PREFACE

The second half of 20th century had been the witness to a relentless struggle led mostly by women for gender equality. Although the struggle brought for women many victories, inequality between men and women still persists. Till today, in no society do women enjoy the same opportunities as men. There exists considerable disparity between women’s contribution to development and their share of the rights and rewards. This disparity is a general feature of development in all countries and within all societies of human beings living in this planet. Nevertheless, the deprivation of women, that is, the gap between women’s responsibilities and entitlements, has been the most intense particularly in the less developed parts of the world.

The persistence of inequalities between men and women and the continuing phenomenon of women’s deprivation have attracted so far a good deal of scholarly attention. The contributions came from many disciplines – Economics, Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology, History and Political Science, to mention a few – and reflected many different perspectives. A cursory glance over these scholarly works that came to light during the period since the 1970s’ suggests two major trends. The first one was the incorporation of the gender perspective in the analysis of capital labour relation. The other trend that became popular since the late 1980s’ was of replacing the earlier frame of ‘Women in Development’ by that of ‘Gender and Development.’ This latter shift signifies the implicit recognition by researchers that gender issues at any given point of time reflect in a particular form the exploitation pattern that works within and is reinforced and institutionalized by the wider socioeconomic, regional and cultural contexts of any given group of human beings. In fact, this realisation in the sphere of women studies point to the fact that the interface between gender and context is crucial to understanding women’s work and their deprivation, and the same need to be studied by undertaking micro-level investigation in different spatial, occupational and cultural settings.

It is the aforesaid backdrop that indeed prompted us to undertake the present research endeavour on the female plantation labourers in South Assam. Our prime objective throughout the study has been to analyse the linkage between three major issues: gender, work and deprivation by locating these within the specific socio-economic contexts of the women labourers in the tea plantations in South Assam.
I express my sincere thanks and gratitude to my supervisor Dr. P. Nayak who was so long serving in Assam University as Reader in the Department of Economics and, of late, has joined the North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, in the same capacity. In fact, throughout the course of the project he provided me with constant inspiration and guidance and helped me to tide over all hurdles that came in my way.

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The study being an exploratory one was based mainly on primary data. The tea estates selected for the purpose were: Arcuttipore, Silcoorie, Koomb, Hattikhera, Manipur and Lalachhera. I record my thanks and appreciation for the management and staffs of these tea estates for extending to me, wherever necessary, the needed cooperation for carrying out the investigation. At the time of direct personal interview with the sample women workers in the selected tea estates, each respondent spared for me a good deal of their precious time. I gratefully acknowledge this sacrifice of theirs for the sake of an unknown researcher.

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In course of the research work I visited a number of libraries and institutions. Prominent
among these were the Central Library of Assam University, Library attached to the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata, the National Social Science Documentation Centre, New Delhi and the Gauhati University Library. I record my thanks to the librarian and staff of all these institutions for their help and cooperation.

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While utmost care was taken towards maintaining accuracy, it goes without saying that I fully shoulder the responsibilities of any inadvertent error that might have crept in.

\[\text{Silchar} \\
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