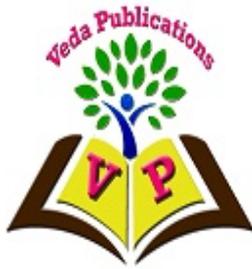




RESEARCH ARTICLE

**LITERARY AND CULTURAL NARRATIVES OF THE TEA TRIBE: A CASE STUDY OF GOPAL KRISHNA TEA ESTATE, MORIGAON DISTRICT, ASSAM**

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*Independent Researcher**E-mail- ankitab054@gmail.com**Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2025.12408>***ABSTRACT****Article history:**

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The Tea Tribes of Assam, who migrated during the colonial period to work in plantations, have sustained a rich cultural and literary heritage that continues to thrive amidst socio-economic challenges. This research focuses on the community residing in the Gopal Krishna Tea Estate of Morigaon district, Assam, with the aim of exploring their literary expressions, oral traditions, and cultural identity. Drawing upon folk songs, oral narratives, and community practices, the study examines how the geographical location and historical circumstances have shaped their worldview and philosophical outlook. The research employs a qualitative methodology, combining literary analysis with cultural documentation, to highlight the resilience and creativity of the tea tribe population. It also situates the findings within broader scholarly discussions on marginalized voices, subaltern studies, and cultural preservation. By analyzing the literary and cultural practices of the community in this particular estate, the study not only contributes to the understanding of Assam's multicultural heritage but also emphasizes the need for safeguarding these intangible traditions for future generations.

Keywords: *Tea Tribe, Morigaon, Gopal Krishna Tea Estate, Literature, Culture, Assam.*



INTRODUCTION

Assam is the largest tea-producing state in India and is known worldwide for its strong and tasty tea. The tea industry began here during British rule and now plays a very important role in the state's economy. It provides jobs to many people, mostly women, and most of the tea gardens are found in the Brahmaputra Valley. Assam produces more than half of India's total tea and is a big part of India's export.

The Gopal Krishna Tea Estate is one of a tea garden in middle Assam. It offers a significant site for understanding the intersection of geography, culture, and literature in shaping the lives of the Tea Tribe community.

- Gopal Krishna Tea Estate is located at the south-west side of Morigan district at very nearby national highway 37.
- Gopal Krishna Tea Estate (Gopal Krishna Tea Co. Pvt. Ltd.) is located in the Killing Valley area of Morigaon district, Assam. Its approximate coordinates are 26.1201° N, 92.2253° E (postal code 782410).
- Head office Gopal Krishna tea co.pvt ltd Marwaripatti Jorhat Assam fssai lic no.10323999000158
- In the eastern side the Killing River is flows. That's why the valley where the tea garden situated named as Killing Valley. It is located almost 29 kms away from the district head quarter of Morigaon district.
- In the garden the entire facilities like factory, residential colony, hospital, weekly market etc. are surrounded by tea plantation from all sides of the boundary. The area where the labors are live is known as "line". The road again divided into various line.

- Assam Tea Garden Worker's financial Scheme (ATWFAS 2025)

Table 1: Assam Tea Garden Worker's financial Scheme 2025

Cetegory	Male	Female	Total
Permanent	305	314	619
Temporary	262	553	815
Sub- Staff	24	0	24
Staff	11	1	12
G. TOTAL			1470

Unlike the more widely studied tea belts of Upper Assam, Morigaon provides a relatively underexplored context where the Tea Tribe continues to preserve its traditions while negotiating with modernity. The district's geographical landscape—marked by fertile plains, rivers, and multicultural interactions—has directly influenced the lifestyle, rituals, and literary expressions of the community residing in the estate. The Tea Tribes in Gopal Krishna Tea Estate sustain a wealth of oral literature, including folk songs, proverbs, and festival chants, which not only embody their cultural memory but also serve as a vehicle for resistance and identity formation. Festivals such as Karam Puja and Tusu Puja are celebrated with oral recitations and songs that reinforce communal solidarity and philosophical beliefs. Such cultural practices also carry literary value, as they reflect the aesthetics, symbolism, and lived experiences of the community.

The purpose of this study is to explore the literary and cultural narratives of the Tea Tribe in this specific estate, situating them within broader frameworks of literary criticism, cultural anthropology, and subaltern studies. By focusing on Gopal Krishna Tea Estate, the research attempts to fill a scholarly gap and provide a micro-level perspective on how geography, culture, and history intersect in shaping the identity of marginalized communities in Assam.



MAPS SHOWING

Figure 1: Map of India

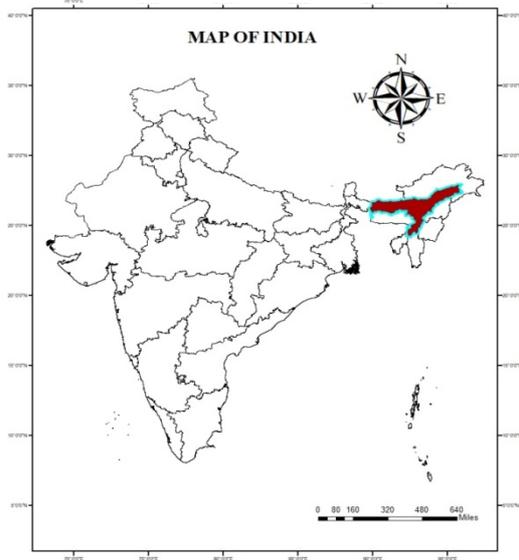


Figure 3: Map of Morigaon District

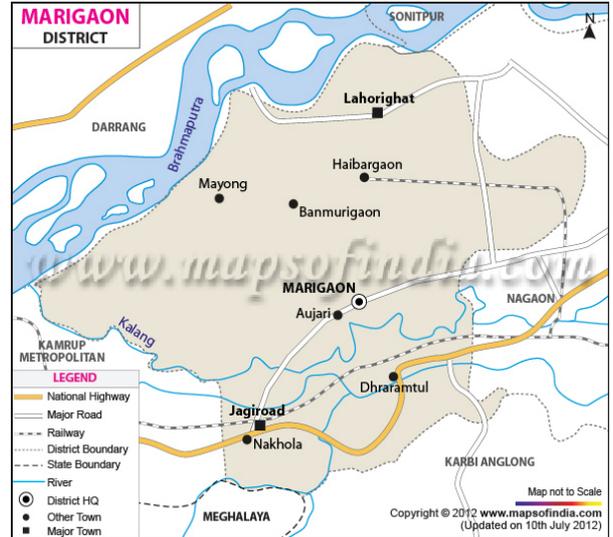


Figure 2: Map of Assam

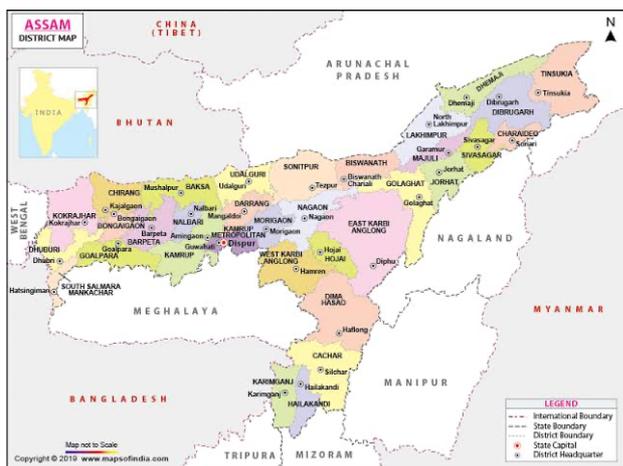
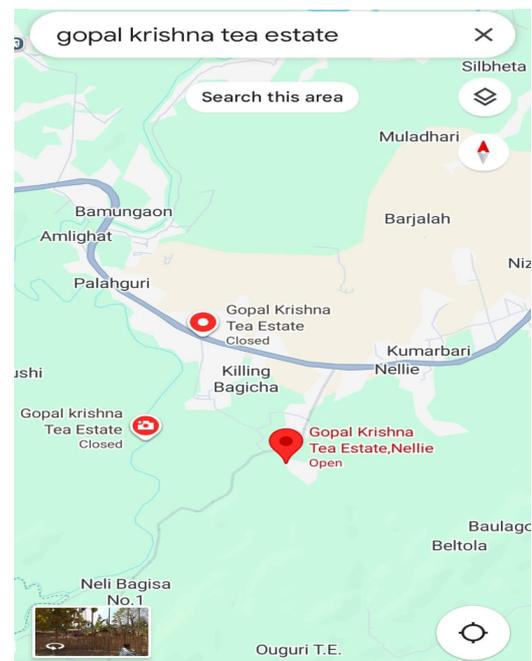


Figure 4: Map of Gopal Krishna Tea Estate



Source: - prepared from the India shape file map.



METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This research adopts a qualitative and interpretative approach to study the literary and cultural expressions of the Tea Tribe community in the Gopal Krishna Tea Estate, Morigaon district, Assam. The methodology combines field-based observations, oral history documentation, and literary analysis to capture the richness of the community's cultural narratives.

Primary data has been collected through

- semi-structured sampling technique
- **Interview:** interviews with community members, including elderly residents, cultural performers, and youth, to document oral literature such as jhumur songs, festival chants, proverbs, and folktales.
- **Observation Method:** Special attention has been given to cultural events like Karam Puja and Tusu Puja, which serve as platforms for oral performances and storytelling. Participant observation during these festivals has provided insights into the performative aspects of literature, including rhythm, symbolism, and audience participation.
- **Providing Questionnaire:** collected the information directly from tea garden workers of Assam by asking questions through a questionnaire and personal talks.

Secondary data has been drawn from scholarly books, journal articles, government reports, and cultural documentation available on Tea Tribes in Assam. Works by historians, anthropologists, and folklorists have been critically reviewed to contextualize the findings from the Gopal Krishna Tea Estate within broader academic discussions.

For analysis, the study employs a thematic and cultural-literary framework, identifying recurring motifs such as resilience, identity, migration, and cultural memory within the community's oral and literary forms. This approach allows the research to highlight the aesthetic as well as socio-political dimensions of Tea Tribe literature, while also

situating the narratives within the geographical context of Morigaon district.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The Tea Tribe community of Assam represents a complex interplay of history, migration, and cultural adaptation. In the case of the Gopal Krishna Tea Estate in Morigaon district, this interplay is further shaped by the geographical and socio-economic conditions of central Assam. Unlike the more industrially advanced tea belts of Upper Assam, Morigaon's estates occupy a unique position within the district's agrarian economy, surrounded by riverine plains and multiethnic settlements. This environment has shaped not only the livelihoods but also the literary and cultural expressions of the Tea Tribe community.

1. Oral Literature as Cultural Memory

The oral traditions of the Tea Tribe serve as living archives of memory and identity. Among the most significant forms are jhumur songs, which combine rhythm, dance, and lyrical expression. In Gopal Krishna Tea Estate, jhumur songs are performed during festivals and community gatherings, often narrating stories of labor, love, and resilience. These songs, while entertaining, also reflect the hardships of plantation life, thereby functioning as both cultural preservation and social commentary.

Proverbs and folktales are also widely circulated among the older generation. Many of these tales feature themes of migration, survival, and community solidarity, indirectly reflecting the historical experiences of displacement during the colonial era. Such narratives highlight the community's resilience and act as a repository of indigenous philosophy.

2. Festivals and Performative Literature

Festivals such as Karam Puja and Tusu Puja occupy central spaces in the cultural calendar of the Tea Tribe. These festivals are not merely religious rituals but also literary performances. Songs sung during Karam Puja, for example, invoke the spirit of the Karam tree and symbolize fertility, unity, and strength. In Gopal Krishna Tea Estate, the



performance of these songs reinforces cultural identity while providing younger generations a sense of belonging.

Similarly, Tusu Puja, celebrated in the winter months, is accompanied by lyrical compositions dedicated to the goddess Tusu. The verses often blend devotional elements with everyday concerns of agricultural labor, poverty, and hope. These festival songs illustrate the community's ability to merge spirituality with material struggles, thereby transforming oral traditions into a form of lived literature.

3. Geography and Identity Formation

The geographical setting of Morigaon plays a significant role in shaping the cultural practices of the tea tribe community. The district is located in central Assam, bordered by the Brahmaputra River and its tributaries, which create fertile plains. Unlike the tea estates of Dibrugarh or Tinsukia, which are surrounded by dense tea-centric economies, Morigaon's estates exist in close proximity to non-tribal Assamese villages. This geographical context fosters cultural exchange, visible in the gradual incorporation of Assamese words, tunes, and rituals into the community's oral literature.

At the same time, the estate's semi-isolated environment ensures the preservation of core traditions. For instance, the rhythmic patterns of jhumur in Morigaon retain certain distinct features compared to those in Upper Assam, indicating regional adaptation influenced by geography. This suggests that the literary practices of the Tea Tribes are not monolithic but dynamic, shaped by the local environment.

4. Philosophical Dimensions of Oral Narratives

Beyond their cultural significance, the oral traditions of the Tea Tribes reveal a philosophical worldview rooted in resilience, collective identity, and harmony with nature. Proverbs often emphasize values of hard work, patience, and solidarity. The invocation of natural elements—trees, rivers, soil—in festival songs reflects a cosmology where human life is intertwined with the environment.

For instance, in Karam Puja songs, the Karam tree is not only worshipped as a divine symbol but also as a

metaphor for endurance and growth. Such philosophical motifs underscore the community's capacity to transform everyday struggles into aesthetic and symbolic expressions. This worldview aligns with broader indigenous philosophies that value community over individualism, oral over written traditions, and spirituality over materialism.

5. Literature as Resistance

The cultural productions of the Tea Tribe can also be read as acts of resistance against marginalization. While mainstream Assamese literature has often portrayed tea laborers through economic or social lenses, the oral literature of the community itself provides alternative narratives that assert dignity and agency. The songs of hardship, while acknowledging poverty and exploitation, simultaneously celebrate communal bonds and aspirations for a better life.

In the context of Gopal Krishna Tea Estate, the persistence of oral traditions despite socio-economic challenges highlights the role of literature as a tool of survival. By keeping alive their songs and stories, the community resists cultural erasure and asserts its rightful place within Assam's multicultural heritage.

6. Intergenerational Transmission and Challenges

A critical aspect of the Tea Tribe's cultural sustainability is the transmission of oral literature across generations. Elders in Gopal Krishna Tea Estate often recount folktales or lead festival songs, while younger members participate actively in performances. However, modernization, migration, and exposure to electronic media are creating challenges for this oral transmission. Many youths prefer popular Assamese or Hindi songs over traditional jhumur, leading to concerns of cultural dilution.

This tension between tradition and modernity raises important questions about preservation and adaptation. While some cultural forms risk being forgotten, others are being reinterpreted—for example, jhumur songs are now occasionally performed on stage during cultural festivals, thus gaining new audiences and meanings.

**7. Linking Local Narratives to Broader Discourses**

Placing the experiences of the Gopal Krishna Tea Estate within broader scholarly discourses, it becomes evident that the Tea Tribes' oral literature intersects with themes of subaltern studies, postcolonial theory, and cultural preservation. As subaltern voices, their stories challenge dominant narratives of progress that often ignore marginalized groups. From a postcolonial perspective, their oral traditions embody both the trauma of displacement and the creativity of adaptation. From the standpoint of cultural preservation, their literature represents intangible heritage that requires conscious safeguarding.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

The literary and cultural practices of the Tea Tribe community in Gopal Krishna Tea Estate, Morigaon, demonstrate the richness of oral literature as a medium of identity, resistance, and resilience. Their songs, festivals, and proverbs not only preserve historical memory but also offer philosophical insights into community life. Geographical factors, intergenerational dynamics, and cultural exchanges shape these narratives, making them unique to Morigaon while linking them to the broader experience of Tea Tribes in Assam.

FINDINGS

The study of the Tea Tribe community in Gopal Krishna Tea Estate, Morigaon district, yields several important findings. First, oral literature—particularly jhumur songs, festival chants, folktales, and proverbs—functions as a crucial medium for preserving cultural memory and transmitting values across generations. These literary forms provide insights into the community's resilience, struggles, and aspirations, while simultaneously reflecting their deep connection with nature and spirituality.

Second, festivals such as Karam Puja and Tusu Puja play a dual role as religious events and platforms for performative literature. Through collective participation, these festivals strengthen communal identity and ensure the continuity of oral traditions. At Gopal Krishna Tea Estate, workers receive a 14%

Puja bonus and a 6% Faku bonus calculated from their monthly income.

Third, geography plays a significant role in shaping cultural expressions. The location of Morigaon, with its riverine plains and proximity to diverse ethnic communities, has led to unique adaptations of Tea Tribe traditions compared to other tea belts in Assam. This confirms that Tea Tribe literature is dynamic, regionally distinct, and responsive to its environment.

Fourth, the community's oral literature operates as a subtle form of resistance against marginalization. By affirming dignity and solidarity, these cultural practices counteract narratives of invisibility often imposed on them by mainstream discourse.

Finally, intergenerational transmission remains both a strength and a challenge. While elders actively preserve oral traditions, younger generations are increasingly influenced by modern entertainment, creating tension between preservation and adaptation.

CONCLUSION

The Tea Tribe community of Gopal Krishna Tea Estate in Morigaon district embodies a rich cultural heritage that deserves scholarly recognition within the broader landscape of Assamese literature and culture. Their oral traditions—songs, proverbs, folktales, and festival performances—are not only artistic expressions but also repositories of history, philosophy, and identity.

This research highlights the ways in which literature and culture intersect with geography and history. The specific context of Morigaon reveals how the environment, socio-economic conditions, and intercultural exchanges shape the narratives of Tea Tribe communities in distinct ways. By focusing on a micro-level study, this paper contributes to filling the gap in existing scholarship, which has largely concentrated on the tea belts of Upper Assam.

Importantly, the findings suggest that Tea Tribe literature is not static but dynamic, reflecting both continuity and change. It embodies resilience against socio-economic marginalization, while



simultaneously negotiating with modern influences. This duality underscores the need for cultural preservation initiatives that not only document oral traditions but also create opportunities for their adaptation in contemporary contexts, such as staged performances, school curricula, and digital archives.

In conclusion, the “Eti Koli Duti Pat” scheme plays an important role in improving the lives of workers in Gopal Krishna Tea Estate by promoting better education, health care, and living standards, leading to the overall development of the tea garden community. literary and cultural practices of the Tea Tribe in Gopal Krishna Tea Estate must be valued as integral components of Assam’s multicultural identity. Their voices, though historically marginalized, provide profound insights into the human capacity for endurance, creativity, and community solidarity. Recognizing and preserving these traditions is essential for ensuring that the cultural heritage of the Tea Tribes continues to enrich future generations.

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