

The background of the entire page is a lush green tea plantation. In the foreground, several tea bushes are visible with their characteristic serrated leaves and buds. The background is a soft-focus field of similar tea plants, creating a sense of depth. A bright, circular light flare is visible in the upper right quadrant, adding a natural, sunlit feel to the scene. A prominent yellow semi-circle graphic is positioned horizontally across the middle of the page, partially overlapping the tea plants and serving as a design element for the chapter title.

CHAPTER I

Introduction



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1.1 A Brief History of Tea and Tea Tribes in Assam

Assam is the birthplace of Indian tea having one of the largest tea growing areas accounting for 51 *per cent* of the total tea grown areas in India. In terms of tea production, Assam accounts for 52 *per cent* (2022-23) of all India production thus, holds the top position. Tea in Assam is grown mainly in the vast plains of Brahmaputra and Barak Valley¹. Out of the total 3,47,201 hectares under tea cultivation in Assam, Brahmaputra Valley accounts for 3,10,632 hectares (89 *per cent*) and Barak Valley accounts for the remaining 11 *per cent*. Out of the total production of 667.73 million kilograms (2021) of tea in Assam, the production of tea in Brahmaputra valley was 623.79 million kilograms (93 *per cent*) and in Barak valley, the production was 43.94 million kilograms (seven *per cent*). Other significant tea growing states are West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. Major tea producing States in India are outlined in **Map 1**.

Map 1: Major tea growing States of India



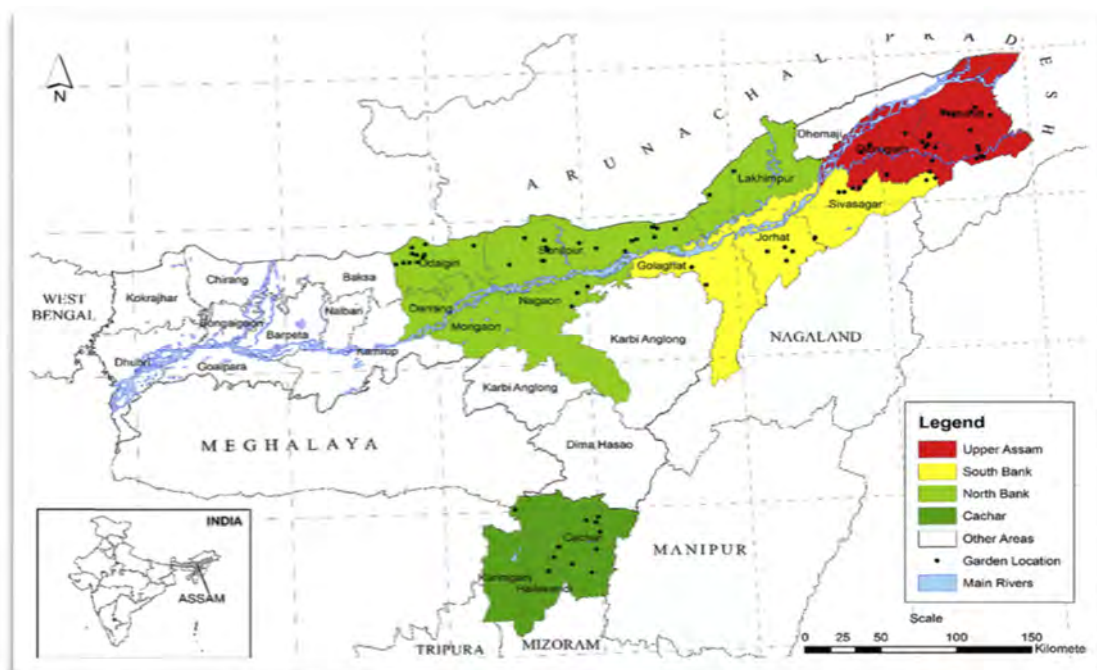
¹ Brahmaputra Valley is a region situated between hill ranges of the eastern and North Eastern Himalayan range in Eastern India. Barak Valley is the southernmost and administrative division of Assam, named after the Barak river.

The Tea industry, by nature is a labour-intensive industry requiring heavy workforce to carry out the most important and basic/ initial work starting from tea plantation to plucking and processing of the tea leaves. The tea plantation industry of Assam is more than 200 years old. The gradual expansion of tea plantations in Assam necessitated recruitment of a large number of workers. In 1860, the then British Government and the planters started bringing labourers from the regions of present-day West Bengal, Jharkhand (erstwhile Bihar), Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

The workers who came from outside the State are known as Tea and Ex-Tea Garden Tribes and are recognised as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) by Government of Assam (GoA). Tea tribes are active tea garden workers, and their dependents reside in labour quarters inside the tea estates whereas the "Ex-tea tribe" are those who were once active as labourers but have now left the job and vacated the labour quarters after retirement or for other reasons.

The State Government had not carried out any census of tea-tribes population in the State, however, as per a research paper titled 'Socio-Economic Development of the tea-tribes of Assam, published (2017) on the website of Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, the total population of tea tribes is estimated to be around 20 *per cent* of Assam's population (approximately 65 lakh based on Census 2011). They are located mainly in the districts of Upper Assam (Charaideo, Dibrugarh, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sivasagar and Tinsukia districts), Northern Brahmaputra belt (Kokrajhar, Nagaon, Sonitpur and Udalguri districts) and Barak valley (Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj districts) where there is a high concentration of tea gardens. Tea growing areas of Assam have been highlighted in **Map 2**.

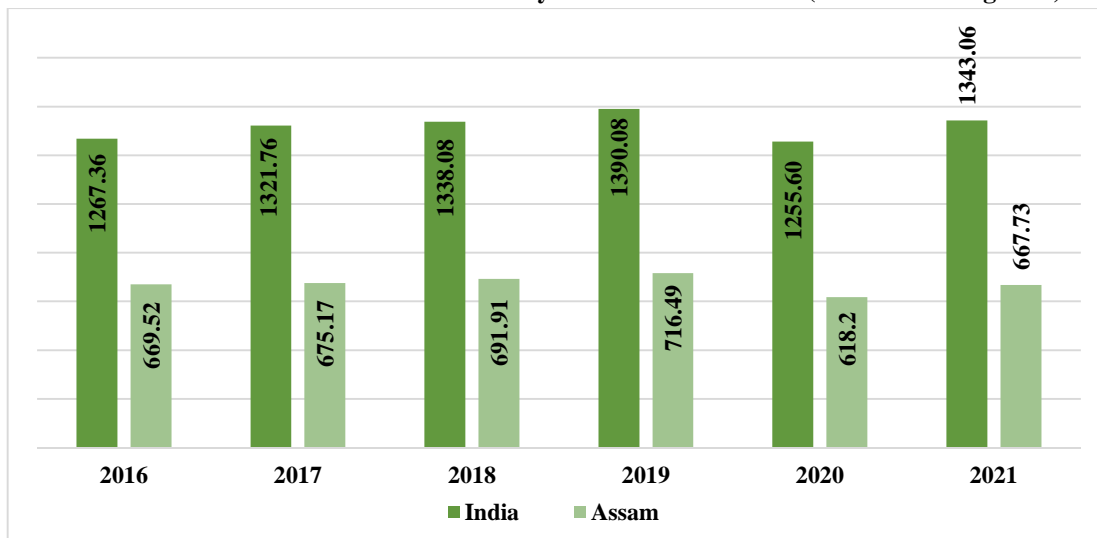
Map 2: Tea producing regions in Assam



The tea tribes in Assam not only constitute a sizeable chunk of the population of the State but have also made major contribution to the State and the country's economy

through tea production. Production of tea in country as well as State is given in Chart 1.1.

Chart 1.1: Production of tea in the Country as well as in the State (in Million Kilograms)



1.2 Key Departments

Government of Assam (GoA) has been implementing various welfare schemes for the socio-economic development of the tea tribes through different departments. Amongst these, the Tea Tribes Welfare Department (TTWD) and the Labour & Welfare Department are the key Departments.

1.2.1 Tea Tribes Welfare Department

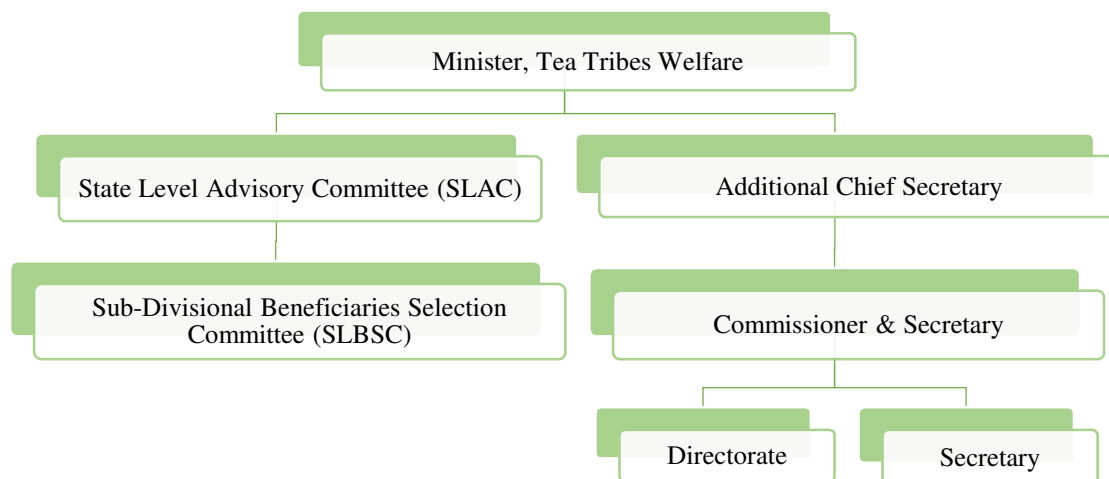
TTWD was created in 2004² as a separate administrative department for speedy implementation of development programmes including State-sponsored schemes targeted at tea tribes. Besides, the Department has also been assigned with other important functions *viz.*, to coordinate with the other developmental departments for providing basic amenities like health and hygiene, sanitation, safe drinking water and electricity to the tea tribes, and to monitor all development works undertaken by other departments in areas inhabited by tea-tribes or ex tea-tribes.

The Principal Secretary to GoA, Tea Tribes Welfare Department is the administrative head of the Department. The Directorate, TTWD is the implementing agency for developmental activities being undertaken by the Department. The Director is assisted by Sub-Divisional Welfare Officers (SDWOs), who are under the administrative control of Welfare of Plain Tribes and Backward Classes (WPT&BC) Department as TTWD does not have district/sub-division level offices. TTWD has deployed 30 Lower Division Assistants in 30 out of 46 Sub-Divisional Welfare Offices for assisting SDWOs in implementation of the schemes for tea tribes. There is a State Level Advisory Committee (SLAC) headed by the Minister, Tea Tribes Welfare Department, which deals with matters relating to schemes/programmes of the Department and is the

² Prior to 2004, there was a Directorate for welfare of tea tribes functioning under the Department of Welfare of Plain Tribes and Backward Classes (WPT&BC).

final authority for approval of beneficiaries. At the district/sub-divisional level, there is a Sub-Divisional Beneficiaries Selection Committee (SLBSC) which selects beneficiaries under various schemes and submits the same to Director, TTWD for further action. Organisational structure of TTWD is given in **Chart 1.2**.

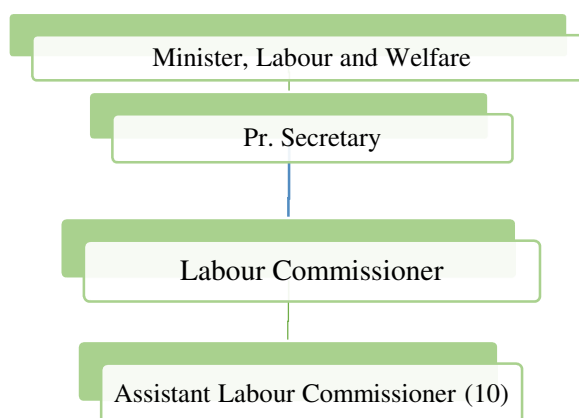
Chart 1.2: Organisation structure of TTWD



1.2.2 Labour and Welfare Department

The Principal Secretary to GoA, Labour and Welfare Department is the administrative head of the Department. The Labour Commissioner is responsible for ensuring welfare amenities to workers in organised/unorganised sectors through enforcement of various labour laws. The Labour Commissioner is assisted by 10 zonal offices³ headed by Assistant Labour Commissioners who are located at different district Headquarters. Organisational structure of Labour and Welfare Department is depicted in **Chart 1.3**.

Chart 1.3: Organisational structure of Labour and Welfare Department



³ Dhubri, Dibrugarh, Golaghat, Guwahati, Jorhat, Nagaon, Silchar, Sivasagar, Tezpur and Tinsukia.

1.3 Why we chose the topic?

As per TTWD, the tea tribes in Assam are economically backward and have low literacy rate. The State Innovation & Transformation Aayog (SITA) under Transformation and Development Department, GoA, in a Tea Conclave (March 2018) opined that the tea and ex-tea garden workers were languishing in poverty and living in deprived conditions and only a very small section of the community had joined the mainstream. The community needed special support and facilities on par with other communities in the State. SITA further stated that although the Plantations Labour Act, 1951 aimed to ensure improved working conditions and other facilities for the plantation workers, things did not change to the desired extent, largely due to the neglect of the provisions of the Act by the plantation management and reluctance of the State Government in enforcing them.

This Performance Audit (PA) was taken up in view of the fact that economically, the tea tribes of the State are quite backward and literacy level among these communities is extremely low. The responsibility of welfare of tea tribes is split between the State Government and Plantation Management (under Plantations Labour Act, 1951). Further, a host of welfare measures have been announced in the State *viz.*, provision of wages during pregnancy and motherhood, mobile medical units (MMUs) for tea gardens, free medicines, financial assistance to each matric pass student per year, *etc.* during the last five years (2015-16 to 2019-20). Accordingly, PA seeks to evaluate the implementation of various schemes introduced for welfare of tea tribes.

Further, in this PA, Audit has also examined, apart from implementation of various welfare measures by TTWD and other State Government departments, the extent and efficacy of implementation of the Plantations Labour Act, 1951 and the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 and Rules⁴ framed thereunder which are enforced by Labour and Welfare Department in the tea plantation areas. The Labour and Welfare Department also manages various welfare activities for tea tribes with the help of the Assam Tea Employees Welfare Board (ATEWB).

1.4 Audit Objectives

The objectives of the Performance Audit were to assess whether:

- the schemes/programmes/other welfare activities framed/planned for implementation by the Tea-Tribes Welfare Department (TTWD), were according to the needs of tea tribes population;
- the planned schemes/programmes were implemented effectively, economically and efficiently in compliance with the prescribed policy, rules, guidelines, *etc.*
- the schemes/programmes implemented for the tea tribes were monitored effectively and had achieved the desired objectives; and

⁴ The Assam Minimum Wages Rules, 1952 and, The Assam Plantations Labour Rules, 1956.

- the Plantations Labour Act, 1951 and Minimum Wages Act, 1948 were implemented effectively and objectives desired therefrom were achieved.

1.5 Scope of Audit and Audit Methodology

The PA commenced with an entry conference with the TTWD on 11 December 2020 where the audit objectives, scope and methodology were discussed. The representatives from Finance and Labour & Welfare Department were also present in the meeting.

Audit commenced in December 2020 and was completed in November 2021. The audit stretched over a longer period due to lockdowns announced by the State Government in various phases and travel restrictions on account of the Covid-19 pandemic. The audit of implementation of welfare schemes, implementation of the Plantations Labour Act, 1951 and Minimum Wages Act, 1948 was carried out through collection of information and verification of records of the period from April 2015 to March 2020 in the following departments/organisations:

- a. Tea Tribes Welfare Department, Government of Assam;
- b. Labour and Welfare Department, Government of Assam;
- c. The Assam Tea Employees Welfare Board;
- d. National Health Mission (NHM), *Axom Sarba Siksha Abhiyan* (ASSA), Director, Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs (FCS&CA) Department, Commissioner, *Panchayat* and Rural Development (P&RD) Department and Director, WPT&BC were also visited for collection of information on activities undertaken by them for the welfare of tea tribes;
- e. Sampled district/zone offices and tea estates.

Documents and information collected from various departments, responses of beneficiaries to the audit team, photographs and results of physical verification of facilities provided to tea workers in the sampled tea estates have been considered as evidence for audit observations. The draft Report was issued to the Government in February 2022 and the audit findings were discussed in an exit conference held in February 2022. The responses to the audit findings received from the Government/ departments concerned have been suitably incorporated in the Report.

1.6 Sampling

The Labour and Welfare Department has grouped 800 registered Tea Estates (TEs) spread across 24 districts of Assam in 10 zones. These zones are headed by Assistant Labour Commissioners (ALCs). For the purpose of sampling for this PA, Zones were grouped into three geographical strata of Assam-Upper Assam, Lower Assam and Barak Valley, and 30 *per cent* of the zones from each stratum were selected. The selected zones were Cachar, Dibrugarh, Nagaon and Sonitpur. There are 390 tea estates in the four sampled zones of which, 40 tea estates⁵ (10 *per cent*) were selected for audit based on the size of the plantations and number of workers employed therein. Apart

⁵ Cachar: 10 TEs, Dibrugarh: 18 TEs, Nagaon: five TEs and Sonitpur: seven TEs.

from scrutiny of records, audit also interviewed 590 workers in the 40 test-checked TEs.

Director, TTWD implements welfare schemes at district/sub-divisional level through Sub-Divisional Welfare Officers. Audit also test-checked 10 schemes implemented by the Director, TTWD, list of schemes selected are shown in **Table 2.3** under **Paragraph 2.7**. The selection of schemes was made based on the volume of expenditure.

1.7 Audit Criteria

The criteria for the PA are as following:

- a. Operational Guidelines of schemes;
- b. Assam Financial Rules, 1939;
- c. Assam Tea Plantations Employees Welfare Fund Act, 1959 as amended from time to time;
- d. The Plantations Labour Act, 1951 as amended from time to time and The Assam Plantations Labour Rules, 1956 framed thereunder;
- e. The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 as amended from time to time and The Assam Minimum Wages Rules, 1952 framed thereunder;
- f. Periodical reports/returns and evaluation reports depending upon availability;
- g. Various orders, notifications, circulars and instructions issued by GoA.

1.8 Acknowledgement

The Office of the Accountant General (Audit), Assam would like to place on record its appreciation to the officers and staff of Labour and Welfare Department for rendering active cooperation and support to the audit team in conducting the audit. The office is also thankful to the officers and staff of Tea Tribes Welfare Department for extending cooperation and assistance to the audit team.

