

FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

This chapter places the study in a theoretical framework for understanding the gender relations in India with special reference to the status of women in the tea garden setting in Assam. The framework includes the problem, review of literature, objectives, hypotheses and methodology for the conduct of the study. These are given in the following discussion.

The Problem

Gender provides a dimension of social relations that embraces the whole of a society. The dimension of human relations emanates from a gendered perception that divides a society into the categories of men and women in all of its social, cultural, political and economic spheres. The gendering of human populations and their relations, too, emerge when the biological property of

sex dividing the populations into the categories of males and females. The cultural objectification or gendering (into men and women) of the sexual properties (males and females) occurs in a society wherein the two (genders/sexes) get tied with each other in terms of culturally defined social relations of mutual obligations, duties, rights and privileges. The gender relations provide a variety of societies organized on the principles of equality and inequality-some of them practicing equality while others evincing a range of inequality between men and women based on differential allocation of cultural resources in various spheres of social relations. In human history most of the societies indicate a wide range of gender hierarchies in the form of dominance of men over women, i. e., cultural bias or gender discrimination against women. The discrimination against women reflected in their low status in society varies micro to macro situations in terms of its nature, magnitude and causal factors. The phenomenon, a social concern since long times in the human development specially in the modern world, has been addressed in its studies by scholars and individual and social actions. The studies undertaken have focused the phenomenon variously- partially or holistically, descriptively or analytically, spatially or temporally, unifactorially or multi-factorially, intensively or extensively and universally or particularly.

But the reality is not segmented and deserves a treatment in its totality. While attempting it one traverses across a particularistic variety of the reality. This appears truer when one looks at a multi-cultural society like India, specially the North East region in India. Such a situation stirs a mind to conduct a study in the multi-cultural North East India. The tea gardens in Assam provide a unique socio-historical setting to investigate gender relations with a special focus on the status of women. The concern of women has been in the centre stage in a number of gender studies stimulated so far. Therefore, to draw insights for formulating the problem of the present research the existing researches on gender relations in India have been surveyed and reviewed here.

Review of Literature

In India the writings on women's problems started with Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. But the systematic studies on women are of recent origin, mostly after Independence. After Independence, the condition of Indian women underwent a series of changes. The Indian constitution declared equal citizenship of women along with men; the Government gave them special treatment as a 'weaker section' of the society and the parliament passed several acts in favour of women like the Hindu Special Marriage Act, Hindu Marriage Act, etc. But the present wave of women studies in India is the result of the encouragement received from both the Indian Government and the United Nations Organization (UNO).

In 1967 the UNO General Assembly setting women's equality as a worldwide goal provoked the member states to work out strategies against women's discrimination in education, work force and politics. The Government of India initially neglected UNO's request, but on constant prodding by the UNO appointed a committee to examine the status of women in 1971. The committee's report submitted in January 1975 (Government of India 1975) explains the miserable condition of Indian women in all aspects of life. After the appearance of this report the Government became sufficiently aware about women's problems and took various steps to remove discrimination against women. In 1975 the Ministry of Labour and Employment set up a separate cell for women, and in 1976 the National Commission on Agriculture was charged with special responsibility to look into the role of women in agriculture.

Besides, with a view to encourage research studies the Government of India started scholarships on women studies. Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and University Grants Commission (UGC) gave priority to researches on the problems of women during 1970's. Along side, the other international organizations like Educational and Scientific

Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) and International Labour Organization (ILO) also supported the cause of women studies in India.

Briefly, women's concern in modern India has grown out of the writings of individual scholars to the efforts of national government and international organization like UNO. These concerns have generated a number of studies on the gender relations focusing specially women in terms of their historicity, ethnicity, role duality, violence, migration, education, social movements, economy and tea industry.

Historicity

In India different scholars have highlighted women's position in different spheres of social life in different eras. Joseph (1998) is of the view that in Vedic period, especially during the Rig Veda, the women enjoyed a high and honoured position when remarriage and divorce were permitted under certain circumstances. Altekar (1939, 1962) says that the status of women of the Vedic period in India was much better than its contemporary Greece, Rome and Palestine. According to the Hindu texts and tradition until about B. C. 500, women in India enjoyed considerable freedom in choosing their mates and taking part in public functions. Equal to men in religious matters were the upper class women who were well educated and they married late. Divorce and widow remarriage were acceptable. But during the next one thousand years (B. C. 500- 500 A. D.), women's position gradually deteriorated. Educational and religious priority was denied to them and widow remarriage was forbidden to the women of high status. Swami Vivekananda (1900 A. D.) said:

..... I never would have thought of that but one of your American travellers, Mark Twain, writes this about India, in spite of all that western critics have said of Hindu customs, I never saw a woman harnessed to a plough with a cow or to a cart with a dog as it is done in some European countries. I saw no women or girls at work in the fields in India on both sides and

ahead (of the railway train) brown bodied naked men and boys are ploughing in the field, but not a woman

Baranwal (1992) while discussing the education of women in ancient India found that up to Post-Mauryan period men's and women's education went side by side but, gradually, due to some social evils and malpractices such as 'easy marriage', women's education continuously deteriorated day by day. Dhumatkar (1982) found that the position of Hindu women was much better in Vedic period than Post-vedic, Pre-British and British period. Talking about the deteriorating status of Indian women Gupta and Agnihotri (1992) argued that the root cause of sex discrimination is the dawn of colonial era, i.e., the foreign invaders made the Indian people to re-assess the superiority of sex. During British period certain changes in the status of women took place as some of the laws were passed to protect inhuman attitudes towards women; namely, Prohibition of Sati System 1856, Hindu Widow Remarriage Act 1856, Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 and so on. At the same time various efforts were made to educate women.

After Independence Indian constitution makes provisions for no discrimination between men and women so far as rights and privileges are concerned. In spite of this all, the status of women is at par with men neither in economically affluent classes nor in working classes (Phukan 1992). Srinivas (1977) in a survey on **The Changing Position of Indian Women since the End of Second World War** found that a rapidly increasing concern both with the role and the position of women has resulted into a greater equality between the sexes now than before. In fact, the urban workingwomen have taken a very bold step to greater equality with men in every field. But the women of village and tribal community are still lagging behind. The report of the committee on the status of women in India (1975) argued that lack of adequate planning and co-ordination, inadequate machinery and resources and multiplicity of agencies have been major

causes for the failure of well intentioned policies and programmes which were launched for the welfare and development of women.

The scholars like Desai (1957), Kapadia (1958) and Dube (1963) feel that many changes have occurred in the status of Indian women due to the new opportunities for education and employment, privileges of equal legal and political rights, emergence of new socio-economic patterns. In spite of the changes taking place in the socio-economic life of the Indian women, the pressure of existing traditional customs and norms continues to determine the society's attitude towards women. The patriarchal family system, institution of caste hierarchy with religious norms and dominant value system are still surcharged with the spirit of male domination (Thakur Joshi 1999).

Ethnicity

The low status of women in general is related to the socialization of individuals, which varies on the basis of religion, caste, region and tribe. Therefore, the life style in different ethnic groups is also important to understand the status of women in a society. In India one finds more than 400 tribes mostly settled in the Central and North Eastern India and some minor tribes in South India (Sachidananda 1978). A number of studies are therefore found on the tribal women in India.

Danda (1978) studied the status and role of tribal women in central India. Grigson (1938) found that among Moria Gonds the status of women is low. Singh (1988) is of the view that the status of women in tribal society is much better than their non-tribal counterpart. Mazumdar (1960) mentions that the birth of daughter is not considered bad in a tribal society. Nath and Mazumdar (1986) reports that in the matrilineal Khasi and Garo tribes the succession that is an important office is through females - it is sister's son, a male, who always succeeds. Further, Mazumdar (1980) says that among the Garos husband and his father-in-law who is usually his

paternal uncle also manage property. Karlekar (2000) is of the view that the substantial economic contribution by the tribal girls is partly responsible for their value. It may therefore be argued that the continuance of bride price is a direct result of their high valuation.

Sen (1978) finds the Toda of the Nilgiris who practise pastoral economy restricting their women's entry into the dairies as they are considered to be impure. Sachidananda (1978) observes that the tribal women have much freedom in the matter of marriage, divorce and occupational mobility. Hutton (1921) says that the women of Angami Naga enjoy considerable freedom in selecting their mates and among them bride wealth is nominal. Among the Bhil it is just formality (Sen 1978). Among most of the tribes in Arunachal Pradesh a girl has a little say in selection of her mate (Dutta 1976).

Some scholars have conducted studies on Hindu and Muslim women. The ICSSR report (1989) includes some studies on the Hindu women. Hate (1947) has studied the social position of Hindu women. Wadely (1988) finds that in the Hindu tradition the term **women** is related to dual conception, i. e., the woman is fertile and benevolent, on the one hand, and she is aggressive and malevolent, on the other. In other words, Hinduism considered women necessary but powerful and dangerous who can be controlled only by their husbands through religious law prescribing women's proper behaviour under the control of men.

Talking about Muslim women Bhatta (1987) says that the Muslim girls in Uttar Pradesh believe that women are inferior to men in every sphere of life. Jeffery (1979) and Papanek and Minault (1982) inform that the Muslim girls are socialized on the basis of strict norms of seclusion or purdah.

Role Duality

The workingwomen whether manual or non-manual workers have to perform a dual role at home and on farm or firm. The dual role of women that has been an interesting area of the studies during the sixties of the twentieth century has different patterns at different places. Devki (1982) states that modern woman's activity has contributed to the family income as a social asset to her husband but in no way neglected her traditional works. Srivastava (1990) says that the work routine of rural women consisted of both household and farm works like collecting of fuel, cooking, fetching and transporting water, earning for well being of family, caring animals, cleaning, washing, etc. Asha (1987) views that women played a large role as the primary feeders in family and as the workers at farm or cottage industries. Hibbard and Pope (1987) say that married working women faced greater health risk than men because of their dual role of work and family responsibility. The Government of India Report (1985) shows that among the poorest, sections, the economic contribution of women is more. So, women have been taking up a wide variety of jobs on farm and at home.

In service sector a woman who has to perform plurality of roles both at home and in office faces role conflict. Karlekar (2000) says that *urban work often involves a different venue and interaction with a new set of individuals. It introduces several factors into the lives of women, including the entire issue of apportioning time between different tasks.* The working urban women who belong to middle class often involve a conflict over role, relative responsibilities and commitments. Chakrabarti (1978) while studying the middle class women in Calcutta finds that most of the respondents are unwilling to waste their educational training but at the same time competing claims worried them. Indira Devi (1987), Ramu (1989) and Papanek (1973) report that due to the fear of disharmony sometimes women have played down their occupational role. It is

also found that the husbands of employed women are often resentful to their wives, particularly if they have taken jobs after some years of remaining full time housewives. Lober (1984) views that the women's pre-occupation with marriage, family and child care responsibilities affects their career development resulting into role strain and role conflict and sometimes into sacrifice of their career for family. Gorwaney (1977) informs that the role conflict of women as mother, wife, employee, etc. demands of them not only additional resources in value, emotion and role commitment but also wider institutional support from society. It tends deeply to affect the self-image that women have of themselves. Dak (1986) observes that women's household and productive tasks remain unrecognized in India because of socio-biological factors. Women's pregnancy and rearing of infants adversely affect the duration and efficiency in work. This generates bias against female employment, especially in the organized sector. Again, women's employment outside the home is considered to indicate low status of parents or husband. Sometime due to this conflict women gave up their jobs. Rao (1985) finds that the problems and dilemmas faced by the working class earning women are related to their socio-economic background like low and unequal wages paid for the equal work, excess burden of earning as well as caring children, lack of minimum facilities of privacy, economic insecurity and so on. And the women of middle class face the problem which is more social than economic, for instance, disregard of women as decision makers, lack of recognition of women's work in comparison to men's and so on.

Violence

Women suffer violence in various ways ranging from simple suppression to abuse, aggression, exploitation, and severe oppression (Chitnis 1998) in the form of purdah, illiteracy, malnutrition, dowry death, sexual exploitation, rape, pre-puberty marriage, etc.

The violence against women in India begins with the birth of girl child not welcomed even in educated families. With the help of sex determination test (ultra-sonography) parents can know the sex in womb. Sometimes, female foetuses are aborted. In Bombay alone 40,000 female foetuses were aborted in 1984. The main reasons behind such an attitude are (i) dowry needed for daughter's marriage and (ii) son's importance considered for furtherance of family lineage (Tripathi 1992).

During their childhood girls suffer from malnutrition, excess workload, less opportunities for education and so on. Gangrade (1988) says that the girl child in rural and urban areas is deprived of nutritious food, proper education and other needs for full growth and development. Sharma (1987) observes that in rural areas the infant mortality rate for girls is higher than for boys. According to Health Ministry of the Government of India (1985), 64.8% of the children who died under the age of one year are females. Miller (1985) argues that the infant mortality rate shows the negligence and unwantedness of girl child. Power (1988) points out that discriminatory socialization of female children can be evaluated from their declining sex ratio, higher mortality rate, low literacy rate and ill treatment in families. The Census Report of India shows a gradual decline in the sex ratio since 1901 when it was 972 females per thousand males whereas in 2001 it is 933 females.

Violence against women in the form of child marriage continues till today in spite of the legislation to ban it being in place. In Rajasthan alone, 1, 30,000 children are married off each year on one-day festival. And about 90% marriages held in some villages of Rajasthan are illegal considering the prescribed legal age of marriage (Hindustan Times, April 29, 1990). Child marriage resulting into child motherhood is the root cause of ill health as Pant (1992) points out that 50% of those who became pregnant are adolescent girls and they suffer from malnutrition and anaemia.

The marriage in our society is closely related with dowry. *Kanya-dan* (donation of girl) in Hindu society was considered to be very pious activity but *Artha-dan* (donation of valuables) has now become more important (Tripathi 1992). This dowry is an undying conflagration that has consumed several innocent lives in the last thirty years. Women victimized by mental and physical tortures either kill themselves or get killed (General Knowledge Encyclopedia 1999). With the passage of time demand for dowry has also increased to include huge sums of cash, jewellery, clothing, costly home appliances of modern living, etc. As majority of parents are incapable to afford these, it leads to bride burning (Singh 1992). As Devendra (1993) has observed that despite the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 and its amendments in 1984 and 1986 the incidence of dowry deaths has sharply increased in the whole of rural and urban areas of Northern India Mazumdar (1998) estimates that a bride is burnt every two-day in India due to dowry. Bhagwati (1985), the Honourable Ex-chief Justice of India, suggests that mere legislations are not enough for women's development, and they have to be backed by proper implementation and strong public opinion to eradicate the evil of dowry.

Wife beating, another marital violence, is faced by the women in almost every part of the world. Dhar (2002) says that in India one of every four husbands has tortured his wife either physically or mentally and the women of upper classes are also not free from tortures. Some of the case studies of highly educated women of Calcutta city show that husbands torture their wives who wanted to work outside home whereas in other cases a wife was tortured when she disclosed an illegitimate love affair of her husband. Kosambi (1998) says that wife beating is related to dowry. Azad (1993) finds wife beating as a common phenomenon in both patriarchal and matriarchal societies and argues that alcoholism and wife-beating prevailing in low-income communities manifest a growing economic powerlessness. Analyzing a cyclical theory Walker (1979) mentions three phases of wife beating; namely, (i) the tension building phase, (ii) the

acute battering phase and (iii) the calm-loving respite phase. Similarly, Falvia (1983) also makes a detailed analysis of the courses of and preventive measures for wife beating.

Rape is one of the barbaric abuses of women prevailing in every region of the world and under every system of government. Sathe (1998) says that *in society women are seen as the property of men representing the honour of the male, the family and the community. To destroy the dignity of a group, the women of the class/ caste are raped to bring the most humiliating way of their torture. Rape is used as a terrorizing and punitive mechanism against women.* Similarly, Flavia (1995) says that in Indian society rape of women legally defined as the act involving penetration of the vagina by the penis itself reveals the underlying patriarchal assumption that the offence consists in the violation, not of the women's body but of another man's sexual property. Kapoor (1983) while giving an atrocious picture of Indian women' rape says that in India, every two hours a rape case occurs. Abdulali (1983) says that the fact that most of the rape cases in India are not reported highlights how women of different classes are raped and how anti-rape movement began in India 1980's.

The victims of rape are not only adult women but also small babies or old women. One of the brutal gang rapes of babies was committed in Guwahati on 13 July 2002 in the waiting room of Network Travels where an eight year old girl, Barnali Deb, was raped by four employees of the travel agency and thrown in a toilet tank resulting into her death. In the protest of this brutal activity, different organizations of students of colleges and Mahila Samitees launched movement and called bandh in the state (Dainik Sonar Cachar, 14 to 18 July).

Migration

Migration as a form of geographical or spatial mobility between one geographical unit and another (Sarma 2002) is expressed in various ways like inter-state, intra-state, international, urban to urban, village to village, village to urban, married male single migration, married female single

migration, unmarried male migration and married couple's migration effecting woman and household greatly in each case (Uma Devi 1904). The effects of migration upon women have been studied by a number of scholars. Jetley (1987) who has studied the lower caste migration from three villages of eastern U.P. finds that *the migration of male members of the family affects the traditional system of intra-family dependence, increases the responsibilities of women for subsistence of the family and exposes them to frequent economic crises and emotional insecurity.* Chakroborty (1970) says that when men move to city, women's agricultural workload increases. But men return during the harvest time to sell the crops and, thereby, exercise control over the income in whose generation they have been only remotely involved. Menon (1988) while studying Saura tribes of Orissa finds that destruction of forests, i.e., the major source of tribal livelihood has resulted into male migration to the road construction labour and, decreasingly, to the tea gardens in Assam. The women left behind manage shifting cultivation effectively but are less confident with settled cultivation. In her study of 37 households on the outskirts of Trivandrum (Kerala) Gulati (1987) finds that as a result of the male migration from a family to the Gulf, the people staying behind have to make major adjustment in their life style. Mascarenhaskeyes (1989) says that the women in Amore (Goa) manage their family finance and household activity and rear their children more carefully when their husbands migrate abroad.

Like the male single migration, the migration of single woman for employment is also growing. The women migrated from rural to urban areas to work in different factories and industries are exploited severely. Rao (1978) in his study of the gender migration from Guntur district in Andhra Pradesh finds that most of the over 10,000 women migrated from urban areas are single women who often travel a distance of 600 to 800 km. After completing work in Guntur they move to Karnataka where the grading seasons are different. They are familiar with the idea that they have to earn for survival. Banerjee (1977) says that in Calcutta city more and more

women are coming into employment market in spite of constant wages in some sectors over a period of time.

Besides, women migrate to urban areas in a large number as a part of family unit and usually such movements are designated as associational ones in nature (Balan 1981). Uma Devi (1994) views that the women who migrated along with their husbands are in certain respect more free as compared to their counterpart left behind. On the other hand, they may face the problems in rearing children. Moreover, as the ties with native place may have broken, building of up new ties with the host economy may not be easy.

Education

Sexual discrimination in education is related to social, economic and family factors. In India the boys are preferable to girls as is considered access, retention and further use of education. A small fraction of women who have gained higher education is less competitive in nature in comparison of men. In general, it is believed that education's role for a girl is to reinforce the value of consistency and obedience. In many parts of the country the prevailing notion that it is of no use to waste time and money on schooling a girl who has after all to go to another family has widened the gender gap in education (General Knowledge Encyclopedia 1999). In 1911 there were 1055 illiterate females to 1000 illiterate males whereas in 1981 it has increased to 1322 (Karlekar 2000).

For the low level of female literacy familial factors are also responsible. Talking about the education of women Karlekar (2000) argues that girls of village areas are overburdened with different kinds of paid and unpaid works. This can directly be attributed to certain assumptions regarding women's nature and role, which restricted girl's access to school for education. In her another study (1987) of the Balmiki, a sub-caste of the North Indian sweepers, in Delhi slum areas she finds that three quarters of the mothers whose sons were being educated wanted to

complete schooling for them whereas 50% of them admitted that their daughters did not study beyond class III in view of getting a job and /or being married off. Bhagwati (1973) and Kamat (1973) say that the poor families of our country largely depend upon the labour of children and women, and in such a situation schooling of children is very low. Singh and Desouza (1980) observe that in the migrants' Bastis of Delhi the women wanted to send their daughters to primary school only for a few years but hoped for their sons to finish school. Farooqui (1993) avers that it is cruelty to girls to deny them educational opportunity and thereby to perpetuate their inferior status in the family and society. Baxi (1989) is of the view that literacy alone can make women realize their potential and equip them for better employment and wage.

Improvement in the schooling of girls is also found with the passage of time. The report of the Education commission 1964-66 shows that between 1950-51 and 1960-61, to every 100 boys enrolled to primary school the number of girls rose only 39 to 44. For general education at the college and university level the figure rose 16 to 27%. Rao (1992) says that higher education of women in India has greatly expanded after Independence but still the percentage of higher educated women is very low. The reasons for this situation include failure to understand the importance of higher education, social evils and outdated conventions, poverty and undeveloped condition, lack of girls' schools and women teachers and so on.

The report of the committee on the status of women in India (1974) shows that sending girls to schools depends upon certain facilities available in schools like more girls' school, more women teachers, better transport and toilet facilities and so on. In order to improve girls' participation in education the Secondary Education Commission of 1953 and the National Committee on Women's Education suggested for establishing girls institutions. Chauhan (1992) is of the view that education plays an important role in determining various attributes of socio-

economic and political development of an area. There is the greatest need for improvement and investment in educational facilities, particularly women's education.

Social Movements

The enlightened individuals of the male section initiated the struggle against gender injustices of the patriarchal institution that suppressed womanhood in Indian society (Desai 1948). In the 19th century the Brahma Samaj of Bengal took leading part to remove the disabilities of the Indian women. Similarly, Prarthona Samaj of Bombay, Mahadev Gobind Ranade and others launched movement against the evils of caste system, prohibition of child marriage and widow remarriage and above all for women's upliftment.

With the passage of time the women too organized themselves under their own leadership; they built up women's organizations and created a platform to agitate for the redressal of their disabilities (Desai 1948). In the later part of 19th century Pandita Ramabai setup Arya Mahila Samaj to eradicate oppression against women. Another notable women organization named Bharata Mahila Parishad was formed at the third meeting of the Indian National Congress in 1887 to provide a forum for discussion of social issues (Ghosh 1989). Besides, various individuals and women's organizations like Women's India Association, All India Women's Conference and so on to spread education among women, launched the movements and, as a result, a number of girls' schools were opened in different parts of the country (Desai 1948; Shah 1990).

During the nationalist movement, especially after 1919, thousands of women participated under the leadership of M. K. Gandhi (Patel 1988) who played an important role in raising the status of women (Jain 1986; Mazumder 1976). The ideology of Gandhi was to recruit women in public life without affecting their role as housewives and his efforts of mobilizing women were

also responsible for the participation of women in freedom struggle. Subhas Chandra Bose also organized women who played an active part in freedom movement (Mehta 1982).

After Independence the women lost their interest to think about large social issues. But with the establishment of autonomous women's groups the things started changing (Patel 1982). The autonomous women's groups which are run by the women for women characteristically (a) organize women and lead the movements, (b) fight against oppression, exploitation, etc. against women and (c) in no way subordinate themselves to the decisions and necessities of any political or social group / organization (Patel 1988).

In the mid and last of 1960's the working classes initiated anti-price rise movement. Along with, other movements like anti-war movement, colonial liberal struggle, etc. also started beyond the boundary of socialist parties. Women too took part in a large number in the process of struggle (Manohar 1981). Mitra (1984) and Munshi Saldanha (1986) who have studied the role of women in tribal movement found that women were an integral part of various tribal movements in the twentieth century. These scholars also highlighted the militant role played by women in the tribal movements in Bihar and Maharashtra. In various peasant movements like Telengana movement and Tebhaga movement the women participated largely. Peter Custers (1987) showed how women from the poor peasant and labour classes provided effective leadership in Tebhaga movement. Women also participated largely in the communist led movement of coir workers in Kerala (Velayudhan 1984). Omvedt (1978) is of the view that women's participation in various class struggles against capitalist development on the country side has led them to participate in the production process.

But the participation of women in these movements has not helped them in their own struggle against oppression. So, many women activists and women organizations realize the importance of taking up issues related to oppression of women in the form of rape, sati, sexual

discrimination at work place, dowry death, wife beating, common civil code, trafficking in women and so on. Due to the pressure built by the different women movements, amendments have been made in the laws of rape, dowry, marriage, wife beating, etc. (Punwani 1984). Different autonomous women organizations are also trying to deal with the problems faced by the women in working places (Melkote and Tharen 1980). In this regard they wanted to form separate wings within the trade unions exclusively for women. Talking about the activist movement in Maharashtra Omvedt (1980) is of the view that women across the middle and lower classes are becoming more conscious of the need to fight against oppression, on one hand, and they recognize the increasing marginalization of women which make their fight difficult for independent status in the family, on the other.

The feminist movement in this country started at the end of the seventies in twentieth century. It is found that due to the pressure of this movement the biased terms like **work**, **head of the household**, etc. routinely used in the census reports of the country have been carefully examined and changed (Jain and Chanda 1982; Dube et al. 1986). Further, the movement has interacted with the government and other institutions to point out how the introduction of new technology in mode of production affects women's employment (Agarwal 1986; Dandekar 1986). In India the feminist activists have mediated on behalf of women in major developmental projects like World Bank funded Narmada Valley Dam Project that not only destroyed the environment and cultivable lands but also dislocated women (Shiva 1988). The gender discrimination and exploitation is inextricably related with the poverty and poor women as clearly pointed out by the feminist movement in India.

While talking about women's movement Rohini, Sujata and Neelam are of the view that women's participation in the movement has the four major forms; viz., (i) the women organized automatically for control over their bodies, e.g., against rape, etc. and for political rights, e.g.,

suffrage against pornography, etc.; (ii) they fought through the unions in order to improve their living standards and conditions of work; (iii) they organized as housewives for social recognition and remuneration for their work and (iv) finally they have fought more general in social movements on issues which affect men and children as well (Uma Devi 1994)

Omvedt (1978) classified the women's movements into two types; namely, (a) the women's movements for equality which may not challenge the existing social structure but demand equal position for women and (b) the women's movements for liberation which directly challenge the existing sexual division of labour itself.

Leaders of the women's movement always have come from the upper and middle castes/classes. The social reformers who raised the women related issues in the 19th century mostly belonged to the upper class male section. Shah (1984) and Caplan (1985) said that local level leaders of women's movement came from middle classes and upper classes of the society, who were more educated than the other women as a whole. Savara and Gothaskar (1984) studied struggle of landless women and gave some glimpses about leaders of the movement. They find that the leadership of the movement has come from those women who possess small portion of land as they enjoyed *relative stability and independence from the local rich peasants*.

The various autonomous women's organizations like All India Women's Conference played an important role to highlight the subordinate position of women in the society and mobilized women to fight against exploitation (Everett 1979). But some activist researchers find that the autonomous women's movements in rural and urban areas have not yet taken a stable form because of various reasons (Shah 1990). Rohini, Sujata and Neelam argued that most important factor for the failure of women's autonomous movement is women's identification primarily as an oppressed group (Uma Devi 1994)

Economy

Generally, women in the human history belong to a deprived, discriminated and degraded section of the societies everywhere, east or west and north or south. As an integral part of every society, they constitute 50% of the world population and a one-third of the official labour forces and perform nearly two thirds of all working hours while receive only one tenth of the world income and own less than one percent of the world's property (Dharamvir 1990). In the developing countries they constitute the keel of agricultural work. In Asia they work for 14 to 17 hours per day (Joseph 1997). In spite of this, most of their work go undervalued in economic sense as the opportunities for work are more for men than women, e.g., in India women labour force remains as reserve pool of helpless labourers (Mitra 1980). Contribution of women in family either in the form of controlling young members or through economic aid is always great. Many married women, today, who earn, believe that they ensure betterment of the family (Sullerot 1968). In many families employed women take care of budget, yet their invisibility as economic entity is a reality to reflect their low status (Chakraborty 1985). The economic position of women is worsening because their role in the traditional economy has slowly become redundant while in the modern sector their gains are negligible (Banerjee 1985). Women's social status that is affected by the existence of private property and its ideological and cultural effects strengthens male domination (Saradamoni 1982).

In India the women's status is determined only through their relation with husband, sons and brothers. Their economic contributions to men's work are regarded as non-essential and the help to their husbands in agricultural work is counted as wifely duties rather than work (Banerjee 1987).

According to the ICSSR report of social scientists (1975) on the status of women, after Independence the representation of women in the work force in industry and rural sector has

TH-604 (18)

~~TH-808~~ 20-4-2013

declined instead of increasing for the reasons of (i) technological modernization and (ii) male oriented value system of employment. The committee also found that 94% of the women workers in India are engaged in unorganized sector of economy. The rate of women's participation in work process is low in this country due to the predominance of household work, illiteracy, physical handicaps and poor vocational training. So, the negligence towards women alienated them from development process. However, many macro and micro studies have documented that women's economic status strengthens the development process of third world countries (Alagh 1989). In Indian economy women's involvement is declining over the years and economic development has not been able to take women into its fold (Uma Devi 1989). A half of the females' work is unpaid. The other half is underpaid because women's work at home is unpaid and their work outside is underpaid considering them inferior to men (Page 1982). Majority of the women workers are engaged in unorganized sector of the economy where they work in the worst condition of exploitation, wage discrimination, over work, etc. (Singh and Singh 1992). The main reasons for poor payment of women's work are (a) privatization of women's work and (b) considering women as subsidiary workers (Mosen and Young 1981).

Agriculture contributes largely to our national economy and in agricultural activities rural women's participation is also large. Bhuyan (1988) studied the role of women in agriculture in Orissa and found that the women played a significant role in agricultural activities but the existing extension system was not sufficient to inform them about farm.

While studying four villages of four districts of Haryana Dak (1986) found that in agricultural activities women participated widely. Agarwal (1982) while studying the effects of agricultural modernization on women found that (a) in comparison with men women work for longer hours, (b) distribution of food within the family tended in men's favour, (c) family income is controlled by men, (d) female headed households increased and (e) women tended to loose

more from a modernization scheme than the men. Saikia (1990) who studied female agricultural labourers in 10 villages of Assam found that the average of man-days per female workers was lower in cultivators' families than agricultural labourers' households. A study on the role and participation of women in agricultural production in West Bengal conducted by Chakraborty (1989) found that for agricultural production women work hard. Mira (1986) studying women's participation in textile industry in Bombay found that industrialization had discriminated heavily against women. Das (1979) while accounting the role of female workers in the Coir and Cashew processing industries in Kerala found that in the gender based division of labour in the industries women workers were replaced by men workers time to time.

Banerjee (1985) observed that in Bengal the males pushed out the women workers when they needed job. Ambannavar (1975) argued that the failure of structural change in employment to accompany urbanization could be traced to the fact that the growth of modern industry in towns and cities dealt a deathblow to the rural household industry. With the changing technology and scale of production there was a shift in the location of industry from rural to urban centres, especially large metropolitan cities. These changes were unfavorable to women's participation in work. Gadgil (1985) is of the view that due to adverse effect of productive labour laws for women, policy of equal wages and technological improvement one perceives a decline in the trends of women's participation in industry and factory. This view may be partially true looking to a large number of unskilled women labourers employed in modern industries as due to the lack of mobility and illiteracy they could not possess necessary skills required in modern industry. Roy (1992) mentions that in order to violate statutory provisions such as maternity leave, crèches, etc. the industrialists introduce new machines that require advanced knowledge and skills. As a result, women suffer from insecurity of unemployment, excessive hours of work, lack of standard wages and other basic welfare facilities.

The participation of women in service sector is also on a gradual decline. Though the occupational census shows a marginal improvement in the proportion of women in white-collared jobs of teachers, doctors, nurses and so on, but it shows a decline in the number of women in trade and commerce. Women's participation in work in urban areas is significantly lower than in rural areas. According to Roy (1992) the census data bring out the limited nature of economic independence of women more sharply. As less than half of the male population (46.80%) is classified as non-workers, the corresponding proportion of non-workers in the female population is over 79%.

The occupational distribution of Indian women shows that in 1981 approximately 15% of the female workers were cultivators and 21% were agricultural labourers. As compared to the 1961 census data the percentage of female cultivators, of the women engaged in trade and commerce and of those engaged in manufacturing processing has declined in 1981 (Uma Devi 1994:40). Mehta (1989) while examining the differences in employment and earning opportunities among the similarly educated men and women found that in spite of having similar level of education there is a clear inequality in the employment opportunities between men and women.

The status of women is closely related to their economic position. In Karl Marx's words (1977) *The emancipation of women and their equality with men are impossible and must remain so as long as women are excluded from the socially productive work and restricted to housework which is private*. Realizing this after Independence the Government of India introduced a series of policies and programmes to strengthen women's participatory roles and empowerment to increase their dignity. But the scholars find many drawbacks in these policies and programmes regarding women's participation, for the model of rural development did not contain any special provision for rural women. Mies (1984) reported that women had to struggle to get loans.

Choudhury (1990) finds that in the development process of the country the government took various steps for women's upliftment. But these development plans and programmes have overlooked the need to strengthen women's productive role. Several projects for women are active outside the main stream of development, neglecting the basic role of women in agriculture. So, well-articulated policies for increasing women's participation in development are still lacking.

Godre and Mahalla (1985) while studying the level of female utilization in crop production with traditional and modern technology in Vidarbha find that due to the implication of new technology women get more opportunities for work and employment. Marothia and Sharma (1985) who conducted a study in Chhattisgarh region (now state) of Madhya Pradesh found that female labour contributed a higher proportion of total labour input in paddy production activities.

While studying the hill region of U.P. Singh, Sharma and Singh (1988) found the rural women of the region playing very important economic role through their active participation in various agricultural activities. The women's role in agriculture is indispensable as nothing can be done without them and that is why they enjoy a relatively a better position.

But some studies show that in rural India the female labour participation has decreased in view of the implementation of new agricultural technology and therefore the dependency of woman has increased. Parthasarthy and Rao (1974) who have conducted a study in Andhra Pradesh found that the implementation of High Yield Varieties of seeds has increased the family income but as a result women's participation was withdrawn from the labour forces. Sinha (1980) finds that with the introduction of pump sets for irrigation and wheat thrashers, the female labourers lost their work in North Bihar. Boserup (1970), Ghosh (1984), Gupta (1986) and Patel (1984) are among the others who have also highlighted the negative impacts of technology on rural women's work participation.

Tea Industry

Tea Industry is an agro-based labour intensive industry, for the establishment of which needs the energy of male and female labourers equally. From the very beginning female labourers were also imported with their husbands or parents or alone. Sometimes, some parents sold their daughters to *Arkatti* or *Sardar* (contractors) due to poverty (Mishra 1993).

The tea industry employed more women in comparison with other organized industries because (i) the plantation work being a special kind of agricultural work is familiar to Indian women the vast majority of whom live in rural areas; (ii) the facilities have been given to male workers to settle on the plantation or in its vicinity and to take their wives and family with them and (iii) to balance the family budget a number of women have to even today seek employment under the old system of labour contracts based on the principle of utilizing every able bodied person in a family and fixing the wage rates accordingly despite the fact that the contract system has been abolished; the wage system and the need for supplementary earning still remain (Awasthi 1973 : 164).

The 1885 report on labour emigration in Assam shows that there were 1, 80, 531 adult labourers among whom 1, 02,257 were males and 78,274 were females. As per the 1991 record the average number of women employed on daily wage in the Brahmaputra valley was 2,13,542 and in the Barak Valley it was 27,573. In 1994 the number was 226681 and 27942 respectively in the two valleys (Mazumder et al. 1999).

Therefore, the tea gardens employ a large number of women. But in the development of tea gardens women have suffered more in comparison of men. Some glimpses of the condition of female labourers at initial stage of the development of tea gardens are found in the writings of Chattopadhyaya. In his article **Slavery of India** (1959) he narrates the miserable conditions of women labourers...*the wives and grown up daughters of coolies were natural victims of the white*

managers, overseers and the Sardars. They forcibly and openly used the coolie women as their concubines. The fathers and husbands were quite helpless and nothing but silent spectators... He (1998) further mentions that for a young coolie woman it was very difficult to save herself from the lustful attention of the planters. The planters often abducted the chastity of coolie women. While talking about the condition of early emigrants in the tea gardens De (1990) writes: --- *women labourers were occasionally tied up to the post, their clothes lifted up the waist and were beaten on the bare buttocks with strip leather. The outraging of women's modesty was also not rare in the garden world.* The female labourers in tea industries suffered not only from sexual exploitation but also from economic exploitation. The wages of female labourers were lower than those of male labourers. But now they receive equal wages along with male labourers.

Though the contribution of female labourers in tea industry is much more yet not much literature on the women in the tea gardens is found. Mallier and Rosser (1987) in a comparative study on the women and economy of U.S.A and U.K. report that in the tea industry where women are considered essential but even then they lost their jobs in the times of depression in favour of men. Das Gupta (1978) who studied the women workers in tea plantation of North Bengal and Assam found that in spite of working in the tea plantation they can in no way neglect their domestic responsibility like cooking, managing household affairs, etc. Bhadra (1992) observes that though the women labourers in tea plantation are the members of trade unions but even then the leadership of working women labourers has not yet emerged. In another context while studying the role and status of adivasi women working in Chandmani Tea Plantation in Darjeeling district Bhadra (1997) finds that the women wage labourers work in the tea gardens due to economic necessity but only with full knowledge and consent of their husbands and other family members. The workingwomen in tea gardens are happy with their work and they do not face any serious role conflict as mothers, wives and working women. Phukan (1992) while

discussing the status of labour women of tea gardens of the Brahmaputra Valley says that most of the women labourers are illiterate and ignorant and therefore are not much conscious about their socio-economic status. They are always silent in the matter of wage discrimination against them as compared to male labourers and also show no dissatisfaction while performing their roles of mother, wife and worker. Also, due to dual responsibility at home and in plantation area the labour women, particularly married women with their small children, suffer from great mental and physical strains. Joseph (1999) says that there is a need to make *intensive anthropological investigation in order to have a better, deeper and holistic understanding on the status of women workers in tea plantation in general and those of Assam in particular.*

The studies on women mainly focussing on the status of women appreciate the social problems and deprivations of women in various structural and cultural aspects of social life. This kind of approach pervading almost all the studies derives the status of the women in isolation or against men, which renders it to be static. Actually, status of women is the outcome of dynamic gender relations in a society with shifting connotations-positive or negative-of women's problems, deprivation and sufferance in various vistas of life, at different places; in different socio-historical formations and at various levels of economic development. Therefore, the status of women can only be understood in the historico-contextual dynamics of gender relations in a given setting like tea gardens by probing into their various dimensions for a comprehensive view. Besides, the status of women in the tea garden setting focussed so far remain non-systemic in the sense that their problems and sufferance under the colonial power system in the tea gardens are conceived as gender relations of the people implying a low status of women. But such relations are primarily the relations of super ordination and subordination, which refer to a wider frame of class analysis. In order to grasp the concrete nature, magnitude and determinants of the status of women gender relations in various institutions impacting women in terms of power distribution

have been examined in tea garden setting. For this purpose the following research questions are formulated here.

- 1) What patterns of gender relations are obtained in India, specially the tea garden setting?
- 2) What mechanisms and magnitudes do the gender relations posit in the situation?
- 3) What factors determine the gender relations in the given situation?
- 4) What kind of re-arrangement of the factors will alter the existing pattern of gender relations in order to bring the women at par with the men in India?

Objectives

The study aims to analyze gender relations with focus on the status of women in the tea garden setting in Assam. The following objectives were set for the study.

- (1) To comprehend the gender relations and the status of women in India.
- (2) To understand dynamics, processes and patterns of gender relations and the emerging status of women with reference to place, time and type of a society.
- (3) To bring out the magnitudes of gender relations on the basis of equality, inequality or otherwise in social, economic and political social institutions India.
- (4) To identify the historical, cultural and contextual determinants of the gender relations and status of women in India.
- (5) To suggest the possibilities for re-arranging relations for gender equality and women's empowerment in India.
- (6) To evolve a general frame of reference for gender studies in India.

Hypotheses

The following are the hypotheses that were formulated to answer the research questions mentioned under the problem of the study.

(1) Patterns of gender relations, especially status of women, are dynamically shaped by the historical (traditionalism and colonialism), cultural (patriarchy) and contextual (status, wealth, power, education, health and communication) factors. Historical (traditionalism and colonialism), cultural (patriarchy, identity consciousness, etc.) and contextual (esteem, wealth, power, education, health and communication) factors dynamically shape the patterns of gender relations, especially the status of women.

(2) Access to one or more factors leads to empowerment of women and equality in gender relations.

(3) Right to property is the most fundamental factor for gender equalization in a society.

Methodology

The methodology of the study is discussed under theoretical perspective, sources of data, universe and units of the study, sampling of respondents and tools for data collection.

Theoretical Perspective

Gender relations are the basic elements in the formation of most elementary social groups, institutions and human life. Family, marriage, kinship, community and society could not have emerged and sustained so far in absence of interactions and relations based on the distinction of the two sexes-male and female. The distinction is used to categorize the members in society by assigning particularistic cultural meanings to their biological properties of sex. The cultural

definitions converting sex based population categories into gender based social divisions determine the entire spectrum of actions and interactions, positions and roles, rights and duties, styles and chances of life, and dreams, visions and world views. The cultural meanings and symbols of gender that direct, control and regulate relations between individuals always vary from group to group, community to community, society to society and time to time. The polar opposites of gender relations between males and females may be conceived as the pure types each one based on the principle of equality or inequality but, actually, the gender structures generally constitute various mixtures of the equality-inequality principle. Owing to a cultural bias empowering either of the genders the existing and historical societies have been mostly iniquitous rather than egalitarian ones. In most of the gender relations between the men and women in societies the latter is generally a loser, deprived, sufferer, oppressed and exploited whereas the former – a gainer, dominant and powerful. The powerful enjoys a high status and the powerless reels at a low status in a society and its various groups. In the contemporary ascendancy of egalitarian or/and feminist ideology and actions in societies, the matters of low status and need for empowerment of women are great concerns to almost all societies, especially the societies of abysmal gender inequalities like India.

The term status has various meanings. From sociological point of view the term is used consistently to refer to a position in a social system with distinct array of designated rights and obligations (Merton 1968). Linton (1921) is of the view that the status is primarily a position in a social structure involving rights, duties and reciprocal expectations of behaviour, none of which depends upon the personal characteristics of the status occupant. Malinowski argued that a correct definition of status could be given only after considering all mutual duties between sexes and the safeguards provided for the protection of each sex against the highhandedness of the other. By these definitions the status of women 'is determined in terms of the norms and taboos

governing their roles and behaviour in particular community (Chauhan 1990:2). Or the status of woman refers to the relative prestige or honour she enjoys in different aspects of life (Joshi 1999). Lowie (1940) is of the view that women's status is determined on the basis of four major factors; viz; (i) treatment of women in society, (ii) women's legal status, (iii) opportunities available to her for public activities and (iv) pattern of her labour participation.

Obviously, the status of women is a relative term that differs in its meaning from individual to individual and from society to society. While discussing the status of women the queries are: In comparison with whom and in comparison with what? When one talks about the status of women in tribal society, it remains incomplete unless one makes a comparison of the status between (i) women and men in tribal society (ii) along with the status of women in caste society. But the relativity or comparison of the status of women also needs a base to talk about. The base consists of certain indicators like her freedom of choice and movement in social matters, type of taboos and her legal and political status (Chauhan 1990:3). Therefore, the status of women in a society may be determined by asking what prestige she has, what decision making powers she possesses, what degree of rights and duties she enjoys in different spheres of life and so on.

Different scholars have studied the role and status of women in socio-economic, political, religious and educational spheres since the dawn of history. But it gets momentum all over the world only after 1975 – the International Women's Year. Different scholars have made different observations regarding the status of women. Lal (1979) argued that the status of women in a society is determined by a number of factors. The pattern of task differentiation in the family also provided valuable clues to the prevailing status of women in the society. Women's status will be the lowest in a society characterized by firm differentiation of work between men and women. Ortner (1974) finds that in society women's subordination is universally recognized because they

are symbolically associated with nature, i.e., women have the reproductive function that restricts their movement and confines them in the domestic precincts.

In women studies gender conceived mainly as category of analysis in the same manner as caste, religion, class and status group used so far by the social scientists (Abbott and Wallace 1990; Agarwal 1986; Moor 1988) has been highlighted in terms of other variable categories to examine social, economic and political status of women determined in the historical, cultural and contextual situations, on one hand, and to amplify the voice of women expressed in literature, art and history, on the other. The studies gained substantial position, both, in terms of their problem oriented researches and theoretical orientation after the World War II. The theoretical orientations of women studies can be classified; viz; neo-classical institutional, Marxian, radical and other approaches (Amsden 1980).

The neo-classical approach explains that the increasing number of women's participation in paid employment heavily rests on the effect of income and prices on the behavior of women. This approach does not consider that the women earn low due to social injustice and, instead, it attributes to small investment in human capital made voluntarily by women, which in turn leads to their low productivity. The reasons put forth are that (i) women are out of the market at the time of child bearing and rearing and (ii) that they avoid jobs which require training (Niemi 1974). Thus, the neo-classical approach does not pass any value judgement about the status of women and just provides an explanation in technical terms without questioning the existing system that puts women in a disadvantaged position (Uma Devi 1994: 31).

The institutional approach while analyzing women's work conditions starts from the side of family to look at the relationship between non-market and market work of the women, and considers the higher entry of women in the market as the result of their growing ability in work (Oppenheimer 1970). The institutionalists have highlighted the low pay of women, labour market

segmentation and sex typing of job. They view that division of labour has always been there but at certain stage of economic development it is attributed to the sex based differences than to others. Thus, women's position deteriorated with the invention of the plough (Boserup 1970). They show that sex inequality takes the form of 'job' discrimination but not the form of 'wage' discrimination.

The Marxist feminist approach focuses on the women's access to resources, conditions of work and share in distribution of the production of their labour (Chauhan 1990). They as well as anthropologists believe that men and women are simultaneously independent of each other in terms of economic relations and rituals, and the roles of both men and women are equal in respect of means of production, i.e., the women are in no way subordinate in their role of mother (Duane Bell 1983; Karen Sacks 1979). The radical feminists conceive women as a class and patriarchy as the main feature of an unequal society (Chauhan 1990:5). According to them the main reason behind the oppression of women, often seen in the biological differences between male and female, is the men's ability to maintain these differences through male institutions and values which constitute patriarchy - the important unit of which is family. They believe in radical change to be brought about by total abolition of women's exploitation (Nanda and Mangalagiri 1985:17). Besides, they focus on the material and political benefits derived by the capitalists from the sex-inequality which survives to serve interests of the capitalists as the sex-inequality at home itself leads to sex-inequality in the market (Humphries 1977:241-58). Thus, the growth of capitalism leads to several ways of exploitation of women both in the family and market.

The moderate feminists who believe that men and women are born equal and therefore deserve equal opportunity focus on the struggle for equal rights of women within the framework of existing society. They demand the equality of women in political participation, job

opportunity, education, right to vote, etc. (Saha 1984:12). They do not agree to the view that the specifically assigned roles of **mother** and **housewife** suit more to women than men.

These theoretical orientations explain the position of women in a social setting by perceiving them from relatively different social stances. The present study has been undertaken in a systemic perspective of gender relations in Dewan Tea Garden village. The variables such as caste, tribe, class, power, occupation, region, community or religion are used to examine gender relations in social, economic, political, educational, health and communicational aspects of life cutting across the diversities of population in the system as well as in the historical evolution of the system. The gender relations are explained in terms of historical, cultural and contextual determinants.

Sources of Data

The study utilized both the primary and secondary data. But the primary data collected from the field have been the prime and inevitable in the study. The secondary as well as documentary data have also been extensively used to formulate the problem and to understand the facts in perspective. The data were collected during the period from September 2002 to November 2003.

Universe, Field and Units of the Study

The tea garden setting in Assam dominated by tea garden economy and divided into two regions; namely, the Brahmaputra Valley and the Barak Valley is the universe of the study. The regions have two types of village; viz. (i) the tea garden-cum-village and (ii) the non-tea garden village. A tea garden village consists of a tea garden and its land with a large population engaged in various activities in the garden whereas a non-tea garden village is a revenue village inhabited largely by a population pursuing occupations such as agriculture, shopkeeping and services.

Dewan, a tea garden-cum-village and field of the study, was selected to examine the gender relations in a population with optimal heterogeneity of region, religion, community, tribe, caste, class, power and occupations. A large village has generally a population of about 1000 or more in the Barak Valley. Household unit is taken for tapping the information for the study.

Sample of Units

For the purpose of intensive study the basic data were collected from all 925 households in Dewan to find out the socio-cultural and economic patterns of life. To understand the status of women, a sample of 50 households (about 5%) was drawn from the population by applying stratified random sampling method for a representative cross-section of the multiple heterogeneities of the households. The households were selected from various sections of the population on the basis of ancestral nativity, mother tongue, religion, caste, tribe, occupation, landholding, family types, marital types and literacy level. At first, the sub-samples were taken from each of the sections and, then, the common units were eliminated. The remaining units constituted the main sample. Over a 5% of the units constituted the sample of the respondents. These units were interviewed intensively to gather their responses for understanding the gender relations, specially the status of women in the tea garden setting. The data gathered from the units of the sample are analyzed in the fourth chapter onwards.

Tools for Data Collection

To collect socio-economic data, the respondents from all the households were administered an inventory of the questions divided into basic information, generation depth and nativity, occupational profile, forms of cultural expressions, patterns of family and marriage, political activities and health and communication.

To probe the patterns of gender relations and status of women a structured interview schedule formulated on the basis of inter-personal, and inter- and intra-group relationships between the two sexes in various aspects of life; viz, health, reproduction, marriage, family, kinship, property, inheritance, succession, political awareness and participation, education, personal belongings, etc. was administered to the respondents to know how rights, privileges and obligations of each sex are constituted in practice.

In sum, the study is designed descriptively to enquire into the dynamic gender relations in social, economic, political, educational, health and communicational aspects of the tea garden people's life determined by historical, cultural and contextual factors. The research problem is attempted with reference to Dewan Tea Garden village in the South Assam.



Plate 1.1: A Part of the Dewan Tea Garden, Dewan, Showing Tea Bushes