

## Harmony in History: Unveiling the History of Women Tea Plantations Workers Through *Jhumur* Songs

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### *Abstract*

This paper explores the cultural significance of *jhumur* songs within the context of colonial Assam's tea plantation communities. *Jhumur*, originating from the *Sadanic* language, serves as a vital narrative tool reflecting the experiences and struggles of tea plantation workers, particularly women. Through an analysis of *jhumur* songs and historical sources, the paper reveals the deceptive strategies employed by the British government and plantation owners to recruit and exploit labourers. Specific examples of *jhumur* songs are examined to illustrate themes of migration, exploitation and cultural resistance. The paper introduces two theoretical frameworks—the "Migration-Exploitation-Strategies Nexus" and the "Model of Colonial Hegemony and Cultural Resistance" to analyse the socio-cultural dynamics at play. Ultimately, this study highlights the enduring resilience and cultural identity embedded within colonial Assam's tea plantation communities as evidenced by the poignant narratives preserved in *jhumur* song.

**Keywords:** folk song, cultural hegemony, migration, exploitation, cultural resistance.

### *Introduction*

“Songs are considered to be faithful cultural representatives of the prehistoric civilizations” (Chattopadhyay, 1999: 35). Folk songs have been used for decades as a potential narrative tool, offering insightful peeks into a variety of times and places. These songs, passed down through families and communities, hold within them the voices and experiences of those who came before us. Through their lyrics and melodies, folk songs offer unique perspectives on the events, emotions, and traditions that have shaped different times and places. They serve as windows into the past, allowing us to connect with the lives and stories of our ancestors, as well as the cultural landscapes they inhabited. Whether celebrating triumphs, mourning

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losses, or simply reflecting everyday life, folk songs continue to enrich our understanding of history and heritage, preserving the richness and diversity of human experiences across time and space. One of the most well-known styles of song and dance in Assam is *jhumur*. *Jhumur*, also known as *Jhumar* or *Jhumair*, is folk music originating from the *Sadanic* language spoken by communities residing in the Chota Nagpur plateau. Primarily found in regions such as Jharkhand, the southwestern area of West Bengal, and the northern part of Odisha, *jhumur* has also spread to the Tea State of Assam due to migration (Mondal, 2018). According to Gogoi (2013), the *jhumur dance* is mostly performed among the tea tribes in Assam. These tribes are the descendants of workers brought by the East India Company to work in the Assam tea plantations. The dance started because of the hard work of these workers in some of the biggest tea plantations in the world. It's known for its cultural charm and is usually performed by young girls. The *Jhum* songs serve as a bridge connecting the history of migratory women tea plantation workers in Assam.

The phrases "folk music," "folk song," and "folk dance" are relatively modern terms. They evolved from the term "folklore", which was first used in 1846 by English antiquarian William Thomas to refer to the tradition, custom, superstition, migration history, sorrow, and pain of uncultured classes ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk\\_music](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk_music) retrieved 4/02/2024 at 3.47 pm). Famous anthropologist Alan Dundes (1989) defines folk song as a tradition shared by any group of people who have at least one thing in common, like occupation, language, or religion. These traditions include myths, legends, folktales, ballads, riddles, proverbs, and superstitions. Generally, folksong is passed down orally from one generation to the next through a process called enculturation. In a society with big differences, folk music has a lot of power to bring people together and express feelings. In the same way, the Tea plantation women workers' lives are depicted in *jhumur songs*, demonstrating how music has the power to both create and transform things. According to Baishy (2016), the tea industry in Assam began around 172 years ago and has become very important for the national economy. Robert Bruce discovered tea plants in 1823. After discovering indigenous tea in Assam, efforts began to establish tea nurseries and gardens. In 1835, the first tea nursery with Chinese tea plants was set up at *Sadiya*, where the *Kundil* and *Brahmaputra* rivers meet. Unfortunately, these early attempts didn't yield good results. However, in 1837, a successful tea garden was established at Chabua, 18 miles from Dibrugarh. This marked the beginning of tea production activities in Assam. Interestingly, the quality of tea produced in Assam was found to be good. Initially, tea manufacturing in Assam followed Chinese techniques. The Calcutta Courier published news of tea production in Assam on November 21, 1836, mentioning tea prepared from

indigenous seeds brought by Chinese tea planters to Suddaya. Researcher Griffith in his book mentioned that the letter from the Court of Directors to the Tea Committee on January 23, 1839, confirms the high quality of tea produced in Assam. The letter is written thus, "We receive with much satisfaction the samples of Assam Tea (twelve Chests) alluded to in your letter dated 23 May 1838, and which arrived in November last, under the designation of *paho* and *souchoung*. Specimens of each sort have been very extensively distributed, and it affords us much pleasure to communicate to you, that we have received very favourable reports regarding it, as well from the most respectable brokers and tea dealers as from several individuals and various corporations towns and scientific bodies to whom it has been submitted" (Griffiths, 1967: 53).

Behal (2014) attempted to piece together Assamese plantation history in his paper, noting that as tea production in the industry grew, the demand for labour force increased first. The British planters aimed to involve Assamese-speaking, non-tribal women in the expansion but they were reluctant to work in tea cultivation. Although there was a lot of fertile land available, the tea industry paid relatively little. As a result, only a few locals agreed to work on the plantations. This had a negative effect on plantation communities. Also, the local people were labelled as lazy and addicted to opium, and they were seen as not wanting to improve their economic situation. Only a small number of tribal women from the Bodo and Sonowal, Kacharis worked as plantation workers. Over time, the British-employed local Kachari and Naga women workers became rebellious and difficult to control because they were close to their homes and farmland. Besky (2014), stated that by the 1860s, as efforts to find local labourers failed, the tea industry, along with the colonial government started looking for immigrant workers who were cheap, reliable, obedient, and easy to control. Thousands of mainly tribal migrants from different parts of India were promised easy work in beautiful green gardens and transported to Assam under harsh conditions starting from the mid-19th century. This continued for almost a century, facilitated by a network of legal, semi-legal, and illegal agents involved in various forms of coercion and violence. Initially, two firms, *arkatis* and *Sardars*, were commissioned as agents in Kolkata to supply labour from outside the state. At first, women workers of Chinese origin were brought to Assam from Kolkata. Later, thousands of labourers from various places like Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and the newly formed Chota Nagpur and Jharkhand were recruited. They were persuaded to migrate because they were poor and illiterate. Belal (2008) explains that in agricultural areas like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Orissa, famine, drought, floods, and epidemics were common. Additionally, poor peasants and landless women labourers were heavily exploited by

landlords and zamindars. These factors pushed many people to migrate to Assam in search of a better life. As a result, a large number of women labourers joined the tea industry, plucking the 'two leaves one bud' for making tea. As already mentioned women workers migrated from different areas they mainly belong to Nepali and different tea tribe communities of India. According to Gogoi (1994) in Assam this migrated tea tribe community has added a new dimension to the cultural landscape. Therefore, through extended periods of interaction and unity among diverse cultural groups, whether tribal or non-tribal, an integrated culture developed in Assam. The culture and way of life of tea plantation workers and tea tribes, from which *jhumur* folk songs originate, are rich and dynamic. They encompass various aspects such as religion, language, songs, dances, rituals, and numerous customs. In this context, the *jhumur* song emerges as a significant embodiment of composite cultural value. According to Minakshi (2017) a distinguished folk song researcher, Assam is recognized as the "paradise of folksong," showcasing a diverse repertoire of folk music and cultural heritage. Among these treasures, *jhumur* music stands out, resonating with the unspoken hardships faced by women labourers in tea plantations. Through its poignant melodies and lyrics, *Jhumur* music offers a window into the hidden narratives of these workers, enriching the cultural tapestry of Assam. The genre of *jhumur* folk songs is remarkably diverse, showcasing a range of expressions and diverse components that blend nicely. They exhibit tribal and ethnic influences and also allude to similarities with their music and culture that may have resulted from social, religious, and sociocultural interactions. "Tribal and non-tribal, the acculturated and the assimilation, the Sanskritized and non-Sanskritized, all coexisting in a remarkable state of juxtaposition," as noted by Datta (1994). Georgy (2001) noted that Kali Dasgupta (born in 1926) is a famous singer and collector of Eastern Indian folk songs. In the 1940s, during his involvement in left-wing movements, he began collecting *jhumur* songs that depicted the lives and work of regular people. Now, he has amassed several *jhumur* songs, many of which are very rare. These songs tell stories about various women tea plantation workers' life experiences, including their migration journey, forgetting jobs, and pain. The Assamese tea estates are symbolic settings where the production of this famous beverage has been entwined with the labour of women labourers. Yet beyond the beautiful views, there are many hidden strategies taken by the Britishers to borrow the labours which are often told through the melodious *jhumur* song. Several research works have been conducted on *jhumur* songs and the history of tea plantations in Assam, yet none have explored the relationship between these songs and plantation history. This paper highlights the strategies employed by the British government to borrow the workers, as reflected in the lyrics of *jhumur* songs, and

offers a theoretical perspective on this connection.

**Research Objectives:** This thesis seeks to illuminate the resonant histories hidden within *jhumur* songs, focusing on the strategies taken by the British government to lure women workers during the colonial period. By examining the cultural significance of *jhumur songs* and their portrayal of the lives and struggles of tea plantation workers, this study aims to provide insights into the migration history of tea plantation women workers. Also, try to draw a perspective of *jhumur* songs and the historical context of tea plantation workers in colonial Assam

**Research Methodology:** The present study takes a descriptive and analytical approach, relying on secondary data as its foundation. This secondary data is gathered from pertinent books, research journals, periodicals, mass media, websites and various electronic sources.

#### ***A Glimpse into Jhumur Songs- Concise Overview***

Anthropologists have observed that music and singing held significant importance in the lifestyles of cultures. By studying primitive societies still in existence today, researchers gain insight into the pivotal role of music in rituals, religious ceremonies, and recreational activities within these cultures. The lyrics of traditional folk songs serve as poignant reminders of the timeless qualities shared by humanity in their experiences of living, loving, working, and suffering. The personal nature of folk songs makes the individuals or events they portray deeply relatable to listeners, who often identify closely with the emotions expressed. This personal connection is what makes folk songs from any culture vitally significant (Mills, 1974). As the *Jhumur* song, plays a significant role among the tribes of Chotonagpur Plateau and Bengal, has also found significant practice among the Tea Tribes in Assam. These tribes, hailed from various parts of central and eastern India, have brought their own socio-cultural and linguistic perspectives, creating a blend of diverse influences. Anthropologist Friedrich Ratzel emphasized the need to consider, migration and contact phenomena before attributing cross-cultural similarities were attribute to independent invention. In Assam, the migration of different tribes has led to the emergence of a heterogeneous cultural landscape. Basically, in Assam, the language of the tea communities shares similarities with Assamese dialects, reflecting a blend of influences shaped by their migration history. Despite undergoing transformations, elements of their traditional and religious customs, beliefs, practices, and rituals persist, contributing to the cultural tapestry of Assam. *Jhumur* holds a dynamic role within the tea communities of Assam, manifested through religious observances,

linguistic expressions, musical traditions, and customary practices. *Jhumur* song and dance symbolize the joyous celebration of tea tribes. This song and dance are performed during the harvest and festival season. The festivals of the Tea Tribes, like *Tushu Puja* and *Karam Puja* are tied to farming. They see crops as gifts from the divine for good harvests. Over time, Tea Tribe workers in Assam started doing more than just working in tea gardens. They also began growing rice and doing other farming jobs. Many now have their land for farming while still working in tea gardens for extra money.

These tribes celebrate lots of festivals, each with its special customs and traditions. *Jhumur* dance and songs known as *Jhumur or Bagania* songs are a big part of these celebrations, especially during *Karam Puja* and *Tushu Puja*. The man usually handles the music for the *jhumur* dance. They sing songs in local languages which makes everyone feel at home. They use instruments like *Madal, Dhol, Flute, Shehnai, Bansi, Dhak, and Taal* to make music. The dancers wear different clothes depending on where they're from and the occasion. Women often wear white sarees with red borders while men wear long kurtas or traditional clothes. *Jhumur* songs talk about everyday life - the happy times, the sad times, and the dreams people have. The way *jhumur* dance and songs have changed over time shows how important culture is. They used to be just for entertainment, but now they're a way for people to express who they are and how they've overcome challenges. These traditions help keep stories alive and let people who might not have a voice otherwise share their experiences.

### ***Relation between Tea Workers and Jhumur Song***

The *jhumur* songs of the Assam tea tribes keep alive the memory of their history and experiences. Through these songs, they share the story of tea garden workers, their connection to their work, and their place in Assam. These songs seamlessly weave together the past and present, tracing the origins of tea plantations in Assam back to colonial times. During colonial times, the British recognized the crucial role of women as essential workers in the tea leaf-picking process. To ensure an adequate female workforce, they implemented various strategies. We learn about the strategies through the *jhumur* song.

***The Deceptive Strategy- False Hope in Labour Recruitment:*** *Jhumur* songs, a crucial part of the oral traditions among the labouring communities in colonial tea plantations of Assam, depict life in the plantation enclaves. They reflect the perspectives and imaginations of the labourers including women, about the tea gardens during the colonial era (Verma, 2011:170-185). The contemporary poet, Dina Tantri wrote

*“Assam Desher Chah  
Pat Pani Boli Bar  
Mitha Chal Sakhi Chal Jabo  
Bagane Tulbor pata anand mane”*

(Sekhwabat, 2020:20)

**Translation**

‘Assam, the land of Tea  
Where the water is supposed to be sweet  
Friends! Let’s go  
We will pluck leaves on the gardens with joy’

The song describes how the tea garden recruiters filled them with hope. However, when the labourers reached the colonial plantation areas, they discovered that they were filled with despair and challenges. Another famous song ‘*Chol Mini Assam Jabo*’ very popular folk song also recognised as the *Domkoich* song over time which gained massive popularity. Kali Dasgupta, the famous folk artist sang, recorded, and performed the song, as have many other artists and cultural activists. Each time the song is sung, it feels fresh, and the beautiful melodies of ‘*Chol Mini Assam Jabo*’ echo endlessly. There’s a special sweetness to the tune, as it talks about themes like moving to new places, remembering loss and betrayal, and the tough life of working in a tea garden in Assam. This shows how music can keep memories alive and help us understand the challenges people face.

*“Chol Mini Assam jabo  
Deshe boro dukh re  
Assam deshe re Mini Chaa bagan horiya  
Hor mara jaimon taimon  
Pata tola taan bo  
Hai joduram  
Phaki diye cholai di assam”  
Eek poisar potima  
Gaya golai tail go  
Minie papa mangee  
Jodi Aare dibo jhol ko  
Sardar bole kaame kaam  
Babu bole dhori aan  
Sahib bulelibo pither chaal  
Hai joduram  
Phaki diye cholai di assam”*

(Sekhwabat, 2020:14)

### Translation

‘Come Mini, we’ll go to Assam  
Misery abounds in our Desh  
In Assam, my dear Mini  
The tea gardens are green and beautiful  
There lies our future  
The heavy digging is done somehow  
Plucking leaves is tough  
Oh, Joduram! You lied to us  
And sent us to Assam  
You fooled us  
And lured us to Assam  
It is difficult to earn one paisa  
Just fetch some oil from the Marwari trader’s shop  
If Mini’s father asks  
He will get some more fish curry  
The children are crying here and there  
There is no water in the vessel  
The menfolk, o ranjha  
Are playing the murali  
Sardar says “Work work!”  
Babu says “Catch them”  
Sahib says “Whip them hard”  
Oh, Joduram! You fooled And brought us to Assam’.

The above-mentioned song ‘*Chol mini, Assam jabo*’ encapsulates the bitter reality of false hope and broken promises experienced by women workers during colonial times. A tea plantation doesn't need many skilled workers because most of the work involves plucking tea leaves. About nine out of ten workers are tea pluckers, and they're mostly women. In fact, in some tea gardens, there are as many or even more women workers than men (Kaniampady, 2003:45-47). This song expresses the inner thoughts and feelings of someone named Mini, here Mini represents the women workers who are being persuaded to go to Assam. They are being promised a better future in Assam, where the tea gardens are described as green and beautiful. The issue of women's recruitment to the nineteenth-century colonial tea plantations of north-eastern India, especially to Assam and Dooars, except as part of the family unit, posed an intractable

problem from the beginning (Sen, 2004). The discussion about this issue has different viewpoints. Some say fraud was the main tactic used (Tinker, 1974:36-89; Breman, 1989:67- 75), while others believe it was voluntary. They think economically disadvantaged and socially marginalized women made a careful decision (Yang, 1989:1793-1920). Women workers (Mini) feel betrayed by *Joduram* the agent, who misled them into coming to Assam with false promises. Life in Assam is depicted as difficult, with struggles to earn even a small amount of money. The lyrics also highlight the hardships faced by workers' families, including lack of water and children crying. Despite the challenges, the song reflects the resilience of the workers, who find solace in playing music and standing up against exploitation by their superiors. Overall, the song portrays the disillusionment and hardships experienced by women workers who were lured to Assam with false promises.

Looking at different articles on how women were recruited in the tea plantations of Assam, we see that gender played a big role in the labour system. During colonial times, one common way of getting workers for the tea plantations in Assam was through *arkatis* or recruiting agents. These agents would go to areas like the Santhal Parganas and Chotanagpur Plateau, where people were struggling due to drought. They became notorious in these areas for their harsh methods of recruiting labour, especially women. They would use all sorts of tricks, like lying about the tea plantations being government-run or promising better marriage prospects for women. They would even dress like government officials to deceive people into going to the tea plantations (Dasgupta, 1986). The following song also reflects the deceptive measures used by the recruiters:

*“Chatichuti diye more  
samkoralo dipughare  
Lekhala hamar sat puruser nam  
Hayre lampota Shyam fanki diye  
badhu chalali Assam”*

(Singdeo, 2007:29)

### **Translation**

"With a bamboo stick,  
they led me to the tea gardens,  
Writing my name along with seven other men's,  
Oh, lamentable Shyam, with deceitful words  
they took us all to Assam."

The song depicted that the contractors deceived me with their cunning and misleading advice, locking me in a dark room. They even recorded the names of my ancestors for

generations. This wicked person forced me to go to Assam's dark reality depicted through this folk song.

The plantation owners' group couldn't depend on the "free" labour market to bring women to the tea plantations. They influenced the colonial government to create laws ensuring a steady recruitment of women (Chatterjee, 1995; Sen, 2004). For instance, starting in 1863, when women migrants made up only five per cent of the total immigrants to the northeast plantations, the Government of Bengal, influenced by the powerful plantation lobby, passed the Transport of Native Labourers Act (III) of 1863 (amended in 1865). This law appointed a superintendent of emigration who could refuse to issue embarkation passes if any group contained fewer than one woman for every four male labourers.

The deceptive strategy: Coolie Drivers

*“Rachi se bhejal kuli de  
de lai kalam churi  
dale dale bapu najara milaiche  
dale dale  
bapu najara baithaiche  
lakhe lakhe lakhe re  
dale dale bapu najara baithaiche”*

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXl31tat03Y>, retrieved 26/03/2024, at 11:37 pm)

The song talks about 'Kuli,' which means workers who were brought from different parts of the country. These workers lived in specific places called 'coolie lines.' They were sometimes held or arrested without telling the authorities, and they faced physical punishment like beatings or being locked up in plantation buildings (Das, 1931; Behal, 2010). In the colonial-era tea plantations, discipline was described as "harsh" (Assam Labour Enquiry Committee, 1906), and it was within this strict system that plantation workers—men, women, and even young children—were required to perform extremely demanding tasks. Payment in the tea estates was typically determined by piece rates and tied to the completion of exceptionally high assigned workloads (Dasgupta, 1986). The *jhumur* song below also supports the statement above.

*“Amra duti ma biti dine rate cha kuti  
Kutite kutite bahe gham  
Adham Dinanath bhane je jabe  
Assam bane Ar na firibe nija dhame”*

(Singha, 2005:105)

### Translation

‘We two mothers, day and night,  
brew tea in small huts  
In the hut, the heat flows everywhere  
If Adham Dinanath says  
he's going to Assam  
He won't return to his own home.

This famous *jhumur song* represents the pain and sacrifice of workers, meaning this song seems to depict the difficult and relentless work performed by two mothers in brewing tea day and night in small huts. The mention of heat flowing everywhere in the hut may symbolize the challenging and oppressive conditions they endure while working. The reference to Adham Dinanath leaving for Assam and not returning to his own home could suggest a theme of longing, displacement, or sacrifice experienced by workers who leave their homes and families for labour in distant places. It may also hint at the idea of the hardships and uncertainties faced by migrant workers (Bhadra,2004). Overall, the song might be highlighting the toil, sacrifices, and struggles of labourers, particularly women, in the context of colonial-era tea plantations. In his writing, the renowned sociologist Verma (2005) illustrated the challenges women workers face. He pointed out that female workers were restricted from staying at home for more than four to five days after giving birth to a child. This illustrates that even pregnant women labourers were subjected to the strict discipline enforced by the plantation owners. They were not exempted from the demanding plantation work, even during their maternity period.

In the song ‘*Ranchi che bhejali kuli*’ the presence of women workers in tea gardens is highlighted, yet they often remain silent and unnoticed. They're depicted as women who silently prepare for work, tying their hair and donning work clothes. In ‘*Ranchi che bhejali kuli*,’ they're portrayed as silent figures without a voice and also mentioned the coolie's journey. Even though they may not have a voice, women workers play significant roles in the *jhumur songs* that tell the tale of tea and its associated products.

**The Deceptive Strategy- Planter Raj:** ‘Planter Raj’ was another method used to make women workers do hard tasks and maintain strict discipline in tea gardens. In this method, strict surveillance was the most commonly used way to control migrant laborers, especially women, in the tea estates of Assam (Dasgupta, 1986; Chatterjee, 1995). The threats given by the ‘sardars’ to plantation workers found expression in the *jhumur song* that

“*Sardar bole kam kam*

*Babu bole dhorian  
Sahab bole libo pither chan,  
Re Jaduram  
Phanki diye bandu pathali Assam”*

(<https://www.sanctuarynaturefoundation.org/article/spilling-the-tea%3A-life-and-wildlife-in-north-bengal%E2%80%99s-tea-estates>, retrieved 26 /03/2024 at 12:15 am)

**Translation**

‘Sardar says work work  
Babu says to catch the fool  
Sahab threatens to peel the skin off my back  
Oh Jaduram  
You deceived us to Assam’.

The song reflects the difficulties and mistreatment experienced by workers. The lyrics depict the voices of workers expressing frustration and resentment towards the authorities ("Sardar," "Babu," and "Sahab"), who use threats and coercion to compel them to work in Assam. The reference to being deceived to go to Assam suggests a sense of betrayal or disillusionment with promises made to them. Overall, the song may reflect themes of labor exploitation, coercion, and the struggles faced by workers in oppressive environments. Once again, it became common for plantation owners to use abusive language towards the workers in the daily life of tea plantations, whether it was at work or in the ‘shaheb’s residence. This was a regular occurrence to maintain strict control over the workers. Even women workers were not exempt from experiencing such abusive behaviour (Chatterjee, 2001:115- 156). As a result, workers were trying to escape from this place for example, Henry Cotton, the Chief Commissioner of Assam in the early 20th century, documented instances where female laborers were whipped for attempting to flee the plantation, suspected of helping others in their escape. Besides escape workers refuse to renew their contract at the end of its term. However, planters frequently used illegal methods to pressure or deceive them into renewing their contracts, thereby extending their period of indentured servitude (Behal, 1992). *Axom Dehar* is another famous song showing the harsh reality of ‘Planter Raj’ the narrative of the song is

*“Shiris paale dhorbi paahi  
Paata lamba paabi buli  
Naake pindhi naake phuli  
Juwaan bulaali*

*Naake pindhi naake phuli*  
*Juwaan bulaali*  
*Hey Sampaa nohoy mure naam Sameli*  
*Hey Sampaa nohoy mure naam Sameli”*

(<https://onlinesivasagar.com/music/axom-dexkhor-sameli-memsaab.html>, retrieved 11/02/2024 at 11:37 pm)

### Translation

‘I am Sameli  
I have pretty eyes and  
Beautiful long legs that can run,  
Wearing a nose-ring  
I joyously dance in glee.  
As the young girls  
Walk with their huge huge baskets,  
they pluck tea leaves  
The tender dry leaves  
Rustle under their feet.  
They are all my friends  
Remember, my name is  
Sameli’

The rich history of migration and exploitation is reflected in *jhumur songs*. ‘*Axom deshor bagisare sowali*’ (the girl from the tea gardens of Assam) is a song from the award-winning Assamese movie ‘Saameli Memsahab’ from the mid-1960s, remembered as a *jhumur song*. In the song, a young girl named Saameli reflects on her complex history and location. She has no connection to the land her ancestors came from but remembers and experiences the harsh surveillance and violence of the "Planter Raj." The song beautifully captures the intricate history of the migration of tea plantation workers through memory, music, songs, folktales, oral history, and narratives. The story of ‘*bagisare sowali*’ (the girl from the tea gardens of Assam) reflects the deep and complex history of migration through cultural narratives that are still vibrant today. These cultural stories help us understand the memories of migration and worker relations that are preserved in *jhumur songs*, folktales, and oral narratives. The *jhumur songs* reflect the challenging experiences of workers in the colonial tea plantations of Assam. They depict the harsh realities of exploitation, false promises, and abusive treatment faced by workers, particularly women. The songs highlight the deceptive strategies employed by recruiters and plantation owners to lure workers and

maintain control over them. Despite the hardships portrayed in these songs, they also capture the resilience and solidarity of the workers in the face of adversity. Overall, *jhumur songs* serve as a powerful medium to preserve the memories and narratives of migration and labour relations in tea plantations, shedding light on a significant aspect of colonial history.

### ***Conclusion***

By delving into the nuances of *jhumur* songs and the socio-historical backdrop of tea plantation labourers during the colonial era in Assam, we can create a comprehensive theoretical framework that sheds light on the intricate dynamics between *jhumur* songs, migration, exploitation, and strategies within the tea plantation communities. The in-depth analysis of *jhumur* songs, which are the traditional folk songs of tea garden labourers, can reveal a plethora of information about their lives, struggles, aspirations, and culture. Furthermore, by examining the broader political and economic context of tea plantation labourers during the colonial period, we can unravel the complex web of power relations, class hierarchies, and cultural dynamics that shaped their lives. By synthesizing these disparate strands of information, we can gain a deeper understanding of the multifaceted realities of tea plantation workers and their strategies for survival and resistance in the face of exploitation and oppression. The theoretical framework we are referring to is known as the "Migration-Exploitation-strategies Nexus", which explains the complex interplay between these three factors. In the context of Assam, people migrated to the region in search of jobs in tea plantations, mainly due to poverty and lack of opportunities in their hometowns. However, upon arrival, many of these workers were deceived and subjected to various forms of exploitation. The tea plantation owners, with the support of the colonial government, treated the workers poorly, using force and harsh language. The workers were made to work in hazardous conditions for meagre wages, which made life incredibly difficult for them and their families. In response, the British government employed a range of strategies to draw workers from different regions of undivided India. These strategies are echoed in every verse of the *jhumur* songs, which were popular among the tea plantation workers. The songs served as a means of communication and expression, allowing workers to share their experiences and struggles with one another. By examining the "Migration-Exploitation-strategies Nexus" in detail, we can better understand the historical, social, and cultural context of this period and its impact on the lives of people in Assam. The framework that we are referring to is a comprehensive approach that helps us gain a better understanding of the intricate interplay between migration, exploitation, and

strategies that were employed by tea plantation workers in their daily lives. Despite facing a multitude of hardships, these workers demonstrated a remarkable sense of strength and unity. They stood by each other and provided unwavering support, while also utilizing various cultural expressions such as *jhumur* songs to keep their spirits high and raise their voices against any injustices that they were subjected to. This approach serves as a testament to the resilience and determination of the tea plantation workers, who showed remarkable courage in the face of adversity and fought for their rights with unwavering conviction.

Another theoretical framework that can help us understand the *jhumur songs* and the dynamics within colonial Assam's tea plantation communities is the "Model of Colonial Hegemony and Cultural Resistance." Colonial Hegemony: This aspect underscores the dominance and control exerted by colonial authorities and plantation owners over labouring communities.

Throughout history, laws and systems have been put in place to favour the ruling class, which has extended hegemonic control over various aspects of society. This control has often included labour relations, cultural practices, and social structures, leading to the marginalization and oppression of certain groups. In response to this colonial hegemony, cultural resistance has emerged as a powerful tool of defiance. For instance, in tea plantation communities, cultural expressions such as *jhumur* songs have been utilized to resist oppressive systems. These cultural forms have provided platforms for dissent, heritage preservation, and agency assertion, serving as potent tools against colonial exploitation. By utilizing these cultural expressions, communities have been able to push back against oppressive systems and assert their own identities and autonomy.

Transformation and Adaptation: The framework acknowledges the transformative and adaptive nature of cultural resistance. As plantation communities navigated colonial exploitation, their cultural expressions evolved to reflect new experiences, challenges, and aspirations. *Jhumur song*, as a prominent example, underwent modifications over time, maintaining relevance and effectiveness in resisting colonial hegemony through adaptive resilience.

In conclusion, theoretical frameworks have been developed to provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics that existed within colonial Assam's tea plantation communities. These frameworks have helped to highlight the significant role that *jhumur* songs played as symbols of resilience, resistance, and cultural heritage. By examining these frameworks, we can explore the intricate connections between migration, exploitation, colonial hegemony, and cultural resistance. This allows us to unravel the lived experiences of tea plantation workers and the long-lasting impact of their resistance against colonial injustices. *Jhumur* songs are poignant narratives that

echo the struggles and triumphs of generations past. They ensure that these stories endure as testaments to the enduring spirit of resilience and cultural identity within these communities.

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