

CHAPTER - VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

I

Research on women is not new but the studies offer a variety of concern with shifting emphasis and perspectives, depending on one's theoretical orientation, changes in the contemporary situation, etc. These shifts in emphasis and approach have to do with trends in current thinking on specific issues relating to the total population in society as well as to women in particular. The emphasis has sometimes been on inequality, on human rights and social oppression, on economic participation, etc.

Since this research is designed to compensate the neglect of a particular group of women workers, it is appropriate to begin this concluding section with a brief discussion of the studies on women from different perspectives.

In the introductory chapter I have discussed about the sociological studies on women. All these studies, except a very few, mention the status of women within the family setting. These sociological studies reveal three different trends of women's study, namely, the Marxist, functionalist and feminist.

The Marxists place women in the direct mode of production of a society and interpret them forming a class, a class which is subordinate to and oppressed by the superior class formed only by men under certain historical circumstances. The functionalists interpret women's role culturally, i.e., women's activity in home and society is essentially cultural but not sex-linked and stratified. Whereas the feminists are much more concerned with the issues of the women's movement, their socio-economic oppression, exploitation and liberation. The feminist movement after 1970's has opened the channel for an investigation into sexual equality in world society. The sociologists and other scholars try to examine women's condition in a wide range of societies and they try to discuss women's role in an evolutionary perspective.

The role of domestic labour, women's wage labour and the relationship between the two in capitalist society has been an important advance in Marxist's theoretical understanding of the women question. Also important has been the study of women from Marxist historical perspective. The Marxist analysis has extended Engel's analysis of the integral role played by the family in advanced capitalist society. The Marxist accounts are rooted in the social relations of production and emergence of private property. The proletarian women live in continuous struggle combining their role of workers and mothers to ensure their families' survival. The Marxist analysis shows

how the mode of production determines the lives of women within their households both by defining the internal structure of those households and by locating their position in the social system. This analysis insists that the position of women can only be properly explored through an analysis of the mode of production and through an examination of those differences among women which result from their place in the class structure. But it does not generate questions about the differences between men and women, about the different ideas that a society holds in respect to women and men, rather it does not deal specifically the basis of female oppression.

The feminist analysis deals with the patriarchal ideology, the ideological mode which defines the system of male domination and female subjugation in any society. The emphasis here is on human rights and the social oppression of women. The feminist analysis has been able to account for the differences in life chances between men and women. But they never consider women as a class category.

The functionalists study women in terms of roles, function and attributes, and consider women as a social category. They consider family rather than individuals, as a basic unit of social system. For functionalists, particularly in the analysis of the family, the most important concept is the "structural differentiation of roles". The functionalists' view is that the female oppression in any society is particularly embodied in the traditional cultural pattern of that

society and the female role is always complementary to that of male. The women should fulfil the natural feminine functions. From this concept the idea comes that the women are always dependent on men for their social identities which defines the socially rewarded roles as wife, mother and mistress. In functionalism there is no theory of sex-based stratification. The family structure, kinship and marriage system affect the status of women in a fundamental way. The anthropological and sociological studies on women put much emphasis on kinship and marriage. Recently they have shifted to the position of women in society with their changing role, status and attitudes. Research on women's role and opportunities in economic activity have remained marginal. From the functionalists' point of view one can assume that the sources of women's oppression are all to be found within the traditional attitudes and cultural institutions rather than the socio-economic and political structures of a society.

In these sociological perspectives even to-day, except a few studies, very little is known about Indian women. Most of the researchers either exclude Indian women from their analysis or they focus only on a limited sample of women who are not exactly the representative of Indian society. Most of such studies are concentrated on the educated middle class working women and are of functionalist orientation; there are only a few sociological studies which systematically examine

women's attitudes to work in a particular occupational context. Studies on industrial women have hardly been attempted by the sociologists. While anthropological studies have occasionally tried to consider rural women's economic roles, they have failed to examine any change in the women's participation in economic activities.

Studies on Indian women have been mainly influenced by structure-functionalism. There is a lack of integrated approach to study women in Indian society. Most of the studies on women have concentrated to examine the changing roles and attitudes of women, particularly of the middle class educated urban women. The other aspects of Indian women which have also been studied are : functions of family system, sex roles and its consequence on marital adjustment, etc. However, such studies rarely compare women with their male counterpart in similar occupations.

The research on Indian women can be grouped into : (a) macro-studies focusing on general features of socio-economic development, sex roles enacted and performed, and (b) micro-studies that explore specific situations in which women are placed.

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1. McNally, F., Women for Hire, Macmillan Press, London, 1979.
 2. Mazumder, V. and K.Sharma, "Women's Studies : New perceptions and the challenges" in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol XIV, No. 3, January 20, 1979, p. 116.

(The research on women's roles and opportunities in economic activity has remained marginal. Sociologists and anthropologists surprisingly have ignored the major role played by women in industry and the manners in which they are being affected by the process of modernisation. They occasionally note industrial women's economic roles but they have failed to examine any changes. The studies made on women from various perspectives like their status and roles in the society, employment in new profession, their position, etc. have considerably ignored to study the women who constitute an important part of industrial work force. In industrial sociology women have been neglected for a quite long time. The role of industrial women workers, their adjustment to industrial environment, their attitudes and behaviour, pattern of promotions, their relationships with the employer and other employees, etc. have not yet been dealt with proper attention.)

(The main purpose of this limited study is to investigate those factors which are responsible for plantation women to enter into the labour force and to find out how the employment of such women affects their behaviour pattern and life styles. The present study unfolds an unknown aspect of plantation sociology and stresses on the need for further empirical research in the field of industrial sociology of women. The plantation has a distinct form of productive organisation which gives rise to certain specific social relations. This

particular study emphasises the role of women in the productive process of plantation system, their life and work outside the family in employment and their life and work within the household.) ✓

II

* (In the organised sector of industry plantation occupies a unique position due to its agro-industrial features and the large component of women in the labour force. As stated in chapter 2 during the last few years there has been a continuous decline in the number of working women in the other organised industries. Plantation is the only industry where their employment has not declined in the recent years. Rather there has been an increase in the women's employment as compared to men, which indicates that the women are well suited to plantation work. Plantation is the only industry where employment has been made on family basis with labour imported from a distance. This labour force recruited from faraway places had to be settled down within the confines of the plantation. This gave some decisive advantages to the plantation owners. Firstly, a labour force was readily available for plantation as well as for domestic work of the superior staff. Secondly, the labour force could be kept under constant surveillance of the management. And lastly, the labour force remaining in semi-isolation would be subjected to little outside influences.)

✓ In this general context of tea plantations, the Chandmoni Tea Estate was selected for this study. It represents a typical tea plantation of the Terai and Dooars regions of West Bengal. The composition of labour force, organisation of work and management structure are similar in all the plantations of these two regions. In Chandmoni there are women workers from 19 different Adivasi groups and 2 caste groups. Most of the workers have come from a peasant background and some are born in Chandmoni or in other tea estates of West Bengal. The migrant population in this plantation is 36.82 per cent. It constitutes 36.88 per cent of the total Adivasi population. The rest are local born. The women workers were recruited directly or as the bonafide dependents of the men workers.)

(It has already been mentioned earlier that plantation industry employs more women in proportion to men than in any other organised industry. In the Chandmoni Tea Estate the women constitute 42.91 per cent of the total work force. The causes are : (1) the system of labour recruitment on family basis has made the women also to seek employment obligatorily; (2) plantation work being agro-based the women labourers has a definite function to perform in the industry. As a matter of fact in some type of plantation work, namely, plucking, they are more suited than men; and (3) as the entire labour force is residential the women can take up employment in the plantation without causing serious disruption in their domestic life.)

(This plantation has also a distinct form of social organisation which gives rise to certain specific form of social relations. Like any other full-fledged industry plantation has an organisation of work and a hierarchy of staff. This hierarchy includes the manager at the top and at the bottom the labour force. The employees can be classified into four categories, namely, managerial staff, staff, sub-staff and workers. Two assistant managers and the doctor are also included along with the manager at the top. Below the managerial category is the staff category which includes the supervisory and clerical staff. In this garden there are 17 such staff, only one of whom is a Bengali women. In the next sub-staff category there are 55 men who are from Bihari, Nepali and Adivasi communities. None of them are women. Of them 46 are from Adivasis and rest are from the Nepali and Biharicaste groups. The sub-staff draw better pay and facilities than the ordinary workers. The management, so far, has recruited only men in this category. They consider that the nature of work of the sub-staff, being supervisory and to exact work from common workers, is not suitable for the women workers. It was found that the sub-staff are generally promoted from the men workers and this is perhaps the only promotional opportunity for them but even this is denied to the women workers. The women in plantation are to remain throughout their career as daily-rated workers. They are commonly known as 'cookie' or

'aurat'. The women workers along with their men counterpart, directly involve themselves in the productive system of the plantation. In this sense they, with men workers, are the actual producers in the mode of production of the plantation system, who sell their labour to earn a livelihood.)

(The specific operation in which women are universally engaged is plucking of tea leaf. Men are engaged in agricultural work like hoeing, cleaning the base of the tea bushes, spraying pesticides, etc. They seldom pluck tea leaf. In slack season women are also employed in light hoeing and light and medium pruning. Only young, efficient and able bodied women are employed in such pruning as it needs some skill. In several occupations the women are as efficient as men and in case of plucking of tea leaf women are considered more efficient than men. In peak season the earning of women workers doing plucking on piece rate basis is higher than that of men. In plantation women are also employed in forking and hoeing and they also do hand weeding. Women are not generally employed in tea-factories, only aged and sick women are employed in factory for sweeping and picking out the tea stalks from finished tea. Apart from plucking it was noted that in many other jobs in the plantation women are as efficient as men. ✓ Plucking requires patience and dexterity of fingers which the women can provide better than men. The young women workers are also adept in light pruning and though it requires some skill they can return

home as soon as they complete their portion of work on Thika.)

(Though there is no rigid compartmentalisation of work for male and female workers some sort of division of labour exists. Women are given more manual and relatively unskilled jobs on the ground that they are not "qualified for higher and skilled job" as the management often says.)

(In this industry there is an obvious discrimination against women in the payment of wages. Their work is always regarded as lighter, and they are often paid at a lower rate. Their working conditions are aggravated by unfair practices that include delay in payment and retention of wage increase, etc.)

(The difference between wages of men and women workers still persists. In the early stage of the development of plantation in North Bengal, i.e., before 1950's such wage difference was greater. We find that the Hazri for Thika remained static between 1920 and 1947. It was four annas per Thika for men, three annas for women and one anna and six pies for children. Gradually after the fixation of minimum wages in 1948 such wage difference was reduced. Upto 1966 there was a difference of 14 paise between the men and women workers. After 1966 the differences rose to 17 paise till the Equal Wages Act was passed in October, 1976. But the employer still

3. Griffiths, P., History of the Indian Tea Industry, Weidenfel and Nicolson, London, 1967, p. 310.

refuses to pay equal wages to men and women workers. The women are not regarded as equal to men in their place of work. The Thika for women is less than that of the men workers in plucking and other work. Women are generally given lighter load of work. In case of plucking such Thika for women is 22 Kg, whereas it is 25 Kg for men, the cultivation work is also 20 per cent lesser and lighter for women than the men workers. A man worker has to perform light pruning of about 60 to 180 tea bushes in a day, whereas a woman worker is allotted only 60 to 100 bushes. In case of weeding and forking a man worker has to weed and fork 160 to 240 bushes, whereas it is about 160 to 200 bushes in case of a female worker.)

✓ The management of the plantation feels that the unequal wages between the men and women workers must be maintained as they perform unequal work load. It will be an injustice to the men workers who do most of the heavy work of the plantation. Therefore, the wage differentiation continued upto 1979. In 1982 the planter paid the differences of wages from 1976 retrospectively as the Ministry of labour clarified that the Equal Wages Act applied to the 'equal nature of work, not the equal volume of work'. But the retention of the increased wage was maintained till July, 1982.

✓ In the plantation hierarchy men have monopolised all the responsible positions. Although in Chandmoni Tea Estate among the daily rated workers women outnumber men the former are always appointed only as daily-wage workers. They are

never appointed to the managerial, executive and administrative positions. The women workers have no promotion facilities. They cannot even be promoted to the position of Sardars who supervise a group of labourers working in the field. Similarly they cannot be Dafadars, Boidars, Chowkidars, etc. Only a male worker, can be promoted to all these positions. By virtue of the occupational statuses the Munshis, Chaprasis, Sardars, Boidars, Dafadars, Chowkidars enjoy considerable prestige and privileges in the plantation community. The plantation authority often consults with them. It is found that women workers are always deprived of such honour and privileges. Only during plucking season most of the women workers earn more than that of the men workers as the wages are paid on the basis of the additional quantity of tea leaves plucked. ✓ Plucking appears to be the most preferred job for the women workers. On the other hand, plucking appears to be the least preferred job among many of the men workers.

The women workers in the plantation are committed workers in the true sense of the term. The employment in the tea plantation is the only source of their earnings. As the plantation industry is agro-based and is not heavily mechanised the Adivasis and the Nepali caste groups do not face much difficulties to work within the work routine and discipline of the plantation. The traditional ✓ agrarian background of the Adivasis and Nepali castes also have helped them to accept plantation

works. The field operations in the plantation are very much similar to those of the agriculture. Therefore, the women workers are not strangers to the new environment. They have easily adjusted themselves in the plantation industrial environment which is evident from the low-rate of female absenteeism and rare case of turn over in the industry.

Among the women workers the old and middle aged are more committed than those who are comparatively young. There are several reasons behind it. The young women remain more busy with their household chores and minor children. Those who are comparatively older consider the plantation work as a part of their family activities. On the other hand unmarried women workers are much more committed among all the women workers as they have less family burden. In general, the plantation women workers are committed workers and their loyalty is valued more than their efficiency.

It is seen that although some of the men workers have connections with their native villages, in most cases the women workers have cut off their links with their native place. They have gradually established social roots in the plantation. The women workers in plantation appear to be more committed workers than the women in other industries. Though in the plantation system upward mobility in the job among the women workers is nil but job experience to a considerable extent determines the degree of commitment of the women workers. It signifies that despite the absence of upward job mobility

commitment of workers in an industry can remain fairly high if the working environment is compatible with the cultural habits and temperament of the workers. Commitment does not necessarily increase with the movement of workers in the occupational hierarchy as has been suggested by some scholars. During the plucking season commitment of the women workers is very high. This is due to their economic interest to earn more wages from plucking extra leaves and also for the nature of the work.

✓ Absenteeism among the men workers is generally due to the social functions and festivals in which they participate and also due to their liquor addiction. Absenteeism among the women workers are due to different reasons. ✓ Household work and child rearing activities are the main reasons for absenteeism ✓ among the women workers. After receiving weekly wages at least half of the men workers absent themselves from the work for a day or more as they go for a prolonged drinking session. Despite this fact the male workers are less absentees than the women workers. Among the women workers the Ghasis and Baraiks remain more absent than all other Adivasi and non-Adivasi workers. Without any apparent reason they remain absent from the work. Traditionally the Ghasis were the drummers and musicians and Baraiks were the weavers. It seems that they are ill suited for the plantation work which is basically agrarian in character. The average rate of absenteeism among the men workers was 20.22 per cent in 1980, whereas it was 24.65 per cent among the women

workers in the same year. There are many reasons for women workers' absenteeism. These have been discussed in detail in chapter 4. The major point that emerges from this discussion is that the women workers are burdened with a multitude of domestic work — cultivation of the family patch of land given by the management, cleaning own houses, attending to daily domestic chores, nursing sick children, attending to guests or sometimes visiting friends or relatives in other gardens. There is no relationship between women's involvement in the union and absenteeism because women rarely involve themselves in the union activities.

The job mobility and turnover of men and women workers is very low in the Chandmoni Tea Estate. This is also an indicator of high commitment of the workers. The aspirations of the women workers is low and they do not look for better wages in other industries. Living in the plantation environment with their families they appear to be committed to the plantation industry. Illiteracy has also made them stable wage workers because work in other industries often require either skill or education.

It was found that, in general, expectations and aspirations of the plantation workers are very low irrespective of age and sex. This is probably due to their traditional cultural background, low economic condition, poor educational level on the one hand and the nature of the industry itself on

the other. This, I believe, is further augmented by the settled nature of job in the plantation and the positive encouragement received by the majority of women workers from their families and friends for their job as a worker.

The women workers consider their work as a part of their life. The inclusion of Adivasi women in the work system of the plantation is an important criterion to determine their status whereas the exclusion from all economic and intellectual activities are the criteria of status among the higher caste women. The majority of women who had already worked in a plantation before marriage continue to work after marriage. In many cases the women workers are the primary bread winners. They almost entirely contribute their income to the family expenditure. So economic motivation is central to their work. They seem to be satisfied with their job as they consider it an advantage to earn in a situation of general unemployment. They stoically accept that they will have to maintain their family and children with their income. In this respect their attitudes differ from that of the middle class educated working women. The attitude of the middle class working women is to enjoy some kind of freedom in the society. Sometimes it may also be connected with emancipatory tendency, they try to be economically independent and try to fulfil their life aspirations. But

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4. Mies, M., Indian Women and Patriarchy, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1980.
Srivastava, V., Employment of Educated Married Women in India, National Publishing House, New Delhi, 1978.
Kapur, P., The Changing Status of the Working Woman in India, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1974.

among the plantation women it is a kind of 'enslavement'. They work only to maintain their mere livelihood, family and children.

As has been said above the women workers of plantation work are basically propelled by their economic motivation. Such economic motivation is a result of obligations toward their family and other dependents. The major part of the income goes towards the purchase of daily foods, just as a part of the man's income goes towards the purchase of liquor and tobacco. Some of the families in plantation live in absolute state of misery. They are burdened with non-earning dependents. Family is not considered here as the status unit as in case of urban middle class, but the family in lower class women of plantation is considered as economic unit. It is significant to note that in the eyes of plantation community the working wife enjoys the same amount of prestige as that of her husband.

✓ The plantation owners offer several facilities for them but all these seem to be inadequate. They provide housing, sanitation, dispensary, education, creche, maternity benefits and many other facilities to the workers. The plantation authority has provided these facilities to create a congenial atmosphere for the settlement of family units and in some cases compelled to do so to fulfil legal obligations. However, the health and hospital facilities are inadequate. ✓ Previously there was a hospital in the Chandmoni Tea Estate but at present it has

been reduced to a ill-stocked dispensary. The educational level of women workers is very low due to the inadequate educational facilities as well as the general discouraging outlook of the workers towards education. There is no recreational facilities provided for the women workers. There is no organisation for the women workers. There is a creche to keep the infants and children under six years of age, which most mothers do not like to use. Only a few mothers keep their children in the creche as there is no one to look after their children at home.

Most of the women workers come from poor and educationally backward families. Work outside home is not new to them. Some of them had worked in the agricultural sector before taking up the plantation work. Work is considered necessary to support the family. The functional role of family has completely changed under the influence of the plantation industry. It has been observed that the structure of the family has undergone remarkable changes. The joint family system has broken down resulting into nuclear families. Traditionally, the agrarian economy required joint living, whereas in the tea industry this system deprives the workers of some of their due benefits from the plantation authority. The plantation provides housing, ration, and other facilities only to the immediate family of a worker. This has obviously helped the nuclearisation of the family structure.

Women workers in other industries face more difficulties at home and in society than at the work place. Work is

necessary because without it the family may not survive. But in spite of this material contribution that a woman worker makes to the income of the family, she enjoys no respect or status in the affairs of the family. She is treated more or less like a slave or servant and has to do all the household chores without any help from the husband or other male members. In the society her position is no different.⁵

In the plantation the picture is somewhat different. It was found that most of the women workers are accommodative as their work demands can be fitted into their family requirements. The women workers integrate work and family in their life without any visible strain. Those who cannot integrate the two occasionally absent themselves from work. As the career aspiration of plantation women is very low they tend to pay more attention to immediate family needs. But normally the work and family both are given more or less equal weightage, so there is less complexity and conflict. Adivasi men help their wives in household work even in cooking and to look after the children. In this respect Adivasi men are more accommodative. This situation has emerged partly due to the traditional tribal ethos of both sexes working for a livelihood.

In the plantation industry work-schedule and working hours help the women adjust with their domestic duties. They

5. Karnik, V.B., Indian Labour - Problems and Prospects, Minerva Associates (Publications) Pvt. Ltd, Calcutta, 1974, pp. 85-86.

can without strain fulfil the roles as wife, mother and a worker. Even if they, sometimes, fail to perform certain household duties their husbands seldom complain. Their children are socialized in such a way with the other children of the community that they never demand more of their mothers' attention. Their friends and relatives never criticise their employment. Increasing emphasis on smaller households, rather than the joint family, makes the husband-wife relationship of crucial importance.

The industrial society normally imposes a strict separation between home and place of work. In tea industry the situation is different. In this industry both the residential and working sectors are within the same area. All these factors seem to have helped the women to adjust better in the plantation work than in any other industry. One evidence to support this contention is that it is only in this industry the rate of employment of women has remained steadily high, if not actually increased, whereas in other industries the rate has fallen down over the past decades.

III

The women workers, specially the Adivasis suffer from a very few restrictions. They enjoy much more social freedom befitting their traditional tribal ethos. The Nepali caste society is also liberal in this respect. In Adivasi society marriage is simply a contract rather than a sacrament. Though

polygyny is permitted, specially in case of barrenness of the first wife, monogamy is the general practice. Second marriage after death or divorce of the first wife, is, however, very common.

A boy and a girl can marry according to their own will without prior consent of their parents. Marriage is now a more personal affair than a family one and in the selection of spouse, kinsmen's role has considerably decreased. In many cases, the girl is simply brought and kept in the house permanently. There exists a mutual understanding between the parties, and their children born out of such union are socially recognized. No social or ritual ceremonies are performed for the purpose. The plantation society gives provisional recognition to such unions and the families established out of such unions. Inter-ethnic marriages were looked down upon about two decades ago and the culprits were driven out of the plantation. But at present such marriages are on the rise and the culprits are not driven out of the plantation. Such marriages are often settled through the imposition of a fine on the couple by the Adivasi Panchayat or the trade union. Industrial environment provides scope for accommodation of the multi-structural communities. This has increased the interactions among the various communities not only in the working place but also in the social life. Due to this reason changes are noticeable in the institution of marriage. Inter-ethnic marriages thus have increased nowadays. Divorce and remarriage of both men and women are frequent

though the trend among the younger couples seems to be declining. One may conclude that family and community's control over the individual of both sexes has become secondary to individuals' freedom of action.

The participation of women in plantation work does not adversely affect inter-personal relationships between husband and wife. It does not create a situation of conflict in the family. However, their husbands and in-laws show positive attitudes towards their employment. Their positive attitude is often equated with their active support.

A high percentage of the husbands show positive attitudes towards their wives' employment. About 98 per cent plantation women state that their husbands want them to work and only 1.8 per cent have said that their husbands are against their working. Almost all women speak of the co-operative attitude of their husbands. These men support their wives' work simply because it brings in money for them and the family. Most of the husbands have mentioned that economic consideration is the main reason for approving the working of their wives. But at the same time they consider women taking up a out-of-home job as something natural in tune with the traditional tribal ethos. The women whose husbands work outside in the railway and in the army and draw better salary are also of the opinion that their wives should continue to work in tea industry as since it has been a family occupation for the last two

or three generations. ✓

So the economic factor seems to be the primary motive for the women to take up employment in the plantation. Interest in the type of work in plantation is of secondary importance.

In plantation society the domestic and child rearing chores are not considered below the dignity of men. This is confirmed from the fact that in 71 per cent of the plantation families the husbands extend a helping hand to their wives in housekeeping tasks. Besides sharing of household responsibilities 87.6 per cent of the men workers are of the opinion that their wives should have a say in the important family matters. The rest of the men workers show negative attitudes regarding it but most of these respondents come from the caste groups.

Eightynine per cent of the female workers desire equal participation in decision-making in the family, but in actual practice this is enjoyed only by a few though an almost equal proportion of the women workers hold the view that their role as wage-earners has helped them to raise their status in the society. It is seen that even in vital matters, e.g., childrens' education, marriage, control of family budget, etc., ✓ they play a much lower role than their husbands. As many as 30.77 per cent of the women workers jointly manage the family budget with their husbands. About 41.63 per cent of the women workers do not manage the family budget; their husbands alone control the family budget. Only 23.98 per cent of women workers manage the family budget themselves. Besides, in 3.62 per cent

of cases sons or mothers control the family budget. In the case of shopping 64.00 per cent of the women workers do it jointly with their husbands. The rest of the women workers or their husbands do it singly. Most of the husbands spend a large part of the income on liquor and tobacco. However some of the women workers too have regular drinking habit. Drinking and smoking are not traditionally prohibited among Adivasi men and women. Many of the older women are seen to drink regularly. On festive occasions men and women irrespective of age drink rice-beer. However, women like to take home-brewed rice-beer while men are fond of drinking distilled country liquor.

The workers' families spend whatever they earn in meeting the basic needs of day to day life. But money available for these needs is substantially depleted due to addiction to drinking. Almost all the families purchase food materials on credit from the grocer's shop and they are burdened with loan. However, among some young women and even some men an organized attempt to give up drinking is noticed. But this is a very recent phenomenon. Three factors seem to have been working behind this change : Conversion to Christianity of a few Adivasi families, education and the influence of caste societies of neighbouring regions and the rising cost of living.

✓ A definite hierarchy exists among the plantation workers which is also reflected in their social life. The members of the cultivating Adivasis (Oraon, Munda, Kheria etc.)

consider the members of the non-cultivating Adivasis inferior to them. Hence they never inter-dine with the latter group. Even the former group consider themselves superior to the Nepali caste groups. They consider the Bengalis and Biharis superior to them in social position. In the case of superior-inferior concept Adivasi women are appeared to be more conservative than men. But such social isolation and inter-ethnic barriers are gradually breaking down.

(Women workers do join the trade unions but hardly take active part in them. It is not because they are incapable of doing so but because of male dominance in this field. Inequality between men and women has been fully carried over into the trade union organisation. Hardly there is any trade union leader in plantation from among the women workers. Even in the local committees of the trade unions there are a very few women members.) Out of 221 women workers of the Chandmoni Tea Estate only 10 are active participants. But in a procession or when a demonstration is staged they are placed at the front. From the point of view of women very few of them are also prepared to devote time for regular union activities. As soon as they complete work in the field they rush back to home for attending to their domestic duties. Their husbands also do not like them to keep away from home after their work is over. As a result, the plantation women workers find it extremely difficult to attend union meetings or to visit union office regularly. In

most occasions, their membership of union is little more than nominal. As a result, their husbands' discouragement coupled with the pressure of domestic burden have failed to create a working class consciousness and a sense of need to develop a strong trade union movement among them. It was interesting to note that none of the women workers of the plantation even know the name of the trade union to which they belong, whereas at least 60 per cent of the men workers know the names of their respective unions. But at the same time they are used as front-liners whenever a demonstration requires to be staged.

In the Chandmoni Tea Estate the CITU union has its roots deeper among the women workers whereas the RCMC is less popular among them. The women members of the Congress union (RCMC) seldom attend the party meetings. Whereas the CITU women members do take part in party meetings occasionally under the leadership of a Bengali woman. Older women workers are generally supporters of the Congress (RCMC) union but those who are young are much more inclined to the Communist trade union (CITU) membership. However, most of the Christian Oraon women are the Congress union members. They are the oldest settlers of the plantation and the RCMC is also the oldest labour union in this plantation. However, all the women workers, irrespective of their union affiliation are unaware of the ideology of their respective trade unions.

In the plantation the women workers are practically unskilled. They are very poorly educated and organizationally

unsophisticated. They themselves are apathetic towards union and politics and avoid conflict with the management so that their wages are regularly paid. Generally they join in strikes and gheraos of the manager and the owner along with the men workers before the Durga Puja in every year demanding bonus.

Though there is inter-union rivalry in the Chandmoni Tea Estate particularly among the men workers, it is not so prominent among the women workers. But in a situation of strikes when the women workers are put in front of the management by the agitating mass they become violent. It indicates that they are slowly developing consciousness in participating in the working class movement. However, still the motive for joining the movement remains confined to an immediate benefit of bonus and enhanced wages. This feature is different from that of the advanced industrial society where motive is much wider. Even today the plantation women workers have not yet actively joined the trade union movement due to the lack of lasting class consciousness as they are ignorant of their working condition, discrimination and exploitation.

In the multi-ethnic plantation society the traditional Adivasi council exists alongside with the trade union. The problem of law and order and social control among the workers is managed by the Adivasi Panchayat. The matters settled by these institution are witchcraft, sorcery, inter-ethnic marriage, adultery, theft, inter-ethnic disputes, etc.

Traditionally village Panch was represented by the village elders and there was no role of women in such Panchayat. In the present situation in the plantation women workers have also no role in the decision-making process ideally, they can only sit and hear the decisions taken in the Panchayat as silent observers but in practice it is seldom found. As the women have no significant role in the trade union leadership and in the decision-making process in the Panchayat their status in the power structure has not improved. The economic status of the plantation women workers has improved but not in the sense of economic emancipation. But in the power structure their position has remained as low as ever. Their low educational level is also responsible for this low status and they seem to be blissfully unaware of their objective condition.

The educational attainment of the plantation women workers is also very low. In general the level of literacy of the plantation workers is very poor but in case of women it is almost nil. Only 4.5 per cent of the women workers are literate. However, in case of education the sons and daughters are discriminated. Most of the women workers do not want to educate their daughters. They cling to the traditional belief that female education has no use for their employment and for their society. Therefore, the women themselves are more responsible for their educational backwardness than

others. The net outcome is that the process of socialization of plantation women promotes a poor self-image of themselves.

It is far from the truth that economic independence has given the plantation women an equal status with men. Though apparently they enjoy considerable freedom, still their overall position in society has remained low. The plantation society is male dominated and women are always treated more or less as a commodity. The inequality between the men and the women extends to almost every sphere of life, in unequal wage rates, unequal occupational status, unequal status in social, political and educational spheres. In the patriarchal plantation society there is no special identity for women. Identity for equal extent is a far cry. The women are socialized in such a way that social institutions condition them to accept their own exploitation. The patriarchal family system along with the inferior educational standard, economic position and power position of women are the sources of inequality among men and women in the plantation society. It becomes evident that women plantation workers have not witnessed significant changes in their life styles over the years. The social conditions in which they live continue to be traditional having some changes. Their ignorance, lack of skill and assertive nature make them subservient both at the place of work and the family life.

In summing up a few tentative conclusions can be drawn from this limited study. These are given below :

1. The study shows that ideas, values, awareness concerning

status are a function of educational and cultural background. Emancipation and liberation from male domination leading to improvement in status cannot be achieved through economic independence alone.

2. Conflict between work and home life among working women largely depends on the nature of employment. If the working condition in an industry is flexible enough to the special needs of mothers and housewives, as the plantation industry shows, the maladjustment of women workers with industrial jobs can be reduced to minimum.
 3. Industrialization may affect men and women workers differently. The women workers in plantation, being confined more to home life, seem to be less affected by it than men.
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