



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI  
SHORT ABSTRACT OF THESIS



Name of the Student : SUMIT KUMAR SARMA  
Roll Number : 166141004  
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Name of Thesis Supervisor(s) : Dr. Mithilesh Kumar Jha  
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The thesis 'Encountering State: A Study of State-Society Interface in the Tea-Garden Labour Community of the Brahmaputra Valley, Assam' is an intensive study of the 'interaction' between the state in 'multiple sites' and the tea garden labour community of the Khumtai Tea Estate in the Golaghat district of Assam. The study has looked extensively into the existing literature on the state, which has been understood both as 'sovereign, ultimate authority' and a 'structural effect' to being a 'porous, volatile' entity penetrated by society in numerous myriad ways. Equally important are how the people make sense of the state practices, which are manifested in the everyday working of the state. It thus becomes important to think of the state as taking shape based on the experiential matrix in specific sites.

The thesis has six chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter is introductory and locates the research question in the field of study, and elaborates on the methodology deployed in the study. The second chapter examines the conceptual categories of state and society and engages with the debates surrounding them. In the first two chapters, the thesis explores the paradox of the simultaneous presence and absence of the state as seen from the 'margins'. This thesis engages with the existing scholarships to understand the relationships between the state and the social groups. It does so by exploring the welfare policies targeting the marginal groups. It also examines how the implementation of these policies also reinforces the sense of marginality among the targeted communities. Thus, marginality is exacerbated through appealing to and engaging with the state. Chapter three focuses on the 'construction' of the 'tea-tribe' category by looking into the historical trajectory of migration into Assam, which was facilitated by the colonial state. Chapter four examines the 'protective' regime put in place by the Plantation Labour Act (1951) immediately after independence. Chapters five and six bring together insights from the field to discuss how the state at the local level creates 'barriers' for the people in accessing the state and how organisations and representatives of the state facilitate engagement with the state at the local level. Throughout the thesis, questions about the state, law, welfare policies and micro-politics, identity and livelihoods and community life-political and otherwise- which pave the way for a vibrant political engagement with the state are dealt with differently.