CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Culture whether rural or urban is diversified, varied, multifunctional and not a single homogenous entity. Cultural analysis helps us understand the urban and rural reality. Tradition and modernization, their interrelationship and its effects on societies whether rural or urban, big or small, have to be taken into account for understanding culture. Barak Valley, southernmost region of Assam is unique with its heterogeneous and multicultural semi-urban and rural dichotomy. Such a setup offers ample scope for studying various cultures especially the folk culture of the tea gardens in Barak Valley, which were established during the colonial regime and are located in the periphery, far removed from the mainstream and, yet, hosts a population which is again multicultural and heterogeneous. Culture and specially literature of the tea garden people provide a treasure of folk knowledge in India. The present study is devoted to understand their culture and literature. To begin this chapter introduces the theoretical framework comprising formulation of research problem, review of literature, research methodology and organization of the study.

The Research Problem

Social construct of the entire civilization has often been subjected to dichotomous constructions and therefore terms like primitive and civilized with reference to societies have often been used. 'Tonnies' (1925) 'Gemeinschaft' and 'Gesselschaft', Durkheim's (1894) 'Mechanical' and 'Organic Solidarity', Maine's (1861) 'Status' and 'Contract', Spencer's (1820) 'Militant' and 'Industrial' are few of such examples (Bottomore 1971). Of all these dichotomies, Tonnies' Gemeinschaft (community) is based on objectives of common interest such as ethnic community, community of speech, community of work, whereas in Gesellschaft (society) the relationship is more instrumental and purposeful, typical of industrial society. Redfield's (1930) scheme of folk-urban continuum was the first systematic attempt to highlight the fact that societies

could be arranged on the basis of their increasing or decreasing complexity, barring structural levels. He conceived an ideal type of folk society as polar opposite to urban society. Folk society is usually small, isolated, non-literate and homogeneous in which a sense of community is provided by the virtue of being a part of the whole where the ways of living are customized into a coherent system better known as culture. In 'The Folk Culture of Yucatan' (1948), Redfield analyzed culture as an ideational phenomenon, emphasizing the quality of organization and inner consistency unifying the mental world of the participants in a well- established community.

The British anthropologist, E.B. Tylor (1871) defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". Ralph Linton (1936) called culture humanity's 'social heredity'. According to him, culture is learned through a process called enculturation, the process by which a society's culture is passed from one generation to the next and the individuals become members of their society. Culture is based on symbols, a coding device, where meaning is compressed. He refers to various types of human symbols like religious symbols, personal symbols, material and economic, ethnic, trivial, political, linguistic and meaningful symbols. Walter Goldschmidt (1950) suggests a way to evaluate culture sensibly; that is, a culture can be said to be working if it is meeting the physical and psychological needs of its people, a positive, working culture would address such issues as (i) maintaining a healthy standard for the nutritional status of the people, (ii) maintaining a healthy standard for the mental state of the people, (iii) in keeping the incidence of crime and delinquency to a low level, (iv) ensuring the stability and tranquility of domestic life and (v), finally, ensuring that the group's relation to its resource base is sustainable. Richard Munch and Neil J. Smelser (1992) in a volume on 'Theory of Culture' examine some of the dimensions of the concept of culture by focusing on the issue of degree of coherence or incoherence. Smelser gives an idea of multifaceted culture comprising high culture, folk culture, and mass culture as part of the fabric of stratification and domination in various European societies. Dictionary of Culture and Cultural Theory (1997), edited by Michael Payne,

views ,"Folk Culture as a term which only makes a conceptual sense by reference to a particular interpretation of Industrial Culture". As shown by Shiach (1989) the idea of the folk was developed in the context of industrialization and can only be understood by reference to the critique of industrial society developed by romanticism. Folk culture describes the culture of preindustrial (pre – market and pre-commodity) communities and was therefore taken to be organized around a number of characteristics: the oral transmission of songs, tales and history, aesthetic authorization by tradition, the integration of nature and culture, body and mind, expression through ritual in the collective deployment of symbols. There are obvious similarities between such descriptions of European folk culture and anthropological accounts of communities in Africa and Asia. But 'folk' is not an anthropological term it is an ideological construct, it necessarily includes a critique of 'modern societies'. The idea of folk culture has in fact served a number of different political and cultural ends (Harker 1985). Benjamin A. Boktin (1939) coined the term "Applied Folklore" which is similar in its rationale approach to other applied sciences. He developed this approach in "Lay My Burden Down" (1945). In 1960 other American folklorists began to apply knowledge gained from folkloric sources to address social issues.

Culture is dynamic and the present day communication and technologies allow greater movement of people and ideas between cultures, resulting in cultural diffusion. In the context of his study of Tepoztlan and Yucatan (1930, 1941) Redfield deals with the heterogeneity and disorganization of culture which results in secularization and individualism. Redfield's concern with the folk pole of continuum brings out the characteristics of folk society as opposite to the urban. Sorokin and Zimmerman (1929) also reveal the difference between the urban and folk societies on the basis of occupation, environment, and density of population, homogeneous / heterogeneous nature of the people, social mobility, size of community, direction and nature of migration, social stratification and system of social interactions. Redfield's (1941) 'The Folk Culture of Yucatan' elaborated how a small isolated community involves progressive degrees of social change and cultural disorganization. He dealt with the 'great traditions' and 'little traditions' concepts in his works titled 'Little Community' (1955) and

'Peasant Society and Culture' (1956). The 1950s ushered in the concept of subcultures, defining groups with distinctive characteristics within a larger culture and by the end of the twentieth century there began the popularization of the idea of corporate culture, distinct and malleable, within the context of an employing organization or workforce. Large societies often have cultures within a society, *i.e.*, subcultures where there are groups of people with distinct sets of behaviour or beliefs that differentiate them from the larger culture of which they are a part. Subcultures may be distinctive and structured on the basis of age, race, ethnicity, class, gender and caste. According to Ralph Linton (1936), culture is the totality of the sub- cultures and the peculiarities of various subcultures must be regarded as specialties rather than main alternatives. Each individual accepts the patterns of his own sub-culture as proper guide of behaviour and rarely attempts to imitate the patterns of other subcultures. The subcultures within a tribal culture must of necessity be adapted to each other and have a considerable number of elements in common to maintain a feeling of tribal unity. But in some respect specialties become alternatives, i.e., they are open to individual choice. Linton further discusses the two parts of sub- cultures; namely core zone and fluid zone. Core zone is solid and well-integrated and fairly stable consisting of all mutually adapted universalities and specialties and the fluid zone is largely disintegrated and constantly changing zone of alternatives which surrounds the core zone. Core zone gives a culture its form and basic pattern while the presence of fluid zone gives the culture its capacity for growth and adaptation. The proportion of change varies at different points. If contemporary rate of change is more, then, the proportion of alternatives will be higher. When a culture changes rapidly the alternatives often become numerous, overshadowing the universals and specialties. The difference between folk culture and modern civilization is primarily a matter of proportion which the core of universals and specialties bears to the fluid zone of alternatives. In folk cultures the core constitutes almost the whole. In modern civilization the core culture is being progressively reduced.

In India, colonization, trade, migration, mass media and religion have influenced the incubation of cultures. The British colonization had a tremendous effect on the Indian people and their culture. The introduction of tea plantation in

Assam, in 1855, created the concept of tea villages in and around Assam. Large numbers of labourers were inducted to work in the tea gardens from distant corners of the country; namely, Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chotta Nagpur, Madras, Santhal Parganas of West Bengal etc. The total area of land, under Tea Estates in Assam is 227 thousand hectares (Assam action plan report 2012). The year 1832 saw the British annexation of Cachar, the southernmost part of Assam. Following the partition of India in 1947, new boundaries in this part were drawn, thus, upgrading the subdivisions into districts. The present-day Barak Valley comprises three districts; namely Hailakandi, Karimganj and Cachar. There are 97 registered tea gardens, spread across the entire Barak Valley (Tea Board 2011). The annexation of Cachar coupled with the strong administrative ability and economic farsightedness of the British helped the tea industry emerge as a leading economic activity in this part. The pioneer tea garden in Cachar was established in 1856 in Barsangan. Structurally the tea gardens of Barak Valley, like any other tea gardens in the State, are agro-based industry, having workers of heterogeneous race, caste, religion tribe, language and culture. The folks in the tea gardens have in many a case retained many of their original traditional cultures which they belonged to prior to the amalgamation. This opens vistas for study of folk culture (folk ways, folklores, and folk literature) in the tea gardens. Though, the new social situation of ethnic plurality provided scope for a new kind of dynamism in various folk cultures and introduced significant changes, the tea folks have largely held their cultural practices despite the exposure to new cultures in the occupational amalgamation. Across the tea villages, there is a plenty of folk literature tied to their oral tradition, reflecting a panorama of their cultures and cultural changes; it mirrors the extinction of the elements which do not appeal to the folk and persistence or accretion of those which appeal to them strongly. Widely spreading education and increasing spatial mobility do cause changes in the folk culture as well as folk literature. It gives rise to a suspicion that this treasure of folk knowledge may be lost in near future without leaving behind any systematic sociological study for posterity. Therefore, the present study of folk literature has been attempted to understand the folk culture in the tea gardens of Barak Valley. Broadly a folk

literature reflects entirety of a folk culture, its structure, interactions and changes. Folk culture and folk literature have been variously subjected to understanding by persons of letters and thought. These contributions have been reviewed here to formulate the problem of the present research.

Review of Literature

Folk culture and folk literature are two closely related aspects of any folk society and they reflect each other. Both of these have been used to gather knowledge about folk societies. Here, the studies on folk societies, particularly in India, have been reviewed under two broad headings, viz; (I) studies on folk culture and (II) studies on folk literature.

(I) Studies on Folk Culture

Studies on folk culture can be classified into two categories: (a) Studies of folk culture in general and (b) studies of folk culture in India. Under the general studies of folk culture the conceptual aspect and meaning is dealt with keeping in mind the folk-urban continuum. The concept of culture was developed by Robert Redfield in his study of the Mexican village in 1930. He realised that culture cannot be compartmentalized and that a society cannot be treated as an isolated unit, for all the people belong to a broader whole. A society is a whole, unaltered social structure where men and women come and go with their varied lives and experiences, where exists the communities within community. Further coherent theory for sociological study of primitive society has also been provided by various conceptual and theoretical studies (Redfield 1948, 1954, 1955; A.R. Radcliffe-Brown1952, 1957). On the other hand, studies on folk culture in India have been undertaken both during the colonial and post-colonial periods. The study of Indian villages during the colonial period actually began with surveys conducted by British administrators for the purpose of collection of revenue and also acquiring knowledge of the culture to get acquainted with the language and manners of the folks who were their subjects. Christian missionaries also took the initiative in order to acquire the language of the people to recreate the religious literature for evangelical purpose. Such studies were taken up by British administrators of East Indian Company 1812; Wiser 1930). It is only in the 18th

and 19th centuries that the administrative workers and missionaries realised the significance of folk culture of the Asian countries. Prior to this very little value was attached to folklore and it was considered to be children's literature and Indians were looked down upon as superstitious and their beliefs, full of myths. William Thoms, an anthropologist, first used the term 'Folklore' in his journal 'Antheneum' in 1846, in lieu of terms 'Popular Antiquities' and 'Popular Literature'. Customs, ballads, superstition, proverbs etc. were all included in Thoms' definition. W.C.Acharjya (1983), A.R.Wright (1928), Verrier Elwin (1959) and R.S. Dorson (1950) were few great critics and scholars who laid ample emphasis on the study of folk culture and folklore and tried to define human civilization as the history of social science (Nandalal Sharma 1999, ch-1).

Assam, with its trade and business prospect attracted the attention of the British and English missionaries and Francis H Buchanan, a surgeon to the Governor General of India, Lord Wellesley in Calcutta, was instructed by the Government of Bengal to undertake a survey during 1807 to 1814 for acquiring information related to Assam. He was directed to collect information on (1) topography, history, antiquities of the country, (2) the condition of inhabitants, sanitation, costumes, food, medical treatment, education, (3) religion, customs, priests, (4) the natural production of the country, animals, vegetables, minerals, (5) agriculture, implements of husbandry, manure, measures connected with floods and inundations, domestic animals, fences, firms, landed property tenure, (6) fine arts and common arts, architectures, sculptures, paintings, markets, (7) commerce, exports and imports, weights and measures, transport by land and water roads (De, Sanjay 2007 Pp:08-19). Rev. William Morton (1932) an English missionary, translated into English and analysed a total of 803 Bengali and Sanskrit proverbs in his book 'Drishtanta Bakya Sangraha'. Rev. Lal Bihari Dey (1883) another Bengali missionary explored the domain of Bengali folk tales especially the children's tale. He published his 'Folk Tales of Bengal' in the year 1983 from London (Sharma 1999).

Descriptive accounts of Assam and knowledge of indigenous folk culture were gathered not only by the colonists but following their tract many Indian scholars made remarkable contribution in the colonial period. Assamese

popular beliefs, folktales, folk songs relating to marriage, ballads, Bihu songs, historical and descriptive account of Kachari tribes, Kachari tales and folklore, Khonar bachan, children's stories, religious songs, rhymes, potua art, potua sangeet of Sylhet, folk dances of Bengal like Jhumur, Sari, Jari, Kati, Dhali, Bratakirtan, folk games or 'Loko Kriya', 'Geetika Charcha' which were descriptive, slow and corrupt narratives, also digressive by nature and contents usually on elopement, theft, betrayal, crime etc. formed a part of folklore studies of the colonial period (Ahmed 2004). Gurusadey Dutta's (1882-1941) essay on 'Folk Arts and Crafts of Bengal: The Collected Papers' was published as a book in 1990.He was also the first man to hold a public folk art exhibition in India at Calcutta in the Indian Society of Oriental Art Samiti Bhavan in the year 1992. His biographer, Dr. Saikat Ajgarh classified the folkloric contents into seven classes: folk culture, folk art, folk customs, folk dance, folk games, folk science, and folk language. The folklorists collected and studied songs relating to different aspects of nature and life, songs sung during floods or natural calamity, peasants or agricultural songs, religious songs, folk chants and ballads but it has also been noted that even those works of the colonial period were published at a much later date sometimes even after Indian Independence (Sharma 1999). 'Auronodoi', a periodical, was published by an American Baptist missionary from Sibasagar contained riddles and their answers in Assamese language and magazines like 'Shribhumi' played crucial role in publishing descriptive and narrative folklores and varied customs of the people of Barak Valley. Folklores like ritualistic rhymes or chants, agricultural songs or songs of the peasant communities, women and their songs expressing their needs, emotions and all found expression in the publications of this period (De 2007- 08:17). Thus, some of the studies of the colonial period played a constructive and crucial role among the folk cultural studies and it reveals that extensive collection work and translation of folklore took place with the initiative of British administrators and missionaries (Bhuyan 1940; Wiser 1930; Soppit 1884; Dev 1319 (Bangla); Dutta 1929, 1932, 1954, 2008; Morton 1932; Dey 1983; Soppit 1884, 1885; Buchanan 1807; Acharjya 1983; Elwin 1959; Dorson 1981; De Choudhury 1925; Bora 1899; Bezbarua

1911; Bhattacharjee 1915; Bari 1335 (Bangla); Nath Raj Mohan 1948, 1371 (Bangla).

In the Post- Independence period of India many universities, institutes and individuals started taking interest in the rural folks and their communities and folklore. The purpose of folklore studies was to search for national identity through legends, myths and epics. In the course of time, many of such universities opened up departments on folklore to study the culture and mind and attitude of the rural folks and also to explore their relationship within and outside the village. The different national folklore support centres have created space for scholars to pursue their studies in folklore and folk life with commitment. Studies have been conducted to focus on the community which sees the old paradigm of control by landlords and family heads being challenged and also to focus on the fact that every village community is self sufficient and has the capacity to live independently (Wadley Susan1994; Sir Henry Maine 1974). Most of these studies on folks were influenced by the nationalistic fervour and a drive to somehow establish their cultural identity. The folk communities did not have any written documents which could narrate their historical background and as such the folks themselves studied their oral folklore in search of knowledge of their past. So, folklore was studied as a historical science in the post-colonial period. Here, it is to say that diverse perspectives have been used to study the folk culture; namely, historical, ethnographical, descriptive, analytical, comparative etc. Historical perspective has been used to understand the reality and history of a community which is often rooted in tradition and is also a product of several events, mythical as well as historical, one rooted in tradition and the other in the reminiscence of the past as well as its significance in the present. The Assamese folk songs; *Jangiar Geet, Barphukanor Geet, Maniram Dewanor Geet, Jaymati Kunwarer Geet* are all pregnant with history and events connected with freedom movement and nationalistic fervour. Popular stories are also associated with the origin and migration of the people and also their cultural heritage. In all religions one finds folk stories associated with the evolution of human being. Proverbs and rhymes, songs, tales, myths, ballads of the different folks have their own language and dialect as such the study of such folklores can easily help one in identifying the

folks, their place of origin and culture. From the Tibetan myth 'Nana Jatir Sristi', one comes to be acquainted with the fact that the tea was a natural product of Tibet. The Santhal myth of the creation of Earth refers to Karam tree, which has ritualistic significance of this tribe (Sen Gupta. 1995 p.216). The tale of the Red Bell of the Mizos traces the origin of the Darlong tribe, why and how the tribe acquired its name. The folktale 'The Lazy Priest' (Denga-Ochai) of Tripura connects itself with the worship of 'Burachha' for the welfare of the tribal society. The culture of such puja is in force amongst the folks of Tripura where the person who performs the puja is called 'Denga – Ochai' (lazy priest) (Brahma 2009 Pp: 9-10). The ancient legend of Tui-Chawng and Nuengi relates the origin of the Tui-Chawng River which is one of the largest tributaries of the Kornaphuli, on the banks of which Chittagong stands; it is nine miles from the town of Demagiri on the Lunglei Road,Mizoram (Brahma 2009 p.20). Similarly there is a Khasi folk tale which bears historical significance as it explains how the Syiems of Shillong attained their name and position (Brahma 2009 p.30). The origin and development of cult practices have a history and that history is again linked with the socio-economic developments of the people. Different legends, myths, rituals and cults have come under the purview of scholars to trace the origin, history and the transformation in the ritualistic practices with changes in the social structure. In Barak Valley some of the cult practices have retained their earlier or intermediary forms giving an idea of the primitive contexts and original objectives associated with them and thus explain widely practiced cults of the country and outside. Various folk cults of Barak Valley make a cultural fusion or synthesis as elsewhere in India, of which Hinduism is the product (Choudhury 2003). Kosambi (1977) thus empathetically stresses on the importance of myths, rituals and folkways as the living source material for reconstructing the social history of the past.

Eminent scholars have been trying to decipher the characteristics of Pre-British Indian society and distinguish it from the pre-capitalist societies as they existed in Europe and other countries of the world. Extensive studies have been undertaken to study the European feudalism and emergence of capitalistic society and also the Indian feudalism and the colonial capitalist society. Historical

studies of India society brings out the point that there is a fundamental unity of the pre-British Indian society as well as peculiar character of Indian feudalism which distinguished it from European feudalism. Indian society and culture has been compared and studied in contrast to European society (Kosambi 1977). India's agrarian social order as well as the contemporary trend of development when studied by Shelvankar (2005:144) revealed that Hinduism was rooted in the Indian culture to such an extent that it unified India but, at the same time, obstructed development on religious grounds. Indian States were governed not by laws of the State but by caste, codes of function and privilege by caste organisation and by virtually autonomous bodies such as the local guilds and village communities and with time there was change in the economic regime, new cultural linguistic groups and sub-groups emerged in the different regions of India but the essentials of the system remained unchanged. The different linguistic groups like Gujaratis, Bengalis, Assamese, Tamils, Tripuris, Boros, Hmar, Naga, Khasis, the followers of Shiva and Vishnu etc were within the wide stream of Hinduism. On the other hand, there were polar opposites of religious minorities- the Sikhs and Muslims (Desai 2005) Cultural practices and tradition of different communities and tribes have been studied extensively to trace the history. The Hmars, the Manipuris, the Khasi, the Boro, the Dimasas, the Bengalis, Karbi, Assamese, the tea tribes, Kukis, all the folks have their past and the social scientists pursue hard to trace the past history and its co-relation with the present. Extensive studies have been carried out not only by Indian scholars but by intellectuals all over the world (Buchanan 1807; Griffith 1967; Desai 1969; Shelvankar 1969; Kosambi 1977; Guha 1977; Bhattacharjee 1977; Chakravarti 1985; Choudhury 2003; Chatterjee 2000; Dena 2008; Burrison 2008; Das 2006; De 2008; Kar 2000; Kumar 2006; Horam 1975; Barua 1969).

Descriptive study is observation and reporting of human culture and society. Describing a culture is not very easy task for a scholar. In order to describe the culture of a particular community one has to get inside another culture through participation and observation and thus learn about their pattern of behaviour, tradition and customs (Barnard 21). Archer (1974) during his long stay in the Santhal Paraganas as an administrator acquainted himself with the

customs and traditions, marriage, fairs and festivals of the folks and thus gave a descriptive account of the folk culture of the Santhals (Archer1974). Similar efforts have been carried out by ethnographers and social scientists throughout the globe to describe the demographic profile, tradition, customs, ethnicity and culture making the readers aware of both the material and non-material culture. Such descriptive works help in restudy of other cultures and also helps in analysing the folk elements for better comprehension of the concerned society. Such vivid descriptions have been highlighted by numerous social scientists and folklorists. Description of Nauka Puja, Dhali dance, Sari dance, Geetika Charcha, Tusu Puja, description of marriage rites, customs and ceremonies of the world, description of Manipuri tribes, Assamese folk culture, Dimasa tribes, Kuki, Reang, cultural profile, describing the Oraon and the Munda of Ranchi district and all other folk cultural elements are there. Further, studies have also been initiated and undertaken to analyse the songs to throw sufficient light on the content, motif, rhythm, form, social structure and their implications. The content and motifs of grinding mill songs, their social and cognitive settings, and the cultural dynamics The beats and rhythms of the Jhumur dance and songs, the songs of some of the villages of South India , North East India, their form and rhythm, their social structure and implications, the motifs in Naga and Assamese folklore, analysis of Barak- Surma folk songs, proverbs, the Hindu marriage songs, the Baromashi songs, the Dhamail songs and dance and also oral poetry of Indian tribes (Archer 1974; Handoo 1979; Sinha 1992; Parel 2008; Bhattacharjee 1996; Choudhury 2001; Srivastava 1992; Hutchinson 2009; Singh 2005; Ghosal 2007; Sen 1992; Malley 1999; Sanajaoba 1991;Guy 2002; Mahapatra 1937; Shrirama 1982; Kumar 1993; Chanda 2007; Pandey 1981; Wendy Leeds 2002; Mazharul 1982; Basak 1998; Ahmed 2004; Arya 1965, 1984).

An ethnography is defined as "a written description of a particular culture- the customs, beliefs and behaviour based on information collected through field work" (Marvin Harris and Orna Johnson, 2000). Ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture and, according to Fetterman, "The description may be a small tribal group in an exotic land or a classroom in middle-class suburbia" (David M. Fetterman 1998). Ethnographical studies

gather information regarding the family structure of a particular society and their relationship within the family and clan. It also focuses on the behavioural patterns of the people centering round kins. Ethnographic surveys help scholars study the language, territory, dress, cuisine, festivals, visibility in all roles, structure etc. of communities. Ethnographical studies have been conducted in Meghalaya, Assam, West Bengal, Orissa (Syiem 2005; Bhandari1996; Bordoloi and Athaparia 2003; Chatterjee 2000). Ethnographical studies on folk culture provide a gamut of information about people. The studies are mainly aimed at getting inside another culture and ultimately comparing the result with ethnographic studies of other cultures. The tradition of ethnography started in the 19th century and great ethnographical studies by Franz Boas (1897, 1930) covers information of a group of North American Indian tribes, now living in British Columbia focused more on practicing local activities, use of native language and also on recording of minute details of cultures which represent the family history and social standing (Barnard 2000 p.14). B. Malinowski (1926) emphasised on participant observation, the use of native language and the functions of social institutions in relation to the individual, he stressed more on the native's point of view, his relation to life to realize his vision of his world. Evans-Pritchard (1940, 1951) was more interpretative while studying the Nuer religion; he wanted to find out how people see their world their belief systems, politics and kinship. Levi Strauss' s (1955) is a broad cultural study in the sense that it gives an outline of the geographical and historical analysis, the links of numerous places, times and ideas of Brazil, France, New York and South America Boas (1897) and Strauss (1962) both studied totemism with different findings. Boas laid stress on totem poles and ritualistic marks of the Kwakiutls whereas Strauss did not lay importance on it and argued that totemism is not a single phenomenon but one of the several symbols (Barnard 2007 Pp:14- 16). Reaction of the local people of the Highlands of New Guinea to the Japanese occupation by Kenneth Read (1965), the relationship between the people of Susuroka village and the Gahuku tribe, the men and women relationship, the adult and children relationship actually gives an insight into the life, character and culture of the natives living in the highlands of

New Guinea. The society was based on strength and power and as a researcher Read had to suffer a lot (Read 1965).

Studies which also help unveil the roots of distinctive communities; their past and also the commonality of different cultures along with their ethnic identities have been revealed by Buchanan (1965). Phenomenological approaches to field work to trace not the doings of the people but also the cultural elements themselves, e.g., winking is not only a gesture but might have had several meanings like meaningful communications and symbols. The 33 Scheduled Tribes of India have been studied and the People of India Project conducted 116 studies which include panchayat system, rural development, family, kinship, religion, languages, dances, festivals, songs, lifestyles, handicrafts, tribal communities with their oral tradition, traditional wisdom, ethno-medicines, modernization, cultural resources, economic development and changes in the livelihood. The Mahadev Kolis in the Surgana Taluka, the Pastoralists of Maharashtra and their oral tradition, the comparative study on the traditional wisdom system of the tribes of Orissa, Gujarat and Maharashtra, the Coorgs of South India, the flexibility and mobility in the caste of the Coorgs have been dealt with (ASI 1985).

Studies on caste system amongst the Muslims, Buddhist, Jains, Sikhs, Christians of Kerela and Goa and also of the Hindus are a pointer to the fact that caste system was rigid in which the position of each component caste is fixed not for all time: instead movement has always been possible especially in the middle ranks of hierarchy. It is possible for groups born in a lower caste to rise to a higher position by adopting customs of higher castes, e.g., adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, through the process of sanskritisation. The caste system and Indian jajmani system which stretched their ties across Indian villages were extensively studied. The caste system and its own mechanism for regulation of internal and external affairs of the society especially in controlling and dispensing of marital affairs like breach of marriage, marital disputes and inter-caste marriage is generally dominated by the panchayats. The studies on castes in Barak Valley also reveals that certain caste panchayats function only within the village like Bawari, Goala, Koiri and Bhuyan caste whereas the Kahar and

Mirdha panchayats function across villages and the Bawari panchayat has connected itself with the district level Bawari caste association in some places (Ram and Deb Nath 2008).

Studies reveal ethnographical research on the village community as a political society; the village as a body of co-owners of soil and the village community as an emblem of traditional economy and polity. The socio-cultural characteristics of a synthetic society formed by people under most unfavorable condition, and their problem of social integration and adjustment, superstition and its exploitative nature on the folks, the tribal religion, its pluralistic nature, magic, witchcraft, practices related to human sacrifice, invocation of the dead have been all explored by different ethnographers (Read1965; Sharma 2003; Boas 1987, 1930; Malinowski 1926, 1927). Ethnographic survey of 115 communities of Assam in collaboration to local scholars throws sufficient light on the language, territory, dress, cuisine, festivals, availability of land, water, immigration of the people, vegetarianism, fish and fishing culture, settled cultivation, vibrant folk tradition, flourishing crafts, sociability and great intercourse and yet rigidity of jati and varna structure (Singh2003).

Tea plantation workers of Sikkim, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh studied by different scholars throw light on caste tribe zone. The relationship between Nak Chuchees and Nak Thapchees groups at Temi Tea Estate is well coordinated and both the Hindu and tribes speak a common language, the Nepali language. But in the tea gardens of Assam the situation is different as there are people from several communities living together. In Arunachal Pradesh, the Nepalese have permanent settlement in the Anula Shagun Tea Estate environment and are well-integrated with the local Khamti tribes of the region and yet they have retained their distinct ethnic identity in respect of language, marriage and culture. These Nepalese are again preferred to the Hindustanis (Hindi speaking people) by the tribes for they speak Assamese very fluently. So, language plays an important role in the social integration (Sharma and Das 2008; Sharma 2005; Kumar 2006). In Barak Valley there are 97 tea gardens all consisting of folks from different regions of the country (Tea Board 2011). The survey of literature shows very few ethnographic studies have been taken up in case of the tea garden communities of

Barak Valley whereas extensive studies have been conducted on all the tribes in India and outside India (Boas 1897, 1930; Malinowski 1926,1927; Pritchard 1951, 1956; Srinivas 1952; Baruah 1951; Strauss 1955; Buchanan 1965; Read 1965; Maybury 1965; Geertz 1973; Swayam 2000; Choudhuri 1990; Sharma 2003, 2005; Sahu 2004; Ram and Nath 2008; Das Gupta 1978; Dalton 1872;Koiri 2010).

Studies focusing on the structure of folk culture lay bare the fact that village, household and family extensive units with marriage affiliation, jajmani system, caste system, clan and that each one is a small unit of the greater whole in the social structure. Great variety does prevail within the societies which are seemingly dissimilar and yet there is a linkage of one village with another. Culture contact gives rise to a continuum, technically known as folk- urban continuum. Studies on the structure of life cycle, e.g., birth and naming ceremony, growing up, initiation and marriage, adulthood and raising children, old age, death and funerals. Women's life both in relation to men and in relation to other women have been taken up by several scholars (Joshi 2005; Sharma 2005; Choudhury1977; Srinivas1995). The folk culture of tea villages and coffee plantation has also been taken up for structural analysis of the work force as well as the managerial hierarchy and also the relationship between the tribes and the caste Hindus (Sharma2005; Das and Sharma 2008; Sarkar and Lama 1986). The Raj Gonds of Andhra Pradesh and their social structure, the tribe - non tribe continuum, the family and kinship, social control and religious beliefs and practices and effect of cultural contact on small communities like Soliga peasants of Biligiri Rangana hills near Mysore and structural evolution thereby have been studied. The 'Munda Social Structure' (1977) is ethnography on relationship between the Khuntkattidars or the clan of settlers of the village and other Mundas who lived in the same village. The unilineal descent groups of clan, sub-clan or lineage have been appropriately described. So, a lot of studies have been taken up on different tribes and clans both within the country and outside (Firth 1936; Kaberry 1936; Marriot 1955; Shoshtak 1981; Lughod 1993; Haimendorf 1979; Chattopadya 2010; Karve 2010; Mukherjee 2010; Singh 2010; Atal 2010; S. C Dube 1955; Mazumdar 1955; Srinivas 1955; Choudhury 1977; Doshi 1974;

Sharma 2005, Singer 1972). However, the tea vllages of Barak Valley and its structure have been left almost untouched.

Studies centering on villages, peasant communities, tribes and social change throw light on the ceaseless change in fields of technology, economy, social institutions, ideology, art, religion, and other institutions of culture. The powerful waves of modernisation have brought significant changes in both tribal and non-tribal life both in India and also across the globe where tradition-bound small scale societies have come in contact with comparatively advanced societies, on one hand, and the Government effort to reach out the rural people, on the other hand. This changing trend is not the same in all cases; sometimes, it is imperceptibly slow and sometimes significantly rapid. There are many factors responsible for the social change in the culture and tradition of a rural society; namely, natural forces like earthquakes, famines, floods have disastrous effect on the territorial zone causing harm and destruction to the flora and fauna of the region and leading to modification of life process. Technological advancement and varied inventions also have a far-reaching effect in the economic, social and political structure of a society. The Government and other political and social instruments use various methods to bring about changes like persuasive method, demonstrative method, compulsory method, method of social pressure, educational method and also contact method. So, in order to study cultural change amongst the folks one can resort to carefully analyse and study the cause and effect of changes (Joshi 2005; Dube 1977; Mann 1987; Marriot1955; Redfield 1950). Now, the studies on Indian village shows that national and regional influences contribute substantially towards shaping its value-orientation, ethos and general pattern of life and yet there is much that is individual to the village. Thus, Indian villages are sufficiently isolated and yet can be considered as community within larger community (Redfield 1930, 1956, 1941). A village community may have a single settlement structure in which the community has a shared and common compact settlement with a unified culture or it can be a 'nuclear' village with a central settlement as the nucleus around which there is a number of smaller settlements. Further, it may be a dispersed village community with a series of dispersed homesteads having well defined ties with one another.

Such villages have different caste structures and also different economic and occupational structure. In case of socio-religious life, especially ceremonials and rituals connected with birth, puberty, marriage and death are so organised that it requires participation by a large number of castes at various stages. The occupational castes often barter their traditional services. In such cases the traditionally low class people is influenced by the moral values and codes of behaviour of high class people and as such they try to modernize both socially and ritually. It is also a fact that if a particular group or community of people is kept for long under environment of repression the boundaries of change is very small, on the contrary if they get free environment change is free. Studies on changes and continuity have been conducted all over the world by researchers and scholars (Joyner 1999; Marriot 1955; Malley 1999; Singh 1972, 1973; Desai 2010; Dube1955; Doshi 1974; Haimendorf 1976).

Briefly the literature on the folk culture in India have mapped out the tribes, villages, castes and tea garden communities, using descriptive, ethnographical, phenomenological and structural methods of analysis.

(II) Studies on Folklore and Folk Literature

Folklore encompasses all traditions, beliefs, customs, sayings, stories, chants etc. preserved among a community. Folklore mirrors the culture of folk community and this is expressed in the folk literature which is transmitted from one generation to another by way of mouth. Studies on folklore and folk literature can be classified into three classes; namely:

A. Classificatory studies

B. Studies on structure of literary components and

C. Studies on social significance and implications of folkloric/folk literary components.

These classes of the studies are being discussed here in detail.

(A) Folk literature can be **broadly classified** under four heads:

i. Studies on folk songs,

ii. Studies on folk tales,

iii. Studies on folk drama and

iv. Studies of other types (Phrases, idioms, riddles etc.)

Folk songs are the most popular form of folk literature and are connected with every aspect of life and with all occasions. The songs are rhythmic and are extempore composition, depending on the occasion. Folk songs can thus be used as sociological documents. There are pastoral songs, which are sung by shepherds, cowherds, cattle breeders, hunters and peasants in different parts of the folk communities. There are fishermen songs, love songs, war songs, songs in association to different activities of agriculture, songs sung at the time of natural calamities like flood, earthquake, famine and disease, religious and festival songs, songs introducing and describing the family tree, seasonal songs etc. Folk songs are usually sung in accompaniment of dancing. Such songs and dances are community performance in which all participate. Musical instruments like flute, drums, trumpets, musical bells etc. are used.

Folk tales or traditional narratives can be classified into historical, social, value oriented, humorous, animal fables, tales exhibiting human behaviour, supernatural tales etc. These folktales are usually narrated by the elder people to the younger generation or are narrated or sung by religious leaders or minstrels of the community. "All along the ramparts of time, our sages and seers have evolved noble guidelines in human relationships through tales and parables. Stories have always attracted the young and the old and the reservoir of ancient Indian wisdom contains thousands of stories which offer solutions to most of the modern day problems." (Acharya 2009). Acharya Ratnananda, a renowned Vedic scholar, has collected stories from Ancient Indian folklore and presented them in his 'Tales for the Young and the Old'. The tales are magnus opuses which reflect on the significance of the scriptures in the lives of the people. The tales are not only historical evidences but also full of wisdom and knowledge that is eternal. Tales of how Tenali Ram became a famous jester, how Kali Das became one of the greatest poets of ancient India, stories from Puranas, Katha Upanishads, Ved Vyas Ramayan, etc. are indispensible documents for the present and future generations (Acharya 2009). Fables and folk-tales of different ethnic groups of people of Assam have been collected and published by Ghosh &

Ghosh(1998).These tales describe the origin of different tribes namely; Lalung and their clans, the Koch, the Dimasa, the Karbi and also the Kalitas who belong to the caste Hindu Assamese group. The tales of migration trace their origin and culture which are historical clues and at the same time mythological and didactic.

Folk theatre is traditional folk performing art. Different communities have their traditional theatres for instance, Tamasha of Maharashtra, Bhavai of Gujarat, Bhaona of Assam, Harikatha in West India, Yakshagana and Burrakatha of Andhra Pradesh, Nautanki and Ras in Uttar Pradesh, Jatra Palla in Bengal, Ram Lila in North India, Chavilta Natakam in Kerela, Kirtan of Barak Valley, Khamb of the Korkus are costume dramas where men put on costumes of gods and play the roles of gods. The Gaon-bandhani is a form of ritualistic drama amongst the Kolam tribals. Puppetry is also a form of dramatic art, Putul nach of Bengal, Kathputli of Rajasthan, Sakhi Kundhai of Orissa are some of the puppet dance forms, Bharat Lila, Rahasa, Bandi Nata of Orissa, Lalit of Maharashtra is an old Marathi folk form combining both devotional and entertainment quality (Kumar 2003; Pandey and Singh 2005; Goswami 1960). Folk drama is non-commercial, based on folk traditions and local and regional history. This form of drama declined in the West due to print media, literacy and also more emphasis on individual contribution rather than community participation in urban area (Encyclopedia 2007).

Other types of folk literature include phrases, rhymes, idioms, proverbs, chants, abuses, riddles, lullabies. These types of oral literature are also full of wisdom, imaginative and also suggestive. The entire gamut of folk literature has thus been classified and studied both in India and outside India (Herder 1744-1803; Hensen 1957; Asafa 2007; Acharya 2009; Deva 1985; Das 1972; Chatak ed 1981; Nautiyal ed 1981; Bahuguna ed 1954; Mishra 2001; Hussain 1999; Hennig 1973; Rama 1935; Sankar 1974; Mieder 2005; Bhattacharjee1985, 1996; Sengupta 1974; Goswami 1960; Datta 1986; Basak 2006; Dunes 1980; Sharma 1999; Ahmed 1990; Pandey 1981; Ghosh&Ghosh 1998).

(B) There are two **structural theories** of folklore developed by Russian folklorist V. J. Propp and French structural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss known as

the syntagmatic structural theory and the paradigmatic theory respectively. The syntagmatic structural theory analyses the linear sequential function of the dramatis personae; it does not analyse the context and its meaning. The paradigmatic theory, on the other hand, deals with inner and hidden meaning. Further, the meaning is only revealed through relationship between things. Things have no meaning independently. It has been found that songs, tales, ballads and dance, all, use motifs and these motifs are again related to certain myth which has a meaning attached to it. Some of the folk songs describe some rituals and such rituals have meaning embedded in them which is juxtaposed through ritual action. The meaning of a song or poem remains peculiarly mixed up with its image structure. Moreover, the verbal structure and arrangement of lines of the same folk song or poetry varies from tribe to tribe.

The folk literature also finds expression in man, nature and spirit continuum. Studies in this field have been conducted but, till date, no such study has been taken up to throw light on the folk literature of the tea gardens of Barak Valley. Noted studies are those by Dundes (1963), Propp (1958), Kumar (1993), Deva (1981), Raju (1935) and Mahapatra (1992). All these studies throw sufficient light on the structure of relationship between the different groups of people and how the relationship varies from person to person and also changes under different situations. The relationship between man and his environment is also interconnected for when environment changes man's behaviour and lifestyle changes and such transformation finds expression in their oral composition also.

(C) **Studies on folk literature** showing its social significance and inspired by Indian nationalism are available. Tagore collected rhymes and tales from the villages on the fringe of Santiniketan Institute to bring out their significance in the national context. Proverbs have been studied to show how they serve as a potent force and play a prominent role in regulating the human life and behaviour and how they function as informal and indirect means of social control. Oral poetry of Indian tribes expresses man's relatedness with his external forces and things. Customs and beliefs or superstition also find expression and it can be noted how much exploitative they can be in relation to the lives of the folks. Songs, puzzles, riddles, all, have their beauty and are expressions of well

formulated social thoughts, their functional aspect as social criticism and as a guide for moral values and knowledge is well determined (Prakash 1984; Haque 1981; Shrirama 1982; Mathur 1983; Pandey 1985; Mahapatra 1992; Basak 1998; Khan 2006; Bhattacharjee 1996; Ghosal 2007; Ratnananda 2009).Thus, these studies of folk literature are classificatory, structural and significatory in their nature.

In sum, India being a multi-racial and multicultural nation unfolds a broad canvas for cultural studies. The heterogeneous nature of the population is all pervading across the country. Barak Valley, in Assam, is a region of ethnic plurality comprising folks of diverse historical, cultural and traditional background, providing ample scope to unravel their origin, migration, economics, politics, culture, literature and the process of change and continuity in their culture, especially the populace of the tea gardens migrated long back from different parts of the country. There are numerous communities consisting of both tribes and castes living in the tea gardens of Barak Valley with their distinctive cultures which are varied and seemingly dichotomous. In the above context, the present study attempts to comprehend and analyse the structure of life-cycle, socio-economic structure, family structure, political institutions, kinship, religion, practices and beliefs, customs, festivals, dances, food habits dress, languages, literature (both oral and written) and the process of change and continuity amongst the tea garden folks of Barak Valley.

Objectives

The study has the following objectives:

i. To understand the structure and process of the folk culture of the tea gardens.

ii. To study the folk literature of the tea garden communities

iii. To interpret the folk literature of the tea garden communities for capturing the nature of interactions between the folk culture and the urban culture.

iv. To identify the areas of intervention by the agencies concerned for development of the folk communities in the tea gardens of the region.

Research Questions

The following research questions were framed to investigate the folk culture and literature in the tea gardens of Barak Valley:

i. Which are the different tribes and castes living in the tea gardens of Barak Valley?
ii. What is the relationship between these different groups of people?
iii. How far the tribes and castes of tea gardens are retaining and following their traditional culture?
iv. How far have they adapted to the environment of the tea gardens after migrating from their homelands?
v. What are their distinctive cultural traits and practices?
vi. Is the traditional culture of the tea garden workers changing?
vii. Is the social structure of the tea gardens changing?
viii. Is the economic structure of the tea gardens changing?
ix. Is the mindset of the tea garden workers changing?
x. Is the educational status of the tea garden people changing?
xi. Are the tea garden people conscious of their cultural identity?
xii. Is the change among the tea garden people occurring through Sanskritization?
xiii. Is the change among the tea garden people occurring through modernization?
xiv. How far the lives of the tea garden people have been affected by State policies and developmental programmes?
xv. Are the tea garden workers still attached to their oral literature?
xvi. What are the oral literatures still prevalent amongst the tea folks?
xvii. Are there writers amongst the tea garden and ex-tea garden people?
xviii. What written literature have the tea garden and ex-tea garden people produced?

xix. What does the literature of the tea garden and ex-tea garden people reflect on?

Data and Methodology

(i) Sources and Types of Data

The present study is mainly based on the oral literature of the tea garden folks. However, some of their literature is available in written form as well. The data therefore have been sourced from both oral and written literature of the tea gardens. Oral or written literature is found in the forms of poems, tales, dramas etc.

Besides, field data pertaining to the folk culture in the tea gardens were collected to understand the literary data in the cultural context. Thus, the data used in the study are of three types; namely, (i) oral literature, (ii) written literature and (iii) observations on cultural life. Moreover, some secondary data from books, journals, reports etc. have also been used to understand the research questions in a wider perspective.

(ii) Universe and Units of Study

The tea gardens of the Barak Valley constitute the universe and individuals as the authors of oral and written literature as well as makers of material and non-material culture of the gardens are the units of the study. However, in order to understand the present folk culture of the tea gardens and to initiate the collection of data related to folk literature the Kumber Tea Garden was purposively selected as it is a big garden comprising a huge number of communities as well as having located not far away from the Silchar town so as to maintain sustained interactions with the urban centre. Households were taken as units for data collection.

(iii) Selection of Units

For studying the culture of tea gardens, Koomber, a multicultural tea garden, was purposively selected. A sample of the households from all the communities was selected by applying a stratified random sampling method. It has 843 households with a total population of 1297 consisting of tribals and non-

tribals (Annual Return 2011). Out of the total households, a 10 per cent sample (85 households) with a population of three hundred seventy five persons was selected for collection of data on the culture of the garden. Of these households, 23 are tribal and 62 are non-tribal households. By picking clues from the garden the individual sources of the oral folk literature and authors of written folk literature were listed. The sources of oral literature were contacted to collect the literature and the written works of authors were collected for analysis.

(iv)Techniques and Tools for Data collection

Data about the folk culture were mainly collected with the help of an interview schedule which consisted of questions related to their socio-economic, political and cultural life. The data on oral literature were mainly collected through personal contacts and informal interviews of traditionally informed persons. Story-telling sessions were organized in different tea gardens for collecting the narratives while other oral literary components were collected through interactions with the informed individual sources. For written literature published works were used and some of the authors were also contacted for discussion.

(v) Methods of Analysis

The study involved transcription, classification and content analysis to comprehend, interpret and tease out the implications of the collected data on literature. Data on socio- cultural life, economic activities, politics and the life style of the tea garden workers as a whole were collected through structured interview schedule, which have been analysed.

The objective No. 1 is achieved by collection and analysis of field data from Koomber Tea Garden Village to understand the folk culture in its multi-community setting. The objectives, No.2 and 3 are achieved by analysis of oral and written literature in the chapter 4 and 5 on the tea garden folk literature. The literature gives understanding of folk cultures of the tea garden people in Barak Valley. The objective No. 4 and 5 are achieved by deriving understanding from the analysis of the folk literature, as discussed in the conclusion of the study.

Significance of Study

The study is an invaluable experience by itself for it has helped to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the various social thoughts, culture and practices and institutions of the tea garden workers of Barak Valley who have been living a segregated life for more than one and half centuries. Keeping in mind the Indian heritage the folklore and literature of the tea garden people is really of national significance. Globalization and modernization have bearing effects on these cultures and the treasure of oral literature is fast losing its traditionalism thus, documentation of the oral compositions is necessary and the study has undertaken the task of not only documenting but also making situational analysis along with their social implications which is significant enough for preserving the most valuable treasures of oral literatures. The study further contributes to the existing theoretical knowledge on folk cultures, their dynamism and changes, on the one hand, and to find out, on the basis of that, the ways of appropriate development of the folk people.