

**Chapter – 1**  
**INTRODUCTION**

## Chapter – I

### INTRODUCTION

**1.1 Background :** The emergence of Women's issues, as an area of research in various disciplines of social sciences, is an event of immense theoretical and empirical importance. It is indeed amazing that even though constituting a massive one-half of the population, women have always been found residing outside the basic concerns of social science knowledge and enquiry. Women's existence, as a relatively autonomous and independent category of the humankind, generally stood concealed for a long time.

It was with the rise of new women's liberation movement in advanced societies, in late 60's and 70's, that women's issue began to be seriously discussed and debated. The last two or three decades can be characterized as a period of great spurt in women's studies. This was so partly because of the encouragement received from the efforts initiated by the International Organisations for the welfare of women such as International Women's Year Conference held at Mexico City in 1975 and the World Conference of the United Nation's Decade for women organized at Copenhagan in 1980. since then, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of Conferences, seminars and researches on the issues concerning women. The ideologies, that justified the subjection of women in society for several hundred years, took a new and unusual turn towards liberation of women. The women's liberation movement of the 70s created new visibility of women and their specific problems and concerns.

Recently when women began to ask about the origin of the unequal relationship between the sexes, they discovered that explanation put forward by social scientist for centuries were not at all satisfactory, for most explanations, a positivist-functionalist or a Marxist, or even a psychoanalyst approach see this situation biologically determined and, hence, consider it beyond the scope of change. They put forward their arguments that the woman owing to some inherent

characteristics of her nature and specially in fulfilling the demands of maternity and child rearing confined within the household; and had always been subjugated and subservient to men irrespective of the kinds of societies and cultures. But women, who struggle for their emancipation have taken opposite stance and rejected biological determinism on the ground that the unequal, hierarchical, and exploitative relationship between men and women is caused by social i.e., historical factors which are very much within the scope of social change. According to them the social and cultural determination of nature to be more crucial than the biological or psychological characteristics of women.

Murdock (1949) sees the biological difference between man and women as the basis of sexual division of labour in society due to greater physical strength of men and the fact that women bear children. Given the biological differences between men and women, a sexual division of labour is the most efficient way of organizing society.

Parsons (1965) characterizes the women's role in the family as 'expressive' which means she provides warmth, security and emotional support which is imperative for effective socialization of the young. He argues that for efficient operation of a family as a social system, there must be a clear-cut sexual division of labour. In this sense, the instrumental and expressive role compliment each other.

Culture as the determinants of human behaviour pleads for learning the respective male and female roles and justifies by a belief and value system which state that gender roles are normal, natural and proper.

Oakley (1974), a British sociologist and a supporter of the Women's Liberation Movement, comes down strongly on the side of culture as the determinant of gender roles. She pleads that the division of labour by sex is not universal. Human culture are diverse and endlessly variable. She cites the Mbuti Pygmies of Congo rain forest and Australian Aborigines of Tasmania not having sexual division of labour. Similarly, in present day societies, women form an important part of many armed forces, particularly those of China, Russia, Cuba and

Israel. In India, some 12 per cent of labourers on building sites are women and in some Asian and Latin American Countries, a quarter of the labourforce in mines is female. She claims that there are no exclusive females roles and that biological characteristics do not bar women from particular jobs. The mother role is a cultural construction. She says that gender roles are culturally rather than biologically determined. Bettelheim (1969) also expresses the similar view based on his study of collective child rearing in a Kibbutz system. He concluded that a close and continuous mother-child relationship is not essential for effective socialization of young.

Ortner (1974) also claims that it is not biology as such that ascribes women to their status in society but the way in which every culture defines and evaluates female biology, as in every society, a higher value is placed on culture than on nature.

**1.2 Theoretical perspectives on Women's Studies :** If one looks at the corpus of material on women's studies, following their assertions for justice and freedom, two kinds of orientations become easily discernible. The first type of orientation draws its strength from the over-arching paradigm of materialistic explanation of injustice and exploitation in society, propounded by Karl Marx and his followers. The Marxist paradigm of materialistic explanation of exploitation and injustice are the expressions of class inequalities and reflect the class contradiction among societies. While contradiction of classes centers around the classes of have and have not, they do not touch upon the issues of exploitation and injustice based on gender relations. The Marxist logic did succeed in sensitizing social scientists about the situation of women's oppression yet he ignored the real issue of women's historical exploitation. Women who constitute nearly one-half of the class of exploited, and who have equally been the subject of alienation and oppression, could not become the focus of Marxist revolutionary demand.

Engels (1972) made serious efforts to understand the issue of oppression on women in his book *Origin of Family, Private Property and the State*, but he could

not grasp in totality the problem of women's subordination and he simply reduced the whole issue of women's exploitation and fight for survival to abolishing of private property. He argued that with the establishment of collective ownership of means of production, oppression on women will automatically come to an end.

Some of the Feminist Scholars with Marxist orientation (Beneria and Roldan: 1987; Maria: 1988) have tried to apply the model of class contradiction to demonstrate the contradiction between the genders. However, the scholars who attempted at assigning class status to women have not been able to provide a basis for treating women as a class.

The second type of orientation in women's studies is known as Radical Feminist approach or paradigm. This feminist paradigm is further divided into two sub-orientation. The first orientation try to seek equality, freedom, social dignity and justice by being in relation to the male world. Women scholars of this orientation (Agarwal: 1988, Majumdar: 1979) demand reforms and change within the settings of domestic life and in their day to day interaction with the outer world.

The second orientation, on the other hand, demands a total break from all the nexes of man-made culture and society. It does not seek to negotiate for a just and dignified coexistence with patriarchal system in which they are located. This radical feminist (Firestone: 1972; Kausik: 1985; Kishwar: 1991; Spender: 1980), aims at carving out a parallel female world which defines its autonomy and freedom in terms of its own gender identity and existence.

The changing social conditions not only reshape the ideological basis of the nature of concepts and issues of social sciences, they also redefine the priorities and the directions of social research and enquiry. In this rapidly changing modern societies, the inter-play of the global and local intellects have provided for publication of numerous books on the various aspects of women's subordinated life in India. Scholars like, Agarwal, Majumdar, Desai, Kishwar, Kaushik, Jain and Kumar have raised women's issues especially in the area of analysis of women's movement, women's grassroots organizations, authority and power in the family,

condition of work, impact of technology on women, violence against women, patriarchy and gender and the like.

### **1.3 Conceptual Issues :**

This section makes an attempt to present a conceptual issues like 'status', 'role', 'role-conflict', 'empowerment', 'culture', 'community' etc. So as to provide a matrix for the analysis.

The Constitution of India gives equality of status to Indian women with that of men. However, the question still looms large whether they have attained this equality in reality. As we know, there always exists a gap between theory and practice. Therefore, it is not merely equality of law that determines the status of women in a society. It is the tradition and custom that proves more powerful and crucial than law in determining women's status within the social structure.

Social scientist customarily use the term status as a recognized social position within a social group. Status simply refers to any socially defined position. Ralf Linton (1936) defines status as a "Collection of rights and duties." It meant a position in a social system occupied by designated individuals. By 'status' Bendix and Lipset (1957) refers to rank position with respect to chiefly income, prestige and power-one or all of these.

Morris (1971) defines status as the location of an actor in a system of social relationship and role as the set of expectations applied to the incumbents of that particular status.

Parsons (1951) defines role as the organized sectors of an actor's orientation which constitutes and defines his participation in an interactive process. Status, on the other hand refers to the actor's position within an institution i.e., within a system of roles. Role is, thus the "processual aspects" and status the positional aspect of an actor's participation in a social system.

According to Merton (1957) social status of an individual is his status-set, each of the statuses in turn having its distinctive role-set. Role set according to him is the complement of role relationships which persons have by virtue of occupying a particular social status.

The study of relative roles of the sexes has assumed significance in view of the concern expressed in the present era about human rights and social justice, and on the utilization of human resources. The women's liberation movement since the seventies has given special stimulus to sociological research on role-performance and related aspects.

Roles are the links between the individual and social structure. They refer to the expected pattern of behaviour in a given situation. The actual behaviour of an individual in a given situation is called role performance. It is the degree to which one carries out her expected roles. The role performance of an individual in the multiplicity of roles, he or she performs is conditioned by the norms and cultural values of the society at large and the sub-system to which one belongs.

Linton (1936) the eminent American anthropologist argues that role represents the dynamic aspect of a status. In practice there are no roles without statuses or statuses without roles. Merton (1957) says each social status involves not a single associated role, but an array of roles. Malinowski (1944) defined status as a synonym for role as it is largely taken by others, too. Roles are expected behaviour associated with a social position. Some social psychologists have distinguished actual behaviour from the role behaviour. Thus the actual role behaviour may not be identical with the expected role behaviour. Each status in society is accompanied by a number of norms which define how an individual occupying a particular status is expected to act. This group of norms is known as a role. Playing or performing roles involves social relationships in the sense that an individual plays a role in relation to other roles. Individuals interact in terms of roles.

Getzels and Guba (1954) state that role conflict refers to those situations where an actor is required to play simultaneously two or more roles that present

inconsistent, contradictory, or even mutually exclusive expectations. The actor cannot realistically conform to such expectations.

Behera and Padhi (1995) used the phrase 'role-conflict' to refer to the situation in which incompatible demands are placed upon an actor because of his role relationship with two or more groups. Generally the person involved feel internally the obligation to meet the conflicting demands, face the threat to possible sanctions if they fail to fulfill either demand and yet find it impossible to comply fully with opposing obligations.

The concepts like gender, Women's Empowerment and Patriarchy are very vital in the context of studying women's role and status in the society. Gender is the socially constructed roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women in a given culture and the societal structure that support them. Gender is a learned behaviour, which is dynamic. It is determined by society and not by biology. (Pelinc: 1977, UNICEF: 1991). Empowerment is the process of generating and building capabilities to exercise control over one's own life. Women's empowerment is a model of gender analysis that traces women's increasing equality by empowering through five phases, viz. welfare access, conscientisation, participation and control (INSTREW: 1995) Patriarchy is a concept which essentially means the rule of the father or the patriarch i.e. the male members of the household or society. It leads women to internalize as well as to perpetuate patriarchal ways of thinking, both in values and in behaviour (Bhasin: 1991).

Linton (1936) states that, 'The culture of a society is the way of life of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation.' (Linton: 1936) According to Kluckhohn (1951) culture is a 'design for living' held by members of a particular society. Since man has no instincts to direct his actions, his behaviour must be based on guidelines which are learned and shared by its members. For Malinowski (1944) culture stands for a total way of life which secures for an individual the satisfaction of his bio-psycho drives and fulfillment of other desires ultimately investing with satisfaction.

For Majumdar and Madan (1970) culture is an integrated whole and therefore no single cultural trait has any meaning by itself unless it is seen and analysed in the context of the whole. To a large degree culture determines how members of a society think and feel, it directs their actions and defines their outlook on life. Members of society usually take their culture for granted. It has become so much a part of them that they are often unaware of its existence.

According to Maciver (1970) community means area of common life, village, or town, or district, or country, or even wider area. To deserve the name community, the area must be somehow distinguished from further areas, the common life may have some characteristics of its own such that the frontiers of the area have some meaning. Wherever men live together they develop in some kind and degree distinctive common characteristics – manners, tradition, mode of speech and so on. These are the signs and consequences of an effective common life. A community is a focus of social life, the common living of social life has territorial frontiers and exercises control over all. Community is a network of social interrelations. Community is the common life of beings who are guided essentially from within, spontaneously and freely relating themselves to one another, weaving for themselves the complex web of social unity. (Maciver: 1970)

#### **1.4 Statement of the Problem :**

The Tea Industry enjoys an unique place in our national economy by virtue of its position as an enterprise providing employment to around a million workers and supporting a number of ancillary industries and services and a major earner of foreign exchange.

It occupies an unique position due to its agro-industrial features and highest percentage of women's employment. Tea is the backbone of economy for the hill region of Darjeeling. It produce one of the finest tea in the world. At present, there are 76 tea gardens in Darjeeling hills with 18,428 hectares of land under tea cultivation and produce around 11 to 12 million kgs. of tea per year. The average yield per hectare is 647 kgs. As per 1991 census, there are 52,000 working

population with 2,08,000 dependents out of this more than 55 per cent (28,005) constitute women workers.

In the tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas about 95 per cent labour force is composed of Nepali community. The middle caste groups like Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Manger, Gurung, Bhujel, Thami, Sunuwar, Newar are dominant among the Nepalis. The tribals like Lepcha, Bhutia, Sherpa, Yolmos form about 3 to 4 per cent and the rest 1 to 2 per cent is composed of people from plains and terai Nepal. Women are numerically dominant as workers or coolie. They perform several kinds of plantation work like plucking of tea leaves, pruning, weeding, light skiffing, manuring, chilling, nursery work etc. Besides plucking and cultivation work, women are also employed in the manufacturing process particularly in sorting or shifting room. Besides worker or coolie category, women are also appointed in sub-staff (supervisory staff) and staff (clerical) categories though their percentage in these last two categories are very few.

### **1.5 Review of Literatures :**

Plantation studies have come to be one of the main concerns in Social Science research in recent years. Unfortunately, however, there are only a few books focusing on the tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalaya.

**Capital and labour in the Indian Tea Industry** (Bose: 1954) delineates the process of labour recruitment, labour condition during pre-Independence period, workers struggle etc. The author very nicely described the different phases of development of tea industry in India since its inception in 1839. He has also given a detail analysis of various Acts and legislations of pre-Independence period regulating the labour recruitment and labour conditions.

**Impact of Tea Industry on the life of the Tribals of West Bengal** (Das and Banerjee : 1964) focuses on the impact of industrial work on tribal socio-economic system in the four tea gardens in Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal. The authors describe the changes in socio-cultural system brought about by new industrial work.

The change in their economy from simple agriculturist to wage worker have brought about tremendous changes in tribal's traditional social system and social activities.

**The History of Indian Tea Industry** (Griffiths: 1967) deals with origin and development of tea plantation in India along with the different aspects like production, wage system, ownership, labour recruitment, origin of trade union movement etc. The book is based entirely on secondary sources.

**The savaras of Manatta – a study of the effects of Tea Industry on the Tribal life** (Kar: 1981) deals with the social changes among the tribal labourers of Assam region. The author describes the socio-economic life of an immigrant tribal group in a plantation society. The book examines the changes into social, cultural and economic spheres.

**Class formation in the plantation system** (Bhowmick: 1981) is the most important and analytical book which deals with tea industry from sociological point of view. The book investigate and analyse the different social forces which have broken down the isolation of the adivasi worker (Oraon, Munda, Santhal, Kharia etc.) bringing them in contact with the wider social system and consequently, leading to a change in a plantation system. For this purpose, he has worked in Sonali Tea Estate which was a sick garden, has been the study area. The author has relied on both primary and secondary sources and analysis is done from Marxist perspectives. In this study, he has pointed out that though objectively, adivasi plantation labourers form a class, being sellers of their labour power, inter-tribal divisions among these adivasi workers separates their homogeneous economic life as wage-labourers from their heterogeneous stratified social life. This factor, coupled with the isolation of the plantation make the problem of class formation complex. He argues that mere unity among workers on the basis of their economic activity is not enough, their unity has to extend to their social life as well. Such a process is taking place as tribal barriers are now eroding, leading to greater integration in the social life of the adivasi workers.

Tea plantation in Sharat Devala's **Employment and Unionization in Indian Industry** (Bhowmick: 1992) highlights on the recent employment trends and unionization in the tea plantation. The author examines the high rate of casualisation in one hand and the stagnation of trade union Movement on the other. He also points out the reasons behind the high casualisation and stagnation in trade union movement.

**Problems of Tea Industry in North East India** (North East India Council for Social Science Research: 1981) is a compilation of Seminar papers. The various papers highlights the issues of labour-management relations, socio-cultural life of workers, labour problems, role of tea industry in the economic development of the region etc.

**"Tea Gardens and Neighbourhood" A study in Hill Darjeeling.** (Subba, 1984) is an interesting articles which deals with the changing plantation situations and the kind of impact they have made on the surrounding agrarian areas and vice-versa. In order to examine the relationship between plantation system and agrarian system he has taken the Dooteriah Tea Garden and Rungball Village which are close to each other. He has relied mainly on primary sources which is supplemented by secondary information. He has pointed out that during the pre-Independence period tea gardens were kept isolated from the neighbouring areas. After the Independence of India, legislative measures brought about many changes in their relationship. He has also pointed out the inability of the tea gardens to absorb the surplus labour population and its impact on neighbouring societies. The occupational diversification is the significant change in the tea gardens today. The cultivation of cash crops like cardamom, ginger, vegetables and oranges and animal husbandry is found widely practiced now-a-days. When the gardens fail to absorb the increasing labour force, the labourers began to look for alternative ways of earning their livelihood. This phenomenon was absent during the British period because most of the gardens were well run at that time as well as workers were for bidden to work outside the garden.

**Impact of Tea plantation Industry on the life of Tribal labourers** (Dasgupta and Khan: 1983) attempts to deal with the life and culture of the tribes who work in the tea plantation of West Bengal and Assam. This study was done in three tea gardens, taking each garden from Darjeeling (W.B.), Jalpaiguri (W.B.) and the Goalpara District of Assam. The study shows how the various tribes have forged into an inter-ethnic solidarity while maintaining some of the markers of individual ethnic identity. The authors have shown that though in all the three districts tea plantation started with migrant labourers from Chotanogpur and Nepal and the labourers in the long run had settled in the respective regions. Yet there is marked differences in attitude and behaviour among the three sets of population in their socio-cultural and political concepts.

**Tea plantation workers in the Eastern Himalayas : a study on wages, employment and living standard** (Sarkar and Lama (ed.): 1986) includes almost all aspects of Darjeeling tea industry viz., productivity, marketing, trade unions, employment pattern, wages and social security benefits, ownership pattern etc. This book also highlights the sickness or stagnating conditions of Darjeeling tea industry and its impact on labour population.

**Tea Gardens of West Bengal: A critical study of land Management** (Ghosh: 1989) is the book on West Bengal tea gardens. Most of the materials used in the book are collected from secondary sources. He has relied on various newspaper, Govt. reports etc. The aim of the book is to highlight the problems of tea gardens that were there in West Bengal since the inception of tea plantation in India and identify the areas where improvements could enlarge the scope for its overall developments. The author argues that the production of tea has increased despite the fact that area under plantation has remained more or less stagnant. This has been possible mainly due to technological developments in its cultivation like, greater use of fertilizers, insecticides and high yielding tea bushes and all these are short-term policy towards development. He says that different land management policy which may be term as long-term is still lacking in tea industry. According to the author, the major problems of tea industry in India are the results of lack of a suitable land

management policy but he has overlooked the other problems like out flow of capital, continuation of absolute technology, international price fluctuation of tea and its impact on tea production in India etc. These issues are not dealt with his study. Despite this short-coming this book calls on the attention of the planners towards various problems concerning land-management in tea plantation or overall development of it.

**Economic Development of Darjeeling hill areas: Problems and prospects** (Dasgupta: 1989) deals with the problems of Darjeeling tea industry. Dasgupta has written a number of books and seminar papers (i) Industrial Relation in Tea Industry in North Bengal, (ii) Labour productivity in Tea Industry in North Bengal, (iii) Trade Union Movement in Tea plantation in Terai). The running theme in all his papers is problems confronting the tea gardens of Darjeeling. However, none of his works has thrown any light on the participation of women in these gardens. For instance, the productivity of Darjeeling gardens is very low in comparison to Assam and other regions. This is mainly due to such factors as style of pruning, age-mix of plants, elevation of the gardens, vacancy ratio, use of chemical fertilizers are mainly responsible for it. According to him, the main reasons for the uneconomic condition of Darjeeling hill gardens are the frequent change of ownership of the garden, high turnover of managers, high cost of production, financial and liquidity crisis etc.

**Taming the Coolie Beast : Plantation Society and the Colonial order in Southeast Asia** (Breman: 1990) is an authentic book where the author vividly described and analysed the harsh colonial policies in promoting the interest of agrarian capitalism. In this book, the author vividly described how the life and work of the indentured coolies was conditioned by outside forces. The author gives detail account of the various colonial Acts and legislations designed to serve the sole interest of European colonialists. From this book one can understand how the land-poor or landless mass were recruited, migrated and formed the reservoir of plantation labour throughout Asia. Whether it is Tobacco plantation of Sumatra's East Coast, Sugarcane of Java or rubber plantation of Indo-China, one can find the universal recruitment pattern adopted by colonialists.

**Industrial sickness** (Shyamroy: 1991) is yet another book written on the sickness of tea gardens in Darjeeling hill. The main objective of this book is to find out the various factors which are mainly responsible for the sickness of Darjeeling hill gardens and also to explore the means through which the sick gardens can be revived. The author has mainly relied on secondary sources like newspapers, Govt. reports and magazines.

According to him, the tea industry in Darjeeling had been stagnating for quite sometime. Neither the acreage under tea nor the total production registered any increase which had been moving around 18,350 hectare with production around 10,000 kg. He has identified several factors as responsible for this stagnating conditions of tea industry. They are high vacancy ratio and little investment on infills, old age of tea plants, shift in ownership from foreign to Indian Companies, inefficient garden managers, heavy burden of taxation etc. The author has examined the various means through which the Darjeeling tea industry would be able to see better days in future. In this context, he has analysed the role of financial institution or scheme like NABARD which has now been directly looking after the subsidy scheme created to take care of the problem of hill gardens only. He has also examined the role of the State and the Central Govt. to look after or revive the sick or abandoned gardens.

**Study of Trade Union Organization among the Tea workers of Terai and Dooars Regions** (Sarkar: 1992) deals with the origin and development of trade union movement in Terai and Dooars plantation regions. The author has mainly focused on functioning of Trade Unions, leadership pattern and social change etc. He has relied both on primary and secondary sources of data collection. He worked on three tea gardens namely. Lalfa, Anrabhasa and Kurty Tea gardens. The author has highlighted the social changes brought about by the trade union functioning specially in the spheres of inter-caste marriage, purity and pollution, food habits, health practices behaviour, recreation etc.

**Social dimensions of health of tea plantation workers in India** (Bhadra: 1997) is another book on the health practices of plantation labour. The study aims to investigate into the behaviour of the tribal people in terms of health. The persistence of traditional health culture or the rejection of it and acceptance of modern health practices, housing, personal hygiene, intoxication, smoking, child rearing, sanitation are the aspects covered as parts of health culture. The contention that the traditional culture of the tribal acts as barrier in acceptance of modern medical system does not seem to hold good in the present context.

**Colonial labour conditions in the plantation Industry: The case of Criminal Tribes on the Tea Estates of Annamalai Hills in India** (Ramachandran and Maya: 1997) is an interesting article seeking to analyse the nature of the controls that the plantation labour in the erstwhile Madras Presidency were subjected to the colonial era. This paper also seeks to demonstrate how the imposition of the Criminal Tribes Act on certain migrants groups was used by both the colonial State as well as the planters to meet their own needs i.e. creation of a reserve labour force for the planters. This article has explored or revealed the coercive nature of employment on the plantation of the Annamalai Hills. The author vividly describes the adoption of repressive legislation like the Criminal Tribes Act which declared some of the tribals like Kaders, Chetties, Moplahs, Donga Dasaris, Nellore Dommaras and Kollar as criminal tribes. The Act was used by the colonial State to suppress marginal groups like wandering gypsies and traders who refused to lead a more conventional settled existence. The introduction of Act in the Madras Presidency in 1911 served the purpose of colonial interest who were in search of permanent, residential and bonded labour.

**Tea Industries in India: An Introduction** (Sharma: 1999) deals with the changing features of tea industry in India after the policy of economic liberalization adopted by our government since 1991. The problems and prospect of tea industry, human resource development, field practices and manufacturing of tea, history of tea industry are the various aspects incorporated in this book. The author has further highlighted the present set backs of tea industry in the global market facing stiff

competition from new tea producing countries of the world. The author has thoroughly discussed the commendable role played by the small tea growers for the development of tea industry in India.

**The Himalayan Tea Plantation Workers** (Sharma : 2000) deals with the plantation labour of Darjeeling Himalaya. In this book author has mainly focused his enquiry on the socio-economic conditions of the workers, their participation in trade unions, welfare measures, history of recruitment, settlement of workers etc. He has also discussed the role of ethnicity in the origin of trade union movement, setback of present trade union movement, problems and future prospects of trade union movement in the Himalayan tea gardens. Further, he has also highlighted the impact of new economic policy of 1991 on the tea industry as well as on working class.

In tea plantation, women constitute more than half of the work force however, there are very few writers who have turned the focus of their enquiry on the female labourers. Some of the books mentioned above covers women workers but their focus lies on workers in general i.e. men and women workers. There are few studies on women workers.

**Socio-Economic conditions of Women workers in plantations** (Labour Bureau: 1980) in a report provides a board picture of the characteristics of women's employment, their working conditions, wages and earnings, welfare amenities, social status available to them, besides throwing some light on their living conditions and other socio-demographic characteristics in Tea, Rubber and other plantation in India.

**Study of wage labourers on a Tea Gardens of Assam** (Jain: 1988) shows that the plantation Women workers, part of the largest and most viable section of Indian working Women possess a level of independence sufficient to enable them to live on their own. The independence is likely to be eroded if it is not viewed as an asset to mobilize action for changing the present working and living conditions on the tea gardens.

**Women in Tea Plantation – A case from the Dooars Area of West Bengal** (Balagopal: 1990) examines the status of women in Dooars plantation and for this purpose he has taken three aspects; the wages of women workers, their position in management hierarchy and trade unions. He argue that women have low status in plantation society with comparison to men which is evident from the analysis of wage-structure, work hierarchy and trade union activities.

The author accepts the Marxist feminist explanation of the subordinate position of women in Dooars plantation and argues that the productive and reproductive functions of women as well as inter-action between these two roles determine their subordinate position. Because of these dual-role women do not have an opportunity for competing with men in gaining education or equality of status in the tea plantation or Trade union hierarchies. The author highlights the roles of different agencies to bring about necessary changes into the life of women workers and he has also emphasized the role of strong women's organizations to better their living conditions.

**Women workers of Tea plantation in India** (Bhadra: 1992) is one of the few books written on plantation women. The main objective of this book is to deal with the position of women workers in plantation hierarchy, their status and role in plantation society, their socio-economic background, their attitude and commitment towards plantation work etc. Chandmoni Tea Estate of Terai in Siliguri sub-division of Darjeeling district has been taken as study area. The author has used the secondary sources as well. This book is divided into six chapters dealing with the women studies from various perspectives, women as a plantation workers, their social environment, their participation in the organization of work etc. In Chandmoni Tea Estate majority of workers are adivasis namely, Oraon, Munda, Kharia, Santhal and other minor communities like Mahali, Ghasi, Asur, Malpahari, Lohar, Turi etc. and few Nepali are there. All of them except Nepalis are tribals from Chotanagpur, Madhya Pradesh and Orrisa regions. According to the author hierarchy in plantation, process of recruitment, wage pattern, job opportunities etc. are same in all the plantation for this reason she has taken Chandmoni Tea Estate of

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Terai region to represent all the tea plantation. However, the conclusions she has drawn based on her findings do not corroborate to the situation in Darjeeling hills. Despite short comings as mentioned above, her work can be considered valuable so far as the focus and the analysis is concerned.

**Status of Himalayan Women** (Mondal: 1999) is an important article dealing with the status and role of Himalayan women, particularly of Eastern Himalayan. Though the article is not directly related with the tea plantation women yet it throws some light on the status of Himalayan Women in general. As the tea plantation of Darjeeling hills also falls under Eastern Himalayan region, plantation women also share many common features with the other women of this region as we know that the factors or forces like common ecology, environment and economy have crucial role to play in shaping or moulding the role and status of women everywhere. In this paper, the author has examined the status of Himalayan women by analyzing multi-dimensional role played by women in local economy, family, religious rituals and ceremony and other socio-cultural spheres. The author argues that the women of this particular region enjoy higher position in the society as compared to the plains, son preference is almost absent among them, birth of a girl child is not at all a problem, custom of dowry is not prevalent, remarriage of widow is widely practiced, work status of women is also high as they are the equal partner in all economic activities. Despite their multi-dimensional role in socio-cultural and economic spheres, the overall status of Himalayan women is low as compared to their men folk. Women also suffer from many problems like heavy work load because of male out migration, less education, lesser exposure to new ideas, lack of access to property, low participation in political spheres and low level of self confidence than men.

### **1.6 Aims and Objectives of the Present Study :**

Keeping in focus the importance of the present study, the main objective is to examine and assess the changing status and role of Nepali women in the tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas from socio-cultural perspectives. The evaluation

of the Status of women and their role performance necessitates an indepth analysis of community culture and social structure, as the role and status of women are intricately interwoven with community culture and social structure. So we have examined the position of Nepali women in terms of their roles in family, religious rituals, community or social participation, different decision making process, marital practices etc. In this study, emphasis is also given on the dual-role and associated problems of women workers. We have identified the problems faced by working women both at domestic front as well as at place of work.

Another objective of the present study is to assess women's contribution in the production process of plantation economy and to identify the nature of the problems and issues concerning female work participation. In the view of many writers economic status is crucial to the overall status of women in the society. So one of the main objective of the study is to assess the economic or occupational status of women by analyzing their nature and degree of work participation, work opportunities or chances of upward job mobility, role in economic decision-making, wage-structure, nature and type of work done by women and so on.

In order to understand the role of women in the plantation economy it is necessary to study the work organization which gives an idea of the basic nature and salient features of the social system underlying a society. Keeping this in mind, we have attempted to study the work organization of tea industry and women's position in it. The study also attempts to critically examine the socio-economic change or impact of wage work on their life.

We have also try to examine the women's role in trade union movement as the present day working situation necessitates organized economic activity whether for wage earners or for white collar workers. Their membership and participation in the trade union activities have great significance for them as it gives a forum for developing their leadership qualities and thereby to compete with men in yet another non-traditional area. An attempt has been made to identify the factors that might facilitate or impede the effective participation of women in trade union activities.

Further, we shall try to assess the impact of economic participation on the socio-cultural life of the women and also study the inter-linkages among the different communities who have entered into the plantation life.

Another main objective is to explore or identify the various problems faced by Darjeeling tea industry particularly during the post-Independence period and its direct or indirect impact on working women and finally the study try to suggest some remedial measures to overcome the problems and thereby upgrade the socio-economic position of Nepali Women in the tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas.

### **1.7 Research Questions:**

The study addresses itself to a number of questions.

1. Why is it that the Women workers have outnumbered the men workers in the tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas?
2. What are the factors, which are responsible for the numerical dominance of certain communities in the hill tea gardens?
3. How far the Women workers and their family with their respective cultural traditions have assimilated into a general community – Sharing certain common social features in the agro-industrial nature of plantation Society? If they have assimilated, what are the factors responsible for their assimilation, and if not, what are the main constraints or obstacles to the same?
4. Whether the different positions (status and role) traditionally enjoyed by Women in different communities have any impact upon the nature of their economic participation?
5. How far is it true that the Women's economic activities are a more accurate measure of female freedom?
6. Whether and how far the community factor and gender differences is reflected in the plantation work hierarchy?
7. Is there any change in the structure and composition of family or is there any change in the relative dominance of spouses in decision-making as a result of

wife's employment? How far the employment of women has contributed to enhance her status within the family and society at large?

8. What is the nature and degree of women's participation in the Trade Union Movement? What are the constraints to their participation in Union activities? Do these bodies help in ameliorating the condition of these workers?
9. What are the problems of Darjeeling Tea Industry and its impact on Women workers?

### **1.8 Importance of the Study :**

The importance of the present study lies on the fact that no study relating to women workers in the Tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas have been so far undertaken. Though, there are few studies made on the women workers of Terai, Dooars and Assam regions. Women workers of Darjeeling Himalayas have different socio-cultural background, place of origin, migration history, occupational background, different positions in their respective community. The empirical investigation about the role and status of women belonging to different communities in Tea plantation from Socio-cultural perspective have remained scarce. This calls for a need to obtain more empirical knowledge on the Women's economic participation, employment condition, their status and role in Society. The present work is an attempt to fulfill this gap in the study of Women's work in cultural and community context in the tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas.

### **1.9 Methodology :**

#### **1.9.1 The Study Area**

The Study covers only two hills sub-divisions i.e., Darjeeling Sadar and Kurseong of Darjeeling District. The tea gardens from Kalimpong sub-division is deliberately omitted as there are very few (only six) tea gardens located in the foothills of Gorubathan block of Kalimpong. The Terai (in Siliguri Sub-division of

Darjeeling District) and Dooars (in Jalpaiguri District) plantation regions have not been included because many works have already been done relating to the areas. Darjeeling Sadar Sub-division has the highest number of tea gardens i.e. 41, Kurseong and Kalimpong have 30 and 6 respectively. Considering the high number of tea gardens in Darjeeling as compared to Kurseong, it is proposed to take four tea gardens from Darjeeling and three from Kurseong area. The Seven tea gardens taken here for intensive case study are : Badamtam, Pandam, Happy Valley and Vah-Tukvar from the Sadar sub-division of the district of Darjeeling and Singell, Springside and Gourisankar (Castleton) from the Kurseong sub-division of the district.

### **1.9.2 Research Design**

The design of this research has been formulated on the basis of nature of this research project. The study area, the people i.e. the informants or respondents of this study and the tools and techniques for data collection has been decided as per aims and objects of the present study. The present research is purely an exploratory study the approach of this study is purely analytical one. The comparative method, both synchronic as well as diachronic over space and time, has been adopted for understanding the present position of working women in an agro-industrial setting of plantation society as well as the changes that are taking place in their socio-cultural life. The data for this study has been gathered from primary (field work) as well as from secondary sources. For writing first three chapters extensive library work has been done. The secondary sources both published and unpublished materials like Gazetteers, books, journal, newspapers, Govt. reports Seminar papers etc. have been tapped. While the empirical facts are mainly collected through intensive field investigation of seven purposively sampled tea gardens of Darjeeling Hills besides stray visits to around twenty tea gardens in the area.

The data presented in this research work are the results of my field investigations in seven purposively sampled tea gardens conducted during the period between 1998-2001. The name of the tea gardens which are studied for the purpose

of this research are : Badamtam, Pandam, Happy Valley, Vah-Tukvar, Singell, Springside, Gaurisankar. So far tea gardens are concerned these were selected purposively taking into consideration the size of the tea gardens (area under tea cultivation), ownership and control (Private Ltd., Public Ltd., Govt.) economic health of tea gardens (sick, closed, abandoned, economically well-off or sound) availability of infrastructural facilities and existence of different castes and communities in the gardens. One of the purpose of selection was to represent different tea gardens under different ownership and control. For this purpose we have selected Badamtam, Castleton and Springside which are owned by Gooderick Group Ltd. Which is a subsidiary of Lowrie Group, one of the fourth largest company of U.K. Pandam and Vah-Tukvar are owned by West Bengal Tea Development Corporation and Tea Trading Corporation of India respectively though the latter is officially closed since 1995. Singell of Kurseong is now under private ownership while the Happy Valley of Darjeeling is running as small-scale industry. Another purpose of selection was to represent different sizes of tea gardens in terms of area under tea cultivation. For example, Pandam, Happy Valley, Gaurisankar and Springside are small tea gardens with less than 150 hectare of lands under tea cultivation. On the other hand, Badamtam, Vah-Tukvar and Singell are large size tea gardens with more than 250 ha. of land under tea. The third purpose was to represent various gardens in terms of health or economic condition or economic prosperity. For instance, Badamtam, Castleton represents economically sound or healthy tea gardens. Vah-Tukvar represents abandoned and closed garden under T.T.C.I., Pandam was also sick unit taken over by W.B.T.D.C. and Happy Valley represents normal tea garden under individual proprietorship. And last purpose was to see the availability of infrastructural facilities, existence of different ethnic groups (castes & tribes) in various tea gardens located at different areas.

### **1.9.3 Selection of Informants**

For the present study, informants or respondents were selected purposively from different categories such as women workers or coolies, women clerical staffs and women sub-staff or supervisory staff. The total number of women respondents

from workers or coolie category were 300 taken fifty each from Badamtam & Singell (large tea gardens) and forty each from other five small size tea gardens. The total number of women as clerical staff and supervisory staff in the seven Tea Garden were thirty five and ten respectively so we have taken the interview of all of them. Information on migration process, recruitment system, origin of trade unions were obtained from village elders, mostly males. Information were also collected from tea garden officials, trade union leaders, and management.

#### 1.9.4 Tools and Techniques of Data Collection

The information for this study were collected both from the primary and the secondary sources. The data on theoretical perspectives on women studies, conceptual issues, history of Darjeeling District, origin and evolution of tea industry, formation of trade unions etc. were gathered from published materials for which researcher visited different libraries like National library, Calcutta, Central Library, N.B.U. Documentation Cell, Centre for Himalayan Studies, District Library, Darjeeling and so on. While the empirical facts or first hand information were collected through intensive field work on seven tea gardens with the help of following sociological and anthropological tools and techniques of data collection, viz. census survey, interviews, case studies, genealogy, informal group discussions and observation.

First of all, to obtain quantitative data on the demographic and socio-economic life of the people a schedule was prepared containing various questions covering different aspects of plantation women and filled up this schedule with the help of interviews. As a method of data collection we have used both the structured and unstructured interview though we have mainly relied on the former as we thought this would be more reliable since the order and wording of questions are the same for all respondents, it was more likely that they would be responding to the same stimuli. Thus different answers to the same set of question would indicate real differences between the respondents. Interviews were conducted by the researcher at

the residence of respondents as well as in the field or place of work. Few Staff and sub-staff women were interviewed at the garden office.

Unstructured interviews also proved helpful for us as these are more like an informal conversation. Through this technique, we could obtain data on attitudes and opinions of women regarding their self-perceived status, appropriate age of marriage for girls and attitude towards early marriage, justification for sexual division of labour at home and place of work, gender discrimination, ideal size of family, son preference etc.

The genealogical technique made it possible to gather huge data at a time. This technique helped a lot to analyse the age structure, extension of kinship relations, changing pattern of household and family composition, marital distance etc. These data were further supplemented by participant and non-participant observations. The technique of observation (non-participant) helped a lot to understand the working of tea gardens, the relationship between women workers and their daffadars (group leader) or supervisors. Participation of women in different types of plantation work have also been observed from close quarters. Observation method also helped me to have an idea about their informal group in the place of work, their behaviour with the supervisors, social relations, cultural expressions etc.

As a means of gathering data, the technique of participant observation has also been used by researcher participating along with the women folk in various ceremonies and festivals celebrated at garden and community levels which helped a lot to get an idea about their actual role in religious and cultural activities.

Every tea garden conducts an annual census of households. The garden census is a regular feature of the tea garden. The researcher has extensively used the garden census to have an idea about recent trend of household composition and family structure, age of the working females, number of unemployed or dependents, major caste and ethnic group etc.

### 1.9.5 Data Processing and Analysis

The data collected through field study were processed after necessary checking and editing. In course of data processing the completeness and accuracy of data was looked carefully. Tabulation was done manually. Data were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Simple statistical methods consisting mostly of percentages were calculated. The analysis of qualitative data were made through systematic and analytical descriptions of the collected facts. In course of analysis methods of comparison has also been used. The data were finally organized into relevant chapters.

### 1.9.6 Presentation of Data and Contents

The material of this study has been presented into 7 (seven) chapters. Chapter 1 is Introduction which outlines the statement of the problems, theoretical and conceptual issues, review of literature, aims and objectives of study and the research design. Chapter 2 introduces the area under study including the historical background of the District of Darjeeling, evolution of tea industry in Darjeeling hills, problems and features of tea industry, labour force etc. A short profile of seven tea gardens under study were also discussed. Chapter 3 discusses the women and work organization in tea plantation of Darjeeling hills. We have also examined the position of women in the occupational hierarchy of tea plantation. We have tried to explore the reasons behind overwhelming majority of women as workers or *coolie* by analyzing the system of recruitment, nature and degree of women's work participation, types and nature of activities performed by women and soon. Chapter 4 deals with the ethnic, social, occupational and cultural background of Nepali women in the tea plantation of Darjeeling hills. We have analysed in detail the aspects like migration pattern, existence of various ethnic groups including castes and tribals, Nepali caste structure, religion and rituals, household composition and family types, Education levels, diverse marital rules and regulations, traditional occupations of various castes and tribals groups etc. Chapter 5 examines the status of Nepali Women by analyzing the multi-dimensional roles played by women in

their socio-cultural and economic life. We have examined the women's status in terms of sharing of domestic responsibilities or sexual division of labour, their role in various decision-making process, financial autonomy or access to property, leisure time activities, participation in socio-cultural organizations and so on. Chapter 6 deals with the women and Trade unions. In this chapter we have briefly discuss the origin and development of Trade union movement in Darjeeling tea industry with special reference to role of women in the trade union activities. We have analysed the nature and degree of women's participation in trade union activities, their nature of membership, reasons for joining trade unions and so on. We have also tried to explore the reasons for their low participation in trade union activities. Chapter 7 deals with major findings, conclusion and recommendations. This chapter is devoted to findings with overall discussions on status of Nepali women in tea plantation of Darjeeling Himalayas and in concluding section we have recommended some remedial measures to upgrade the socio-economic status of Nepali women.

### **1.9.7 Limitations**

This study has certain major limitations. Since the empirical study on Nepali women in tea plantations of Darjeeling hills covering their status, role in cultural and community context is undertaken for the first time, benefits of earlier research studies were not available. Hence as an exploratory study it has its own limitations. Secondly, the study was undertaken on only seven tea gardens out of seventy six tea gardens of Darjeeling hills. Hence, the observations drawn from this study can not be generalized too far covering the whole tea gardens of Darjeeling Himalayas; even though the study provides an important ideas about the changing role and status of Nepali women in the tea plantations of Darjeeling Himalayas.