

## **Chapter-5**

### **Conclusion**

This chapter broadly highlights two aspects of the thesis. Firstly, it provides a concise summary of all the chapters. Secondly, it provides a critical analysis and concluding remarks of the observations of the study.

The introductory chapter provided a detailed outline of the research plan including the statement of the problem that signifies the importance and relevance of the present study. The chapter also included a systematic and elaborate review of relevance literature and objectives of the study. Besides these, the methodology of the study explained that the study is mainly based on the Constructionist theory of ethnicity; that mainly draws from Fredrik Barth concept of ethnic group. Various data collection techniques through which data were collected; observation, interview and discussion are also discussed. This chapter also highlighted on the history of the tea plantation and Tea Community. Tea Community of Assam which is composite of more than hundred caste and sub-caste like Munda, Orang, Tanti, Guwala, Kurmi, Teli, Mahli etc brought by the British Tea Planters holding false promises to work as labourers in the newly established tea gardens. The people were from a diverse socio-cultural, ethno-lingual and economic background from a region of Eastern India comprising tribal areas of Bihar (Jharkhand), Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. The British Tea Planters years back brought these people by two main recruitment process *Sardari* and Contractual. Since then they came to Assam and stayed here. Every social group has its own distinct socio-cultural life. Living more than hundred fifty years in Assam and engaged particularly in Tea Industry they have come to a convergent point creating a common culture and evolving a lingua franca. This chapter mainly highlights how these people brought by the British Tea Planters, what were various circumstances that these people had faced to settled here in Assam.

The second chapter titled 'Theoretical Perspectives' is mainly on conceptual framework of the study which has given a detailed account of the concept of ethnicity, three theories of ethnicity and identity construction. The chapter briefly discussed on the three theories of ethnicity viz. Primordialist, Instrumentalist and Constructionist for a better

understanding of ethnicity process. Definition given by Abner Cohen, Glazer and Moynihan reveal that ethnicity is something that is used as an instrument by the elite class of a social group to gain state resources and services. Definition of Urmila Phadnis lies in the fact that ethnicity encompasses an objective approach (such as race, language, descent etc.) as well as a subjective approach (group related feelings of identity distinctiveness) into its fold. On the other hand Fredrik Barth mentioned that it is the 'boundary' which differentiate a social group from others but not the cultural markers. Barth emphasised on one's perception of "us" and "them" and not on objective reality that actually exists "out there" in the real world to identify an ethnic group. According to him ethnicity is an ever changing and socially and subjective construction. The study 'Ethnicity and identity construction of Tea community' is mainly drawn from the works of Fredrik Barth.

There is a need of multidisciplinary approach to explain and better understanding of the concept of identity as well as to know the various variables which are crucial in identity formation and also the surrounding consequences in which identity is found. Such approaches of Stuart Hall, Benedict Anderson and Erik Erikson helped us to understand the concept of identity in a pluralistic society as well as its relation to ethnicity, culture and religion.

Chapter three and four detailed the empirical data. Chapter three discussed the process of ethnicity and capitalization of Tea Community identity. In the field area it was found that Tea Community identity emerges as the strongest identity. The intermingling of various factors like economic and social backwardness, low literacy rate, lack of social interaction provides the background for the construction of Tea Community identity. The impact of Trade Unions and the Students' Organization like All Tea Tribes Students' Association (1948), Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (1958), All Adivasi Students' Association Assam (1996), Assam Chah Jonogusthee Jatiya Mohasava (2003) etc. on identity consciousness is remarkable. The ATTSA which is found to be the dominant Student's Organization of Upper Assam has not only worked for the welfare of the Tea Community people but also has taken various steps to promote their Tea Community or Tea Tribe identity. They have submitted various demands to the Assam Government like broadcasting of their culture in *Sadri* language on Dordarshan and demanding of ST and SC status to the Tea Tribe. Thus the impact of Trade Unions and Students Organization

along with the recent political identity consciousness has resulted the Tea Community Identity. There has been found three major cultural differentiations that differentiate the Tea Community from the other social group of Assam; these are commensality, language and festivals. By living in a co-residence with various ethnic group of Tea Community more than one hundred and fifty years the Tea Community created a commonness and evolved a common lingua franca known as *Sadri* and a host of common festivals which helped them to differentiate them from the other social group of Assam. Thus the feeling of 'we' and 'they' helped to create the Tea Community identity. Various interviews taken during the field investigation revealed that in Sivasagar and Dibrugarh District people of the Tea Community whether they engaged in Tea Industry or some other profession prefer to identify themselves as Tea Community. While examining the Tea Community identity it was also found that along with the Tea Community identity, some section of these people also identify themselves by two other identities that are Adivasi and Caste or Tribe identity. But in the area of the present study the people do prefer to identify themselves as Tea Community or Tea Tribe.

The fourth Chapter titled 'Identity Construction and Cultural Expression' focused on the various cultural expressions which are used in the construction of Tea Community identity. Ethnicity or identity construction can be looked as a kind of cultural stimulation. Every social group in their ethnicity process and identity construction, stimulate its culture, redefine and standardize various cultural expressions. The Tea Community of Assam is also not exceptional to it. To identify as Tea community the people of the community is not only promoting their *Sadri* language but also have started celebrating a host of common festivals and have showcased their different material culture in various meetings/conferences and rallies. To uphold the *Sadri* language it is seen that recently they have published a bi-monthly magazine named '*Sikor*' on the *Sadri* language. Along with this it has also observed that various cultural expressions like *Karam Sanmilan* and *Jhumoir Sanmilan* are now organized in public sphere instead of performing individually. They have also revived a lot of folk songs which are now recorded in audio cassettes and CD's.

Finally the Chapter six 'Conclusion' summarizes the main findings of the study.

Ethnicity is social constructed; the process of its construction and reconstruction is dynamic. The process involves both self-definition and ascription of ethnic identity by the actors concerned. As Fredrick Barth (1969) has observed 'Ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by its actors themselves'. The basis of ascription could be language, race, region, religion or a combination of these. Different groups of people originating from the same country can form an ethnic group and develop a common ethnic identity even though they have no common biological bond (Yang 2000). People identify with an ethnic group according to the situation in which they find themselves the membership of an ethnic group is dependent on its capability to fulfil their economic and political interest. Ethnicity in reaction to changing conditions and ethnic groups are often 'imagined communities'. Historical process and shared memories provide the mechanism to create ethnic groups. People who shared a given identity may redefine their identity due to some external factors or internal conditions and this may result in the reconstruction of historically constructed and shared identities. Circumstances are therefore important for the construction and reconstruction of ethnicity.

The present study endeavoured to analyse the different dimensions of ethnicity and the identity construction of the Tea Community of Assam. Though the study is mainly based on field observation but for a better understanding and analysing the process of ethnicity and identity construction the study also used a theoretical framework mainly based on the Constructionist perspectives of ethnicity. In Assam (Sivasagar and Dibrugarh district) the area under investigation, at the largest level, the Tea Community identity is not something inherited from ancestors but a new socially constructed identity. The methodology of the study was guided by the Constructionist approaches that aim to understand the social reality as constructed by the participants contextually by attributing meanings to their own experiences. Drawing from the various perspectives of Constructionist theory that are ethnicity is a socially constructed (identity is something that is created), ethnicity is dynamic and ethnic identification is determined by the society. The fluid and *Constructionist* nature of Tea Community identity is not only manifested in relation to 'place' and interactions, but also through time and situations.

For having a better life or political benefits or other government facilities they have constructed the Tea Community Identity.

The study attempted to understand the process of construction of the Tea Community identity.

With regard to objectives of the study it has observed that the issue of identity has started as soon as these people have brought and settled in the Tea Gardens of Assam but they have not concerned about identity. The tea Community living more than hundred fifty years in Assam engaged in tea industry is not yet able to receive an adequate attention in the so called development process of the state and which is still fall under the category of 'indentured' labour in 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Tea Community is hoping that there would be a change in their socio-economic and political fate; they would secure a descent life with adequate representation in the new political dispensation of the country. The condition of the Tea Community is remained as deplorable as it was. There was also the pressure of homogenization of the Assamese ruling elite's which created a sense of insecurity in the minds of the people with regard to their identity. Such feeling of insecurity, economic backwardness, poor literacy rate and the socio-political scenario of Assam created the ground for identity consciousness among the Tea Community of Assam. From that with the exposure to higher education, politics in the state after independence and the growth of different Trade Unions and Students' Organization has brought a gradual trend for identity consciousness among the Tea Community with a demand of schedule tribe status.

The question of having a proper identity is the most important issue of the Tea Community. Large section of these groups believes that the people of this social group must develop or form a common identity for themselves. In their consideration 'Tea Community' is the most suitable identity which can prestigiously cover every section of this social group. Over the years different organizations and people belonging to this group have been increasingly advocating this identity. Though various literatures revealed multiple identities of these people, but most of the respondents on my study area identify themselves as Tea Community. The role of various organization in construction of Tea Community identity is remarkable especially the role of ATTSA.

Moreover it is known that the most common means by which a group can identify themselves is through culture. So while exploring the identity or ethnicity of the Tea

Community the researcher has identified some important cultural indicators of ethnicity that exist and meaningful to them such as occupation, language, dress, festivals, social customs etc. Careful consideration and analysis have revealed that certain elements like occupation, language, festivals, material culture having a strong grip on the life of Tea Community and therefore can be referred as the core elements. On the other hand elements like religion, food, social customs are having a marginal and can well be regard as secondary elements. The annual observation of *Karam Sanmilan*, *kalipuja*, *Jhumoir* folk dance and songs of the Tea Community at large in the various tea gardens deserves mention. The celebration of such common festivals by the people of the Tea Community for a long time has obviously contributed towards their creating tea tribe identity both psychologically and culturally regardless of their distinctive individual identity.

Besides these, some of the observation that observed in the field are:

1. Most of the respondents have found a sense of identification regardless of their occupation, whether they have still engaged in tea industry or any other occupation.
2. The younger generation have a higher sense of identification than the older one.
3. Though the male members have slightly a higher sense of identification yet the female members are in forefronts in showcasing their identity.
4. It is observed that there is a kind of differentiation about the identity issue among the people of Tea Community of Assam depending upon the location of the tea gardens where they stay. The Tea Community person who stays in the tea garden which is situated in near urban areas, rural areas and areas surrounded by Assamese villages is different.