

---

## MNEMONICS OF CULTURE AND JHUMUR SONGS OF THE TEA PLANTATIONS OF ASSAM

---

**Bidushi Saha**

Ph.D Scholar, Department of English, CoochBehar Panchanan Barma University

---

**Article Received:** 17/05/2025

**Article Accepted:** 19/06/2025

**Published Online:** 21/06/2025

**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.18.06.485

---

**Abstract:** Music when it speaks to us often speaks, speaks for itself and it takes us away from the familiar world on a journey through space and time. Music brings changes in the very fabric of the social, everyday and lived realities. These changes, upheavals and the making and unmaking come to work in the ruptures of social fabric and it is in this way that music is created and comes to life. The endless possibility of making music in a society gives music the power to express and mobilize. Jhumur songs of the tea plantations of Assam is one such genre of music that culturally bears a lot of realities related to the plantations of Assam.

Tea plantations of Assam, much like other plantation economy have been developed for commercial purposes by the British. It is a labour oriented economy and as a result, workers were recruited in the tea plantations of Assam from different parts of India. They brought their culture in the plantations of Assam. The historical trajectory of tea has a plethora of fragmented, violent and ambiguous histories. Migration of different communities in the recent past transformed the socio- cultural terrain of Assam( Behal 65). Thus, a prolonged period close contact and togetherness among the variegated cultural groups and their socio- cultural relationship, whether inter-tribal or tribal and non-tribal, helped in developing an integrated culture in Assam. The culture and livelihood of tea plantation workers and tea tribes from whom Jhumur songs come have a rich and dynamic existence in terms of religion, language, songs, dances, rituals and numerous customs. In this context, the jhumur songs can be perceived as a composite culture and so is the wonderful folk musical repertoire that has grown around it (Datta 25).

Jhumur songs as a genre represent an astonishing variety, reflecting multiplicity of expression and heterogeneous elements. Jhumur songs are often remembered as songs of resistance against the exploitation and oppression which exist in the everyday lives of tea plantation workers. Jhumur songs reflect tribal and ethnic influences and also hint at affinities with their culture and music which might have been the result of socio-cultural, religious exchanges and social ties (Bhadra 75).

The story of Assam tea and Assam tea plantation labourers as remembered in Jhumur songs keeps alive the memory of all that has shaped history and continues to unfold for the

workers. Jhumur songs tell the story of tea garden workers, their history and their culture. Pay heeding to these songs opens up horizons for understanding the dimension of history and for analyzing how tea garden labourers of Assam are placed in history and memory (Biswas134).

The popular jhumur song *Ranchi che bhejali kuli* is from the tea plantations in Assam, which was documented by cultural activist Kali Dasgupta in the 1960s. This song provides a piercing glimpse of the universe and experience of coolies on plantations in Assam.

***Ranchi Che Bhejali Kuli***

Ranchi che bhejali kuli  
Dedalai kalam churi dale  
Dale babu nazara bhaithaise  
Laxe laxe laxe re dale,  
Kur mara chalak chuluk  
Pata tula dogi dog  
Aina dekhi khupa bandhe ure je kapoor re  
Ranchi che bhejali kuli  
Dedalai kalam churi  
Rode barxhane maya pata ke Tulane  
Laxe laxe laxe re dala.

This jhumur song tells us about the life of the tea plantations workers who were brought to Assam from Ranchi and surrounding area and cannot rest. This song captures the pulse of migration under British Raj and the fear and helplessness of the workers are also revealed through it. Forces of oppression were tightening their grip and countless workers were being made to travel to unknown land under false promises and hopes of a better life, it was through songs and music that the migrants' memories and experiences found expression and a voice which lives on to this day.

Another popular jhumur song from Assam tea plantations is – *Chol Mini Assam Jabo*. This song has gained massive popularity over the years in films, music videos, protest gathering.

***Chol Mini Assam Jabo***

Chol Mini Assam Jabo  
Deshe boro dukh re  
Assam deshe re Mini  
Cha bagan horiya  
Hor mora jaimon taimon  
Pata tola taan bo  
Hai joduram

Phaki diye cholai di Assam  
 Sardar bole kaame kaam  
 Babu bole dhorai aan  
 Sahib bulelibo pither chaal  
 Hai joduram  
 Phaki diye cholai di Assam

The tea industry is a highly labour intensive industry and it bears a long history of colonialism and exploitative working conditions. This jhumur song highlights the history of migration of the plantation workers and the painful memory of that migration when workers were tricked, falsely promised and lured to the green fields of Assam and brought in through the agent like Joduram. The everyday experience of the plantation workers, the journey to the wrenched green fields find expression in this song. This song is immensely popular in recent times also and rooted in the tea gardens as till today women plucking tea leaves sing this song together as a symphony.

The complex history of migration and exploitation finds expression in another popular jhumur song- *Axom deshor bagisare sowali*. This song is from the national award-winning Assamese movie Sameli Memsahab.

***Axom Deshor Bagisare Sowali***  
 Axom deshor bagisare sowali  
 Jhumur tumur nassi koru dhemali  
 Hei Laxmi nohoi mure naam Saameli  
 Shiris pale dhorbi paahi  
 Paata lamba paabi buli  
 Naake pindhinaake phuli  
 Juwaan bulaali  
 Hei Sampaa nohoi mure naam Saameli  
 Choto choto chokori  
 Boro boro tokori  
 Morom abuj paatot tole dok dok  
 Jowaan bazar raakhide kore lok lok  
 Choto choto bowkhanaa kore dhok dhok  
 Ki bhaabes ore aamak chaheli  
 Sardar bole kaam kaam  
 Babu bole dhorai aan  
 Sahib bulelibo pither chaal  
 O bideshi shaam  
 Phaaki diye aanilu Assam

This famous song beautifully captures the history of migration as Saameli sings that she does not remember where she comes from but now finds herself in Assam and calls it

her desh. She does not know or remember where her forefathers came from but she is now a part of Assam and performs bihu with glee. This song bagisare sowali and its relation to production brings forth important questions of the processes of racialisation and otherness through Saameli's character. The feminisation of the commodity operates in various complex and enmeshed ways to produce the feudal patronage system of the Planter Raj ( Gogoi 213). In some ways, the categorization of what actually makes jhumur songs does not remain a static well –defined category. It gets enmeshed in what comes through and gains recognition as jhumur songs, but is often something which tells a story of the tea gardens of Assam and is reborn in remixes and popular culture or in what is sung, performed, and lives in the workers' memories.

**Works Cited:**

- Behal, R.2014. *One Hundred Years of Servitude: Political Economy of Tea Plantations in Colonial Assam*. New Delhi: Tullika Books
- Bhadra, M. 1992. *Women Workers of Tea Plantations in India*. New Delhi: Heritage Publishers.
- Biswas, Hemanga.2014. *Asom Aru Bongar Loka-Sangeet Samiksha*. Nalbari, Assam Journal Emporium
- Datta, Birendranath. Ed.1994. *A Handbook of Folklore Material Of North East India*.Guwahati: ABILAC
- Gogoi, Lila. 1991. *Sah Bagisar Jivan aru Sanskriti*. Assam: Assam Sahitya Sabha.