Chapter III

CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 GENDER—A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

By gender is generally meant the 'social construction of sexual identity'.¹ As Evelyn Fox Keller (1986) rightly observed:

"Gender...is...what a culture makes of sex. It is the cultural transformation of male and female infants into adult men and women. Invariably, how they do it—how they organise the spectrum of human attributes around sex—has a significant impact on their structuring of the world beyond sex as well—indeed it permeates all aspects of their existence."²

Sexual identity of a human being is derived from his or her birth and hence 'given' to begin with. But gendered identity is socially and culturally constructed. One's subsequent positioning in the society, role or expected behaviour as male and female are prescribed by the society through the institutionalised and, hence, practised set of customs, codes or norms. In this connection Fernbach (1981) says:

"The division of sex is a genetic one, clearly inscribed in our chromosomes....Everything that is not attributable to the working of our genes is a difference not of sex, but of gender....The opposing of gender to sex is very definitely something progressive....this is one instance of a wider distinction between nature and culture, between the raw material and what human society constructs....³

To put it in a different way, sex mimics gender and bodies become gendered by merely performing their roles. One becomes 'woman' by performing as woman.⁴ Hence gender refers to the differences between males and females in human society over a wide range of variables—

¹ Karin Kapadia: 'Mediating the Meaning of Market opportunities; Gender, Caste and Class in Rural South India,' Economic and Political weekly, Vol. XXXI No. 47, Nov. 23, 1997; pp 3071-77.
behaviour, personality traits, identity, roles, functions, rights, rewards and so on. It also
denotes certain norms which result in creating a particular type of individual, recognised as a
man or a woman and these norms are applicable to every aspect of life.  

With this socially constructed gender differences, males and females are positioned
differently in relation to existing power structure. While all societies use this woman-man
dichotomy, the criteria applied for demarcation vary enormously among the different cultural
settings. In this connection Maitreyi Krishnaraj says:

"What is considered 'manly' or 'womanly', what are deemed to be appropriate roles and
activities, differ widely across culture. These distinctions are conceived, constructed and acted
upon by people in society...."

Obviously, gendered identities are neither given nor fixed. Central to the concept of
socially constructed gender is the unequal power relation among the two genders. This unequal
power relation actually means male domination and a subordination of the female. This
'domination- subordination' pattern inbuilt within the gender relation is observed in all spheres
of life — public and private, where both the genders are the constituents or actors.

3.2 GENDER RELATION IN HOUSEHOLD DOMAIN

To begin with one may consider the gender- relation as is found to be operative in the
household domain. In the household, some activities are performed by every member for his
or her own sake. Besides those activities, most of the household works are performed by the
members not solely for their own sakes but for the sake of other members of the household.
These activities have intrinsic use-value and social-value because these are imperative for
developing capabilities. The pursuit of good health, acquisition of knowledge, the time devoted
to maintain the domestic unit properly, the time spent to fostering social relationships etc. all
are worthwhile, interactive and relational activities and can ensure the development of capabilities.
For example, preparing meals in the house naturally involves effort of any member of the
family, sharing meal with other members of the household is a way of enjoying and reproducing

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6 Rinita Mazumder, op. cit.; p 83.
8 Karin Kapadia (1997), op. cit, pp 3071-77.
a relationship. Of course, by-product of this work is nourishment and building the capabilities of the members of the family.\(^9\) To put it in a different way, the household is the locus of a particular type of production of human being distinct from production of material goods. Production and maintenance of human beings and of social relationship are as important as the production and distribution of goods and services. Production, in this view, is oriented to meet the needs of entire population and to the enhancement of human capabilities.\(^10\)

Thus most of the household works make life worth living though they carry no price tag. We can view all such activities done in the household domain as 'social process' since such works relate to production and maintenance of human beings and are interactive and relational.\(^11\) This 'social process' in the household domain involves the contribution of members of the household. Contributions can be equated with responsibilities from which the question of right arises. This means that responsibilities and rights are shared among those who are involved in household works. Here works are accomplished as a social process with participation of both the gender; and gender hierarchy through gendered division of labour decides the respective responsibilities and rights of males and females involved in the process.\(^12\)

Gender relation in household domain carries with it a systematic relationship between the two sexes which is structured by the ideology regarding men's and women's roles and rights in the family. The most significant aspect of gender relation is that it is embedded in relations of power and in hierarchy.\(^13\) This implies that a 'domination - subordination' pattern of relation is bound to be implicit in the gender relation.

The intrahousehold 'domination-subordination' pattern of gender relation structured by gender hierarchy ascribes the asymmetrical gendered division of labour in favour of men. This implies that overall burden of work or overall responsibility borne by women in household domain is heavier than that borne by men. In this connection HDR (1995) observes:

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\(^10\) Kate Young (ed): *Serving Two Masters: Third World Women in Development*, Bombay: Allied Publisher; pp XX.


\(^12\) Rinita Mazumder, op cit; pp 15-18.

\(^13\) Aasha Kapur Mehta (1996), op. cit, p. ws-80.
... Women work longer hours than men in all countries. ... Of the total burden of work, women carry 53%, men 47%. In rural areas, this widens to 55% and 45%. In urban areas it is 51% and 49%.”

Asymmetrical gender division of labour implies that women are everywhere charged with producing and raising children. They are charged with daily up keep of the household, the care and servicing of husband and other household members, the care of kin, the maintenance of the network of kin, and neighbourhood ties. In fact these household activities involve multiple tasks. Moreover, in the rural areas in developing countries, many production activities outside the household can hardly be separated from household works and women's multiple tasks often combine the two. But this heavy burden of tasks are nowhere recognised as being of the same order of importance as those directed to the production of things which have economic value. This fact, obviously, helps to perpetuate the 'domination - subordination' pattern of gender relation in the household domain. Again this pattern of gender relation decides the rights of both the gender which is sharply asymmetrical in favour of men. This is reflected in unequal sharing pattern of resource use, unequal extent of liberties that women are permitted to enjoy, unequal care and facility of education, unfavourable attitude towards girls and viewing women as 'dependent' rather than self-reliant.

3.3 GENDER RELATION IN THE WORKPLACE

It is equally important in this connection to consider the gender relation as is operative in the workplace i.e. in the public sphere of life. In the public sphere, efforts are made collectively to produce and maintain both material goods and human beings and thereby relationships are reproduced. We can view these activities as a 'social process' precisely because such works are imbued with social value. These works not only have use value but have exchange value too. In the workplace, where works are accomplished as a social process, both the genders participate in the process and here also gender hierarchy decides the respective roles and rights of males and females involved in the process.

A number of studies have been conducted so far to examine the nature of employment of females, and gender relation in workplaces. In fact, the literature on women's actual and

15 Kate Young: Serving Two Masters: Third World Women in Development, Bombay: Allied Publishers, p XIX
potential roles in public spheres and the effects that the changing micro as well as macro social environment have on women's lives and status has grown immensely since the publication of Ester Boserup's book 'Women's Role in Economic Development' (1970). Boserup's observation was that economic progress caused by modernisation is characterised by pronounced differentiation among men and women workers in respect of wage and employment status. Women, according to Boserup, have remained by and large confined in the realm of family which is a domain characterised by extreme patriarchy and sub ordination of women. Thus, Boserup was of the view that women are far from being integrated into the process of development.  

Writers such as Papanek (1977) and Nash (1976) have argued that role of women, being indispensable, always have been integral part of development process, but the problem is that their work goes unrecognised and contribution is unvalued. Indeed, the absence of sensitivity and hence non-recognition of women's work in standard data sets have been the two major concerns not only for feminist writers and activists, but also for various national and international development agencies. For instance, UNDP's Human Development Report (HDR) 1995, notes as follows:

"Women's work is greatly undervalued in economic terms. This is due in part to the restricted definition of economic activity. But part of the problem is the notion of value itself. For the purpose of economic valuation, value is synonymous with market value . . . . , but many goods and services with economic value are not marketed."  

While, pleading strongly that the System of National Accounts (SNA) should become more comprehensive so as to rightly assess and include women's contributions, HDR (1995) observes:

"A review of the 31 countries shows that women work longer hours than men in nearly every country. Of the total burden of work, women carry on average 53% in developing countries and 51% in industrial countries. Of men's total time in industrial countries, roughly two-thirds is spent in paid SNA activities and one-third in unpaid non-SNA activities. For women, these are reversed. In developing countries, more than three-fourths of men's work is in SNA activities. So men receives the lion's share of income and recognition for their economic contribution, while most of women's work remains unpaid, unrecognised and under valued".  

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Revelations of above sort have led researchers to propose various valuation techniques for assigning economic value to women's work at both national and cross country levels. In this connection Devaki Jain observes (1996):

"Time as a measure of value would reverse the value of men and women's work. Women would always come on 'Top' as they spend more hours working than men as HDR shown through TAS."\(^{21}\)

Since status in contemporary society is often equated with and derived from income earning power and since women's unpaid household works have no exchange-value, they suffer a major undervaluation of their economic status. This premise has promoted policy makers in this country particularly since the Sixth Five Year Plan, to search ways and means in order to ensure greater job opportunities for women and equality of wages.\(^{22}\)

The premise that 'status' is derived from income-earning power, of course, has come under detailed scrutiny particularly by researchers. While agreeing that greater participation of women in paid work is one of the preconditions for their gaining the much needed economic independence, these researchers convincingly point towards the complexities of capital-labour-relation within a free-market economy and towards the possibility that the factory or workplace, within the prevailing exploitative framework of capitalist relations, may become as much a locus of gender hierarchy and women's subordination as family.\(^{23}\)

Nirmala Banerjee in her paper 'Women and industrialisation in Developing Countries' has analysed the nature and characteristics of industrial work that women do in developing countries. She observed that women's experience of development through industrialisation in different developing countries follows a basically similar pattern. In general, women's industrial employment has been increasing in several countries including India in recent times. In modern sector at least, women are growingly being integrated into the web of the system of wage labour


although they are yet to be properly assimilated in the general work-force and hence can not
claim equal opportunities with men. In fact, she has found that, greater participation in the
industrial sector often has led to greater identification of women workers with women type and
therefore inferior jobs with low wages.  

Industry or sector specific studies by individual researchers in the Indian context have
also pointed out that even outside the factory sectors or organised industries the ongoing
phenomenon of super exploitation by the capital-owning-class only serves to reinforce the
existing patriarchal relations between genders via various newer forms of sub-ordination of
women. Particular mention may be made, in this connection, of the studies on the impact of
economic reforms. As pointed by scholars, in the face of new economic policy, both organised
and unorganised factory sectors are expanding and this has led to not only a higher workforce
participation rate for women in industrial occupations but also to a shift from traditional family
based industries to large factory based production. But the employment status of women
workers has been changed in the direction of increasing underemployment, self employment
and casual empolyment.

Millie Nihila (1999), in a micro level study, tries to show that with the liberalisation,
employment in leather tanning industry in Tamil Nadu has been increased, but quality of
employment especially for women has worsened. Leather tanning industry is an export earning
industry and there is a drive towards expansion of leather industry because of the adoption of
export-oriented growth strategy by the Government of India. But in many cases, expansion
is done without formal approval of Government in order to avoid labour protection laws. These
illegal units as well as many legal units have employed large number of informal workers,
particularly women. Almost 80 per cent of the total leather tannery work force are female

24 Nirmala Banerjee: 'Women and Industrialisation in Developing Countries': CSSSC Occasional Paper No. 71
Industrialisation in Developing Countries': CSSSC Occasional Paper No. 71 Calcutta: Centre for Studies in
Social Sciences, 1985; Nirmala Banerjee: Poverty, Work and Gender in Urban India, CSSSC Occasional Paper
No. 133, Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, 1992; A. Dharmalingam: 'Female Beedi Workers in
a South India Village', Economic and Political Weekly, Vol- VIII, Nos 27 & 28, July 3-10, 1993; pp 1461-68;
Maria Mies: 'Dynamics of Sexual Division of Labour and Capital Accumulation : Women Lace Workers of
informal workers employed on temporary basis. They are generally engaged in a much polluting and hazardous tanning process.\textsuperscript{27}

Another micro-level study done by Maria Mies (1981) shows how the capital accumulation exploits rural poor women working in the lace industry which is an expanding export-oriented industry.\textsuperscript{28}

Writers like Sudha Deshpande and L.K Deshpande (1998) have used micro-level data base of urban labour market in Bombay to show that manufacturing sector which is favourably affected by New Economic Policy in India, has achieved feminisation of jobs following either by increasing employment of women workers faster than that of male or by reducing employment of women workers slower than that of men caused by modernisation. But the micro-level evidences show that the increase in female employment has occurred not in high paid jobs but either in low paid jobs or in jobs with temporary status which are outside the purview of comprehensive labour benefits.\textsuperscript{29}

Swasti Mitter in her work 'Information Technology and Working Women' shows that new technology brought about by liberalisation has polarised the workers. Top management is mainly the men's domain. Management in the second category is handled by both the gender, though not equally. Engineering works are handled mainly by men and clerical works mainly by women. In service industries the rate of entry of women as computer-workers has been impressive as the use of computer is generally women-friendly. However, despite this quantitative gains, the picture remains gloomy as women are congregated at the level of low cadres.\textsuperscript{30}

Multinational enterprises are the agents of economic modernisation in the developing countries. A large number of women are employed by multinational enterprises. But not unlike the situation in agriculture, women in developing countries are employed by industrial multinational


manufacturing enterprises mostly as production workers in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs and labour intensive processes requiring manual dexterity and little physical strength. In the service sector too, a small elite group of women are employed in white-collar work in multinational banks and commercial establishments. Most of the women in this sector, however, are employed in low-level jobs. Skilled, technical, professional and managerial jobs are relatively few in both the sectors of multinationals and largely dominated by men.\textsuperscript{31}

Thus, as shown by the scholars, in the expanding competitive factory system of production, cost-effectiveness is a significant factor and for achieving cost efficiency, employers introduce both labour flexibility as well as production flexibility. Some of the dimensions of labour flexibilisation are – increased use of casual, temporary, contract and other types of non-permanent labourers and increased use of female labourers in this low paid, non-permanent and unsecured jobs. Production flexibility is brought about by emphasising specialisation of products using new technology and providing training to the workers in multi-skilled jobs. Both of these ways of achieving cost-efficiency are having unfavourable effects on women's employment.\textsuperscript{32}

These are the unique examples of super-exploitation by the capital owning class to reinforce the 'domination-subordination' pattern of gender relation in the workplace. In this connection Nirmala Banerjee observes:

"The tradition of undervaluing women's work appears to be common to all forms of industries. This surely stems from the institution of patriarchal control of women labour within the household....The status of women in the labour market is but a mirror reflection of their status in their families and societies and little can be done to improve one without changes in the other."

Elsewhere, it has been found that for the assetless section of the population, the


\textsuperscript{33} Nirmala Banerjee: \textit{Women and Industrialisation in Developing Countries}, 1985, op cit, p 40.
socially and culturally constructed 'domination-subordination' pattern of gender relation is prevalent in all such works which are accomplished as 'social process'—both in the public and private sphere. This gender inequality and deprivation at various levels combined with patriarchal attitude of the State's implementing apparatus minimise the chances of empowerment of women and thereby accord legitimacy to women's subordination. Herdi Hartmann in her work talks of the material basis of patriarchy which is formed via controlling women's labour power and sexuality in the public sphere and via the gendered division of labour in the private sphere. In the public sphere women perform jobs in the lower category for lower wages and in the private sphere they perform domestic labour without any wages thus producing merely use-value and not exchange-value.

3.4 METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE DESIGN

The study being an exploratory one, is based mainly on primary data collected from sample women labourers of the tea plantations in South Assam.

For the purpose of the collection of primary data, sample respondents were selected by a two-stage sampling exercise.

In the first stage, sample tea estates were selected. In the second stage, sample female labourers were selected on random basis from each sample tea estate.

To begin with, details regarding the operating tea estates in South Assam were collected. Among the 116 operating tea estates in South Assam in 1998, details regarding ownership, management, acreage and production were available separately for 110 tea estates in The Assam Directory and Tea Areas Hand Book. Of these 110 estates, more than half (64 estates) are located in Cachar district alone and the remaining estates are located in Hailakandi and Karimganj districts in South Assam (prior to 1983, these two districts were parts of the undivided Cachar district). Although the operating tea estates in South Assam belong to various size-classes, the data published by the Tea Board of India in the various issues of Tea Statistics show that about 63 per cent of the tea estates are in the 'large' or 'very large' size-

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classes taken together. These large and very large tea estates together in 1997 accounted for 91.15 per cent of the total acreage and 94.16 per cent of the total tea production in South Assam (cf. Table 2.IV in Chapter II in this thesis). As all the operating tea estates in South Assam are members of either the Surma Valley Branch of Indian Tea Association (SVBITA) or The Tea Association of India, Barak Valley Branch (TAI), the tea estates, regardless of their size or ownership pattern, follow an uniform labour policy. These policies are formulated by the two associations jointly within a common forum called the Consultative Committee of Plantation Associations (CCPA). In view of the observed homogeneity of the labour policies pursued by the tea estates in this region and also considering the background-related or contextual similarities of the tea labourers (already discussed in Chapter II), for the sake of an intensive study, we decided to restrict the sample size to six tea estates. These six tea estates covering the large and very large size-classes were purposively selected. Of the six tea estates, three were from Cachar district alone and remaining three from the rest of South Assam (two estates from Hailakandi district and one from Karimganj). The sample size was thus slightly higher than five per cent of the total number of operating tea estates in South Assam.

Details regarding the six sample estates are presented in the Table 3.I:
**TABLE 3.1: DETAILS OF THE SAMPLE TEA ESTATES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Tea Estate (T.E.)</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Out gardens</th>
<th>Area under tea (in hectare) (main + out garden)</th>
<th>Production of tea in 2000 (in Kgs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Arcuttipore</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
<td>Arcuttipore Tea Co. Ltd.</td>
<td>Chhapanhal division</td>
<td>293.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Silcoorie</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
<td>The North Eastern Cachar Tea Co. Ltd.</td>
<td>a) Durga Kona division</td>
<td>343.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b) Dharam Khal Division</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c) Borokai Division</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Koomber</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
<td>Koomber Tea Co. Ltd</td>
<td>a) Nistal Division</td>
<td>793.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b) Langlachhera Division</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c) Tikalpar Division</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hattikhera</td>
<td>Karimganj</td>
<td>Hanuman Textile and Industries Ltd.</td>
<td>a) No. 200 Division</td>
<td>936.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b) Solgoi Division</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c) No. 8 Division</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>Hailakandi</td>
<td>Manipur Tea Co. Pvt. Ltd.</td>
<td>No outgraden</td>
<td>550.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lallachhera</td>
<td>Hailakandi</td>
<td>Lallachhera Tea Co. Pvt. Ltd.</td>
<td>No outgraden</td>
<td>322.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1) SVBITA; *Surma Valley Branch of Indian Tea Association: 1901-2001: Centenary Souvenir, Silchar, 2001.*

2) Office of the Assistant Labour Commissioner, Cachar, Karimganj, Hailakandi and N.C. Hills Districts, Silchar.

Table 3.II presents sex-wise distribution of total employment (permanent + temporary) of adult labourers in the year 2000 in the six sample tea estates:
**TABLE-3.II: SEX-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF TOTAL EMPLOYMENT OF ADULT LABOURERS IN 2000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SL. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Tea estate</th>
<th>Total adult male labourers. (Main + outgarden)</th>
<th>Total adult female labourers (Main + outgarden)</th>
<th>Total employment (Male + Female)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Arcuttipore</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Silcoorie</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Koomber</td>
<td>805</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>1506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hattikhera</td>
<td>995</td>
<td>966</td>
<td>1961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Manipuri</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lallachhera</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>690</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


After selecting the sample tea estates, sample women labourers were selected on random basis from each of the six sample estates. Total number of adult women labourers in the year 2000 (permanent+temporary) who were residing inside the garden and working in the estates constituted the sampling frame for each of the sample tea estate. Table 3.III shows the sampling frame of each sample estate and number of sample women labourers for each of the sample estate. About 10 per cent of such resident women labourers in each sample estates were selected on a random basis as sample respondents for the purpose of this study:
TABLE-3.III: SAMPLING FRAME AND NUMBER OF SAMPLE WOMEN LABOURERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SL. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Tea estate</th>
<th>Total Female Labourers</th>
<th>Number of sample female labourers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Arcuttipore</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Silcoorie</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Koomber</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hattikhera</td>
<td>966</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lallachhera</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3011</strong></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Same as Table 3.II

For interviewing the women labourers so selected a carefully designed interview-schedule was used. The schedule was so designed as to enable us to collect the necessary and relevant information from the sample women labourers regarding their role and status at their workplaces as well as in their families and also on their behavioural aspects such as their self-image, the level of their perception and the resistance offered by women to their gender-specific deprivation. The schedule was administered in local language and in a way that the respondents can understand properly the implications of each of the questions placed before them.

The primary data so collected were supplemented by arranging discussions with the administrative staffs in the sample estates and the officials of the Industry Associations. Information were also collected from the Office of the Assistant Labour Commissioner, Silchar to know about the size and composition of the workforce in each of the sample tea estates and the welfare and amenities provided in the concerned estates to the labourers.

Information relating to trade unions operating in sample tea estates were collected from the district headquarters of the concerned trade unions.

The study, as mentioned earlier, has necessitated the use of a good deal of secondary information for understanding the operational details of the tea industry as well as for evaluating the socioeconomic context of the tea plantation labourers. For these, the reports, bulletins etc. published by various governmental agencies, the Tea Board of India and the Industry Associations were consulted.

The parameters of enquiry and the methods and techniques applied for analysis of data are mentioned in detail in the different chapters in the thesis.