chachi suhagan

Mor bhatija hari hari debo

Uptan lag rahe hai.

Soneke katora se agar chandan

Rupeke katora se hari hari debo

Haldi laganewali Phupi suhagan

(Source: Santosh Akura, a lecturer in Chankhira College, Karimganj, hailing from Bagbahar Tea Garden).

The chant like *Amma suhagan* (mother whose husband is alive), *Chachi and Phupi suhagan* (aunts whose husbands are alive) etc. indicate that widows are excluded from *haldi chandan* ritual.

The Hindustanis also have a kissing ritual during marriages. The kissing ritual is done only by the women folk while smearing of turmeric on the bride with the following song:

(5)

Koirini koirini

Tuhu baru rani ho

Kaihiake haradi

Uparakailu aju

Hamare anjane dularu Sahana sakele haradiya ke jar.

(Santosh Akura, a lecturer, hailing from Bagbahar Tea Garden)

The *Koirini* (a female Koiri woman) grows turmeric and vegetables in her garden and stores the turmeric over a long period of time, for it is believed that old turmeric is very good. She contributes the preserved turmeric for using it in the marriage of her neighbour's daughter. The female relatives of the bride thus weave the above song asking the *Koirini* why she has brought out the turmeric for their dear daughter and at the same time kiss the bride.The song reflects on solidarity of the tea garden folks during celebrations and functions.

The Bhojpuri Muslim community folks of the tea gardens also sing songs celebrating marriages. One such song gives us a list of gifts bestowed upon the bride at the time of marriage; namely, turmeric (*haldi*), sugar-balls (*tilua*), groom's outfit (*jama*) overcoat (*achkan*), butter (*makhane*), glasses (*chasma*) handkerchief (*rumaliya*), shoes (*juta*) perfume (*attar*), umbrella (*chatri*) and jiggery (*ghurdowa*). It reveals the practice of exchanging gifts between the the families of the bride and the groom. It is as follows:

(6)

Ye Haldi bhajey mera Allah! ho Nabi ne,

Telua bheje Ali ne

Kiya khusise shadi rache mera Allah Nabi ne.

Tauho jama bheje mera Allah Nabi ne,

Achkana bheje mera Allah ne.

Kiya khusi se shadi rache mera Allah Nabi ne,

Makhane bheje Ali ne

Kiya Khusi se shadi rache mera Allah Nabi ne

Toho chasma bheje mere Allah Nabi ne

Rumaliya bheje Ali ne,

Kiya Khusi se shadi rache mera Allah Nabi ne

Toho jutuwa bheje mera Allah Nabi ne,

Attar bheje mera Ali ne

Kiya khusi se shadi rache mera Allah Nabi ne

Toho chattri bheje mera Allah Nabi ne,

Gawa Allah bhalla bhalla bheje mera Ali ne,

Kiya khusi se shadi rache mera Allah Nabi ne

Ghurdwa bheje Allah Nabi ne

Joru bheje Ali ne

Kiya khusi se shadi rache mera Allah Nabine

Tilua bheje Ali ne.

(Source: Musammat Rila Begum, a folksinger, Baghbahar Tea Estate Dwarbond).

The songs of the Hindustani Muslims of the tea gardens of Barak Valley bring to light the superstitions prevalent amongst them. They believe in *jadu and tona* (black magic) and pray to Allah *(Allah manayia)* for protection of the groom at the time marriage. From their songs one comes to know that the wedding rites are performed by five priests *(panch peer).* The following is a song sung by the women folks while the bridegroom is dressed for the occasion:

(7)

Unche dalanpar dulah jamai pinhleho

Dekhiya ho koi jadu na mare

Koi tona na mare ho

Unka dadi ghare Allah manaye ho

Allah manaye pancho peer ho.

Unche dalanpar dulah acchkan pahirley ho

Unpar khusimare Allah manaye ho

Ucche dalanpar dulah jutey lagaiya ho

Dhekhiya ho koi jadu na mare

Koi tona na mare ho

Allah manaye pancho peer ho.

(Source: Mussamat Rila Begum, a folksinger, Bagbahar Tea Estate , Dwarbond)

Songs full of jokes and humour are sung by families of bride and groom targeting and lampooning each other such as:

(8)

Pati ho pati

Arieya danti

Toke bolaike

Le jaibo

Tihla ke dati ho

Tihla ke dati.

(Source: Rita Mal, an ASHA worker from Silcoorie Tea Estate)

Here, the sisters-in-law are teasing the groom telling him that since his teeth are like saw, they would enchant and whisk him away to the hill top to level down the earth with his saw-like teeth. In another song by the Burdwani people the couple is warned by the young amongst in-laws to be careful when they are in bed together as the bedcover is old and might get worn of:

(9)

Aam pata lamba lamba

Kathal patar bichoney

Dher tana tani

Nai korbi bhai

Chadar achey purana.

(Source: Arun Tati, a worker of Kathal Tea Garden, Hailakandi)

In yet another Oriya song the groom's party sings:

(10)

Basore a garhey gheeyia

Ka gharey achey

Sundaro jiya

Tako mokey bahar kore diyo.

(Source: Arun Tanti, a worker and folksinger in Kathal Tea Garden, Hailakandi)

The first line is in no way relevant to the narrative and is used merely for rhyming. In the next three lines the groom's men seek beautiful maidens for themselves. The elder brother-in-law is not spared and is often teased by the bride's sisters as in the following song:

(11)

Sonwa dhai gurethwa Bhasur

Dhiyawa bahut jatan ke

Bajuwa dhai ke gurethwa Bhasur

Hasuli jei gurethwa Bhasur

Suna dewyar ye bahin rakha wale

Maro se khedaye

Tako tako chitewya hamare gorawe.

(Source: Bharati Bin, an old woman of Dewan Tea Estate)

There is a wedding ritual amongst the Bhojpuri Hindus known as *Gurethwa* which has to be performed by the elder brother of the groom and the person performing the ritual can never visit the sister -in-law thereafter. The brother-in-law represents the groom's family and brings gifts for the bride. But it is customary to observe the relationship of avoidance between the elder brother of the groom and his wife; they cannot touch each other or talk directly to each other. The song is some sort of warning by elderly women to the concerned brother-in-law *(Bhasur)* to dare not look at the bride thereafter.

The groom and party often target the brothers and sisters of the bride through their songs and the following is an example:

(12)

Alu chaka chaka chori

Tor bhai, baini boley chori

Age khujey taka.

Alu chaka chaka

Udam chora toke

Koto shikabo likha pora

(Ramrati Kahar, a worker in Silcoorie Tea Estate)

Pieces of potatoes girl, both your brother and sister accuses me of demanding money. Pieces of potatoes reckless boy, how much more should I teach you to read and write? (Transcription of the above song). The oral literature of the tea people reflects on their food habits like the above song. Often these people collect wild potaoes for eating.

When the groom reaches the entrance of the bride's house; he and his men receive stinging attacks from the bride's kins as reflects from the following song:

(13)

Hum mangli gora gora

Karia kahe anlere

Hum mangli dine dine

Rat kahe karle re

Mar Sala bharuwa

Dewan ke hasaile re.

(Source: Hari Prasad Dhobi, a retired teacher from Dewan Tea Estate)

Its literal meaning is "We asked for a fair groom, why did you bring a dark complexioned one? You were asked to come by day time, why have you come at night? Hit the henpecked husband (*bharuwa*). The whole of Dewan garden is laughing (The name of the garden in the song changes according to change in the place of marriage)".

The conjugal night is very significant for a couple. The Indian bride arranges betel leaves and areca nuts for her husband and waits anxiously.It is a moment when the brother-in-law (younger) takes liberty to tease his sister-in-law singing, 'the wooden bed *(khat palange*) with a cool-mat *(shital pati)* is lying empty *(khali poray railo)* oh! Friend, oh! Friend *(shoilo shoilo)* where is your beloved (*Pranobondhu koilo).*The night is drowsy; *(rath ghumu ghum)* the sleepy eyes are looking out through the window (*khirki pane chailo).* Oh! Friend, where is your beloved? The plate full of betel leaves and nuts is just lying there *(Bata bhora paner khili khali porey roilo).*Oh! Friend, oh! Friend, where is your beloved?' The original song is as follows:

(14)

Khat palange

Sital pati khali porayrailo

Shoilo shoilo

Prano bondhu koilo

Rat ghumu ghum

Chokhe ghumu ghum

Khirki pane chailo

Shoilo shoilo

Prano bondhu koilo

Bata bhora paner khili

Khali porey roilo

Shoilo shoilo

Prano bondhu koilo!

(Source: Arun Tanti, a worker Kathal Tea Garden, Hailakandi)

New relationship is created between the two families through marriage and this tie is celebrated through jokes and leg pulling. One such joke in Sadri language targeting the in-laws is sung:

(15)

Bhukhat dukhal aile samdhi,

Chaple dumur ghache ho !

Dumur ghache le girle samdhi

Akhi- O phutal !

Kan- O phutal !

Tutalo ta dono hadh ho !

Ano bhain sui suta

Siya samdhi ke duno hadh ho !

Bahein pisa biro,

Janha janha samdhike dard lage

Tanha tanha lagaiha biro.

(Source: Hemchandra Mirda, the Village Headman of Mirda community from Dewan Tea Estate)

Here, the bride's family refers to the bridegroom's family as hungry ones, who have come to fill their bellies. The mother-in-law climbs an Adina cordifolia (*Kadamba)* tree and falls down to the ground, breaking two of her bones (*Tutalo ta dono hadh ho!)* So, the bride is asked by her brother to bring a needle and thread (*Ano bhain sui suta*) and stitch up the broken bones (*Siya samdhi ke duno hadh ho!)* of her mother-in-law and grind herbs (*Bahein pisa biro*) and apply the poultice to soothe her wounds (*Janha janha samdhike dard lage/tanha tanha lagaiha biro*).

Vulgarity and merry-making runs through the following lines in a song:

(16)

Bhaitache Bukholo Hemchandra Bhardwa

Kuchu kuchu khaiyo bhardwa

Kuchu kuchu tor muche lagaihe

Aur kuchu kuchu ley jaihe tore bahinia lagi

(Source: Hemchandra Mirdha, Dewan Tea Estate)

When translated this means: 'The hungry Hemchandra Bhadwa, is sitting. Eat a little and stick a little on to your moustache to carry back home for your sister'.

The mother-in-law often rebukes the son-in-law for being inefficient, to which he retorts:

(17)

Suna Thakur bitiya

Burah bhaisa kaisa

Jotab khetia

Sas pota hai dey galiyia

(Source: Hemchandra Mirdha, Dewan Tea Estate)

Here, he said that he had already put in years like the old buffalo (*bhura bhaisa*) and, yet, his mother-in-law rebuked him for not going to the field for ploughing. He further quips:

(18)

Kesho paki gaile

Datowo giri gaile

Umaro ta chaligaile

Chokhe chalisa lagi gaile goya

Ami hoiley katari ke khoya.

(Hemchandra Mirdha, the panchayat headman of the Mirdha community, from Dewan Tea Estate)

(Hairs have turned grey, teeth have fallen, age has gone, eyes have lost power, and I am useless now, just like the sheath of the sword).

Weddings are full of joy.Yet there are conflicting pains when the bride is bid farewell from her parental home and is send off to an alien family. On such occasion heart rending songs are sung to give effect to poignant emotions:

(19)

Deshcharey re suga

Bidesh geli

Janamay janamay

Ma bap ke kandaili.

(Source: Hariprasad Dhobi, retired headmaster, Labac Tea Estate)

Here, its literal meaning is that the darling daughter is married off to a distant and foreign land, leaving the parents in tears forever.

The Santal and Munda tribes of the tea garden weave farewell songs *(kudi bidai songs)*. They worship their *Maranburu* (god) before the libation ceremony and then bid farewell to the bride. In one such song the mother sings that having

given birth to her daughter she guided her all along so far but now that she is grown up and is married off she has to tread a new and unknown path on her own:

(20)

Nudung duarere biding dare

Bidire bidanta bayemele liding

Hare chale beti langai napung

Janam karam beti

Parer duwar janam karam

Parer duwar.

(Source: Arati Santal, a worker of Koomber Tea Estate)

The Christians of the tea garden also sing marriage songs such as:

(21)

Alisarer khuja gali

Issac lage kannya

Nuwa nagare kunwa kinare

Palai kannya.

(Source: Pradip Aind, a worker of Koomber Tea Estate)

Its literal meaning is that Elizar went in search of a bride for Issac. The maiden was standing by a well and as soon as she spied the boy's comrade she escaped from there.

Death and Funeral Songs

Death and funeral songs have special significance among the tea folks. Such songs are sung throughout nights and days for about a month. The songs are sung to invoke the spirits of ancestors (*Bonga*) and the messenger (*godet*) is asked to inform the village headman (*Majhi*) and the priest (*Naike*) about the death. He is also entrusted to call upon the villagers (*duse duse*):

(1)

Duse duse laya aipe

Atu dosh laye aipe

Kora khon udungketa

Tala kulire dohakeda ai

Haire! Haire! Baba bachare

Udung chalaonai

(Source: Arati Santal, a worker in Nisthal Tea Garden, an out garden of Koomber Tea Estate).

The meaning is that "Inform the people and ask them to come in groups of ten take out the dead body and place it on a bed (*parkhom*). Take the dead body to a three lanes' meeting point. Oh, save us! Help us! We did not even know when he died." It can be observed that the language used in the song is not purely Santali. There is a mixture of Sadri language also.

The Burdwani folks of Kathal Tea Garden sing the following song:

(2)

Kay katilo jharer bash

Kay pakailo dori

Charjone te kandelaiya

Bolche Hari! Hari!

(Source: Bharat Tanti, a worker of Kathal Tea Garden, Hailakandi.)

This song shows the solidarity of the folks in times of tragedy. How they come together on all occasions. On death of a villager they gather and cut bamboos (*jharer bash*) to make a bier *(charpoy)*, for the dead, bringing in ropes to tie the body and then four men lift it up on their shoulders (*Charjone te kandelaiya*) and take it to the graveyard *(shashan)* for the last rites,chanting the name of God (*Hari*).

The tea folks of Barak Valley celebrate festivals like Karam Puja, Holi, and Tusu Puja, Kali Puja, Durga Puja, Manasa Puja, Mangala Puja, Chat Puja, Saraswati Puja, Sankranti, Diwali, Christmas, Easter, Id, and Moharram etc. They have their own songs for all these festivals.

Karam Puja Songs

Karam Puja is also known as *Jayowa Parab* (2002) is held in the month of August – September (*Bhado/Bhadro*). Karam is actually the spring dance of the Gonds, Mirza, Kols, and Oraons of the tea gardens. A branch of Sal tree (*Shorea Robusta*) which is called as *Kalma dal* is wrapped up in a new cloth and placed on an altar (*bedi*) which is decorated with various flowers and leaves. The Sal is considered to a sacred tree by the tribals who consider it to be the home of spirits and build their shrines under its shade.It is worshipped by childless couples for offsprings. During Karam Puja the tree is worshipped by the priest and the glorious story of Karam Dharam is narrated, followed by drinks, and Jhumur dance is performed by the young boys and girls in unison throughout the night. Finally, Karam deity is immersed in a stream, river or pond. The Karam song cycle is expressed through the following songs:

(1)

Telighare teli

Diya ghare bati

Hamar shasur jaoli

Charan shel o shaki dhoni dhoni.

(Pasi Mirda, a worker of Labac Tea Estate)

(2)

Matike madal

Pitoleke jhaire

Jhanike jhanike madal baje

Jhonike madal baje

Baje madal baje.

Hai mai jhenar menar hai

Matike madal

Dada leley madal

Bhaiya leley jhaje

Didi leley apano singar

Sato karam katey

Sato gopini seva kare

Dadago dada karam kati dey

Bhoji o bhoji dala buni dey

Harona leley maiya

Galoana leley

Leley gaile tera singar

Sabke piya har jote gail

Harona leley

Jhamke madal baje

Baje madal baje.

(Source: Sheela Thapa, retired worker and singer, Koomber Tea Garden).

Through the song the whole family is asked to join in the rituals of Karam Puja .The elder brother*(dada)* is asked to take the drum made of clay*(madal)* the younger brother *(bhaiya)* is asked to take the *(jhajey)*,the sister to deck up and get ready to cut the branch of Karam tree along with the seven votaries.The elder brother is requested to cut the Karam branch (*Dadago dada karam kati dey*).

The sister –in-law is asked to make a bamboo tray *(dala)* the mother is asked to take her necklace and thus the whole family joins in the celebration. The men have left with their plough to plant the Karam sapling.

The very thought of Karam Puja creates a kind of nostalgia in the minds of married women. The following songs reflect such feelings:

(3)

Pahere porbote maina

Kore ana guna re

Pahariar maina

Boilya diyo go maina

Najabo hamire

Karam ka diney

Haire! O haire! Hai!

Nadhekle prasna jai

Eheijey dinwa

Me kemne dikheya re

Mor asha tuti golo

Karam ke diney.

(Source: Mina Kondu, a worker from Barsangan Tea Garden)

Here, a married woman had seen the birds singing and flying over the hill top, instantly she felt as though the birds were conveying message of Karam Puja, back in her parents' home. Thus, she asked the birds to convey her parents that she would not be able to visit them during Karam Puja, although in her heart she was nostalgic and depressed.

(4)

Badhoke Ekadashi,

Karma ke rate re;

Sabey gopin khelto

Jhumri hai! re! hai!

Hathe lilo gamcha

Khandhe lilo maduli

Sabey gopin nachey

Ghuri pheri hai! re! hai!..

Ankhrai baje banshi

Koyeler muchki hashi

Gopin sabey holo hula huli

Bhadoke ekadashi

Karama ke rate re,

Hathete kangan churi go

Payete nupur go

Thumuki thumuki chale Radharani

Chokhey kajal mukhey hashi

Ke boli bo hai !re!hai.

Khupai achey genda phul

Nache Radharani go.

(Source: Binod Mirda, a worker from Labac Tea Estate).

Here, both the men and women join in the song. The women sing and dance Jhumur to celebrate Karam Puja. They deck themselves up with bangles (*kangan churi*), anklets (*nupur*), and eye make up (*kohl*) and adorn flowers in their hairs (*Khupai achey genda phul*).Men beat the drums rhythmically keeping pace with the women dancing in unison.

The following is another song which establishes the man and nature continuum:

(5)

Gojomati harpare

Chalo akhra khori

Jhumoro, Jhumoro bajey

Gajomotir hargo

Jhumoro, Jhumoro bajey

Gathiya debo hargo

Shakhi dhonike hamargo

Bujai debo gojomati hargo

Jhumoro Jhumoro bajey

Gojomati hargo.

(Source: Annapurna Devi, wife of AshokVerma,)

The women of the tea gardens live in the midst of nature and thus love to deck themselves up with natural flowers at the time of festivities especially during Karma Puja keeping in line with nature in her varied form, hue and colour.This is reflected in the above song.

(6)

Gache ke guwa didi

Latke pan re

Kaison mitha lage didi

Pakan pan.

Chutomuto marich gach

Koto jatn koribo bolo

Deogo Thakur

Didi kakey Sango Koribey

He! he! he!

(Source: Annapurna Devi, wife of AshokVerma who hails from Lalamukh tea garden)

Unmarried girls pray to the Karam to give them worthy husband and married women seek for a boon to beget a child. In the above song the younger sister teases the elder one. She asks her sister to make offerings of betel leaves *(pan)* and nuts *(guwa)* to the Karam God *(thakur)* so that she might be blessed with a life partner.

In Karam Puja the flower of cucurbitaceous plant *(jhinga phul)* is used and many songs are woven around it such as the following:

(7)

Jhinga phul shari shari

Gathiche bonomali

Bodhutu kahar bari

Ashbis tui amar bari

(Arati Phulmali, a worker from Silkuri Tea Estate)

A special Karam *Sanmilan* (conference) was organized by the tea garden people of Barak Valley for the first time in Dolu tea garden on the 8th September 2011. On this occasion Jhumur was performed by troupes hailing from different tea gardens of Barak Valley and one of the troupes sang the following:

(8)

Dharam Karam chilo humgo bhanga ghorey

Aaj Karam ailo Dolu cha baganey re.

(Source: A performing troupe during Karam Puja in Dolu Tea Estate).

The above song tells us that Karam Puja has become a community celebration with the conference held at Dolu Tea Estate where the people from different tea gardens met together to celebrate Karam Puja in a grand manner unlike individual celebration.

Holi Songs

Fagua/ Holi is another festival of celebration amongst the tea garden folks of Barak Valley. Holi is a spring festival celebrated on the day of full moon *(purnima)* in the month of February-March (*Falgun*). Preparations start one month ahead of Holi. The Santals, Orangs and the Mundas used to organize hunting and share the games caught amongst them.Nowadays, because of the government laws they have stopped the expedition.Drenched in rice beer and smeared with colours, the folk express solidarity amongst themselves while

performing Stick Dance *(Kathi Nach)* and singing with an animated spirit of joy and simplicity. The following is such a song:

(1)

Nacho re Anjana

Nacho re Kalpana

Hathe te lathi baje

Paye te napure baje

Mathe te mayuro pankhi

Gale bono mala.

(Source: Arun Tanti, a worker from Kathal Tea Garden, Hailakandi)

They often sing songs in honour of Sri Krishna, Radhika or Ramchandra:

(2)

Kadam daley bosha re Shyam

Ag dale bosha re Kukil

Kadam daley bosha re Shyam

Bhangilo re pireter dal

Aie jiboner asha re Shyam

Basho nai basuri naiba

Saral basher aga re Shyam

Bina phuke baje re bashi

Bole Radha Radha re Shyam

Kadam daley boshe re Shyam.

(Source: Arun Tanti, a worker from Kathal Tea Garden, Hailakandi)

The song is expression of romance between Radha and Krishna.The men and women of all age groups dance together full of mirth and gaiety steeped in romance. Radha is believed to be supreme amongst women because of her feminine traits and this song relates to social control as the songs points out that

all women of the society are expected to be loving, caring and devoted to their husbands like Radha. *Bole Radha Radha re Shyam,* (Shyam sings Radha, Radha) implies that only if women are faithful and loving they will get reciprocal love from their consorts like Shyam (Krishna).

Tusu Songs

Tusu is related to harvesting of crops and is celebrated after the harvesting is over. As such it may be referred to as thanks-giving ceremony. It is celebrated mostly in Bankura, Malbhumi, Manbhu and Borjura regions of West Bengal. It is also celebrated in almost all the tea gardens of Brahmaputra and Barak Valley of Assam.Tusu is a folk deity. Its Puja is performed in the month of December - January. The final immersion of Tusu-Mata takes place on 14th January (*Posh Sankranti*). The celebration continues for a month. It is performed by the women folks.It is also an occasion for the married daughters to visit their parents. But as usual the situation becomes conflicting when the in-laws do not allow the daughter-in-laws to visit her parents. Such conflict is explicit in the following Tusu song:

(1)

Ekti amar sadher Tusu

Mon bazare shashur ghar

Pakar upore ghare raikhia

Palai ailo baper ghar

Palai aili bhaloi karli

Thakbo beti ghar kori

Jamai aile lagbo jhogra

Manbona toke liye jaite.

(Source: Shanti Mal, a worker, Labac Tea Estate).

Here, the mother is supporting her daughter who has come to her parents' home to attend Tusu Puja without the permission of her mother- in-law. She is willing to pick up a quarrel with her son-in-law if and when he comes to take her

daughter back. Tusu is venerated and invoked by the tea folks through their various song compositions such as:

(2)

Tusu ma ke ante jabo

Chandan kather choudaley

Jadi Tusu daya koro

Karbo sunar mandire.

A small palanquin *(choudola)* is made out of sandal wood *(chandan kat),* in which the diety is placed for worshipping.The devotees pray to Tusu to bless them with riches so that they can make a golden *(sunar)* temple *(mandir)* for her. Traditionally, palanquins were made of sandalwood. At present sandal wood is expensive. So, they use bamboo or ordinary wood for it. It is decorated with colourful papers and flowers and following the tradition they add a small piece of sandal wood.

Tusu invocation is varied and full of rites and rituals and the propitiation is done at dusk. The following is a song pertaining to invocation:

(3)

Sanch dilam salita dilam

Sargey dilam bati

Sancher bela sanch salita

Sokal belai muruli

Ai muruli ke dekh mago

Jar ghare Bhagobati

Thali thali jelebi khaja

Sital diye ma batasha

Ake ake Sandhya loiyo Ma

Lakkhi Saraswati.

(Source: Lolita Mal, a worker from Silcoorie Tea Estate)

Ake ake sandhya loiyo ma Lakkhi, Saraswati, (One by one, take the offerings at dusk, Lakshmi (Goddess of Wealth) and Saraswati (Goddess of Knowledge). According to the Hindu mythology, Lakshmi and Saraswati are the two daughters of *Shiva* and *Parvati* (Bhogobati). Sujit Choudhury has identified Lakshmi as a Hindu female deity of wealth worshipped all over the country. She is believed to have close association with corn (Choudhury 1996 p138). Saraswati is a female deity of knowledge. The Hindus light lamps and give offerings to the deities in the evening (*sandhya)* as a thanks-giving gesture for guiding them with knowledge (by Saraswati) and providing them with their daily requirements (by Lakshmi) and sing doxologies.

The girls often go from door to door, collecting flowers, fruits and money. They even take the opportunity to visit the bungalows of tea garden managers and sing songs:

(4)

Asho mago hridoy mandirey

Saheb dilo aigan baigan

Memey dilo phuler bagan

Phul tulo phul tulo Tusu

Bachia tulo bhabore

Bina shutar har gathechi

Debo Tusur goley re

Phul tulilam dal bhangilum

Daler bhitore khanjori

Khanjorir bhitore dekho

Sri Radhika sundari

(Source: Rita Mala, ASHA worker, Silcoorie Tea Estate)

(5)

Boro boner lota pata

Chuto boner shal pata

Kun bone haraley Tusu

Shonar bandha lal chata

Shaluk dater ghar tullam

Ghar kore lekar pekar

Char dhare char dhutura phul

Dhare dhare genda phul.

(Source: Rita Mala, ASHA worker, Silcoorie Tea Estate)

The Tusu songs are not only songs of veneration and worship but they rather reflect diverse spirits and thoughts. In the tea gardens poverty haunts every home, yet, one can find the spirit of selfishness and competition amongst them:

(6)

Amader Tusu muri bhajey

Sakha jhol mol kore go

Toder Tusu bhai batori

Achal patey khuja go.

(Source: Rita Mala, ASHA worker, Silcoorie Tea Estate)

The literal meaning of the above composition is: "Our Tusu is frying rice, and her conch shell bangle *(sakha)* is glittering all over but your Tusu is dependent on her brother and she begs with the end portion of her saree (*anchal*) spread as begging plate".

Again, the poor tea garden people have to sacrifice a lot or borrow money in order to celebrate these festivals, especially Tusu, which continue for a month. Child marriage is common amongst the tea garden workers. After marriage when the young married girls visit their parents, especially during Tusu Puja, they play

games on the sand. In one of the Tusu songs the girl's friends are asking her to be careful, so that her bangle *(sankha)* does not break, or else her poor parents would have to buy her another pair of *sankha*, before going back to her in-laws, which they cannot afford. *Sankha* is worn by a Hindu married woman.Thus they sing:

(7)

Balu te khelona Tusu

Sankha bhangey jabey

Tuma Ma Baba Obhagini

Sankha kuthai pabey.

(Source: Lolita Mala, a folksinger and worker of Silcoorie Tea Estate).

Relationship in a family is not pleasant always, especially when the family is a reconstituted one. The strain and tension between the step-mother and step-children is of a complex nature.This strained and bitter (*teeta*) relationship is often compared to the bitterness of the *neem* leaves. Such relationship is reflected in the following Tusu songs amongst the tea folks:

(8)

Bok dhola bokini dhola

Aro dhola achey

Takey korte adhin dhola

Tusu mayer saree

Neem teeta kuchila teeta

Aro teeta achey

Takey kor te adhin teeta

Shat mayer ganjana.

(Source: Rita Mal, Silcoorie Tea Estate).

After a month long veneration and worship the Tusu idol is immersed in the river or pond. A huge procession is taken out and the immersion ceremony is carried out amidst tears. The Tusu *bidai* (farewell) songs relate that the Tusu idol is immersed in the water, for it is believed that she (Tusu) returns to her in-laws house which is under water. The following song expresses this:

(9)

Atodin rakhilam ma ke dudh kola diya

Jaibar samay nithur ma go

Amai gelay chariya

Osongoti param gati

Jalay holay jalay khelo

Jalay tumar kay achey

Monete bhabiyia dekho

Jale shasur ghar achey

Bashe bashe cholay jabee

Phire na ashbee...

(Source: Rita Mal, Silcoorie Tea Estate)

Drinking of country liquor or rice beer is common among the tea communities and very often they admit this through songs *(Modh binu ho didi, rahite na pari).* I cannot stay without wine is expressed in the following song:

(10)

Kacha chana

Ujane te bhari

Modh binu ho didi

Rohite na pari.

They love to drink, dance, sing and make merry with the whole family. So, when the mother-in-law abuses her daughter-in-law and asks her to leave the

house to go away in a train *(reler garite)*, the daughter-in-law retorts that she would be happy to leave but she would remember her in-laws when she drinks (*moder batite*). The introduction of railway created great interest amongst the tea garden people. Thus they often refer to it in their songs. A song of the conversation between the two runs thus:

(11)

Mother-in-law

Ja cholay ja reler garite

Toke marbo jharer bash katey

Daughter-in-law

Dompaili boromojate

Toder bhulbo na go moder batite

(Source: Ratna Mal, a worker from Silcoorie Tea Estate)

Song glorifying Shiva

Songs in honour of Shiva are sung by the tea folks during Shiva Puja and they also recite Kirtans (narration of the god's glories).Worshipping of Shiva is a pan –Hindu tradition. Shiva is depicted with a trident in his right hand, a snake as garland around his neck and mounted on a bull. The following is the song pertaining to such a description:

Anari mata samjho anari mata samjho

Hamare Bhole Baba ko anari mata samjho

Hamare Bhole Baba ke Hathewa me trishul

Trishul ke dekhi ke sikari mat samjho

Hamare Bhole Baba ko anari mat samjho

Hamare Bhole baba ke galwe me sapwa

Sapwa dekhi ke saperi mata samjho

Hamare Bhole Baba ko anari mato samjho

Hamare Bhole Baba ke sangwa me Basha

Basha dekhi ke bepari mata samjho

Hamare Bhole Baba ke anari mata samjho

Hamare Bhole Baba ke hathwa me Damru

Dhamru ke dheki madari mata samjho

Hamare Bhole Baba ke anari mata samjho

(Source: Shiv Kumar, Borakhai tea garden , circulation manager in Prena Bharati)

Songs in honour of Baram Baba

Baram Baba, was the son of a Brahmin who had come to the Silcoorie Tea Estate as a small boy, with the priests who were invited by the tea garden people for performing the various rites and rituals. Barambaba was known as Langhtu Baba, he was very much spiritual and often engrossed himself in deep meditation. He witnessed the atrocities meted out by the colonists to the tea garden workers and approached the garden management to resolve the conflicts and be considerate to them. The Manager humiliated and abused him considering him to be a small boy. Langhtu Baba could not accept such a treatment and on returning back sat down under a peepal tree and in deep meditation attained salvation (Samadhi). The people of the tea gardens in and around Silcoorie became a witness to numerous miracles and whenever they prayed to the spirit of the Baba their wishes were fulfilled and thus they became his devotees and prayers were offered under the peepal tree. With the passage of time the tree became so big that it blocked the main road to Durgakona and the people were afraid to cut the branches and clear the way. Ultimately they took an oath to offer 50kgs of Ladoo (round dry sweet) to appease the soul but, the day before the

offering a priest had a dream that only ladoos were not sufficient and that a homa (sacrificial fire) should be performed. Accordingly, the sacrifice was organized behind the peepal tree but, the fire could not be lit and suddenly the priest could hear a divine voice asking him to perform the rituals in front side of the tree. He obeyed and the fire was lit and the homa was performed. The place is considered to be holy even to this day and people from many places visit the temple near Silcoorie. A Devi temple, a Hanuman temple and a Lakshmi –Narayan temple has been set up and a fair (mela) is held every year in the month of Novenber. Some people with distinction namely; Late Indira Gandhi, the ex- Prime Minister of India, Pranab Mukherjee, the ex- finance Minister of India and many other ministers of Assam visited the Bharam Baba temple and offered their prayers.The people of the area sing songs in his honour prayers . The following is one such songs:

Silcoorie Barambaba ke mandirya

Bara suhawan lagela

Ke Barambaba ke

Chalo na darbar Barambaba ke

Har sal Kartik Purnima me

Baba ke melwa lagela

Shrada bhakti se lakho bhakta

Ake jalwa charhwela

Mahima aprampar Baba ke

Monokamna pura kar dela

Ke Barambaba ke

Chalo na darbar ke Bharambaba ke

Nar, nari ,bacho aur budha, melwa ghume awela.

Sadhu sant ke darshan pake akhiyia tripta hoi jawela

Borakhai ke Bhajan mandali raur Bhajaniya gawela

Ke Bharambaba ke

Chalana darbar Baramba

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

Manasa Puja Songs

The tea gardens are full of forests and jungles which are homes for deadly and poisonous snakes. Snake bite death is common amongst the tea garden workers. Hence, they try to appease the malevolent deity, *Manasa*, the Snake Goddess. Animals especially goats are sacrificed and snake charmers *(ojhas)* perform dances known as *Ojhanitya.* The *Ojhas* are believed to possess clairvoyant powers to revive a person bitten by snake.Songs are sung in praise of the goddess such as:

(1)

Borosadh roilo mor mone

Lal Jaba phul diba mar charane

Borosad roilo mor mone.

Ki achey, ki deboy mago

Ki achey amar

Gangar jal Tulsi diya hoi

Puja tumar

(Source: Gonit Phulmali, a Priest, Dewan Tea Estate)

The literal meaning of the song is: 'I have a desire to offer a red hibiscus flower *(lal jaba phul)* at the feet of the Mother Goddess as I have nothing else to offer'. Further, one knows from the song that the holy water of the river Ganges and the leaves of the basil (*Tulsi)* are essential for worshipping the deity.

(2)

Joler upore Behula

Bhelar upore Behula

Behular kulete mora pati

Joler upare Behula

(Source: Raju Bawri, a worker of Dewan Tea Estate)

Manasa is believed to reside in water. There is a myth that she revived Lakhindar's (Behula's husband) life. So, the story of Behula-Lakhindar is narrated during Manasa Puja:

(3)

Bisher jalate prano jai

Kali dio bisher chote prano beche jai

Prano priya arjo bujhi

(Source: Binod Mirdha, a traditional singer of Dewan Tea Estate)

(4)

Dekhete sundoro nari

Porona pater saree

Ghate pathey khuje berai

Koto hazar bari.

(Source: Manik Phulmali, a traditional singer of Dewan Tea Estate)

(All the Monasha Puja songs were collected from Dewan Tea Garden while the singers were singing before the deity).

Chaat Puja Songs

Chaat Puja is celebrated by the Bhojpuri community of different tea gardens of Barak Valley. It is performed by the women folk. The workers of Silcoorie, Bajrangpur, Arkatipore, Borakhai, Monacherra, Rukni, etc. observe

this festival in large numbers. The setting sun is worshipped by women standing in waist deep water in lakes, pond, rivers and vegetables, fruits, turmeric, milk and ghee is left in the water to float as an oblation. It presents a colorful sight with women walking up to the river bank in a large procession, wearing colourful clothes and bangles and the whole environment reverberates with songs. One such song is:

(1)

Kanch hi bash ke bahangiya

Banhigi lachkat jai

Bat se puchli Batoiha

Bahangi kekra ke jai

Tut a andhar haway re Batoiha

Bahangi chaat mai ke jai

Kanch hi bash ke Bhangiya

Bahangi lachakat jai

Bat se puchela Batoiha

Ukhiya kekara ke jai

Ka andhar haway re Batoiha

Ukhiya chaat mai ke jai

Kanch hi bash ke bahangiya

Bahangi lachkat jai

(Source: A few votaries of Chaat Puja who were singing while going down to the stream for the rituals at Borakhai Tea Garden).

In the above song women are enquiring the vendor as to where he is carrying the vegetables and fruits. The vendor, then, takes the name of each devotee separately and tells them that he is going to the house of the referred devotee to deliver goods for Chaat puja.

Human beings while trying to appease the Sun, forget that other creatures are also a part of nature and have equal right to survive in this world. The song below is full of angst and at the same time romantic. Here, a man uses his bow and arrow, which is believed to be the cultural symbol of the tea garden workers to shoot down, a male bird feasting on the ripe bananas. The female bird then cries her heart out and appeals to the Sun god to make her mate alive. Thus, the following song is a message to mankind to make space for all and give away meanness:

(2)

Kelawaje pharela ghawadse,

Uhpar suga mera rai (2)

Sugawake marbo dhanukse

Suga girihey muruchay (2)

Sugani je roweli biyogse

Aditya hoie na sahai

(Source: Purbi Kurmi, a worker in Borakhai Tea Estate).

Piriyia Songs

Piriyia is celebrated amongst the Bhojpuri community. It is practiced by the Bhojpuri group of people not exclusively in the tea gardens but also by those living in different parts of Barak Valley as well as through out the country.It is a ritual performed by the sisters, praying for a long and healthy life of their brothers.It also correlates with *Bhaifuta* of the Bengalis and Raksha Bandan practiced by Hindi speaking people of the country.She prays to deities; namely , Godhanbaba, Kali and Durga and sings songs invoking them to bless her brother in the following song:

(1)

Ham jodi janto Godhanbaba ihan

Lipi rakto gharke anganewa

Unkar pagiyia bhoroito

Launga Elachise

Ham jodi janto Godhanmai ihan

Lipi rakto gharke anganewa

Unke khoincha bhoroito

Launga Elachise

Ham jodi janto Kalimai ihan

Lipi rakto gharke anganewa

Unke khoincha bhoroito

Launga Elachise

Ham jodi janto Durgamai ihan

Lipi rakto gharke anganewa

Unke khoincha bhoroito

Launga Elachise

(2)

Soneke tharime jewona paraso

Jewat ke Ram pucho Suratiya

Koisan haun suna tohar Suratiya

Jira aison patri laung aison gamke

Ram dihale Suratiya Suraj joyton

Jhanjre geruwa me gangajal

Pani piyat ke beriya na

Ram puche Suratiya

Jira aisan patri

Laung aisan gamke Suraj ke joyton.

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

In the first song she sings about cleaning the mud-hut with cowdung and water *(lipi rakto)* which signifies the traditionality of the song, with urbanisation, people have started living in concrete houses; of course, in the case of the tea garden workers most of them are still residing in mud huts.The second song describes the different offerings made to Rama on a golden plate and the devotees imagine Rama accepting the offerings. At the same time they appreciate the divine qualities of Rama which is again compared to the radiant Sun.

Chandima's Song

Chandi is one of the incarnations of Durga and is worshipped by the Hindus. In Orissa there is a famous Chandi temple at Cuttack which is visited by hundreds of devotees. Devaki Tanti, a worker of Lalcherra Tea Garden of Hailakandi district who belongs to Oriya community sang the following song:

(1)

Jayo jayo Chandi

Tutiso mareley Mago

Jayo hogo Chandi

Bipada karoro Mago

Rakto hoyo khandi

Through the song she is hailing and praying to the Goddess to free them from pains and sorrows.

Sitala Puja Songs

Sitala is the goddess of diseases, especially small pox and chicken pox.In the tea gardens the people observe restrictions when anyone is attacked with such disease and abstain from taking spices, oil and non-vegetarian diet.They also offer prayers to the goddess to cure the sick and protect others in the village as reflected in this song:

(1)

Jungolo kati kati Sitalimai sahara banaweli

Tahi bicha ek maliya basaweli

Maliya ka putowa maiya garabe gumonwa

Sahara biche maike phulwo-na, laweli

Ap ke kasurwa map kara

Hota bhore ham layeeb

Sahara biche phulwa

(Source: Shiv Kumar, Borakhai Tea Garden, circulation manager of Prena Bharati, a Hindi newspaper from Silchar).

It is believed that the gardener's wife is the favourite devotee of the Sitala as she offers flowers to her.The above song conveys that the gardener's son is not as sincere as his mother, for he dwells in the city raised by cutting down the forests. The son does not offer flowers to the goddess and this makes her unhappy.Thus, the devotee apologises and promises to worship the goddess with flowers and prays for blessing from her. The song has a message for the young generation not to forget their tradition, even though some of them have moved to the urban areas.

(2)

Urte urte chirayee jale Kamadh deshwa

Liawa chirayee Sitalmaike Sandeshwa

Wohe Kamru deshwa me chandan ke deshwa

Tahi tare Sitalmai khele juwa sarwa.

(Source: Shiv Kumar, Borakhai Tea Garden, circulation manager of Prena Bharati, a Hindi newspaper from Silchar).

The literal meaning of the song as conveyed by the consultant is that *Sitalimai* lives in Kamat, the land full of sandalwood where on the street the Mother goddess is gambling *(khele juwa).* The song is really interesting as it throws light on the habit of the tea garden workers who, while away their time uselessly and indulge in gambling .This is an indirect way of justifying the bad habit of the people saying that even the gods gamble, so why not they?

Jhumur Songs

Jhumur belongs to irresistible class of music. There is reference to Jhumuri in *Padabali Sahitya* (Bhattacharjee1965) such as:

Jhumur gahiche Shyam bashi bajaiya

Jhumuri daduri bole

Jhumuri is meaningful and poetic which is sung by women folk. Asutosh Bhattacharjee (1965) referred to Jhumur as Santhali song.He also said that it was borrowed from "Kul jati". It is believed that Jhumur song originated from Mallarpur of Birbhum district where young women used to sing and dance Jhumur, visiting villages from January to mid - April and by Shivaratri they used to return back to Mallarpur. Often, they were invited to rich households to perform their dance (Mukhopadya 1999: 107-109).

Jhumur is performed by the tea garden folks of Barak Valley on almost every occasion. A lot of carnavalism is also involved in it. They express their joys and sorrows through the Jhumur songs and dances. Originally, Jhumur was performed only by women but nowadays even young boys join in.Jhumur is performed during marriages. The Jhumur songs are full of hilarity and jokes are cracked through these songs:

(1)

Pati ho pati

Arieya danti

Toke bolaike

Le jaibo

Tilake dati ho

Tila ke dati.

(Source: Rita Mala, an ASHA worker, Silcoorie Tea Estate)

Here, the young friends of the bride are teasing the groom.They are conveying that they would whisk away the husband to a hill top.

Jhumur is performed during Tusu Puja amidst joy and humourous songs. The following are few such songs of the occasion.

(2)

Tar ghare nai bason kusan

Ar baire dekai Amitabh Bachchan

(Source: Rita Mala, an ASHA worker, Silcoorie Tea Estate).

The literal meaning of the song is that there are no utensils *(bason)* in your house and outwardly you show off as though you are Amitabh Bacchan (The Hindi film actor). The field informer said that she was targeting the driver, Ansari, of Silcoorie Tea Estate.The song reflects on how the standard of living is measured in terms of material possession by the tea garden people and also throws light on the influence of media on the minds of the people. There are similar songs with reference to filmy heroes like:

(3)

Ghare nai noon baire Mithun

(Source: Rita Mala, an ASHA worker, Silcoorie Tea Estate).

Here, it means that being poor you do not have salt (noon) at home and outside you behave like Mithun (silver screen hero) or the rich.

(4)

Ghare nai benda baire Govinda

(Source: Shiv Kumar, Borakhai Tea Garden, circulation manager of Prena Bharati, a Hindi newspaper from Silchar).

The meaning is that you do not have a piece of wood to latch the door (*benda*) at home, yet, you behave like Govinda (silver screen hero).

(5)

Silcharete dike ailam

Kabuli belouse bachaiche

Jun chari re dekte jabey

Saheb batar koris na

(Source: Rita Mala, an ASHA worker, Silcoorie Tea Estate)

In this song the Saheb of the garden is being indicated. The Saheb is asked not to marry the girl with puffed-sleeved *(Kabuli)* blouse.The song also tells that these people visit the urban market (Silchar etc.) and, thus, get acquainted with new fashions.

(6)

Ek takar chana bhaja

Dak ghare chita bo

Je dekta jabey

Dhare kurai khawabo

(7)

Kala kala bolona

Kala jaley jaiyona

Kala jaley koto tumar chalona

Kala jalke hela karona

Ailo kala railo kar ghare

Kaliar mon bangheyo na.

(Source: Rita Mal, Silcoorie Tea Estate, all the above Jhumur songs)

(8)

Salgangar pathe jate

Suluko mare lo loke

Rajaro ghare jore re dumusa

Baje uchcha surra go.

(Source: Sheela Thapa, a folksinger, Koomber Tea Estate)

Salganga, is often visited by the Koomber tea folks Sometimes while crossing the houses of well to do people they could hear loud beating of drums *(dumusa)* and they make the following passing remarks when they sing Jhumur songs:

(9)

Boro dur se auale

Eko geeto gaonwali

Dekhi suni go didi

Mukhona lukaiha

Paner chun mukha ghashidiyia

Moro geeta jhoke lele age kano

Saiya boro dur se auale

Boro rijhe laglo gaya.

(Source: Sheela Thapa, a folksinger, Koomber Tea Estate)

The tea garden folks are conscious of their common identity spread across different tea villages of Barak Valley. In the above Jhumur song, a woman who has come from a distant village to participate in Jhumur is communicating with

her co-singer. She asks her friend not to turn away her face as they sing the same tune and hail from the same background *(eko geeta gaonwali).*

The poor lifestyle of the tea folks is reflected even in their Jhumur songs, the tea garden folks of Barak Valley are living from hand-to- mouth. Most of the days they survive on wild tubers and leaves especially Arum *(kachu shak)* growing wild, yet, they welcome guests even from Silchar *(Silcharer maherman)* open heartedly as reflected in the following song:

(10)

Kachushak, kachushak

Koto sijabo

Silcharer mahermanke

Koto bujabo.

Ailey bandhu bhaloi karle

Kachushak, kachushak

Kato sijabo

Silcharer maher manke

Kato bujabo

Boshay boshay katha korbo

Jurabo paran

Aile bandhu bhalai karle...

(Source: Sheela Thapa,a worker and traditional singer of Koomber Tea Estate)

Songs Reflecting Material Consciousness

Songs again relate history also Amalendu Bhattacharjee (2010) has discussed sufficiently how historical themes are extensively used in *Dhamail* songs of Barak valley. The introduction of railways, outbreak of malaria, *Swadeshi* movement, and water hyacinth inspired the folks of Barak Valley to compose songs. The tea garden folks are no exception to this as some of their songs reflects history such as:

(1)

Assam deshe amra borai sukha achey go

Assam deshay,

Diney suraj, raite chand

Alo kore cha bagan

Assam deshay.

Jodi bagan na gore to

Railghare na chalite!

Assam deshay.

(Source: Bijon Tanti, a school teacher of Dolu Tea Estate)

The tea people were intelligent enough to see that railways were introduced in Assam for the exportation of tea and, hence, the importance of tea gardens, this finds expression in the following song:

(2)

Dekho desowa me rail chalayee

Khabar puncheyee

Aisi akal lagayee phiringeyia

Dhuwa ke gari banayee

Panch kosh par station banowale

Tapar tar lagayee

Dekho desowa...

(Source: Budhu Bakti, a 62 yrs old man of Borakhai Tea Garden).

The song is an expression of awe at the intelligence of the Englishmen, who constructed vehicles emiting smoke and opened stations at every five steps with wires overhead.

The concept of *'mai-bap'* (sole benefactor) is unravelled through the following folk song by Bharat Tanti from Kathal tea garden:

(3)

Moni ma suni ma

Haire garebo deko,

Nirok jona rokho pankajo mukho,

Bhasigole bhobojole

Rakho karo mate,

Atanga na sano bana,

Na sono bhakta bedana,

Ada hei jibo mona

Key de bo dako?

Moni ma suni ma

Haire! garibo deko.

The researcher was told that this is a plea to the Sahibs, previously addressed as white Sahibs and presently the brown Sahibs, seeking sympathy and blessings. The *'moni ma suni ma'* is entreated to realize the plight of the devotees *(bhakta bedana)* and help them out from poverty and hunger *(garibo).*

Patriotic songs

The tea garden labourers were inspired by the great national freedom movement and many of them raised their voice against the British Raj. Many folk songs were created at that time such two songs are as follows:

(1)

Jagaran brata dhoro sabe bhai,

Shatru ashechey deshay,

Koroshan kare chhute asho,

Sab jagebe au rate trashe.

Here, the folks were giving a clarion call to all the men to keep fasts *(Jagaran brata)* and glisten *(Koroshan)* their swords to chase off the enemies *(shatru)*.

(2)

Jai Jago bandhu,

Jadu kula Hindu

Jaite bhujia Arjuna,

Sartore marotore,

Narshinga rupao,

Sastrebodito hirono kashipu

Jai jago bandhu,

Jadu kula Hindu,

Tratoyiajugore

Ravana shanghare,

Bibhishane dilo rajya bharo

Jai jago bandhu.

(Source: Bharat Tantia worker from Kathal Tea Garden, Hailakandi)

This song has a mythological essence. When asked, the singer reported that during the freedom movement they sang this song to inspire all men to free their country from the enemies just like Arjuna in the Mahabharat.

Songs of anguish

Pangs of separation of the labourers from their original homeland often find expression through folklores. Some of the indentured labourers of the different tea gardens of Cachar did go back to their native but they had to return dissatisfied when they saw that their land was grabbed away either by their relatives or the agents who brought them down to the gardens and all their belongings were lost. This created a mental conflict which often found expression

through their songs. There are songs in which they compare their fate with bitter gourd and the land of Assam with *asu pitte* (a long-tailed black bird) symbolizing craftiness and unreliability (Mahapatra 1992 p316).The following are few such songs tinged with bitterness and fear:

(1)

Amar mon bandhu kacha sunago,

Barir pathe kore anagona go,

Chor bole maria na tora go

Ami bideshe bhomora.

(Source: Krishna Tanti,a folksinger Kathal Tea Garden)

The above song is full of turmoil and conflicting dreams of home and near and dear ones. The singer pleas for love and compassion and says that his mind is as soft as molten gold *(kacha suna)* which becomes nostalgic when he remembers his homeland. He further entreats those around him not to torture him, for he is not a thief *(chor)* but just a foreign bee *(bideshe bhomora)*.A sense of identity crisis and anguished inner mind is laid bare before the world with a plea for justice and compassion.

(2)

Am gacha am nai,

Jhabdha kane maro hai,

Tumar deshay ami nai,

Akhe kane thare re

(Source: Bijon Tanti, a teacher and singer of traditional songs from Dolu Tea Estate)

Here, the singer is once again filled with angst and pain at the thought of mango trees back at his native. He then reminds himself that it is useless to strain his eyes to see his homeland, which he would never visit again.The following song expresses the monotony of their life:

(3)

Boy : Ah ! sundaro ke sundaro,

Madhu koro hey

ke sundaro.

Girl: Asho brohmora,

Madhu koro go

Ke Sundaro go

Jahapai doru tu,

Pani te kimero nai

Asho brohmaro madu koro go.

Boy: Keta pani, keta poko,

Jona nagala ghabiro.

Girl : Jaha pai doro tu

Pani re kumbir o nai,

Asho brohmoro madhu koro go.

(Source: Motilal Jena a worker from Bajrangpur Tea Estate)

Here, the boy spies a beauty on the other side of the river but are unable to cross the deep waters. The lady invites the lover to cross the river which is free from crocodiles and other water animals. The monotony and helplessness of the young people of the tea gardens is expressed through the folk song by Motilal Jena of Bajrangpur Tea Estate who is 87 years old.

Love Songs in Oriya

(1)

Deyorohaita goley kolikota

Derusoro sange dinonauchi

Bato charohe

(Source: Devaki Tanti, a worker of Lalcherra Tea Garden of Hailakandi)

The consultant said that the song is an expression of a love torn heart of a lover whose husband has gone to Kolkata while she is waiting anxiously for him.

The following Oriya song reflects on practice of polygyny (concurrent marriage of one man with two or more women) where the woman is miserable as her mother got her married to a man who was already married and she had to live with the other woman as a co- wife *(Sawatani)*.She questions her fate: God to whom have you given and what? *(Bidhata kare kidile):*

(2)

Mata moro ulokharigo

Bibha dile sawtani

Sawtani jala mokiyia sohibore

Bidhata kare kidila

(Source: Devaki Tanti, a worker of Lalcherra Tea Garden).

Game Songs

The following are their game songs:

(1)

Etalo betalo teler sisi lukalo

Tel hailo lal moniar khal

(Name of the game*:* *Bondhi*)

(2)

Etil bitil titil chor jhaka jhum

Kauke thum isme lage charkaudi

Rai room raj

(Name of the game: *Luko chori*)

(3)

Kana machi kana machi bhow bhow

Jare pau tare chuaw

(Name of the game: *Kanamachi*)

(Source: Children from Dumurghat School)

Songs Reflecting the British Oppression and Exploitation

The tea garden workers were lured and trapped by agents known as Arkatis and brought down to Assam where they were subjected to unfair and inhuman treatment which left an indelible scar in their minds, which are given a vent, at times, through songs, questioning and critising the dishonesty of the Arkatis and preserved it as a record. In the following song the Arkatis have been referred to as *'Shyam'*. The language in the following song sounds that the workers from Bengal question the Arkatis, as to why they have been cheated—

(1)

Ki nitur Shyam

Phaki diya anili Assam.

(Source: Bijon Tanti, a teacher and singer of traditional songs from Dolu Tea Estate).

(Hard hearted Shyam you have cheated us and brought us down to Assam)

(2)

Sardar boley kam kam

Babu boley dhari ann.

Saheb boley libo piter cham.

Hai Joduram phaki diyia

Pathaili Assam.

(Source: Phula Tanti, a worker from Kathal Tea Garden)

The oral songs are the Magnus opuses which reflect the oppressive and exploitative culture of the colonists. In *'Chal Mini Assam Jabo'* the following lines expose the notorious activities of the Babus and power politics of the colonists:

(3)

Bahar ki bahar maja bagi

Ton ton ton bajay

Babura sahay Tillay jaai

Ek dui teen char koray kromosho bajiyia jaai

Maiyia lokey pata tulay

Purush lukey kodal mara.

Dhola ghora tilai gurite jaai

Tilar uppar Babu Baisa,

Maiyia lukey ghiriyia boisey

.Sahosro gopini majhe.

(Source: Das 2009. *Sthan Nam*)

The above songs reflect on the licentious character of the supervisors (*Tilla Babus*) who used to, while away their time be with the girls *(maiyia lukey)* of the tea gardens.

Songs Figuring Identity Crisis

Songs reflect lived experiences; serving a cord to pull in the severed units seeking identity. "Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (Bhabha 1994 p 63). The diasporic souls cry and clamour together with a sense of shared feelings. Colonists have moved out of the land but the colonial pangs still torture the minds and the wounds in the heart is further acerbated and allowed to fester by the Indian *Sahebs* (*mai-baps at home*). The post-colonial literature is replete with

themes of marginal existence.The tea folks unburden their turmoil through their songs. But is there a sincere listener? The pangs of separation are clear and echoes everywhere when they sing:

(1)

Kun deshgo biyadili morey

Gache ore pata nahi lare

Aam pata nare chore

Mata pita go mone porey

Kun deshgo baba biyadili morey.

(Source: Bijon Tanti, a teacher and singer of traditional songs from Dolu Tea Estate).The singer expresses pangs of separation from her natal family. She feels suffocated and breathless in this strange land and remembers her parents. At heart she questions them as to why they got her married off to this land.

They are not only estranged from their parental habitat, they are marginalized by the people of the land (Assam) where they have been residing and toiling for more than 170 years. They can neither identify themselves with the Bengalis nor with the Assamese and thus they sing:

(2)

Na hailam Assami

Na hailam Bangali

Kapale chilo hamder

Hoilam bagani.

(Source: Bijon Tanti, a teacher and singer of traditional songs from Dolu Tea Estate).

Socio-Economic Vulnerability

The tea garden managers referred to as *Moni ma suni ma* (mai-bap) meaning father and mother (Chatterjee 2001:120) are often entreated to realize their plight and have pity on them as found in the following:

(1)

Moni ma suni ma

Haire garibo deko

Bhasigole bhabojole

Garibo deko.

(Source: Bharat Tanti a worker from Kathal Tea Garden)

The vast canvas of their life, the socio-economic condition, the cultural set-up, the political construct, the frustration and stagnation reflects in the numerous folk songs of the tea gardens of Barak Valley:

(2)

Pahi pahi pata tori

Tokoree bharai

Haire! Haire! Haire! Hai!

Ae shaki kiye ki upay

Ek ti koli duite pat

Tai to pater bhat

Do takar bazaar kore bakey ani lau pani

Haradin patta tore hapte hi to pai

Babuder chenapina eschool pare jaire

Moder chela poka biche jai

(Source: www.utube.com/Tribal Folksong of Tea Garden Workers, Sylhet-Assam region.)

The literal meaning of the song is that the tea garden women pick tender leaves to fill their baskets, for that is their earning with which they buy their daily requirements as well as country liquor.Their children are employed to remove

insects from the plants whereas the children of the Babus go to school. The song portrays the social, cultural life, the frustration, depression and pathetic mind set of the tea garden women workers and children. It is the women who labour from morning till late night, doing hard, paid and unpaid family work. Fustration and disappoinment is expressed through words: *"Haire, Hai"* (Alas).The significance of two tea leaves and a bud in providing them with food is explicit in the lines: *Ek ti koli duiti pat, tai ta patar bhat.* Stereotyped nature of work is signified by *Haradin Patta tore* (Whole day we pluck leaves). The tea garden workers get weekly wages (*Hapta hi to pai*) .This has changed a little, for the tea garden workers of Barak Valley are paid an incentive of five rupees if they work for all the six days a week although such incentive is nominal compared to the inflation in the market. *Do takar bazaar kori baki ani laupani* (Two rupees is spent for buying essentials and the rest of the money is spent on drinks).This also reflects on their culture of drinking alcohol. They relent that their children spend their time killing the insects in the tea bushes for which their children were given a minimal of two rupees whereas the children of the Babus go to school for education (*Babuder chenapina eschool porey jaire, moder chena pokka bias jaire).*This reflects on the center-periphery dichotomy in the tea garden social structure. Ofcourse the situation has changed a lot for the children after the introduction of compulsory education through the Sarvasikha Mission.

The life style of women folk is shown in following song:

(3)

Haire baganer ma bahein

Mathei choppi paye chappal

Rakhish shara din

Hai re baganer ma bahein

Roudhey jharey kam karish

Larka bachher jibon ghorish

Ai bhabe jai toder din

Hai re baganer ma bahein

Hatur upar kaporpindish

Goli goli pati tulish

Sansar jala boroei je kathin

Haire baganer ma bahein .

(Source: Bijon Tanti, a teacher and singer of traditional songs from Dolu Tea Estate).

The song reflects on the life style of the women folks of the tea gardens. They carry cane flat hats covering their heads and wear simple chapels and sarees high above the knees, while plucking leaves the whole day in the scorching sun.They take care of their children and bear all the pains. The following song expresses the nature of their initial work in the plantation:

(4)

Kudal mara boro kathin kam

Re dhaniram, kudal mara boro kathin kam

Sardar bole kam kar

Babu bole dhori aan

Saheb bole libo pither cham

Re dhaniram, Kudal mara boro kathin

(Source: Arun Kurmia worker from Derby Tea Estate)

Assam was full of forests before the introduction of the tea industry and the inducted labour forces were employed to clear the forest which was a hazardous task for them.Over and above they were threatened by the owners on one side and the supervisors on the other who kept strict vigilance over them. The above song is an outlet to such duress at their work place.

Poverty, frustration and unhappiness are explicit in the following song:

(5)

Amar sadne mitelo

Asha na purilo,

Sakole phuria jai ma,

Aie pritibhi koiu baloto bashena

Aie pritibhir kiou bashite janena

Jathai accha bhalo basha basi

Sethai pran jate chay ma

Pather jamin pore roi che ma

Rai pata ar dhonia,

Ami morley korba kanna kati

Ghar thekay bahir korle

Dibey mago gobor chita,

Keokatbe jharer bash,

Keo ba pakai dori,

Char jonete loyia bolbe,

Hari ! Hari !

Roibe re tor sadar dokandari !

(Source: Bharat Tanti, a worker from Kathal Tea Garden)

Here, the song expresses the dismal condition of life, the cruel fate and stark poverty which the singer has experienced during his life time and laments that he would meet his death with unfulfilled desire at heart. After death all the rites and formalities would be carried out and he would leave the world as poor as he had lived.

Promotional Songs and the Folk Creativity

Various developmental measures have been taken up by the Government and a few developmental activities by the W.H.O such as polio eradication

program and Sarvasiksha by Government of India has been highlighted in the oral composition of the tea garden folks which also helped in creating awareness amongst the villagers. These are:

(1)

Polio ko na kareo hela

Duputa jiban ke

Sundar korela.

(Source: Bijon Tanti, a teacher from Dolu Tea Estate)

The consultant, Bijon Tanti, said that he received an award of Rs. 250 from the Shadow Club after he composed the above song for the Polio Publicity Campaign in 2005.

(2)

Chalo shakhi patshala te jabo

Amra hatey dhare

Hathey dhorey khela kori

Patsala te jaibo chali

Chalo shakhi patshala te jabo.

(Source: Bijon Tanti, a teacher from Dolu Tea Estate)

The literal meaning is, Come friends lets go to the lower primary school *(patshala)* holding on to each others hands and playing games together.

To sum up, the materials of the songs provide adequate historical, socio-economic and cultural contents which form a basis for their study in sociological context. Reference to mythological figures is common in the songs of caste Hindus of the tea gardens. The songs collected and analysed relate to social control, especially children and women. Women give expression to their resentment and unhappiness, and share every bit of joy and celebration through songs which are sung during Karma Puja,Tusu Puja, Durga Puja,Chhat Puja,Manasa Puja, etc.acompanied by musical instruments and dance.The songs

invoke to the deities,glorify their power and greatness and qualities.Every occasion involve songs whether birth, marriage or death and these songs narrate the rites and rituals elaborately.The involvement and contributions of people from different walks of life in community functions- the brahmins, barbers, washermen, the priests,the musicians,the friends and kinsmen are subjects of the songs which bring out the solidarity amongst the folks.The items used for rituals,the food habits,their ornaments the gifts every little thing with which they are acquainted are gists of their songs.Humour and jokes are displayed through songs especially Tusu and Jhumur songs that target everyone.Crude and licentious compositions are taken for granted and it does not hurt anyone. The correlation between nature and the people of the tea gardens is unquestionable.The better part of their lives is spent in harmony with nature. It is obvious that elements of nature are components of their songs. The songs and dances of the tea garden folks throw light on communally structured group of people hailing from different states of the country reorganized in a natural setting embracing life with its varied experiences and giving vent to their emotions and thoughts.The songs are the treasures acquired from the past and closely connected with traditional festivities and rituals. The rapid socio-economic changes do have some impact on the songs but as far as possible they maintain consistency and no shocking changes take place, for these are sacred texts of their forefathers aswell as they are away from the forces of swift change.Of course, it may be mentioned here that some songs which are not directly connected with the rites and rituals but are consciously designed for fun and merriment, eg, "there are no utensils *(bason)* in your house and outwardly you show off as though you are Amitabh Bacchan" and "you do not have a piece of wood to latch the door (*benda*) at home, and yet, you behave like Govinda" reflects on the effects of change and modernity in lives of the tea garden folks along with the others.Traditional cultural resources like ritual songs and dances are sanctified treasures of a community whether it is of the tea garden workers, the other groups of people living within Barak Valley, the state of Assam or India which are still preserved and passed on orally.The better section of urban people might have forgotten and some are not acquainted with such songs, yet,during religious

ceremonies and festivals they also invite invite old people and relatives from villages or professional singers of traditional songs, especially during marriages.Some of them even play recorded songs on such occasions.The government and non-government organisations also use the tea garden folk tone and language *(Sadri)* for promoting national and state sponsored programmes in the tea villages. They express their unhappiness through songs like:

Na hailam Assami

Na hailam Bangali

Kapala chilo hamder

Hoilam bagani.

Inspite of the changes the core culture which involve religious and community rites and rituals has not changed in any massive manner. Cultural change is a sizeable part of change. Human beings are dynamic and get tired of old values, ideals or culture thus, bring about modifications with passage of time resulting into social changes. With changes in the physical environment man changes his style of living to adapt to new environment. Acculturation, accommodation and adaptation to other cultures lead to changes. Economic growth, development and educational advancement also bring social changes in the outlook, language, manners and lifestyle of a society which reflects in their culture and literature. The oral literature of the tea garden people reflects the changes which have taken place in their culture and lives. Folk songs of the tea garden people of Barak Valley of colonial period were full of unpleasant expressions delineating hunger, poverty, alienation and anger towards imperialism. Use of words like *garibo* (poverty), *abagini* (poverty stricken), *nitur* (inhuman), *bideshi* (alien), *haire hai!* (Alas!), *phaki diya* (cheating) are glaring evidences which show how the culture of the people was affected by the imperial process. Language evolves with social attitudes and experiences. The tea garden folks use certain terminology to demean, diminish, uplift or embrace a situation, person or event through their folk literature. The Jhumur songs reflect on their acquaintance with the modern world. Name of popular actor; viz, Amitabh Bachchan throws light on their knowledge of the Hindi films. With improved

communication, it has become possible to visit the towns which are full of attraction for the folks of tea villages. The mention of dress names of the town people (Kabuli blouse) in their composition gives them an added air. Their folk tales now include stories of school days, activities of the teachers and the importance of education. The children and youths are not bothered about colonial rule as they were not the direct sufferer and neither they nor their parents have time to relate the past. They are more concerned with the present and sing songs like *Chalo shaki patshala te jabo* (Come friend let's go to school), *Assam desha amra boro shuka acche go* (We are very happy here in the land of Assam). On the other hand, there are others who have a different experience of identity crisis and marginalization, for they are neither accepted as Bengali nor Assamese in the land, they are considered as Bagani even after one and half century.

Jatra or Folk Theatre

Jatra is a popular folk-theatre of Bengal.It is traditionally credited to the rise of Sri Chaitanya's Bhakti movement in the 16th century, wherein Chaitanya himself played 'Rukmini' in the performance of *'Rukmini Haran'* which is the first definite presentation of theatrical spectacle.The performance lasted throughout 1507AD. During the Bhakti movement devotees went out singing and dancing in procession. They sang in temple courtyards, narrating religious events and expressed their devotion with frenzied acting. This collective procession of devotees, singing and acting, gradually came to be known as "Jatra" which means to go in a procession (Gargi 1966). Jatra resembles the Nautanki of U.P, the Lalita, Khele, Tamasha and Dashavatar of Maharashtra and Bhavai of Gujarat, Yakshagana, Bayalata, Attadata, Doddata, Sonnata in Karnataka, Veedhi-Natakam in Andhra Pradesh and the Kutiyattam, Mohiniattam and Kathakali dance dramas in Kerala (Naik 1977 p189). Originally it was mainly religious but gradually by the 19th century it was replaced by moral and didactic content and eventually became secular. Jatra is a long traditional play which is performed in open stage and is usually performed for three to four hours. This is preceded by musical concert in order to attract the audience. The casts are usually mythological scenes, historical tales and folklore. Originally it was male actors

who played the female role also; it is only since 19th century that the females started joining in. The Jatra often opens with a climax which attracts the audience. The Vivek who symbolises conscience a laudable and unique character, acts as an interpreter and moral guardian revealing the mind of the actors through loud songs just like the chorus in Greek tragedies. The Vivek also narrated incidents and happenings which could not be performed on the stage. Loud music and violence was appreciated by the rural audience and such Jatra absorbed all prevalent traditional folk music, songs and dance, be it Jhumur, Gambhira, Gajangan or Panchali. Costumes were usually bright and colourful to attract the audience (Gargi 1966).

Jatra started in Barak Valley in the 19th century and this could be found from the autobiography of Ramkumar Nandi (1831-1902). Ramkumar Nandi wrote altogether eleven Jatra Palla (scripts) and *'Pancholidol'* was the most popular one. Jatra was very popular amongst the tea garden people and was staged specially during the time from Durga Puja Diwali. These Jatras were staged in Nachgarhs of the tea gardens and were witnessed by both the Sahebs and workers.The English managers and employers had great love for Jatra like football.The Viveks were favoured by the Barababus and they often talked with the managers and gave them jobs.The rehearsals continued for months on end. Amalendu Bhattacharjee (2008) wrote in 'Jatra Barak Upatakyar' that Ram Kumar Nandi was the first dramatist of Barak Valley and his Jatra was very popular. He composed 'Nimai Sanyas', 'Sitar Bonobash' 'O Bijoy Basanta' when he was in Silchar and were staged immediately after composition (Bhattacharjee 2008).

Durga Puja was first celebated in Rosekandy tea garden under the Surma Valley Branch of Indian Tea Association; Jatra was staged in Rampur, Subangh tea garden area in the early part of 20th century.In the first part of 20th century there were no professional Jatra troupes and common folks of the tea gardens gathered together to perform Jatras during Durga Puja. 'Kansa Badh', Sutradhar' Bastraharan' etc. were staged. No historical plays as such were staged. The dialogues of Jatra were handed over orally and there were prompters who prompted the dialogues from off- stage. Amar Roy of Khaspur was one of the

well- known prompters. Kanchan Acharjya, Satish Chasa, Sanatan Vaishnav were famous Viveks of Indirajit opera of Udharbond tea garden (Deb 2006).

In the 1970s Jatra in the tea gardens of Cachar halted due to ravages of wild elephants and also because of the insurgents' exploitation. But since 1985-86 it was revived and in 1987 Jatra was organised and staged in Kashipur, Pallorbond, Bandhu, Dayapur, Kalain and Jallalpur tea gardens (Deb 2006). In Sabuj Tilla area also Jatra was staged on various social, historical and religious themes. In the second half of the 20th century Sri Krishna Opera , Shankar Opera of Dewan Tea Garden, Kamal Opera of Panibhara, Kachakantima Opera of Jhappirbond, Nabajyoti Opera of Larsingpar tea garden, Indrajit Opera of Uddharbond, Mukti opera of Rangpur, Satish Opera of Bhagabazar, Ganesh Opera of Baitakhal, Nabin Natya Sangha, Police Natya Sangstha of Silchar, Nabin Sangha of Bandhu Tea Estates, Pradip Sangha of Salganga, Arunoday Opera of Katigorah, Nilmoni Opera of Chandranathpur tea garden, Silpimohal of Silchar, Lalar Milan Sangha, Naba-Tarun Opera of Bekirpar, Naba Natya Sangstha of Katakhal, Tribeni Natya Sangstha of Silchar, Tea Garden Jatra Troupes of Badarpur, Kalain and Pallorbond were the Troupes operating in Barak Valley (Baruah 2008). It is only after 1970s that women folks began to participate. The tea garden folks gathered at the open 'Nachgarh' (community halls) and enjoyed Jatra squatting on the ground. There was no electricity and as such they used lamps and torches (*mashal*) and, later on, Patromax (*Hajak*) was used. Nowadays, of course, there is electricity.Very often the Babus used to take part in the shows; the dress and make up items were supplied by Pandav Pal traders of Silchar. Weapons were made of wood, bamboo and cane. Masks were also made and musical instruments like *Behala* (Violin), *Dhulok*, *Harmonium*, *Mandira, Kartal, Mridanga* etc. were used. As the tea gardens were full of forests which were inhabited by wild elephants and tigers which often attacked the workers, the folks preferred to stay back in the Nachgarh throughout the night and thus the Jatra continued all night which were full of comic roles, loud music and violence (Deb 2005).

Jatras provided no financial gain for the tea gardens and instead it involved a lot of financial investment which was collected from both the workers

and management. Before Independence and during the World War II, because of bombing in Derby Tea Garden in 1942, the Barak Valley area was disturbed and did not have any cultural ambience and only after Independence, Jatra was revived. Jatra of the post- Independence period was totally free from the colonial and western influence; it was completely Indianised and as such achieved great popularity amongst the newly Independent people (Baruah 2008).

Nowadays, the tea gardens are facing financial crisis and a good number of the gardens are closing down, the workers are busy and concerned about their livelihood. Hence, they have no time and money for extracurricular activities. On the other hand, globalization is having its effect on the taste and mindset of the folks of the tea garden. The present day youths are more interested in television and media entertainments which have already reached to their households. The younger generations prefer Orchestra and films to Jatra. There are gardens which are struggling to keep this folk tradition alive but are fighting hard against odds.The people of Borakhai tea garden said that rebellious youths even throw stones to disrupt the performance of Jatra in their village. Yet, they continue to perform plays like *Jalim Singher Mat, Rokto diya kinlam, Kaiphad, Raghubir* etc. From Shankar Kumar Deb's article 'Phire Dhekha: Saradutsabe Jatra – Cinema Cha Bagan Mukhorito' (2006) one learns that in the year 2005, during Durga Puja cinema shows were arranged and in big tea estates like Dewan, people installed television and cable lines in their homes and, as a consequence, they went back home to watch films leaving the Puja pandals empty by 10 pm. Of course, exceptionally, in few gardens like Pallorbond, Chorapur Tea Gardens historical concerts and songs by Vivek were staged. The Jatras in the tea gardens are performed in Bengali. Ojanbabu, the headclerk of Pathichara tea garden who often took part in Jatras earlier expressed the following emotions:

Hani jakon raja sajay,

Jatra gatey jati.

Takhon tunir umar keitna?

Kulay Kakhai rati.

Khaha, khaha jatra gali,

Shunbi shay re chora?

Digun, Kumbha, Dolugeram

Bhandu, Ledichora,

Aro ache Dewan, Tailu

Kitna ta nam boli

Mahabharat hayia jaba,

Nam bateley khalee,

Dher bhoi te pat koreeche

Nam jigabi nai,

Hani kaman Jatra gatee

Tuni he kay Sunai.

Kumbha Saheb medal dilo

"Budev rajar "pathey.

Alibordi kha er roley

Dosh takar notey,

Hani royal deress sajay

Bunduler panchayat.

Bhabona gajir pate' hani

Kama le ek hath:

Bidthesurer Boddhey hani

"Asur raja" hoi.

Audiencer hathe talee ki.

Baina durat shoi,

Ishan master nam suneychish?

---Nitai Nimai Tanti.

Khuka Babu, ar Dhanu duita

Oder sanghe gatey .

Ar dheri lukra chilan

Coronet bashiwala.

Koto koto nam jigabi

Jatra pagal gila.

Puja atey Jatra hota

Dusra kunu nai.

Panchayat, Saheb, Comittey

Rato ektai

Tino dinay, tino pala

Nachghare namabo

Bajna holey uwar picha

Bagan, Bagan jabo.

Achker rokom dhora, banda

Jhogra dola doli

Chilo bakin, tobey komei

Etna ta jonjali

Chilonaba, kahey chupa

Saidin gila?

Rehersal, concert Gaona

Rath bhariya pala.

Uhi ganey matuara

Hai din golo...

Shai sur! Shai gan!

Kaha je chipalo.

(Deb 2008 Pp: 10-11)

The above composition reflects on the folk theatre of the tea gardens of Barak Valley. The speaker, who used to take part in the Jatra, shares his experiences with the youths as an actor.He relates that Jatra began in the tea gardens long back. In those days he used to visit different gardens like Digun, Kumbha, Dolugram, Bhandu, Ledichora, Dewan, Thailu and many others during the Durga Puja.Competitions were held and he recapitulates having received a medal from the manager of Kumbha Tea Garden for his role as a king *(Budev rajar)* and how the frenzied spectators used to throw ten rupee notes and cheer for them throughout the night. He names his co-actors, singers and musicians.There was a committee which consisted of the Panchayat and the Saheb which organised the Jatras in the community hall *(Nachgarh).*The situation was congenial at that time and not so much complicated as the present.They used to spend the whole night in rehearsal and songs.The narrator becomes emotional and craves for those bygone days.

The Adivasi sentiment is spreading fast amongst the tea garden folks of Assam. The tea tribes of Barak Valley like the Santals, Orangs, and Mundas etc. are becoming aware of their rights and are seeking identity. On 24th, November 2007, a public rally was organized in Guwahati, demanding Scheduled Tribe status, where one Lakshmi Orang was stripped and beaten up in broad daylight by a violent mob and several others were beaten to death exposing the State machinery's inhuman and gruesome act of high handedness and denial of human rights to this substantial section of tea garden populace. Protesting the incident, the Adivasi tea garden people of Barsingah tea garden staged a drama named *Ulgulani* which was organized by the Chorus Club of Silchar under the leadership of Kajal Demta. Ulgulani means 'Bidroha' (revolution) similar to Badal Sarkar's *Santhal Bidroha.* There were twentyfive characters, all, belonging to Adivasi community. It was composed by Santanu Sarkar and Biswajit Das acted as the Chorus. The play became so popular that it was staged

at various places of Barak valley like, Barsingah Tea Garden, Silchar, Thaligram, Kumbhirgram, Badarpur and Udharbond etc. the play absorbed Jhumur dance form mainly and was successful in rousing the adivasi sentiment.Yet another drama, *'Tilkamajhi'* translated version of Mahasweta Devi's story by the same name was staged at Borosingha tea garden during Christmas (Demta 2012). It is thus high time for the tea garden folks to uphold this tradition and culture and not let it die out as a past history.

Finally, it can be said that traditional Jatra has been driven out of the tea gardens of Barak Valley as well as from the main stream stage as the electronic media is playing a vital role for providing entertainment to the people especially the younger generation whose craze for orchestra and pop music is well known. They prefer to sit in their homes or in the community halls before the television.The garden management has made provision for televisions, for it is good that the people donot crowd the pandals and go indoors by nine o'clock to enjoy the different programmes of entertainment. Of course in some of the tea gardens the youths collect money and invite orchestra parties. Jatra has also dwindled because it does not pay.Of course, in the town areas modern dramas by professional artists are organised sometimes. The elderly people of the tea gardens as well of the whole of Barak Valley miss Jatra very much and this finds expressions in their writings. It needs to be mentioned here that *Jatra* was organized at Lalacherra tea garden at Hailakandi, during Durga Puja this year ie; 2012.

The materials of the songs are adequate instruments for analysing the psychology, attitude, social actions and interactions of the different communities of people living in the tea gardens of Barak Valley.The songs also reflect on the potentiality of the people to create.The folksongs which are associated with religious rites and rituals stay on even with changing situations.The songs are not independent and isolated but are very much collective and contain signs and symbols which are associated with common consciousness of the community throwing light on the solidarity and oneness.The songs record the tradition which is handed down the line in a very effective manner.The sacred oral texts of songs are preserved by the elderly people without encouraging shocking changes but at

the same time light and frivolous songs involving jokes and merrymaking are always varied and creative adding zing and zest to their stereotyped life.With the changing environment the perceptions of the people change both in modern and traditional society which find expression in their behaviour and language. Society is composed of groups of people with a patterned relationship which designs the structure of the society that undergoes a modification with the changes in mutual behaviour between the individuals.