

Einladung zum Kolloquium

History of Tea Plantations, Small Tea Growers, Agricultural practices and agrarian relations in Sonitpur District, Assam

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Sonitpur district, located on the southern bank of mighty river Brahmaputra, is one of the important tea producing districts of Assam in North East India. This paper focuses on the history of tea plantations as well as of rural society and economy during the colonial and post-colonial times. Tea Plantations were set up by British capital in Assam in 1840 to produce for global market. From its inception labour intensive work process was the mainstay of production of tea. By 1870 tea plantation grew into vast spatial complexes in Darrang with a massive expansion of acreage, production and labour employed. Labour was mobilized from other parts of British India like Bihar, Bengal and Orissa and employed under indenture contract for a minimum period of 5 years. Simultaneous we are focus on Darrang rural society around the time plantations were opened up. We analyse the nature of production system, land use and social composition of Darrang rural society. A predominantly subsistence agriculture base society remained stagnant till well into the twentieth century. By the end of the 20th century demographic expansion brought in pressure on the land which generated social conflict.

By the end of 1970s a new system of tea production emerged known as small tea growers (STGs), largely a peasant based production of green tea leaves to be sold to large estate factories for processing. During the 1990s and beginning decade of 20th century STGs grew spectacularly. We study the impact of this new development on agrarian relations and its relationship with the larger tea estate sector.