CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION

Tea Garden Women Labour of Sonitpur in Assam has had a long history of oppression, repression and suppression by ‘private’ and ‘public’ patriarchies\(^1\) underlying the political and socio-economic system, despite their major contributive roles, both in reproduction as well as production, to plantation economy. A history of the tea industry during the twenty five years, 1983-2008 bears testimony to this. About half of the labour force constitutes women in the Tea Estates of Sonitpur. It is revealed by their recruitment in large numbers in Tea Estates which signifies that their work is considered as ‘productive labour’. The most important occupation of Tea Garden women labour is production of tea through intensive labour which shows their gendered attributes to the different tasks performed in the Tea Estates of Sonitpur. Moreover, increasing workload in Tea Estates does not mean that labour women’s household role is decreasing at any point of time. Exploitation by the Management, by the male members of the community to which they belong and by their spouses reveals the fact that women are easy victims to the inner dynamics of ‘private’ and ‘public’ patriarchies.

Tea is one of the most popular beverages in the World. Tea industry is one of the oldest industries in India, a large organized sector which has been an integral part of the economic development of India and ‘as a primary foreign exchange earner, tea’s significance for the national exchequer cannot be underestimated’\(^2\). Tea plantation\(^3\) is an agro-based industry which is mainly grown in two regions of India i.e., North East and South. Assam and North Bengal produce tea to a large extent and other

---

\(^1\) The concept of ‘Public Patriarchy’ has been adopted from Sylvia Walby. Walby’s definition of Public Patriarchy has been given in Third Chapter.


\(^3\) The terms ‘Tea plantation’, ‘Tea industry’, are used interchangeably in this study and though the term Tea Garden is used in the title, the term ‘Tea Estates’ has been used throughout the Thesis.
states like Sikkim, Tripura, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Mizoram, to a small extent. Assam has the highest area under tea cultivation and is also the largest producer of tea in India. In Assam, tea gardens are found both in the Brahmaputra and Barak Valley. In 1993, Assam and West Bengal together produced 5,73,099 thousand kilograms of tea from an area of 3,32,431 hectares.\(^4\)

In post-Independence period, significant changes began to take place in the tea industry of Assam. ‘Historical developments such as the threat of Japanese invasion through Burma during World War II and Indian independence saw a new cadre of Indian Management replace English Planters’.\(^5\) Accordingly ownership of Tea Estates passed over to small and individual families, large Indian corporations, family business houses and multi-national corporations.\(^6\) Most of the tea gardens in Assam were previously owned by European concerns like McNeill & Magor, George Williamson Ltd., Mcleod Russel, British Assam Tea Garden Company and Empire Plantation Limited etc. But, after independence, there was a change that took place in tea industry as some of the Tea Estates in Assam came under control of Indians by purchasing maximum shares at the Stock Exchange or buying the Tea Estates directly and therefore companies like Tata Tea, Brooke Bond etc. are taking over the ownership of the tea gardens.

The most important feature of the economy of Sonitpur is the existence of large number of Tea Estates. There are altogether sixty one big Tea Estates in Sonitpur District which covers an area of approximately 29,197.11 hectares. The tea garden population in Sonitpur is mainly composed of different ethnic groups and tribes and each of them having their own language and culture. But, over the years there has been an assimilation of cultures and these different communities exchanged their traditions. Therefore, a common culture and tradition emerged, known as ‘Cha Bagania Sanskriti’ (Tea garden culture) and a new *lingua franca* called ‘Sadri’

\(^4\) Tea Digest 1997, Tea Board of India, Calcutta, p. 2.
\(^6\) Ibid.
developed. ‘The use of an indigenous term ‘Sadri’ instead of bagania bhasa (dialect of the tea tribes) is thus a new socio-political construct of recent times’. Predominant among different tribes and castes found in Tea Estates are Oraon, Munda, Parjah, Karmakar, Tanti, Kurmi, Ghatowal, Santhal, Bauri, Hari, Nayak, Gossain, Majhi, Oriya, Gowala, Bhumij, Teli, and Karmakar, Nagbansi, Gorait, Sawra, Mahato etc.

‘Capitalists have an interest in exploiting women as a workforce as cheaply as possible’. Little has been written on the plantation labours in India, much less on the role of female tea labours although they work in large numbers in tea plantations. A study on tea plantation workers of Sonitpur District of Assam has not yet been considered as a serious area of research, let alone the study of the women workers, though it entails historical, sociological and anthropological significance. The Planters showed more interest in women immigrants since women migrants as reproducer of labour, constituted a crucial factor in their calculations. This is due to the fact that the immigration of women led to the long term advantage of a self-reproducing and stable work force. Inspite of this, women have always remained in a disadvantaged position for centuries and the Planters try to devalue women’s labour in tea plantation.

To analyze women’s labour, a framework has been used, which divides labour into two spheres of activities such as ‘production’ and ‘reproduction’. Productive activities are associated with wage labour and on the other hand, reproductive activities are associated with natural aspects of women such as procreation for expanding and stabilizing the labour force. The labour women have played major roles in both the ‘private sphere’ as well as the ‘public sphere’. In the private sphere women perform lots of activities. From procreation to performing household activities like cooking, cleaning, looking after the children and their education, women workers play an influential role. Here, they received minimal help from their

7 Ibid, p. 73.
male counterpart and sexual division of labour is distinctly visible in the household as well. The tea garden women workers are the major driving force, making important contributions not only in the field of reproduction that leads to not only the creation of the labour force, but also for extra-hands, particularly of the eldest daughter, at management of the household, as well as in that of production.

In the Tea Estates, it is the women who pick leaves and this activity is outside the ‘private’ domain. Gender roles on Tea Estates are very clearly defined. From the commencement of tea industry to the present times, women labours in Tea Estates are considered as important and expert in the task of plucking. Therefore, a general assumption that women are assigned only to a particular kind of job like plucking, is made. But, besides plucking, women are engaged in the works like pruning, sorting, sweeping and cleaning factory floors which require a lot of physical labour. They work equally with their male counterpart still their labour do not get due recognition and thus occupy lower position in Estate hierarchy.\(^9\)

Moreover, job segregation is apparent; they are not enrolled in the factory to operate machines, drive tractors or handle Estate vehicle. They are not even engaged to work as Boidars, Munshis and Chaprasis. Power has been given to them to act only as Sardarin whose number is also negligible. They have to perform their duties through the Manager’s hukum (order). Gender dimensions of tea plantation workers could not be understood without knowing the nature of their migration and settlement, recruitment process, gender division of work, organizational set-up of plantation, nature and types of work, wages, adjustment in plantation work and commitment.

Tea garden women labours make very substantial contribution towards the sustenance of their families through their role in domestic capacity and various community rituals, or as wage earners, is often overlooked and never evaluated. Moreover, Estate Authorities’ lacks of concern to improve the lives of women show the kind of power relations which enhance the workload of labour women.

\(^9\) Field Survey conducted in the Tea Estates.
The objectives of the proposed study are:

- To trace the historical background of women’s recruitment in tea plantations of Sonitpur District
- To examine the type of labour and position of women in the power-structure of the workplace
- To understand women’s labour and lives in the household

The Study Area is confined to Sonitpur District. Sonitpur District lies between 26° 30’ N and 27° 01’ N Latitude and between 92° 16’ E and 93° 43’ E Longitude. It is spread over an area of 5,324 sq. km. on north bank of Brahmaputra River. The District falls in the Sub-Tropical climatic region, and enjoys Monsoon type of climate. According to 2001 Census, Sonitpur District has a population of 16,77,874, where 8,64,125 are males and 8,13,749 are females, with a density of 315 persons per sq. km. and the literacy rate of males and females are 57.20% and 43.98% respectively. The population of Sonitpur is 1,925,975 as per 2011 Census. The research covers a period of twenty five years from 1983 to 2008. The year 1983 has been chosen as it marked the formation of Sonitpur District while the year 2008 covers two and a half decades for a substantial micro-level study.

Prior to 1983, Sonitpur was not created as a separate District and its jurisdiction was under Darrang District. It is therefore, necessary to look briefly into the historical background of Sonitpur as a District. Due to the annexation of Brahmaputra valley to the British Colonial Government in 1826, Assam soon turned to be an asset with the discovery of tea. After 1826 the Lower Assam and the Central Assam (Darrang, Nagaon and Raha) were made one division which extended up to Biswanath in Darrang District. The Division was placed under one Administrative Officer designated as the Principal Assistant to the Commissioner. The Upper

11 Census of India Report, 2011.
Assam portion was left to the native rulers with supervisory control under a British Political Agent with political headquarters at Biswanath. Captain Neufville was the Political Agent for Upper Assam. Darrang Division was administered till 1833 from Gauhati (now Guwahati). Darrang was converted into a District and Mangaldai was made the District Headquarters in 1833 and in 1835 the Headquarters was shifted to Tezpur. The District comprised of two Sub-Divisions, Tezpur and Mangaldoi with Headquarters at Mangaldoi. Gradually, for administrative convenience erstwhile Darrang District was bifurcated in 1983, into Sonitpur and Darrang District. The former Tezpur Sub-Division was upgraded and named as Sonitpur District with an outlying Sub-Division at Biswanath Chariali. On 15th August, 2000, another Sub-Division namely Gohpur was carved out from the erstwhile Biswanath Sub-Division. At present, Sonitpur comprises three Sub-Divisions, namely, Tezpur, Biswanath Chariali and Gohpur. All these political changes led to the heterogeneous admixture of different ethnic groups.

The District is located between mighty Brahmaputra River in south and Himalayan foothills of Arunachal Pradesh in North and Lakhimpur District in East to Darrang District in west. With some hills the District is largely plain and a number of rivers which mainly originate in the Himalayan foothills ultimately flow southward and fall into the Brahmaputra River. The economy of Sonitpur is largely agrarian, supplemented by trade and commerce. Majority of the population of the District depend on agriculture and other allied activities for their livelihood. Rice is the staple food. Paddy, jute, sugarcane, tea, pulses and mustard are the major crops and tobacco, potato, vegetables and fruits like coconut, banana, pineapple, orange, and mango are subsidiary crops. Sonitpur is a trade center for Bomdilla, Tawang, Seppa and Itanagar of Arunachal Pradesh. The population of the District has been increasing at the decadal growth rate of 27.62 percent during 1961 and 1971 censuses, while it was 34.95 percent for Assam. During 1971 and 1991 the percentage of decadal variation in population was 57.14 against 53.26 percent of
Assam as a whole. The decadal variation in population since 1901 in the District is shown in Appendix - 1.

For a historical analysis of micro-level study, the selected Tea Estates are Nahorani, Sessa, Shakomato, Dhullie, Nirmala, and Nya Gogra of three Sub-Divisions i.e., Tezpur, Biswanath and Gohpur. For the study, two Tea Estates from each Sub-Division have been taken. Therefore, total six Tea Estates are selected at random which are under different Managements considering the size and location of each Estates and also by keeping in mind that there are as many as sixty one big Tea Estates (according to Tea Directory, 1982) existing in Sonitpur District and the District alone constitutes the highest number of labour employed in different Tea Estates. A detailed report on area under tea crop and name of the Companies of the Tea Estates in the District has been attached in Annexure – II. Location of Tea Estates in Sonitpur District has been shown in Map No. 1 and another two Maps showing location of Tea Estates in Assam and Tea Plantation Area in Sonitpur District has been attached in Annexure – III and Annexure – IV respectively.

Two Tea Estates, **Nahorani and Sessa**, from Tezpur Sub-Division are taken for the study. **Nahorani** under Tezpur Sub-Division is one of the largest Tea Estates. It is owned by Amalgamated Plantations Private Limited and was established in 1910. The Tea Estate occupies a total area of 1115.26 hectares and out of which 671.00 hectares are dedicated to tea plantation.

**Sessa** of Tezpur Sub-Division is under Apeejay Tea Group which has 17 Estates, spread over 50,000 acres in Assam, produce 25 million kilograms (approximately) of tea. Apeejay Tea Limited, Empire & Singlo Tea Limited, part of Apeejay Tea Group are the oldest tea companies in India. Apeejay Tea, formerly known as Assam Frontier Tea Limited was established in 1889. Empire & Singlo is the merged entity following the amalgamation of Empire Plantations (India) Limited established in 1863 and Singlo (India) Tea Company Limited established in 1864.
Two Tea Estates, **Shakomato and Dhallie**, from Biswanath Sub-Division are taken for the study. **Shakomato Tea Estates**, situated on the North Bank of Brahmaputra in Biswanath Sub-Division is owned by M/s. Darshanlal Jagdish Parshad Private Limited, who is in the business of tea production and marketing for more than 70 years. The founder Lala Darshanlalji of Dehradun was one of the pioneers of the tea industry in India. Under the name of M/s Sheo Parshad Darshanlal, the group flourished and spread over Assam, Darjeeling and South India. Shakomato Tea Estate was acquired from M/s James Warren & Co. Limited in 1963 and was developed under an able guidance of Jagdish Parshad by the name of M/s Darshanlal Jagdish Parshad Private Limited. At that time of the inception of Tea Estates, the production was approximately 0.4 million kilograms and today it has gone up to 1.3 million kilograms. The production yield is approximately 2500 kilograms/ hectare.

**Dhallie Tea Estate** is owned by Assam Brook Limited, earlier known as Brook Bond Estates India Limited. The Company is engaged in cultivation, manufacture, processing and marketing of tea. The Company owns two Tea Estates namely Tinkharia and Dhallie. Dhallie Tea Estate covers a total area of 1088.96 hectares and 500.00 hectares areas are under tea plantation.

Two Tea Estates, **Nirmala and Nya Gogra**, from Gohpur Sub-Division are taken for study. **Nirmala Tea Estate**, located in Gohpur Sub-Division occupies a total area of 298.19 hectares. It is owned by New Manas Tea Estates Private Limited. It is a Private Company incorporated in 1968. **Nya Gogra** was established in 1926 and subsequently amalgamated with McLeod Russel India Limited in 1977. The out division, Gohpur, a separate entity under McNeill & Magor Limited, merged with Nya Gogra in 1988. Two more divisions, Satrang and Gogra, constitute the 1121.04 hectares represent the Estate today.

**A Literature Review** for the present study is organized into three categories, namely, secondary works on Feminist theories, tea industries in North East India and other works and articles specifically related to women tea labour in Assam.
Works on Feminist Theories have been consulted to develop conceptual clarity and understand the Feminist perspective in writing the Thesis. In this context the most important work is Chris Beasley’s *What is Feminism? An Introduction to Feminism*. This work reviews the theories which are associated with the Feminists movements of the West. In *Feminist Theory Today: An Introduction to Second-Wave Feminism*, Judith Evans provides an overview of feminist theoretical writings. It deals with the issues of equality and difference in feminist thought and covers all the major variants of feminist political theory. Many feminists studied the subordination of women and patriarchal domination and it help us to locate women in the historical process.

Gerda Lerner in, *The Creation of Patriarchy* mentioned an important hypothesis that it is the relation of women to history that elucidates the nature of female subordination, their opposition and the rise of feminists consciousness. Sheila Rowbotham an important figure in British Feminist Movement contributed a lot through her works which are helpful to understand women in historical process. Her major work *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women’s Oppression and the Fight Against It* examines the situation of women in contemporary capitalism and also upholds the view that there exists a link between women’s movement and their representation in history. Her works influenced the contemporary feminist writers. Sylvia Walby in *Theorizing Patriarchy* explains that there are two different basic forms of patriarchy which emerge in response to the tensions between capitalist economies and patriarchal household economies: private and public patriarchy.

*German Ideology* of Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels is considered as an important Marxist writing. It was in this work that for the first time the materialist way of

---

understanding history became visible. Marx’s view of history becomes relevant and also useful to study women in history as it gives us a methodology to relate women to production, to social relations and to the cultural domination by men. Fredrick Engels famous work *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*\(^\text{18}\) mentioned that a fully materialist analysis of production and reproduction of immediate life reveals a two-fold character: the production of the means of existence and the production of the human beings themselves. Through such assertion he tried to lay a basis for theorizing the specific oppression of women. One of the prominent Socialist Feminist is Juliet Mitchell. In *Woman’s Estate*\(^\text{19}\) Mitchell argues that the definition of feminity and family is crucial in considering the special features of women’s oppression in the contemporary capitalist society. It is mainly within the development of her feminine psyche that the woman finds oppression. There is the need to analyze the socio-economic position of women.

**Secondary works on tea industries in North East India gives** detailed information on the history of tea plantations in India and especially in Assam is available in the books like *The History of the Indian Tea Industry*\(^\text{20}\) by Percival Griffiths which provides detailed information on almost every aspect of the Indian tea industry under the control of British capital and predictably viewed the issues of coercion and exploitation through the lens of Planter paternalism. The book did not discuss any aspect of the tea-garden women workers of Assam and Sonitpur. *A History of the Assam Company: 1839-1953*\(^\text{21}\) by Hinson Allan Antrobus narrated the details of the production processes, finances, machinery, marketing and management operations of the Companies. But, it does not discuss the socio-economic conditions of women workers of Assam and Sonitpur. *Planter-Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and

---


Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826-1947, by Amalendu Guha is one of the pioneering work on the history of modern Assam where labour and the tea plantations received noteworthy attention. Guha’s prime emphasis is on the power and influence of the Planters’ around which the issues like labour and resistance are discussed. One Hundred Years of Servitude: Political Economy of Tea Plantations in Colonial Assam, by Rana Pratap Behal is another pioneering works on tea plantations of Assam since the book represents the history of tea plantations in Assam (Brahmaputra) Valley during the Colonial rule with a special focus on their labour force. It examines how the migrant agrarian communities were transformed into ‘coolies’. The book provides an extensive description based on primary sources and it covers the history of labour force and the role of the Colonial state in Assam. Class Formation in the Plantation System, by Sharit Bhowmik also throws important light on the history of tea plantations in India, especially in Assam. Regarding the growth of Trade Union and class consciousness among the tea garden workers valuable information can be obtained from the works like Tea Garden Labour of Assam: A Socio-Economic Study, by S.S. Harlalka. Jalad Baran Ganguly, in Tea Industry in the Economic Development of North-East Region provides a typical example of usual colonial pattern of exploitation. He is of the view that the large tea plantations of Assam were efficiently managed and yielding high profits but they were not helpful in accelerating regional growth.

Works and articles in journals on women labour are scant. So far as the present literature on this issue is concerned, only a few studies of the socio-economic

---

23 Rana Pratap Behal, One Hundred Years of Servitude: Political Economy of Tea Plantations in Colonial Assam, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2014.
development and working conditions of female workers of the tea industry of Assam have been done. Status of Women Working in the Tea Plantations\textsuperscript{27} by Elizabeth Kaniampady contains the position of women in family and society. It also mentions the role and status of women in terms of their tribe, caste and religious affiliations. But it does not discuss the position of women in the power-structure of the workplace and as well as within the household.

The book, Role of Women Workers in the Tea Industry of North East India\textsuperscript{28} by Navinder K. Singh has discussed the various social, cultural and functional activities of female tea pluckers of North East India. But it did not discuss in details the lives, paid, unpaid and household role of tea garden women workers of Sonitpur. There is a need for an in-depth study.

Samita Sen in her article, Gender and Class: Women in Indian Industry, 1890-1990\textsuperscript{29} opines that male workers’ control over their women’s productive and reproductive activities came to be reflected in Trade Union policies. In her study entitled Gender Dimensions of Tea Plantation workers in West Bengal\textsuperscript{30}, Mita Bhadra attempts to inter-relate the gender role of tribal women workers in the production process and home. It is evident from this work that gender dimensions of tea plantation workers could not be understood without knowing the nature of their migration and settlement, recruitment process, gender division of work, organizational set-up, nature and types of work, wage, nature of adaptation and adjustment in plantation work, commitment and absenteeism. Such assumption has helped to prepare the background for undertaking the proposed study.


\textsuperscript{30} Mita Bhadra, Gender Dimensions of Tea Plantation workers in West Bengal, Indian Anthropologist, Vol.34, 2004.
There exists a few literary works written in Assamese language which deals with the socio-economic and cultural aspects of tea garden workers’ lives. *Chah Bagichar Jivan Aru Sanskriti*\(^{31}\) - a book on lifestyle and culture of the tea-garden community of Assam, written by Sushil Kurmi has made an attempt to discuss the past and present working life of the tea community as well as their socio-cultural life. But, it fails to discuss productive and reproductive role of women workers of Sonitpur. Among the Asam Sahitya Sabha’s Assamese language publication, the earliest work is Nakul Chandra Bhuyan’s *Chah Bagisar Bonua*\(^{32}\) which deals with the history and culture of tea workers of Assam.

The Review of literature has helped in understanding the issues related to women labour in Tea Estates. Thus, this research work is undertaken with the hope of filling up such gap and the study draws on insight provided by Feminist writings and the empirical data provided by the historians of the region.

**RATIONALE:**

The analysis is important to understand paid, unpaid, productive, reproductive, position of labour women and the dynamics of power relations in the socio-economic structure of Tea Estates of Sonitpur, since no such study has been made so far.

**METHODOLOGY:**

Since the major thrust of this study is on understanding in a historically specific way, the lives, labour, paid and unpaid role, and contribution of tea garden women labour to socio-economic production in a specific regional context namely Sonitpur, the study is influenced by a feminist approach and will use the Socialist Feminist Methodology as it offers the best available representation of reality from the standpoint of women. Its ideals are designed to overcome the narrowness and

---

masculine bias of prevailing theories by emphasizing directly on the women’s experience of their lives and labour.

Household is not only confined to reproduction and consumption but it is often a production and economic unit as well. Women labours of Sonitpur here play an important role. Hence, one needs to explore the themes like family and household relations on the one hand and work and production on the other.\textsuperscript{33} Paid and unpaid role of tea garden women labour is extensive.

By arguing their methodological commitment as Marxist, Socialist Feminism wants to develop the theoretical understanding of the difference between women and men through an examination of sexual division of labour. They mainly focus on the social and economic organization of work in capitalist system, on the relations between paid and unpaid labour, interconnection between production and reproduction and the private and the public in order to develop a historical materialist account of the social construction of sex and gender. For them the major condition for the adequacy of feminist theory is that it should acknowledge the standpoint of women.

To view women’s work from this standpoint one has to discount the idea that the work women do or perform in a particular economy are natural or biological given. A Socialist Feminist perspective allow us to understand that the characteristics usually associated with women’s work are very much a social construct that fits in with the general image of women. Viewing women’s work in Tea Estates from this perspective would allow us to find answers to more complex questions like: do women perform only plucking tasks in Tea Estates? Do they engage in household activities? In what ways the working women are constructed in Assam? Do her work and labour get due recognition? These are the complex questions that have to be resolved to understand the contributions of working women to economy and society.

One needs to understand the past of the particular industry in terms of gender relations that existed and compare the same of the present.

In Tea Estates the hierarchy of Planter-Manager-Babu stands tall. As patriarchy operates in invisible ways, there is a need to look beyond the apparent to understand the dynamics of power relations. Besides a critique of patriarchy, the main aspect of Feminist Research and data analysis is the usage of gender and patriarchy as important tools of analysis. The present study is therefore, based on gender sensitive approach. The substantial critique of patriarchy is also highlighted in the study. The concept of ‘public patriarchy’ as elaborated in Third Chapter has been found very useful for the present work.

Oral methodology is of great importance to retrieve women’s role since most of the available data are gender absent. There are different factors that have necessitated the use of oral sources like dearth of recorded files and other documents, and much of its history is yet to be explored. The work is conducted on the basis of intensive study using Multi-Stage Sampling. District forms the first stage, Tea Estates form the second stage and the respondents, the third or ultimate stage of Sampling. For the selection of respondents, number of permanent working labour women in all six selected Tea Estates is obtained through field work and 15 percent of the total permanent working labour women in each Tea Estates are considered to be a representative sample. Accordingly, a Sample of 350 labour women are taken with probability proportional to the total number of women labour in each selected Tea Estates by the method of Simple Random Sampling. The following Table 1.1 shows the number of total respondents that have been taken from each Tea Estates for study:
TABLE 1.1: ESTATEWISE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENT WOMEN TAKEN FOR STUDY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Tea Estates</th>
<th>Permanent Labour Women</th>
<th>Respondent Labour Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nahorani</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sessa</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakomato</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhullie</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nirmala</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nya Gogra</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2333</strong></td>
<td><strong>350</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey, 11/07/2012

With the help of respondent women, a modest attempt has been made to assess their position in the housework and workplace. Again, keeping in mind the objectives of the study, information has been collected through historical analysis which in turn helps to understand labour women’s contemporary situations. While conducting the study, those respondent women engaged in Tea Estates since 1983 have been also taken into consideration as the older generation of workers. So, their narratives would throw insight into the power relations in workplace, family structure, amenities and dual role of women during the last few decades of the twentieth century. This would help in substantiating archival records.

Since the main focus of the study is on women’s labour in everyday life and various aspects of it, the study interviewed women of different religions and ethnic groups. A Questionnaire Schedule has been prepared as a tool for interviewing 350 respondent women labour for the quantitative dimension. Information has also been gathered with the help of key informants. Data has thus been collected by Field Study based on questionnaires and interviews along with group discussions with the labour women of selected Tea Estates. Such group discussions are an important method used to capture the perception and experience of workers which provided further qualitative insights.
This qualitative information provided depth to the quantitative survey as well as acted as a cross check. Non-Participant Direct Observation was another method used for strengthening the qualitative data. Such technique helped in gaining insight into the process of work for example, the operations at the factory, field which involved plucking, pruning, hoeing, spraying, creche, dispensary, and so on. Interview guides for the different types of interviews have been added in Annexure - V. Thus, narratives and information drawn through the interview and questionnaire provide a substantial source material for this study. Such an approach becomes effective in a given area of inquiry, generating historical insight and understanding situations, which are inaccessible by other forms of investigation.

To conduct this proposed study both the primary and secondary sources are used. Primary data has been gathered from Gazetteers, Census Reports, Government Proceedings and Reports, Archival data from Assam State Archives, Statistical data from Tea Board, through field-study and interview schedules. The study also involves analysis of oral tradition with a critical approach to interpret the existing sources, based on internal and external criticism. Different books, articles and research papers on the related topics of tea garden women labour have been used as secondary sources. Information has also been derived from the websites.

The major hypothesis in this investigation is:

- Tea garden women workers of Sonitpur are victims of unrecognized labour and invisible dominance of both private and public patriarchies.

**ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTERS:**

The study has been organized into five chapters:

**Chapter 1, Introduction**, includes review of existing secondary data for conceptual clarity on gender, work and women’s role in production and reproduction. It highlights the area of study and methodology undertaken for this work.
Chapter 2, *Tea Plantation and Women’s Recruitment: Historical Background* traces briefly the history of origin of tea in Assam and Sonitpur. It also presents the table-wise tea statistics of different periods. It emphasize on the methods of labour recruitment adopted by the British Planters. The main focus of this chapter is migration and recruitment of women in tea industry and factors responsible for their engagement in tea plantations.

Chapter 3, *An Exploitative Labour Regime: Women Labour in Tea Gardens* provides gender attributes to the different tasks perform in the Tea Estates under survey. Labour women play an influential role in production in the Sample Tea Estates. Therefore, it gives information on gender division of plantation work in field and garden factory, power relations in workplace and their wage payment system.

*Inner Dynamics of Private and Public Patriarchy forms Chapter 4.* The chapter explores women’s household responsibilities and division of labour in the Tea Estates. Therefore, it deals with the unpaid work of women with the help of respondents’ narratives of their past experiences. It focuses on the family composition, household responsibilities, child bearing and rearing practices. On the other hand it highlights the Planter’s general apathy to improve the lives of the women labour. Thus, the chapter mainly focuses on the ground realities which are gathered through questionnaires and interviews. It also seeks to know respondents view on medical services, their membership in Trade Unions and their views on adequate supply of amenities. It briefly sketches the gender division of labour related to rituals. Overall it tends to focus on how labour women are the easy victims to the inner dynamics of both ‘private’ and ‘public’ patriarchy.

Chapter 5, *Conclusion*, records an overview of the entire discussion and highlights the major findings.
In order to trace the history of Tea Garden Women Labour of Sonitpur in Assam, it is necessary to provide the historical background of the tea plantation system and women’s recruitment in Assam.