

Chapter-4

Identity Construction and Cultural Expression

4.1 Introduction

Identity construction can be looked as a kind of cultural stimulation. Every social group in their identity construction, they stimulate its culture, redefine and standardize cultural expressions and in need they also create new ones. Various scholars belonging to the three different school of ethnicity (primordial, constructionist and instrumentalist) are of the same opinion that ethnicity is the articulation of 'culture'. Ethnicity is articulated with the help of culture which a person acquires as a member of a society. The phenomena of ethnicity and its cultural behaviour can be seen as dynamic continuation of similar political exploitation of cultural forms but in the local level.

In the context of the political usage of the oral traditions and folkloric resources, Roger D. Abrahams (2005, 183) opined that in "giving voice to values and entering into the celebration of ethnicity, oral traditions are a major component in establishing the boundaries and contours of an ethnic group". As ethnicity creates boundaries between 'us' and 'them' –the different folkloric item or genres are exploited in the process. For construction of identity and thereby to negotiate political claims-culture, traditions and heritages are the tools for mobilizing people. New cultural symbols are created, olds are removed- different forms of folklore, cultures are standardized.

4.2 What is culture?

Culture includes everything of a group from language, religion, dress habits, food, festivals, music-dance, to art etc. It's a unique phenomenon which is generally meant everything that a human being does in his/her day to day life. Culture does not only define a social group but it also distinguishes and differentiates itself from others. As Raymond William describes culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in English language. The word culture has come from the Latin word 'Colo-re' which meant to cultivate or to soil. The word culture first appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary around 1430. In the 19th century the word culture was mainly associated with western culture. It meant the habits, customs and tastes of the upper classes (also known

as elite). But from mid 20th century gradually the meaning of culture has been changed. Now it does not mean only of the elite upper class people but of all common masses.

Today culture is meant according to American Heritage English Dictionary 'the totality of socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions and all are products of human work and thought'. In Cultural Studies culture is meant as 'it is the mode of generating meanings and ideas'. By this, Cultural Studies argues that how culture is about the meanings of a community or society generate. Cultural Studies believes that culture of a community includes various aspects like economic, political and ideological and it seeks to understand how particular objects acquire meaning and value in society. Culture is not a natural thing it is produced.

There are various scholars who define 'culture' in many ways. Some of which are as follows-

British Anthropologist Sir Edward B. Tylor in his book 'Primitive Culture' (1871) had define culture as, 'Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'. By this he meant that whatever a human being acquires from his/her society can be said as culture.

One of the founders of Cultural Studies Raymond William said that 'Culture includes the organizations of production the structure of the family, the structure of institution which express or govern social relationships, the characteristics forms through which members of the society communicate'.

According to Clifford Geertz Professor of Social Sciences at Princeton University, 'Culture is simply the ensemble of stories we tell ourselves about ourselves'.

American anthropologist Margaret Mead opined that 'Culture is the learned behaviour of a society or a subgroup'

Another scholar Franz Boas said that 'Culture embraces all the manifestations of social habits of a community, the reaction of the individual as affected by the habits of the group in which he lives and the products of human activities as determined by these habits'.

On the basis of all these definition given by different scholars it can be understood that 'culture' is everything that a human being does in his/her day to day life which he acquires from the society that he belongs. Culture is the each and every rites and rituals which are done from the birth or before birth of a person till death. From above mentioned definitions it is also known that culture is not a natural thing or no one brings it with him by birth. It is produced in societies and people acquire it from the society they belong and it is transmitted from one generation to another. In many times due to various factors like changes of place, new environment and time has brought many changes in culture. When such changes occur in the culture of any groups then a new form of culture come up and that new form of culture also brought changes in the identity of that ethnic group. For this sometime it is seen that the social group lose their original identity and the old identity is replaced with a new identity.

4.3 Tea Community Culture:

Earlier, as it was mentioned that the Tea Community of Assam is a composition of various social groups which were brought from different locations of India to Assam, the culture of each social group was also different at time of arrival. They had their different culture in their original homeland which they had brought with them to Assam. But after coming to this land and living in different tea gardens the cultures of these groups have been changed. This new environment of tea plantation has brought a new form of synergetic culture in their life which is today known as 'Tea Community culture'. The 'Tea Community' culture is a combination of cultures of the various social groups. It is a rich and vibrant culture which is mosaic of different festivals, music-dance, language, religion and rites and rituals.

This new culture is viewed as the main attachment among the various sub groups of the Tea Community. It is serving as the core element in the identity construction of the Tea Community. Initially there is no any purpose of the formation of 'Tea Community culture' but in the recent ethnicity and identity construction process they have use this culture as a instrument to show their uniqueness. The various cultural forms which reflect the life style of the community are nourished by them for the new 'Tea Community' identity.

4.3.1 Language:

Language is the medium through which human being express their feelings, thoughts and most important communicate with each other. Among the various cultural expressions language is regarded as one of the important element in the ethnicity and identity construction. According to Shibutani and Kwan (1996, 41) ‘language provides a bond of unity among its speakers and defines a line of separation marking of one speech community from another. The bond of unity marked by language may be one chance or choice, depending on whether the linkage is attained through mother tongue or a second language that is the ethnic bond based on language can be viewed as either an evolved bond based on mother tongue or a deliberately created unity founded on a language other than mother tongue.’

The Tea Community which is composite of more than hundred caste and tribe have ethnic origin of Pre-Dravidian, Proto-Austroloids and of different linguistic families like Austro-Asiatic, Dravidian and Anglo Aryan groups. Each of these tribe and caste had their different mother tongue. In the 19th century the British tea planters brought these groups to work as a labourer, in the 19th century they have under gone many changes in their languages. While living and working together they require a common language for exchanging ideas or to communicate each other and this eventually led them to develop a lingua franca popularly known as *Sadri* language which is also *Khatha* or *Pachgoniya*.

It is mentioned by Navarangi (1965, 5) that *Sadani/Sadri* originated as the mother tongue of the Sadan, an Aryan group amongst the Non-Aryan in Chotanagpur area. It evolved as a lingua franca of the Adivasis of Chotanagpur and gradually spread to present day Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Orissa. Therefore it may say that the people of the Tea Community who brought from these areas brought the *Sadri* language with them. But living more than two hundred years in Assam, the *Sadri* language has been greatly influenced by the dominant regional language i.e. Assamese. So at present *Sadri* that spoken in Assam has called as Assam *Sadri* and it is distinguished from the Chotanagpur *Sadri* language.

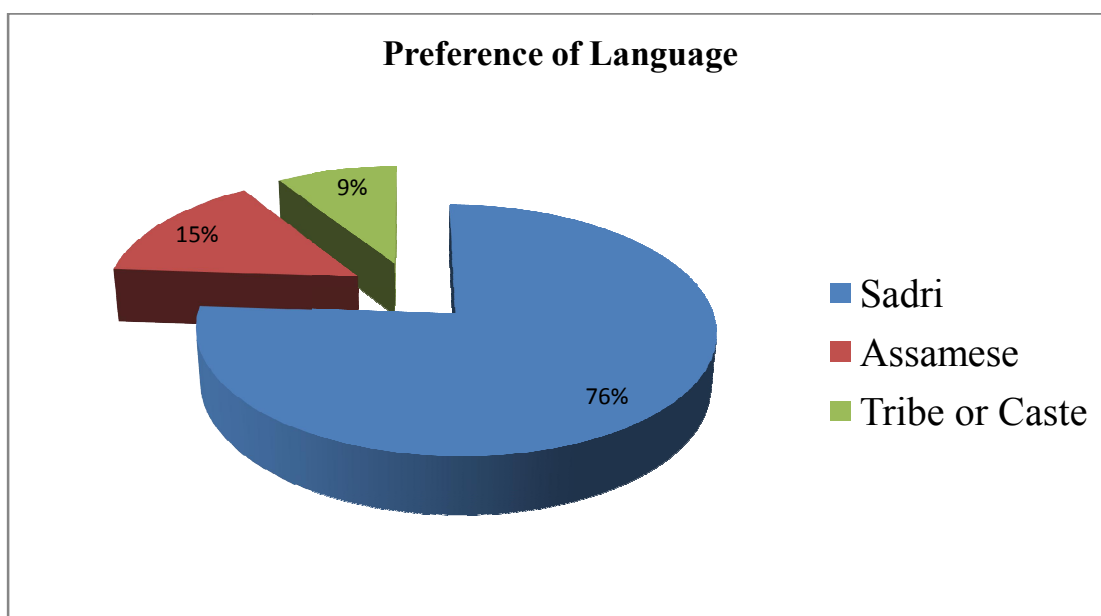
In order to know the preference of their 1st language a question was asked to 200 respondents (those who are still working in Tea gardens and those who are engaged in some other professions) of Sivasagar and Dibrugarh Districts. Respondents were asked

to give opinion regarding the 1st preference of their mother tongue among the three main dominant languages of Tea Community people that are *Sadri*, Assamese and their caste or tribe language. In response to that, as shown below in the table (Table 4.1) majority (76%) of the respondent responded that they prefer *Sadri* language as their 1st language, 15 percent opined that they preferred the Assamese language and 9 percent respondent said that they prefer their caste or tribe language.

Table: 4.1 Distribution of Respondents’ opinion regarding preference of their language

Language	1st Preference (Percentage)
<i>Sadri</i>	76%
Assamese	15%
Caste or Tribe	9%
Total	100%

Figure4.1 Pie Diagram showing Respondents’ opinion regarding Language:



It is clearly known from the table that majority of the Tea Community people consider *Sadri* as their first language. Some youth who had their education in Assamese medium and living amidst of Assamese speaking people and more attaches with them are preferred Assamese as their 1st language. On the other hand some of the aged person who has still some connection with their origin place preferred their caste or tribe language.

At present the people of the Tea Community taking various steps in regards of the upliftment of the *Sadri* language. It is observed in the field that an enlightened section of the tea garden labourers too divulged opinion by calling upon their people accept the *Sadri* language as the link language since it has been serving as the most effective means of cementing the bond of 'unity in diversity' among the various ethnic group of Tea Community in Assam. For instance, while justifying the acceptability of *Sadri* language, Saymurm opined (Cited in Sengupta 2009, 46-47):

'The Adivasi culture is an ancient heritage it has passed unaccountable years of subsistence and survival. Thereby the language has always sided the ineradicably place in the Adivasi culture and community. The *Sadri* is the common language among the Adivasi. Although, the different communities like the Santhals, Mundas, Orangs, Kharias etc. have their own respective dialects, yet the *Sadri* is the medium, which unites all in one common stream as Adivasis. Thus we can say it is unity in diversity. As the Nagamese is the common dialect among the Naga tribes, so too is the *Sadri* among the Adivasis. *Sadri* has been in indefinitely modified and expanded so as to meet cultural demandsand it will remain to meet the cultural, economical, social and educational and political demands.'

Furthermore, the ATTSA strongly demanded to the Government of India to take adequate facilities for the maintenance and preservation of their unique culture by broadcasting them through various programs on Radio and Television in *Sadri* Language.

Recently a bi-monthly magazine on Tea Community named as '*Sikor*' is published under the initiative of Rajib Kr. Mahatta, president of Newspaper Association of India Assam State Committee, in the *Sadri* language. It is the first bi-monthly magazine that published in *Sadri* language. It is published by Hamder Adhiker, a regional news paper, Moran,

Dibrugarh district. On the editorial page of the 1st issue of the magazine 'Sikor' the editor Rajib Kr. Mahatta writes:

'The identity of a social group lies on their language and culture. To identify ourselves along with speaking the language we must have the respect towards our language. As we identifying ourselves as Tea Community, therefore the tea garden language i.e. Sadri is our first language. As we don't have written script of our Sadri language at present so to bring our language at present we are using the Assamese Script' (Mahatta 2014, 2).

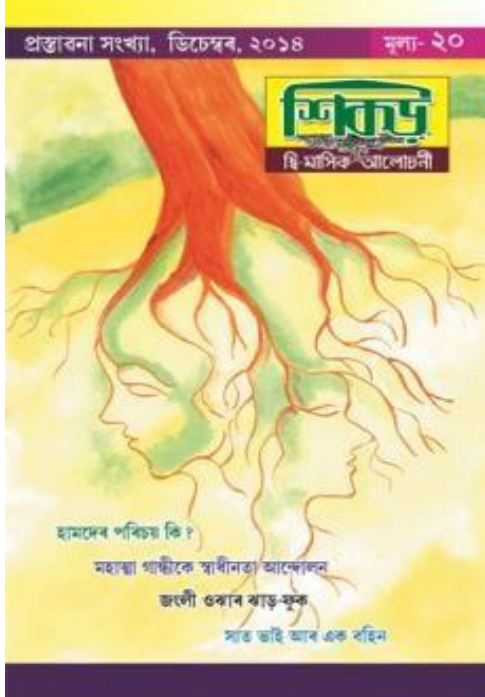
While asking about the purpose behind publishing the magazine he said that to promote the Sadri language is the main and core purpose but along with this we are trying to bring various social issues of the Tea Community people and make them aware about their rights.

Picture: 4.



Photograph of Publication the bi-monthly magazine 'sikor' on 19th December 2014

Picture: 4.2



Photograph of the bi-monthly magazine *Sikor*

Picture 4.3



Photograph of a inside page of *Sikor*

4.3.2 Festivals:

Festivals are significant and essentials for better understanding of a social group. It is through the medium of festivals that one gathers information about the value systems, beliefs, morals and ethics of a community. A festival can have both social base and a religious base but when it comes to identity process of a social group, the social factors are given more important. Festivals serve as an important element of ethnicity process of any social group. Festivals not only showcase the distinctiveness of a social group but also showcasing the ethnic identity.

At present day in Assam every social group celebrates their festival in traditional form to showcase their distinctiveness or the unique identity. Though a social group has many festivals but in the ethnicity or identity construction it is seen that a particular festival has given more importance than the others for example, *Bihu* of the Assamese community, *Baisagu* of the Bodos, *Ali-Ai-Ligang* of the Misings etc.

The Tea Community of Assam also has various festivals which are important part of their life and are deeply connected to their religion and their culture. They celebrate many festivals during different seasons. In the recent ethnicity and identity construction it is seen that festivals are being nourished and adapted in a new way. Like the other ethnic groups Tea Community has also given more emphasis on some particular festivals than their other festivals to advertise their identity. Among these festivals, *Karam* is regarded as the most significant. Along with *Karam* some of other festivals of the Tea Community are also discussed below.

4.3.2.1 Karam festival:

One of the main festivals of the Tea Community is *Karam* festival. *Karam* festival has both social and religious significance in the community. The festival is mainly agricultural base and associated with fertility rites. This *puja* is characterized by colourful dance, musical recitals and lot of eating and drinking. The *Karam* festival is generally celebrated on the month of 'Bhada' (15th August- 14th September) for 7 days. It is started on the 'Saturtha tithi'⁹ (fourth day) of *Bhada* month and ended on the 'Ekadashi Tithi' (eleventh lunar day) of the *Bhada* month.

In the celebration of *Karam puja*, seven or five (odd numbers) girls are needed for the preliminary works of the *puja* and these girls are known as *Karamatis*. The altar (*Karam Bedi*) of the *puja* is constructed with two stems of one tree. While one stem represents for *Karam Raja* (Shiva) and the other represents *Parvati*. The *Karam* tree is selected by a priest. He invites *Karam Raja* by offering betel-nut and vermilion. There is one *Dhakuwal* (The Drum beater), one *Katuwal* (The tree cutter), one priest (who do the religious rituals), and one *Kahani Bura* (he is traditional *Karam* story teller) who are important part of the *puja*. The *Karam puja* is performed in three ways, in three different seasons of the year- *Jatiya Karam*, *Ras Jhumoir* and *Budhi Karam*. Among them *Jatiya Karam* is very popular among the Tea Community. The observation of *Karam puja* involves a tradition called *Jawa Tula*¹⁰. On the first day of the ritual the housewives of the host family along with 7 or 9 girls go to the nearby river, take bath and pray with

⁹ Tithi means Lunar Day

¹⁰ *Jawa* is the mud filled bamboo basket where seeds of mustards, paddy, gram etc. are sowed in *Karam puja*.

incense sticks and *dhuna*. After taking bath and praying they take some amount of sand or mud from the river bank with both hands in a new bamboo basket. This act of mud/sand taking is done three times. In that mud they sow seeds of mustards, paddy, gram etc. and bring it to home. From that day ‘*Karamatis*’ have to follow some rules and regulations in combing hair, sleep in different positions, taking of non-vegetarian meal are taboos. Till the last day of *Karam Festival* i.e. *Ekadashi Tithi* of *Bhada* month, every day the *Karamatis* worship that basket lighting incense sticks and offering flowers and move the *Jawa* from the original place to the courtyard and finally kept it in the courtyard. There they sing songs which are as follows-

(i) *Iti iti jawa kiya kiya jawa*

i) *Iti iti jawa kiya kiya jawa*

Jawa mai jaglo dhano bunolairy

Sayorey jawa ek poisa saiey

Jawa mai jaglo dhano bunolairy

English Translation:

O jawa o jawa o jawa,

O jawa o jawa o jawa,

O jawa mother wake up,

And help to germinate the paddy of the jawa

We believe on you; help to germinate the gram of the jawa

(ii) *Dhan phul photi galai fuly adha rait*

Dhan phul photi galai fuly adha rait

Phulaka deshy jabaeygy nonodin

Phulalorey sakhi hulalorey

English Translation::

The flower of paddy is blooming in the mid night

The flower of paddy is blooming in the mid night

O' sister in the country of flower

You can find many flowers blooming around you.

iii) *Jawa nakatiyo musha nakatio*

Engraji dohai musha koromek seba

English Translation::

O Rat, Please do not cut the *Jawa*

We are offering you something of the *Karam Puja*, you help us to do our rituals properly.

On the last day of the ritual all the devotees should have kept fast. In the evening they go to bring the *Karam dal* from the selected place. When they are in the way to they sing-

Kon bony jhuri jhati,

Kon bony koroma Dail,

Chomor chomor bajey korotaal.

English Translation::

In some places the branches of trees are found,

In some places the *Karam Dal*,

Where you cut the *Karam Dal*, the *Kartaal* is making so melodious sound.

Before the cutting of the tree, the head of the host family light the earthen lamp, offer flowers and embrace the tree. After that the *Katuwal* cut the tree and the *Karamatis* bring the *karam* tree to the house. They plant the branch of a *Karam* tree on that altar

which is made in the courtyard. After finishing all that the *Karamatis* sit around the altar (*Karam Bedi*) and the *Kahani bura* starts to tell the story of *Karam puja*. And when the *Kahani bura* tells story the *Karamatis* offer fruits and flowers, *Ruti-Pitha*, Milk etc. to the *Karam Bedi*. When the *Kahani Bura* tells the story he also asks some questions to the *Karamatis*.

Kahani Bura asks- *Dal dhory ki paili mini?* (What did you get by doing this *puja*, girl?)

Karamati replies- *Krishna aason swami, Radha aason sakhi, Lakhan aason bhai, dorka aason chuwa, don, sampati, aro suck.*(I got husband like Krishna, friend like Radha, brother like Lakhan, healthy child, money, wealth and happiness.)

After that they immerse the *Karam* branch in the water of river or pond and the host family gives some present to the *Kahani Bura* and the *Karamatis* and the villagers are given a feast by the family and thus the *Karam puja* is completed. They also perform *Jhumoir*¹¹ folk dance and songs at the end of this ritual. The songs are divided into three parts at the time of its singing- *Jhumoir, Rang* and *Bhimsiriya*.

Jhumoir:

Akhoda bandono kori saraswati namo dhori

Akhoda bandono kori saraswati pronamo kori

Akhoda bandono brijo nari

Modony jhumoir lagol bhari.

English Translation::

By taking the name of Saraswati

By singing the *bandona* song of *akhoda*

The *brojo* people start dancing

And get lost on it.

¹¹ Jhumoir is the folk dance form with songs of the Tea Community.

Rang:

Shyam ky hami nadekhily hoi be Sahara hai

Hai hai hoi be Sahara hai

Shyam hamar noyoner tara hai

Shyam hamar noyoner tara

English Translation::

If I do not see *Shyam* I get confused

Because *Shyam* is my heart

Bhimsiriya.

Gogony uthilo bela kotona koribo khela ry

Gash kadoma kori dal dhor hori

Banshi bajai koto cholo kori

English Translation::

The Sun is rising in the sky

So many games are being played here

Under the *Kadam* tree

Krishna is also playing his flute.

But currently it is observed that there has been a trend of ascending the *Karam Puja* to the public dais instead of traditional celebration by a single family or a group of families in front of the house. The shift of *Karam puja* or *Parav* venue from individual house to public dais has undoubtedly helped the Tea Community eventually to assimilate into a single group or to form an identity irrespective of their individual tribe or caste difference. Such cultural involvement for years together has ultimately paved the way to form a unique identity i.e. the Tea Community or Tea Tribe. Now-a-days they organize

various *Karam Sanmilan* (Picture 4.4, 4.5) in different parts of Assam like Dibrugarh and Sivasagar District to make it more popular and to project their identity. While interviewing some youths of the Tea Community people about the reasons of organizing the *Karam Sanmilan* in public dais, they have informed that by organizing *Karam Sanmilan* they have get a common platform where they can not only assimilate into a single group but they can also show their culture to the greater world.

Picture:4.4



Photograph of a Regional *Karam Sanmilan* held at Sivasagar Ditriect

Picture: 4.5



Photograph of a Central *Karam Sanmilan* held at Doomdooma

4.3.2.2 *Tusu Puja:*

Tusu puja is another *puja* which is celebrated in the occasion of *Magh Bihu*¹². This *puja* is associated with women folk of the society. This *puja* is celebrated in the 14th and 15th of January. The first day is called *Uruka*. On the day of the *Uruka* the idol of *Tusu Devi* is brought. The whole night the people sing and dance. The next day the idol is immersed in the water.

4.3.2.3 *Faguwa Parav:*

Faguwa is one of the festivals of Tea Community which is celebrated in the Assamese month of Fagun (15th March and 14th April). The festival is celebrated on the day of the *Purnima* (full moon). In this particular day, all the people of a village gather for a community feast. People of all age groups go to the open space and celebrate through whole night. Women are not allowed to go there. The next day people played colour with mud and water. In the midday the people worship the ancestors and apply the *Aabir* (type of colour) on the feet of the village seniors and take their blessings. In this festival they perform a dance called *Kathi*. The songs that sung during the dance are about Radha and Krishna. Examples of few songs are as follows-

(i) *Aguwa faguwa tin deguwa*

Bhoji bhatar ghory hami aguwa.

English Translation::

This is the festival of *faguwa*, all are very happy

I am the main person of the *puja* in my brother's house.

(ii) *Holi khely Radha Krishna Krishna*

Sato gopini songy holi khely.

¹² *Magh Bihu* is one of the folk festivals of Assamese Community which is celebrated during the Assamese month of *Magh* (January).

English Translation::

Radha and Krishna are playing *Holi*

Playing *Holi* with seven lady companions (*gopinis*)

4.3.2.4 Charul puja or Baha puja:

This festival is mainly related with agricultural activities. This festival is celebrated by the Tea Community in the month of April. They keep fasting one day prior to the *puja*. On the day of the *puja* they clean their homes and the dirty things are kept in a basket (which is made from banana tree and or betel nut leaves). The basket is ornamented by different flowers and thus is also called *Phul puja*. All villagers gather along with their baskets (the dirty substances of their homes) in the community prayer arena where they worship the *dangariya*¹³. After performing the rituals the women and girls go to the jungle and throw the baskets in the jungle. This ritual is known as '*Jobra pela*'. They let loose small black chicken in the jungle and worship the *dangariya* to prevent them from all types of disease, environmental epidemic etc.

4.3.2.5 Sahrai Puja

The festival is popularly known as *dewali* or *deepawali* by the people of Assam. This is generally done in the month of November before the harvesting period in the absence of moon which is called as *Amaboisa Raati* (The dark moon night). In this festival the people make a type of *Alpana*¹⁴ which is made from rice. In this occasion the *Go Puja* or the *Gouwa Bonga* is done on the honour of the cow. On the day of the *puja* the place where the cows are kept cleaned by the master of the house and the *Alpana* is made there. The cows are worshiped and offered garlands. The earthen lamps are lit in the night in front of every household. The songs related with the *Saharai* known as *Jahli*.

¹³ People of Tea Community believe a deity who protects their village is called *dangariya*.

¹⁴ *Alpana* is a kind of decoration made on the floor with colour, flour, rice, flowers etc.

4.3.3 Material Culture:

Gordon Allport (Cited in Schwarz and Tesser 2001, 442) has suggested that identities tend to crystallize or condense around certain visible symbols or cues. Similarly Fredrik Barth has recognized the existence of certain overt signals or signs certain diacritical features like dress, language, house form or general style of life to mark ethnic identity. Material culture is an important visible culture of Tea Community. Material culture is the physical form of objects, resources and spaces that people use to define their culture for example clothing, musical instrument, food habits, architecture etc. The role of material culture is not only in reflecting the identities but its role in creating and transferring to a new identity is notable. In the identity construction process material culture plays a pivotal role in articulating identity and it also show the distinctiveness of a social group. In regards to the Tea Community ethnicity process various material cultural forms are seen to be used extensively in public and private domain. There are a lot of material cultural traits which have become powerful symbol of the recent Tea Community identity.

Dresses serve as a statement of identity and a key part of celebration. Dresses, especially the dresses of the women folk is another fact attached with Tea Community identity. Women are regarded as the carrier of culture and tradition. In the identity politics it is seen that women are in the forefront in showcasing their identity. The male members of the community wear *dhuti* and *kamij* while females wear white *saree*¹⁵ with red border and red blouse (Picture 4.6). They generally wear deep coloured clothes. Though the people of the community generally do not wear their traditional dresses but in occasions like marriage, festivals and in cultural processions or in any conference they wear their traditional dresses.

¹⁵ *Saree* is a long piece of cloth which is wrapped around the waist and plated in many folds.

Picture 4.6



Photograph women wearing traditional dress

Among the various material culture bow and arrow are one of the significant cultural trait of the community. Earlier the people of Tea Community were very fond of hunting. The people used the bow and arrow as a weapon for hunting. It is observed in the time of field investigation that in every household of the Tea Community they keep a piece of bow and arrow. Though bow and arrow were used as hunting weapon but in the recent ethnicity process of the Tea Community it is observed that they use it more as cultural trait than as a weapon. In various cultural procession, conferences, and rallies, bow and arrow are used as symbol of their culture (Picture 4.7).

Picture:4.7



জনজাতিকৰণৰ দাবীত সদৌ আদিবাসী ছাত্ৰ সন্থাৰ ৰাজভৱনৰ সন্মুখত ধৰ্ণা, বুধবাৰে।
ফটো : দৈনিক জনমভূমি

**Photograph of a Dharna Programme by ADivasi Students' Associatio of Assam on
2nd October 2013, Photo courtesey Dainik Janambhumi**

Another material artefact that powerfully reverberates with Tea Community identity now becomes a very iconic common metaphor for Tea Community identity is the *Madal*- a musical instrument. This instrument is mainly used in *Jhumoir* dance. It is said that the beat of the *Madal* is so cheering that even the male members also dance in its beats. *Madal* is mentioned in various folk songs of the Tea Community. For example:

(i) *Dhol Baje Madal baje*

Baje singa go

Purush dige jaye dekh

Sorir hate sakha go

English Translation:

Dhol sounds *Madal* sounds

Sounds the Horn

Look friend body moves

Towards the males.

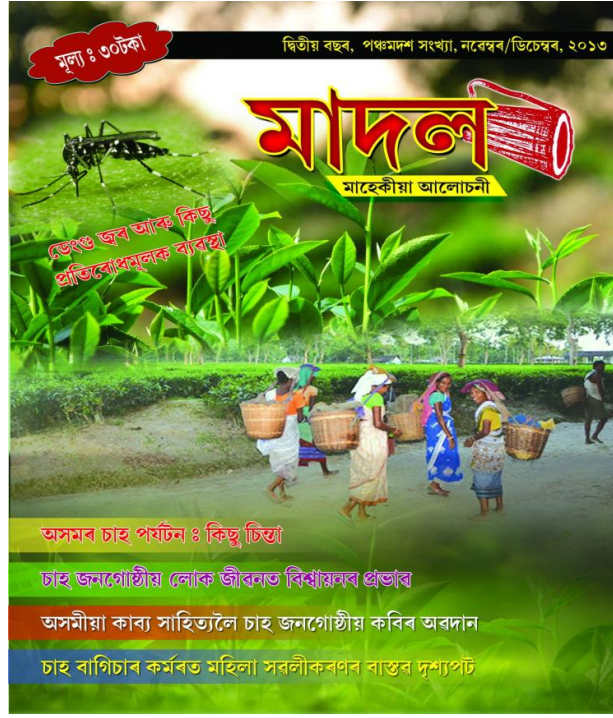
(ii) *Aaj ge karamakar rati*
Bajese madal diba-nishi
Songe khelyo boli aaigo masi –pisi

English Translation::

Today is *Karamakar* night
Plays the Madal day and night
Aunty, Let's play together

Madal is attached to their life in such a way that it can establish a unique identity for the Tea Community. A well-known Tea Community monthly magazine in Assamese is published from Dibrugarh named as *Madal*. It shows the attachment of *Madal* to their life and culture and it is also expressed as an identity marker. The main objective of *Madal* is to aware the society. Ganesh Chandra Kurmi the editor, in the editorial page of *Madal* writes that 'to wake the society up from the drowsy sleep and to make free from the superstitions and prejudices and to introduce the society to the scientific outlook are the main objectives of *Madal*'. Added to this, he also writes that Tea Community has a colourful historic culture. The largest labour group in Asia, these people has human resources and two hardworking hands. What else they need? *Madal* will give the intellectual leadership, courage, patience and guidance (Kurmi, 2013, 2)

Picture 4.8



Photograph of the cover page of the monthly magazine *Madal*

4.3.4 Music and dance:

Along with other cultural traits music and dance plays a very significant role as a marker or tool in the Tea Community identity construction. They collectively perform music and dance in a variety of occasions like wedding, festivals, arrival of new seasons and at the harvesting time. The Tea Community of Assam posses various folk dance form like *Santhali* dance, *Karam Naach*, *Kathi Naach*, *Khariya* dance etc. but among all these dance forms '*Jhumoir*' dance is one of the most famous folk dance of the community.

Jhumoir dance is traditional folk dance which is usually performed during the *Karam* festival. This dance is performed by young girls mostly in an open space which is accompanied by a few male members to maintain the rhythm and vocals and playing musical instrument. In this dance the female members wear white *saree* with red border and red blouse. They wear also wear various ornaments. The dance is performed in various purposes like as a ritual worship and sometime for courting and love-making.

Jhumoir is connected to their life such a way that it can establish a unique identity for them. More of a traditional folk dance the *Jhumoir* regarded as one of the most important elements for unifying them all with a new identity as the Tea Community or tribe. In a sense they have already given recognition to *Jhumoir* dance as an inextricable part of the tea garden labourers folk dance. To popularize '*Jhumoir*' as an identity marker, several organization or members of the community have organized *Jhumoir Sanmilan* and *Jhumoir* competition in many places of Dibrugarh and Sivasagar District of Upper Assam. Andrew Yule and Company Limited and 'Hamder Adhikar' News Paper group along with the Pratidin Time Regional TV channel have organized such competitions for the people of the Tea Community to project their identity in front of bigger audience.

Picture 4.9



Photograph of Jhumoir Rani Competition at Tingkhong Tea Estate, Dibrugarh District

Picture 4.10



Photograph of State level Jhumoir Group and Jhumoir Rani Competition at Moran, Dibrugarh District

Pictur4.11



Photograph of a Jhumoir group

4.3.5 Folksong:

Folk Song originated in the 19th century, is the extension of the term folklore, which was coined in 1846 by the English antiquarian William J. Thoms to describe “the traditions, customs, and superstitions of the uncultured classes” (Scholes 1977) . Lloyd (1968), notes that a folksong is that which has become so much a part of the heritage of a group

or nation that there is a feeling of common ownership whether or not the composer is known. From the definitions, it could be observed that folksongs are always closely bound to a culture within which it fulfils positive functional purposes. Similarly, folksongs in essence, show a degree of continuity and link the present with the past.

Folk songs are one of the most important parts of the Tea Community culture. Along with folk dances, the Tea Community of Assam also possesses numerous folk songs which they mainly sing in the time of festivals. The folk songs function as a primary metaphor in identity construction. Through the folk songs the people of the community try to convey their perspective on social issues and define their daily life style and their history. These songs paint the simple but struggling life of a community engaged mainly in Tea Industry. Based on occasions and various themes the folk songs of the Tea Community are grouped under different heads like *Jhumoir Geet*, *Tusu Geet*, *Domkoch Geet*, *Sadi Geet*, *Dewali* and *Saharai Geet*. Though they have varieties of folk songs but the *Jhumoir* folk song is more popular compare to the other folk songs. The *Jhumoir* folk song is not only confined to the Tea Community but it is also popular among the other people of Assam. Some of the folk songs of the community are-

4.3.5.1 *Jhumoir* folk song:

The *Jhumoir* songs have occupied a major part of the folksongs of the Tea Community. It is the most popular folk song of the community. The *Jhumoir Geets* are mainly sung in the *Karam* festival. Some of the *Jhumoir* songs are –

(i) *Assam Deser Baisag Bihu*

Karam Pujar Saman

Sristir kotha ase gatha

Dunute Soman re

English Translation::

The *Bohag Bihu* of Assam

Similar to *Karam Puja*

Are related/expressed about creation

Both are similar

(ii) Madal Suni nindo nai mor sokhe dhani
Hame awoli dhani, nase awoli dhani
Hunike bajna Bhai
Hame awoli dhani.

English Translation::

O My friend, have no sleep in my eyes
Hearing the sounds of *Madal*
We are dancing
Hearing the music

(iii) Paka Khatai likhali nam
Re lompodiya shyam
Faki diye anili assam

English Translation::

Written the name in the permanent register
O betraying lord
Fraudulently brought us to Assam

(iv) Hamra lagi Assam bashi
Nana jati upajatir re
Sobai mili gahibo sonar Assam
Assam hamer praner pran
Assam deser hawa pani
Sairo dige binodiya re.

English Translation::

We are inhabitants of Assamese
Various caste and sub-caste
Will build golden Assam together
Assam is our life
The air and water of Assam
Everywhere it is so beautiful

4.3.5.2 *Tusu Geet:*

In the time of *Tusu puja* the *Tusu* songs are singing. Though the *Tusu geet* sings on the occasion of *Tusu puja* and are related to *Tusu puja* but the social life also reflect in this songs. *Tusu Geet* are-

*(i) Tel dilam solita dilam
Swarge dilam bati go
Sokol dewota soinaja leu ma
Lakshmi Saraswati go*

English Translation::

Offered oil, offered wick
Offered earthen lamp to heaven

*(ii). Ki bolbo masi pisi
Ki bolbe dukher kotha
Kasa base ghun dhorse
Temni hamar durdakha*

English Translation::

What to say aunties
What to say about our misery
Weevil caught on green bamboos
Equal to that our misery is

4.3.5.3 *Sadi geet:*

The songs which are sung in the marriage ceremony are known as *Sadi Geet*. There are lot of *Sadi Geets* which are sung in various rituals of the marriage. The *Sadi Geets* are mainly sung by the female members of the Tea Community. Some of the *Sadi Geets* are-

(i) *Eto deri kene boro*

Eto deri kene

Tor maa ker bilai chena holo re boro

Dhai khujte geli

English Translation:

Why have you got so late groom

Why have you got so late

Your mother got kitten

So you went to call the nursemaid.

ii) *Harad re harad*

Baro bosore horod

Makh makh dulha koina

Sasur nanad

English Translation:

Use turmeric

Use turmeric twelve years

Use, bride and groom

Use, Mother-in-law, Sister-in-law

4.3.5.4 Domkoch Geet:

Domkoch geet are like *Jhumoir geet* but it is not performed in *Karam* festival. These songs are generally sung in marriages. In the wedding house the youths and even the old persons enjoy the Domkoch dance and Songs. Through the Domkoch songs, contemporary social system and situation of the country are described, in humorous way.

(i) Tor mon bosì gelo

Mor mon bosì gelo

Sajni re,

Sole aili assam.

Babu bole kiya kiya

Sardar edige awa

Sahab bole ma-bap kasam,

Sal bhujà khai rakhli poran

Sajni re

Sole aili Assam

English Translation:

Your Mind got set

My mind got set

O' dear

We have come to Assam

Officer says what happened

Leader asks to come here

Manager says sake of your parents

We keep our lives by eating rice

O' dear

We have come Assam.

4.4 Conclusion

Taking together, all the folk songs paint the picture of a society whose members thrive on Tea Industry living a simple but struggling life in the midst of nature, in sun and rain, highlighting a fair degree of social and cultural homogeneity or universality in the form of practices and beliefs. Recently it is observed that the various folksongs of the Tea Community is not restricted to the community itself but some original and modernize versions of the folksongs are released in the form of VCD's and Audio Cassettes for preservation as well as popularity.

In the recent identity politics, articulation of identity through culture is a common phenomenon. It is noticed that cultural products or performances are seen to be presented in spectacular way to accomplish the identity construction, as evident in terms of *Karam Sanmilan* and *Jhumoir* competition. Such cultural expressions represent the group identity to other social groups. These cultural forms give a distinctive identity to the Tea Community people. The above mentioned cultural expressions, in the form of material cultural, music-dance, language and festivals seek to uplift the Tea Community identity. These cultural forms not only differentiate them from others but also serve as the unifying factors among them.