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Tribal Migration to Plantation Estate in North-East India : Determinants and Consequences*

Introduction

THE attention devoted to rural to urban migration of population in the last few decades has overshadowed migration within India's countryside. Migration within the rural, or rural like setting, has failed to receive the attention is deserves by the social scientists even though it had been an enduring feature of the Indian, society and had been fairly widespread during the British rule. The discovery of deserted villages, land reclamation by forest tribes and prosperous peasants, seasonal migration of peasants etc. are a few of the more striking features that reflect this process. Even so, these types of migration were hardly comparable in scale and magnitude to the migration of tribal peasants from Chhotanagpur and other neighbouring tribal zones to the north-east India for work in the plantations, which were ruraL in character. An attempt is made here to throw some light on this neglected area of population movement in India. The focus is on determinants and consequences of migration which provide deep insights into the working of the colonial economy in India.

Social Composition of Migrant Labour Force

The plantation estates in north-east India undertook commercial production of tea, which was introduced by the British, towards the middle of the 19th century. The introduction was impelled by the ending of British monopoly in

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tea trade with China on account of the estranged political relations between the two countries. Tea, by then, had become an important item of consumption in the British life leading to an evergrowing demand for it in the U. K. market. The British capital, therefore, readily came forward for investment in tea plantation estates.[1] The north-east India with favourable climate and temperature for tea and the abundant waste land and jungles provided an ample scope for this investment. For instance, the total amount of capital invested in tea industry was approximately 1 million in 1872 which had increased to an estimated 14 million by 1903. Invariably, the output too had increased from about 12 million Ibs to 134 million Ibs between 1872-1901.

Even though land and capital were easily available in abundance, plantation estates were from its very inception faced with an acute shortage of labour. Not that there was scarcity of labour in India but it was inaccessible as the plantation sites were situated at a far distant place from the source of available labour force. Of course, some local labour force could be obtained but this came mainly from one, the Boro-Kachan, tribe. The rest of the local population were by and large disinclined to work in the tea estates, except in the Surma valley where certain amount of labour either locally or from the adjoining districts in Bengal could be secured.[2] All the same, the existing labour force was far from adequate. In 1859, only about 10,000 labourers were available for employment in tea estates as against a requirement of 16,000 to 20,000 hands for the current cultivation alone.[3] The import of labour from outside thus became a major concern of the planters and they formed the Tea planters' Association with a view to operating an organised system of recruitment.

This organised system of procurement of labour had come well under the way by the middle of 1860s. In 1867-68, two thirds of the total plantation labour force of 34,433 in Assam proper had come from outside. The remaining one third was local. By the end of 1872, the total number of outside recruits, net of all wastages by death, desertion etc., stood approximately at 24,000 in Assam proper and 20,000 in Cachar. By 1905-06, the adult labour force on Assam plantations swelled to a total number of 417,262, of which only a few thousands were locally recruited.[4]

The main source for this systematic recruitment of labour for Assam and also North Bengal was the Chhotanagpur region and the neighbouring tribal

1. Guha, A., 1977, *Planter* ***Raj*** *to Swaraj, freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in* ***Assam 1826-1947,*** **p. 34.**

2. Griffiths, P., 1967, *The History of Indian Tea Industry,* p. 268.

3. Guha, A., ***op. cit-*** **p. 15; also** *Formation of a Working Class in Assam Plantations—A Study in Retrospect in North East India,* Council for Social Science Research, (henceforth NEICSSR) *Problems of Tea industry in* ***North-East*** *India, 1981,* p. 77

4. Guha A., 1977, ***ibid.*** p. 18; also **1981,** *ibid.* pp. 79-80- **By** 1928-'29 total adult force employed was 615479. See, L-P. Pathak, *The Enticed Emm iff rants: Imported* ***Tribal Tea Labour in*** *Assam* ***I84I-1960.*** (Mimeographed).

zones in Madras and Bombay presidencies. Bengal, Bihar and Estern U. P. too supplied a part of the labour force for work in the tea estates in Assam mainly in Cachar district. This comprised largely of the lower caste Hindus- In 1884-'85, 44.7 per cent of labour force was from Chhotanagpur, 27.2 per cent from Bengal, 21.6 per cent from U. P. and Bihar, 0.2 percent from Bombay, 0.7 per cent from Madras and 5.5 per cent from within Assam. By 1889, half of the labour force was found to have been recruited from Chhotanagpur, about a quarter from Bengal and about 5 per cent only from within Assam.[5] Another important component of plantation labour force was the Nepalese of East Nepal who were mainly employed in tea estates situated in the hilly tract of Darjeeling district. It may be noted that the Nepalese flocked to Darjeeling in considerable numbers and tea gardens had all the labour they wanted without formalities and without the cost of importing it. A part of this labour force was also employed in estates in the plains of North Bengal but (heir proportion had gradually declined. Between 1911 and 1921, the number of Nepalese labourers had decreased by 30 per cent.[6] Paradoxically enough, thus, it was not so much the displaced artisans of the peasant village in India but the tribal population of the Chhotanagpur region and the neighbouring areas that turned out to be the chief source of labour supply to plantation estates in north-east India. This was contrary to presumption adsanced as early as 1834 that this enterprise of tea plantations facilitated by the low price of labour would be able to provide occupation for thousands of Indian weavers who had been relieved by the import of cloth and muslin from Manchester.[7]

Determinants of Migration

The migration of tribal peasants to the plantation estates in north-east India was stimulated by a variety of reasons. Enticement by recruiting agents, conflict in the family, scarcity of food, money and employment, besides adventurism and escape from law, have been cited as some of the major reasons of migration in a study conducted on plantation labourers in north-east India.[8]

5. Guha, A., **1981,** *ibid-* p. SO. This becomes most glaring when one identifies the Local Forwarding Agencies of labour recruitment for Plantation in North-East India. The follow-ijigs were the Local Forwarding Agencies by I954-'55: Kharagpur (W. Bengal); Ctiakradharpur, Dalionganj, Ranchi, Chaibasa (Bihar); Vizianagram (Andhra); Berhampur, Koraput, Sambalpur (Orissa), Bilaspur, Raipur **(M.P.);** Nasik (Bombay) and Rowriah, Silchar (Assam). See, *Tea Districts Labour Association Handbook,* Parti, 1954-'55,pp. **5-10.**

6. Govt. of India (Henceforth ***COI),*** 1930, *The Royal Commission on Labour in 1ndia>* Vol. 5, Part-1, pp. 7-8.

7. Griffiths, G., *op. dr.,* p., 38.

8. Jain, S., 1983, Tea gardens in Assam; *Patterns* of recruitment, employment and exploitation of tribal labour, *Soda! Action,* **33,** 269.

Whereas, the migration of tribal peasants due to these proximate reasons may not be questioned, they were, in themselves, the product of deep underlying social and economic forces that were at work in Chhotanagpur and other neighbouring tribal belts of Madras and Bombay presidencies.

The tribal communities had begun to show signs of disintegration ever since the arrival *of Jagirdars* and *Thicadars* in the agrarian scene of Chhotanagpur and in similar other tribal belts. Originally, these tribal communities practised the usual shifting cultivation but as the population increased, settled agriculture became fairly established among them. In settling down, they produced a typical pattern of village system which was based on a lineage derived from the founder of the village. They recognised the local, and later regional, chiefs who were either of the tribal origin or caste Hindus and to whom they paid voluntary dues called *chanda* which was neither tax nor rent. It was converted into feudal rent under the Hindu or tribal chiefs after they were converted to Hinduism and came under the influences of Hindu ideas of kingship. Thereafter, the chiefs also exercised control over the village cultivable waste land which was termed *rajhas* and settled rent paying non-tribal peasants on them. At the same time, they created a class of *jagirdars* and *inamdars* who were brought from outside and were given villages or groups of villages as *jagirs.*[9] Subsequently, there came to be farmed out by the chiefs and *jagirdars* to so called *thicadars* who squeezed out the peasants as much as they could and even dispossessed them from their ancestral land whenever they showed reluctance to pay rent or render labour services. Thus, although the process of granting *jagir* had begun with the arrival of the Hindu chiefs or the Hinduisation of native chiefs in the 17th century, the dispossession process began only from the last quarter of the 1 8th century.[10] The pace was, howe.ver, hastened with the onset of the British rule. The British rule integrated the tribal areas within two broad system of land and revenue administration viz. the *zamindari* and the *ryotwari.* With this, a new class of landlords and a new notion of legal ownership and private property in land was created in the tribal society.

The *zamindars, jagirdars* and other intermediaries took immediate advantage of this new system. They legalised their holdings, reduced the size of the communal land by usurping portions from such land and settled more enterprising peasants, from outside the region on them. They also imposed high rates of rent on the original tribal peasants as the revenue demand of the government had increased with the introduction of the new system. Thus, more and more pressure wras put upon the original cultivators who were also required to pay

9. Rothermutid, D., 1978, *Government, Landlord and Peasant in India, Agrarian Relations Under British Rule, 1865-1935,* pp. 171-177.

10. tkka, P., 1972, Revivalist movement among the tribals of Chhotanagpur. In: K. Suresh Singh (ed.), *Tribal Situation in India,* p. 425; alsoS. Bhowmik, 1981, *Class Formation in ihe Plantation System,* pp. 43-44.

the rent in cash. In the process, ttey found themselves progressively alienated from the land and became landless.

Meanwhile, there was the establishment of British administrative centres and opening up of roads and communication. This paved the way for the influx of traders, money-lenders and even the land hungry peasants from the neighbouring districts *who* look advantage of the land given for use by the original settler owners and converted them into personal property in the course of settlement operations. In this way, they managed to swindle a Jarge portion of land that belonged to lineage or the village commune and brought the complete ruin of the tribals. There, thus, emerged a new class of landlords from among the new comers and the original tribal owner-cultivators were converted into tenants on their own land and were subjected to various forms of exploitation. Such an agrarian process gave new opportunity to make money which resulted into the emergence of a new class of usurious money 'cnders. They gave loans against security of (and and services and charged exhorbitant rates of interest that were beyond the reach of the tribals. The dependence of tribals on the money lenders was further aggravated by a series of natural calamities such as famines that hit Chhotanagpur and other tribal belts for a little over a century.[11] All these led to acute distress among the tribal people which was further reinforced by denial of traditional usufructory rights in forests and forest produce, restriction of shifting cultivation, commercial exploitation of the forests and imposition of taxes of various sorts by the British administration.

The conjucture of all these forces—largely the product of the British policy and administration—kindled a deep sense of discontent among the mass of tribal peasants that culminated in a series of open revolts against the exploitative immigrants and the British administration from the last quarter of the 18th Centmy onwards. While the uprisings were supressed with a firm hand, protective measures were also introduced to bring relief and save the natives from the cruel exploitation of outsiders. Yet, they *were not* adequate enough to prevent large scUe land alienation or practice of usury. Naturally many more revofts occurred at the turn of the present Century, Some of these revolts had posed *& serious* threat lo the British rule and administration[12].

It was not thus a matter of mere coincidence that just when the British firms were establishing plantation estates in north-east India, tribal peasants from the biggest tribal concentration in India were being pushed of!" from their zones by an organised system of recruitment that was evolved by the British capitalists in connivance with the British administration,. The extent of outmigration from

11. Bhowmik, S., *ibid,* p- 47.

12- The most prominent of these revolts were the Kol and Bhumij revolt, 1833, the Samhal rebellion (1855-'56), Birsa Munda movement (1895-1900), and Tana Bhagat Movement (1915-1922). For details see, S. Sinha, Tribal Solidarity Movement in India; A Review in K. Suresh Singh (ed.j, *op.cit.,* p. 4iO.

Chhotanagpur, which was 3,30,000 in 1891; 2,82,000 in 1901;7,07,000 in 1911 and 9,47,000 in 1921; clearly reflects this link.[13]

Recruitment Pattern

The organised system of recruitment was broadly of two types known as the contractor and *sardari* system in the literature on plantation in north-east India. The former was the main mode of recruitment in the initial phase of the development of plantation estates in north-east India. This received a set back with the introduction of *sardari* system in 1870 and was eventually stopped in 1915, The *sardari* system came subsequently to constitute the dominant mode of recruitment, lasting upto 1959 when it was brought to an end.

In the contractors' system, the recruitment of the labour was entirely left to the private contractors who, working on behalf of an Agency House or an individual tea planter, began deporting group after group of labourers to the plantation estates in Assam. The general practice used by them to procure labourers was abduction, enticement, fraud, wrongful confinement, assurance of higher wages, better working and living conditions, etc. At the same time, the transportation of the labourers was so inhuman that it looked similar to the slave trafficking in the Atlantic in the 17th and 18th Century, Indeed, the mortality on the journey and on arrival was so high that the government was compelled to appoint a Commission of Enquiry as early as 1861. In the light of the reports of this Commission, an Act, the Bengal Act III of 1863, was passed whereby contractors as well as steamers and boats carrying labourers, were licensed. Labourers were to be produced before judicial and civil authorities and contracts, signed as per the Act. The free contractor's system was thus replaced by licensed contractor's system. In effect, the new system was a failure as a handful of licensed contractors hired hundreds of unlicensed subcontractors who continued to practise the same old style of recruitment. Similarly, the specification of the term and the signing of contracts were matters of mere formality. There was still another variant for the system of recruitment by the contractors. This was known as the Dhubri system of recruitment and was designed to facilitate free recruitment within Assam. The idea was to let the emigrant come to Assam, go around the garden and judge the conditions of work and then decide to enter into a legal contract. In practice, the system reinforced the contractors' system for contractors recruited labourers in the usual manner and sent them to Dhubri where the contract was to be executed. Further, Dhubri being far away from the actual plantation sites in Assam, the system could hardly serve its purpose,

U. Singh, K- Suresh, 1978, Colonial transformation of tribal society in Middle India, *Economic and Political Weekly,* XIII (30), pp. 1226-'27. Also, M. "Weiner, 1978, *Sons of the Soil, Migration and Ethnic Conflit in India,* p. 161.

The *sardari* system was introduced as an alternative system of labour recruitment in view of the unsatisfactory working of the contractor's system. The system entailed recruitment of labour by tea garden *sardars. Sardars* were tea garden labourers sent to their own district to recruit more labourers for the estate. On arrival, their work was supervised by the recruiting establishment i.e. agents who were kept there by the owners or the Agency Houses. Later, these agents functioned as employees of one or the other of the associations formed by tea producers for the purpose of organized recruitment. The Tea District Labour Association formed in 1878 was one such organization which recruited quite efficiently on behalf to the tea gardens in the north-east.

Consequences of Migration

As for the consequences of migration on migrants themselves are concerned, it may be mentioned at the very outset that the tribal migration to plantation estates in north-east India was a movement away from one form of exploitative relationship to another of a more brutal nature. To start with, the relations between planters and labourers in the tea estates were guided by the Act XIII of 1859, i.e. the Workman's Beach of Contract Act, as the existing civil law was considered to be wanting in ensuring the interests of the planters. As per this Act, the labourers were liable to prosecution and imprisonment for any breach of contract. Inertia, sluggishness, refusal to work, desertion etc. were treated as punishable offences. Invariably, therefore, labourers were punished with floging, physical torture and even imprisonment on these counts. The plantation labourers were thus denied the basic right of human freedom and lived almost on a bondage.

The miserable life in the tea estates in view of the Act XIII of 1859, was made worse by the condition of living prevalent there. The plantation estates were situated in what were earlier jungles and wild bushes and were described as unhealthy and disease prone. In fact, the Commission of Enquiry appointed in 1868 reported most unfavourably on the conditions of labour in the tea estates. They were not only recruited on false promises and transported in overcrowded and unhygenic steamers but many of them were also not fit for work in the tea estates. All these were followed by overwork, insufficient nourishment, unhygienic condition of living such as bad housing, overcrowding, impure water and climatic conditions that were alien to them. This took a heavy toll on the life of the labourers. In fact, as many as over 30,000 out of 84,915 labourers who landed between 1863 to 1866, had died just within the span of less than 3 years.[14] Yet, such legal disabilities and hardships were not compensated by a higher wage structure. On the contrary, wages were lower than what was normally paid in agriculture or the non-plantation sectors.

14. Guha, A., 1977, *op.cit.,* p. 18.

In 1864, a labourer in P.W.D. earned a wage of rupees seven per month. In tea estates, the same was between rupees 4 to 5 per month and in some estates even lower than 4 rupees. Subsequently, statutory provision regarding minimum wage for the plantation labourers was made. The rate was fixed at Rs. 5 for men, Rs. 4 for women and Rs. 3 for children i.e. the age below 12 year. It was also stipulated to provide rice to labourers at a rate of Re. 1 per mound. Despite this, planters managed to pay lower cash wage by manipulating piece rate payments. They also brought down the real wage by raising the price of rice to Rs. 2, then to Rs. 2.50 and finally to Rs. 3.00 per mound by J900. Meanwhile, plantation labourers were receiving almost half the wage earned by free agricultural labourers in the vicinities. The wage of an agricultural labourer was **Rs.** 9,73 per month in 1873 and ranged between Rs. 8 to Rs. 11 in the subsequent period. As against this, only in rare cases a plantation labourer could earn a wage as high as Rs.6. 50 per month.[15]

The immigration also changed the economic activity of tribals from self-supporting peasant to wage labourer households even though work activity continued to be agricultural in nature. There was thus homogeneity in economic activity even in the new setting. The same was not the case in social and cultural spheres for immigrants comprised different ethnic and linguistic groups. The immigration thus destined them to *live,* in a setting that was, unlike the village in their native place, multi-ethnic community. Even then, each community lived a secluded life. This was made possible by the pattern of housing settlement that was not only scattered over the estate but was formed around the nucleus of the place of origin of ethnicl inguistic community. The seclusion or segregation has however come under erosion lately due to trade union activity and new housing schemes. Another interesting aspect of tribal migration to the north-east has been that a large portion of the labour force had opted to settle permanently in the lea estates or the neighbouring non-plantation villages. Even when the government of Assam introduced compulsory repatriation of labour recruited from outside after independence, almost a half postponed or did not exercise the right for repatriation. This may be guaged from Table 1. The permanently settled immigrants have by now not only lost their ties with their native places but maintained no links whatsoever with them. In fact, even among the first generation of migrants, only a few had been to their respective villages after migrating to the estates.[16] As far as the second and third generation ofmigrants are concerned, it may be noted that they have no knowledge of the place of their origin excepting that they came originally from Chhotanagpur, Santhal Pargana or some other places in Orissa, M. P. and the neighbouring states.

15. Cuba, A, 1968, A big push without a take-off: A case-study of Assam 1871-1901, 77r« *Indian Economic and Social History Review.* 206-207; also 1977, *op.cit.,* pp. 16-17.

16. For instance out of 44H workers, only 36 were first generation migrants in Sonali tea estate in Jalpatguri, **Of** these only 15 wovkcrs had been to their respective villages in Chhotanagpur after migrating to the tea gardens see, S. Bliowmik, *op.cit.,* p. 334.

TABLE 1

	1956	*1957*	*1958*	*1959*	*1960*	*1961*	*1962*	*Total*
Immigrants repatriated	15,312	18,247	13,537	13,319	**26,501**	**18,512**	2,023	**1,25,691**
Immigrants not repatriated	21,301	22,596	**15,689**	**16,413**	18,439	19,089	**10,261**	1,23,788

SOURCE : R,C. Awasthi, Economics of Tea Industry in India, p. 226.

In the process, these migrants are almost on the verge of losing their identity as distinct linguistic group. The phenomenon is more pronounced among those who form numerically a small linguistic group in the new socio-cultural setting. For example, in 1961 only 275,000 persons of the total of 439,000 migrants spoke tribal languages (including Oriya) of Bihar and Orissa. With families they numbered about a million and may be as high as 1.5 million. Besides, there were several hundred thousand former tea plantation workers who were now engaged in peasant agriculture. According to 1961 census report, there were 10 lakhs ex-tea-garden labourers in Assam.[17] It is quite apparent then that there has been tendency of linguistic assimilation among plantation workers in the north-east. According to an estimate, more than half of those originating from tribal areas of Bihar and Orissa, reported Assamese as their mother tongue during the census of 1961.[18] Further, the children of these migrants attend schools conducted in Assamese language. Many of them also observe Assamese Hindu rituals, especially the Bihu festivals that are so centra] to Assamese cultural life. The plantation setting also opened an avenue for plantation labourers to acquire new language known as Sadri or Sadani. Sadri is an admixture of tribal languages and other major languages such as Hindi, Bengalee and Assamese. It is a sort of link language among migrant tribal communities and is widely spoken all over the tea producing districts in the north-east. Unfortunately, even Ihen it has not been given the due it deserves by linguistics, administrators and census officials.

An intricate issue that has plagued plantation labourers in recent years and which has emerged out of migration is the problem of acute unemployment. It is paradoxical that labourers who were enticed to migrate to the plantation estates in view of acute shortage of labour are now faced with the problem of finding employment.[19] The situation has turned worse for them as they have been de-

17. Pathak, L. S., 0/7. *cif., p. 9.*

18. Weiner, M., *op.cit.,$.* 137.

19. Unemployment among tea garden labourers alone was estimated at 2.36 lakhs in 1967-See N. Saha and P. D. Saikia, Tea Industry in Assam—An Assessment in NElCSSR *op. dr., p. 22.*

scheduled from the tribal status after independence. Thus, they have been, excepting those working in tea estates in North Bengal, deprived of all the privileges and benefits that their counterparts elsewhere enjoy.

The last is invariably the result of the consequences of the large scale tribal migration on the socio-economic and political framework of the state. It may be kept in mind that the plantations constituted the biggest factor attracting immigration to north-east until the present century, when the movement of population from East Bengal to Assam came to be more pronounced than the movement of the tribal populations. In fact, as early as 1891, there were 190,000 tribals in the tea areas of Assam and nearly 70,000 in Bengal.[20] But even thereafter the movement continued unabated on the same scale till very recent years. This can be guaged from the following table.

TABLE *1*—ANNUAL IMMIGRATION OF LABOUR INCLUDING CHILDREN **INTO** ASSAM PLANTATIONS IN SOME SELECTIVE YEARS

Year	*No.*	*Year*	*No.*
1902-03	26,684	1931-32	50,997
1907-08	£4,824	1937-38	32,335
1912-13	59.873	1942-43	56,431
1915-16	1110,376	1947-48	36,758
1918-19	2,22,171	1949-50	28,100
1919-20	1,02,089	1953-54	4,087
1926-27	45,694		

SOURCE: A. Guha, Planter Raj to Swaraj, Appcndix-10. p. 350.
Note. Data since 1940s have been taken from L. P. Pathak, *op. cit.* Appendix II; p. 9.

This brought considerable demographic changes in north-cast especially in tea producing districts from the last quarter of the 19th century onwards. One of these was the change in ethnic composition of the population. Tribal migrants coming from different geographical regions with their own distinct language, custom, dress, food habits etc. added further complexity to what had already been multiethnic complex society. Another significant aspect of this immigration was that the proportion of indigenous population viz. indigenous Hindu Castes and tribes, in the total population of the province underwent a steady decline. The proportion had come down from anything between 95 to 99 per cent in the pre-annexation days to 78.3 per cent in 1891 and 67.8 per cent in

20. Weiner, M.. *op. cit.* p. 161 -

1901.[81] Thirdly, there was a change in the spatial distribution of the population as between the districts. The tea producing districts showed a rapid rise in density of population vis-a-vis other districts until the arrival of land hungry peasants from East Bengal. Coupled with this was also the distribution of ethnic groups among the districts. Thus, whereas tribal migrants formed considerable population in some districts like Lakhimpur, Sibsagar or Darrang, they were very thinly populated in the remaining districts. For instance, in 1901 as well as 1921, more than two fifth of the population of Lakhimpur district was enumerated to have come from outside the province. Similarly, people from outside Assam constituted a quarter of the population in Darrang and Sibsagar districts.[12]

Such demographic changes were economically significant in more than one way. Firstly, it led to continued imbalance between the first growth of modern sector i.e. the plantation and the slower growth of traditional agricultural sector. This was mainly due to the fact that the agricultural sector was faced with an acute shortage of labour as there was control over labour by the plantation estates. The result was that the tea producing regions became deficit area in food-grains. In 1873, the annual rice imports were estimated at about 3 lakh maunds which had increased to 4 to 5 lakh maunds by the early nineties. Thereafter, the net import of rice exceeded 7 lakh maunds per year.[23] Under the circumstances, settlement by migrant labourers after the expiry of the contract in the neighbouring villages or waste land tracts brought a partial solution to the problem. By 1871, some 10,000 labourers with terminated contracts, had settled in the district of Sibsagar along. The hind settlement figures too clearly bear this trend. For instance, owned landholding by ex-plantation labourers in Brahmaputra valley had increased from 1.36,216 acres in 1908-09 to 3,79,325 acres in 1940-'41.[24] 1 hus, a substantial pan of savings by plantation labourers was invested in agricultural development of the region. All the same, a part of saving in the form of wages was remitted outside the province either through postal facilities or in person when the migrant labourers returned to their native place. However, this constituted only a small portion of the gross earnings of the plantation sector in the form of high dividends and salaries which were siphoned oft" for developmental process elsewhere. Naturally this had far reaching consequences for the development of the economy of the region as a whole.

In view of such economic and linguistic/cultural position occupied by the tribal migrants, they pose hardly any threat—economic, political or cultural to the local Assamese population. In fact, these migrant communities till today are so backward economically, socially and culturally that of an estimated 45

21. Guha, A., 1968, *op. cit.*, p. 212.
22. Ibid., p. 212.
23. *Ibid., pp.* 209-210.
24. Rothermund, D., 1977, A survey of rural migration and land reclamation, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 4(3), 237; also A. Guha, 1977, *op.cit.*. Appendix 10(Note), p. 350.

lakhs, only 10 have secured the gazetted post in the state and that too under the central government. Again, the total number of these serving in government. semi-government and private sectors, other than tea, do not exceed 100.[25] Even then, a deep underlying fear with respect to these communities is sheltered in the Assamese mind. Deschcduling of these communities from the tribal status after independence is to be seen in this light. Indeed, even though various Commissions on SC and ST have recommended their descheduling, the state government has consistently opposed any change in their status on the ground that it would severely disturb the local political picture.[26] What it means is that no serious attempt is being made towards social and economic upliftmcnt of these people even though they have sacrificed much for the development of the region.

25. **CPI** (Marxist-Leninist), *For a New Democracy* (Assam Special Issue), March-April 1933; p. 64.

26. Dhebar Commission, Lakur Committee and A. K. Chanth Committee recommended Scheduling of these migrant communities. Sec, *Ibid.*, p. 64.