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**Role of Family and Trade Unions in Affecting Women
Workers Fair Representation inside Trade Unions of
Assam Tea Plantations**

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Dedications

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List of Acronyms

CITU	Centre of Indian Trade Unions
ATTSA	All Assam Tea Tribes Student
SEWA	Self Employed Women's Association
PLA	Plantation Labour Act
OBC	Other Backward Castes
ACMS	Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha
ILO	International Labour Organization
TGC	Tea Garden Community of Assam
INTUC	Indian National Trade Union Congress
AITUC	All India Trade Union Congress
BMS	Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangha
HMS	Hind Mazdoor Sabha

Abstract

This study focuses on women workers in tea plantations of Assam to understand their political representation inside trade unions. Despite constituting the majority of workforce, their socio-economic issues remain unheard. Trade unions accountability towards securing workers interests and security is found to be bleak due to which women attain the lowest position inside the plantation hierarchy. In this study, roles of both trade unions and families is focused on either favouring or restricting a fair representation of women workers. Both public and private spaces are considered to study how different social, economic, political, and historical elements affect women workers lives.

This study uses a theoretical framework of patriarchy and gender, sexual division of labour, feminization of labour and intersectionality to uncover and analyse how women workers face marginalization that directly and indirectly shapes their position, thereby limiting their political representation. This paper argues that the economic space continues to effect women workers' political representation due to socio-economic, political, and historical factors. Social space of families though is patriarchal in nature; the level of patriarchal authority is not similar inside the tea garden families of Assam.

Relevance to Development Studies

Women workers form the backbone of tea industry in Assam. They face various forms of oppression in their everyday socio-economic lives governed by plantation management and other external factors. Low bargaining power, low wage payments, low literacy rates etc. all adds up to their marginalisation to a great extent. The irony is that despite facing countless issues, little has been done to improve their socio-economic conditions. Their deplorable conditions seem to worsen more due to a lack of political representation inside tea trade unions. Thus, there is an urgent need to revise acts, enforce provisions and bring a transformative change inside the functioning of tea trade unions which can serve as a better place for every women workers to live and work in tea plantations of Assam.

Keywords

tea plantations, Assam, women workers, intersectionality, sexual division of labour, patriarchy, colonial regime, trade unions, family, feminization.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Historical Background

Tea is one of the most consumed drinks in the world after water (Banerji et al. 2019). With a history of more than 200 years, tea plantations in India are widely known for its global tea production and exports. Much of India's tea produce come from Assam, located in the north-eastern part of the country.

Tea plantation communities inside Assam comprises of multi-ethnic groups who have migrated during the British colonial era. They are referred to as “tea-garden community” that comprises of plantation workers and their dependents (“Tea-garden community of Assam”, 2020). Assam plantations like other tea plantations are well known in its time for slavery and repressive forms of exploitation since the 1840's. Workers are denied their basic rights and are subjected to massive exploitation by the plantation management and companies (Banerji et al. 2019, p.9). One of the major elements of the Assam tea industry began with the indenture¹ system. This system of recruitment started in the late 1860's wherein the native contractors provided the Assam plantations with thousands of laborers coming from the then Chotanagpur region, parts of Orissa, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Issues like landslides, droughts and floods were very frequent in laborer's regions, thus keeping meagre options for an alternative employment. Left with no other options, laborers had to migrate to Assam to work in tea plantations for a livelihood (Saha et al. 2019, p.7).

While plantations on one hand serve the livelihood objectives of the laborers; on the other hand, they marginalize laborers in numerous ways through low wages, restricted mobility, access to rights and entitlements and most importantly poor work and living conditions. In all these aspects of marginalisation, it is the women workers who are the worst sufferers as compared to men workers.

In post-independent India, the Indian government passed a new legislation including all major provisions for the workers employed under plantation industry. This legislation came to be known as PLA Act which was passed in 1951; implemented in Assam and West Bengal. The act makes it mandatory for every plantation management to provide employers with various socio-economic and welfare benefits. Benefits like bonus, minimum wages, rations, education, and provident fund etc. are to be availed by any workers irrespective of given circumstances. But the reality behind the implementation of this act is extremely disappointing. This serves as few of the many reasons why workers in general are living under exploitative situations inside tea plantations of Assam.

Women workers have been long dominated inside the plantations since the beginning of colonial rule. Patriarchal oppression and sexual division of labor has shaped gendered relations inside both public and private space enormously which positions women at the lowest level of plantation hierarchy.

Inside public space (*plantation areas*), women workers plucking as a skill is considered as a no-skilled or semi-skilled job thereby limiting them to actively participate in major activities inside the plantations and trade unions. Due to family recruitment policies adopted during colonial rule; only those women workers were allowed entry into tea plantations who were known to men staying inside the tea plantations and if unknown by the men relatives; women worker was not allowed entry. A similar pattern was found inside private space (*family*) of a

¹ A system of bonded labor introduced by British colonizers in India which compelled laborers to work in various plantations across India (Bhowmik 2011, p.237).

woman worker. Women were dependent on men's opinions regarding decision making power and thus remain subordinated.

Even though the colonial rule ended; its consequences still exists today inside the Assam tea plantations. Generations of subjugation can be seen inside trade unions, plantation areas, factories, labor lines² and inside families of tea plantations.

1.2 An Overview of the Assam Tea Plantations

Assam has a strong prominent position in global trade because of its large-scale tea production. Growth in tea production have increased the profitability of private companies, tea brands, export markets to a huge extent since the past few years. But this increase in profits always comes at the cost of plantation workers' lives.

Map 1.1
Map of Assam



Source: Assam Map, 2020.

As a continuation of the colonial times, even today workers inside the plantation industry functions under several historical disadvantages. Out of all, there are three main disadvantages which is highlighted here. Firstly, workers are migrants who were forced to migrate to work inside tea plantations of Assam due to '*push and pull*' factors (Duara, Mallick 2019). They were lured by false promises of better living conditions and higher pay. Secondly, colonial planters adopted family recruitment of laborers to fulfil two motives. The colonisers wanted a stable labour production and higher productivity. Thirdly, coercion and control strategies were further used by colonial planters to control labourers inside the tea plantations. Watchmen were kept outside labour lines to restrict any outsiders from entering the plantations. Tea plantations are mostly located in isolated places, where there is no form of any alternative source of employment available.

Poor labour-manager relations arise due to workers' deplorable work and living conditions. It has been argued that since managers deny labourers with basic facilities and wage payments; this tends to outrage labourers into violence in the tea plantations. While all

² These are residential quarters of workers inside tea plantations (Bhowmik 2011, p.242).

labourers go through these issues, the atrocities faced by women workers tend to be higher than the men counterparts.

Contemporary studies on plantations reflect workers inside Assam tea plantations undergoing exploitative situations, considering certain provisions of the PLA act are not implemented. Some of the few examples are – low wage payments, low illiteracy, poor health, and housing conditions etc. (Saha et al. 2019). Because of the weak enforcement of this act, plantation workers socio-economic status is poor. Further, women workers status is lower than men due to gendered differences among them. For example – though wages paid to plantation workers are below the standard agricultural wage in Assam, women workers' wages are even lower than men workers' wages (Duara, Mallick 2019). Women constitutes more than fifty percent of the total workforce inside tea plantations of Assam. Despite constituting the majority population, they remain marginalized inside the tea plantations due to poor socio-economic conditions, gendered plantation system, and political factors etc.

1.3 Paper Outline

This paper comprises of six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic of research with a historical background to the study. A contextual background to the research problem is provided along with research objective and questions.

Chapter 2 dwells on the methodology implemented in this study along with methods of data collection. It also provides challenges and limitations faced as a researcher.

Chapter 3 provides theoretical frameworks and spells out why these theories are relevant in this research. Gendered identities of women workers and gendered nature of the institutions of tea plantations in Assam is emphasised to analyse how women workers are perceived inside the tea plantations thereby affecting their political representation and participation. To understand the issues affecting women workers and their political representation; theories of patriarchy and gender, sexual division of labour, intersectionality and feminization of labour is discussed briefly in this chapter.

Chapter 4 provides a picture of trade unions and families operating inside tea plantations of Assam. This chapter reflects a current situation of how both trade unions and families affect women workers political representation inside tea trade unions including excerpts from research participants interviews.

Chapter 5 in light of the above, this chapter provides a detailed analysis of social, economic, political, and historical factors affecting women workers representation inside tea trade unions of Assam, using the findings from the interviews with women workers in the plantations.

Chapter 6 provides a conclusion to the research along with recommendations for future research.

1.4 Contextual Background

It is found that out of 20, only 7 women workers held membership position in tea plantation trade unions of Assam (Duara 2017, p.11). Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha also known as ACMS was founded in 1958 in Dibrugarh in Assam ('Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha', 2020). It is the dominant trade union consisting of 22 branches and a total of 600 members from all districts of Assam to control the bargaining and negotiation between workers and management (Duara 2017). Its aim is to uplift plantation workers by reducing socio-economic and political exploitation and bringing overall development of workers. But such a situation is rarely seen today inside trade unions of Assam tea plantations. Hence, there is a need to

explore ACMS and its functioning in present day situation to understand women workers political representation.

Women workers spend most of their time inside their family. In average, they spend eight to nine hours with their family members. Hence, it is crucial to explore different social categories operating inside family which affects their representation to join trade unions. For example: most of the families inside tea plantations of Assam are patriarchal. This impacts women's choice of joining trade union as it is not their independent choice rather their husbands/fathers/sons etc.

Moreover, there are limited studies undertaken to explore both family and trade unions to understand fair representation of women workers inside Assam tea plantations. While some research focused on trade unions role in affecting workers lives in general; others explored how colonialism played a major role in marginalising women's position inside plantation sphere. Hence it will be holistic to consider both social and political institutions of trade unions and family to explore whether a fair representation of women workers is favoured or restricted inside Assam tea plantations.

1.5 Statement of the Research Problem

Women workers continue to be subjected to exploitation and domination under the present plantation system, and much is needed to be done to reduce the atrocities that they have been facing since centuries. To raise voice against such inequalities it is essential for women to move up the occupational ladder (*in this case representing themselves in the trade unions*).

In the context of Assam tea plantations, few studies reflect how political parties and their ideologies combined with social and historical factors inside tea plantations restricts a women worker's representation. This study is based on qualitative online telephonic interviews with six women workers and six family members of women workers. It is supported by theoretical framework, followed by an analysis of the data collected.

Trade unions and families are important institutions which shape women workers lives differently across tea plantations of Assam. Socio-economic inequalities are faced by women workers inside both spaces of family and trade unions. These inequalities are spread in each aspects of the gendered plantation system in Assam. For example: sexual division of labour is deep rooted, and the consequences are felt by women workers both inside trade unions and family. A combined effect of all these inequalities inside both institutions thereby shape women workers political representation inside tea trade unions of Assam. Hence, I consider an analysis of trade unions and families important through conversation with women workers to study a fair representation of women workers.

The study is innovative since, in the case of women workers in plantation, the private sphere of family combined with that of the public sphere of trade union has never been theorized together extensively. The private sphere of "family" is rarely studied inside Assam tea plantations and hence this research aims to fill this gap.

1.6 Research Objective

The objective of this research is to critically study the representation of women workers inside trade unions of Assam tea plantations.

1.7 Main question:

How do women workers families and the tea trade unions impose institutional barriers against fair representation of women within the union?

1.7.1 Sub Questions:

- a. What role does the family as an institution play for or against women's engagements or active participation in the tea trade union's in Assam?
- b. What are the social, economic, and political factors contributing to or restricting the representation of women workers in the tea plantations in trade unions, labor unions and tea welfare associations in Assam?

Chapter 2 Research Methodology

2.1 Qualitative Research Method & Secondary Data

This research adopts a qualitative research method and secondary data sources to analyse the data gathered from online telephonic interviews with six women workers, six family members, trade unions and independent labour unions inside tea plantations of Assam.

Before moving forward, I would like to highlight some reflections from the initial stages of the interview process. The entire process of taking online telephonic interviews was possible through help of certain frontline workers and few influential members working inside tea garden communities of Assam.

During an initial conversation with the frontline workers, I was made aware of certain relevant factors regarding the current conditions of women workers and situations they are living under the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic. I was also informed about the tea garden community at large, ratio of women to men workers, existing trade unions and plantation management etc. Through this information, I was able to further make modifications in my interview questions and thereby built a good repo. As I shared with the frontline workers that I would not be able to conduct field surveys due to nationwide lockdown; they seemed happy to help.

During an initial round of conversation with my research participants there was a sense of discomfort and insecurity. As I detailed them regarding the motive and goal of my study, women workers felt hesitated to speak. It was later that I was told this is because of certain control strategies adopted by plantation system. Plantation management keeps a vigil eye on every women workers activity. Hence, if found out that women workers are engaging into something without management's advice there is a probability of facing consequences. But gradually as conversations grew; women workers felt comfortable to appear for an interview. The front-line workers who helped me with my research spent extra time besides the interviews; to help me translate the indigenous language that was spoken by most women workers inside tea plantations of Assam. This will be further elaborated in the challenges section of my study.

Qualitative research methodology can be defined as a prototype which occurs in a natural setting and allows a researcher to gain high level of insights from their participation in the real setting (Mohajan cited in Creswall 2018). Through an understanding of their social life it enables us to know and share experiences of people. Moreover, it focuses on words rather than numbers which provides a deeper understanding of the everyday life of people, things, and situations.

This research is purely based on a primary qualitative study using online telephonic interviews and secondary data as methods for data collection. Open-ended interview questions were designed based on the information gained from journal articles relating to the situation in the tea plantations (*see page 36*). At first, three set of questions were formulated – one for trade unions members/leaders, one for women workers and the other for family members of women workers.

Interviews with women workers and their family members went as planned. However, the second set of interviews with trade union members/leaders did not go as planned. This was due to rising COVID 19 cases in Assam and thereby limited time constraints to take interviews. Hence, I utilized secondary data sources (*internet, journals, and articles*) and participants responses to explore trade unions role in affecting fair representation of women workers.

Before the real interviews, I conducted a mock interview with two of my research participants (*women workers*). It was only after this that I realized that all tea garden communities in Assam spoke indigenous language called Sadri³. This meant the responses needed translation from local indigenous language (*Sadri*) to local regional language (*Assamese*). When I shared to one of the front-line workers; she readily agreed to help me as a language mediator. Furthermore, not all women workers and family members were limited to one language (*Sadri*) as a few others knew (*Assamese*) as well.

2.2 Data Collection

2.2.1 Primary Data

Primary data was collected through online telephonic interviews of a total of 12 research participants. While six were women workers; the other six were family members of women workers inside tea plantations. All research participants belonged to the tea garden communities located in upper Assam. Upper Assam is situated in the northern part of the state from where most of the tea produce comes from. They belonged from two districts in Upper Assam namely – *Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur*.

Reaching out to women workers was a tedious task since I was not familiar with the physical environment and the place. The front-line workers in the area helped me to identify women workers with respect to specific location within tea plantations of Assam. While women workers in my study aged between 40 and 60 years; their family members aged between 15 and 60 years of age. Since generally women workers have less time; they agreed for interviews after their work (*plucking tea leaves*) ended at 4:00 pm every evening. This time slot was still not assumed to be fixed since it varied as per women workers availability and consent. The estimated time for one interview with women worker and her family member was 2 and half hours. Thus, in total it took around 15 hours for interviewing both women workers and her family members.

Since women workers in my study have been working inside tea plantations since the past 20 years their responses received were significant. To create a comfortable environment, I started by asking informal questions about their day to day life. Questions like - How was their day? or What did they eat for their lunch? etc. were asked before the interview questions. This helped both women workers and I to know about each other better, thereby creating a comfortable atmosphere.

Tea garden communities are mostly located in deserted areas outside the town and cities; and thus, internet connection was poor. Frontline workers visited women workers houses from where they called me through WhatsApp voice call from their own phones. Since most workers did not have a smartphone or a phone, I would WhatsApp call frontline workers phone for the interview and consequently record the responses.

2.2.2 Secondary Data

Secondary data was collected through various journal articles, previous research conducted by ILO, internet websites and social media. I utilised secondary data mainly for two purposes. Firstly, to understand the role of trade union members and leaders on a fair representation of women workers inside trade unions of Assam tea plantations. Secondly, to better analyse the primary data collected in this study.

³ An indigenous language spoken by tea garden communities of Assam ('Sadri Language', 2020).

Table 2.1
Research Participants & Sites (*Women workers & family members*)

District	Women Workers (Pseudo Names)	Relationship with family member	Indigenous Identity	Age	Tea Estate	Religion	Language
Lakhimpur	Kamla	Daughter	OBC (Tea Tribe Caste)	45	Ananda Pathali	Christian	Sadri
Dibrugarh	Roshni	Daughter	OBC (Tea Tribe Caste)	42	Namroop	Hindu	Sadri
Dibrugarh	Trisha	Daughter in-law	OBC (Tea Tribe Caste)	42	Namroop	Christian	Sadri
Lakhimpur	Sonali	Son	OBC (Tea Tribe Caste)	56	Dinjoye	Hindu	Sadri
Dibrugarh	Sapna	Husband	OBC (Tea Tribe Caste)	55	Namroop	Christian	Sadri
Lakhimpur	Megha	Father in-law	OBC (Tea Tribe Caste)	57	Ananda Pathali	Christian	Sadri

Source: Author's data collected through interviews.

Table 2.2
Wage differences between men and women workers

AVERAGE DAILY EARNINGS (Amount in INR and US dollars)			As of current scenario, both men and women workers get equal payment of 177 INR (2.39\$). But this is not universal in all tea plantation districts in Assam.
	INR	US dollars	
Men Workers	5 INR	0,068\$	
Women Workers	4 INR	0,054\$	
Children	3 INR	0,041\$	

Source: (Bhuyan 2018, p.40).

2.3 Challenges & Limitations as a Researcher

2.3.1 Language Barrier

There was a language barrier to understand the responses delivered by research participants in my study. Due to this the first few interviews that were conducted are not considered in my study due to translation issues. This was further resolved as a front-line worker who accepted to translate all responses delivered from indigenous language (*Sadri*) to local regional language (*Assamese*).

2.3.2 COVID 19

COVID 19 has played a crucial role in impacting the research process. Initially, I had planned to do field surveys which later got converted to online telephonic interviews. Due to this, time frame of my study was also affected. As I was supposed to conduct interviews in the early stage of August; but due to lockdown imposed in Assam and rising COVID cases, the process got delayed.

2.3.3 Confidentiality Issues

As I first started to have conversations with women workers in (*Assamese*); I could sense a feeling that the workers were not comfortable. It is only later that I was told about an issue of confidentiality which was not maintained in an earlier case in a study done by Oxfam in 2019. The Oxfam's project promised workers confidentiality but later did not oblige by their commitments and this contributed to a sense of fear and unease among women workers to open up to other people/organisations who would want to study their lives inside the tea plantations.

2.3.4 Positionality as a researcher

As an international student carrying a regional Assamese identity; my image served to be favourable as well as unfavourable for my research. On one hand, the relation between participants and myself was “reserved” due to my image as a “privileged student”. On the other hand, my image served favourable as an Assamese woman/student as I got positive responses from local organisations, front-line workers, and field practitioners who helped me during my entire research phase.

During Term 2 at ISS, I took Feminist Perspective course and was exposed to the field of gender and development. As I wrote an essay on women's “agency” with respect to tea plantation workers in India, I further gained interest in studying women workers inside tea plantations. This was the starting point of how I gathered an initial interest in studying this topic which led me to choose it as my research topic.

2.3.5 Technical Issues

Tea plantations in Assam are located far away from the main town and cities. Due to this, there was poor network connectivity. Consequently, most of the interviews were conducted either through family members or front-line workers' phone.

2.4 Ethical Consent

Before conducting the interviews, all women workers and family members were asked permission for recording their responses. At first, they were hesitant for recording the interview. But later as I started to have an informal conversation; they got comfortable and agreed to record their voice. All research participants were informed about the purpose of my study and I was granted the permission to quote their words. Moreover, I have used self-styled names to protect the privacy of my research participants.

Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework

This research will use a combination of a few theoretical frameworks including patriarchy and gender, sexual division of labor, feminization of labor and intersectionality. Moreover, a relevance of using these specific theories to my paper is highlighted in specific portions to create a better understanding of the focus of my study.

3.1 Patriarchy & Gender

Patriarchy is “the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general” (Lerner cited in Hunter 1988). In this research, this definition has helped in understanding its role in the social construction of women workers during the colonial era (Lerner cited in Hunter 1988). In the context of Assam, patriarchy “had been differently exercised in the context of time, place and social structure” (Nath 2011, p.825).

In an Indian society, the norms of patriarchy originate from traditions and customs. Most societies are Brahmanical which focuses on men’s dominance over their women counterparts. A similar situation existed in pre- colonial Assam, where Hinduism acted as a barrier to women’s socio-economic freedom bounded by a patriarchal society. For example - education was important for women after western ideas got imported to Assam, but it was opposed by men and other conservatives. According to them, if girls receive education, they will get more freedom and become unfit for household chores. This is against the sanctity of Hindu traditions. Hence, women were not allowed to go outside their house and engaged into activities like weaving and sewing etc. (Nath 2011). Nath’s work reflects that women’s position and social values in Assamese societies are changed with respect to the location and context at which one is situated. For example, while in some Hindu societies’ women are not allowed to move freely; in non-Hindu societies it is the opposite.

Tea plantations of Assam is set in a colonial backdrop surrounded with forces of patriarchy, marginalization, and oppression faced by women workers. Women’s role of a working-class women is shaped by a patriarchal society. I use the theory developed by J.G. Nath. I will use her theory because of her focus on how patriarchy shapes women’s lives according to specific location and context at which they are located (Nath 2011). Patriarchy though is prevalent inside tea garden communities of Assam, not all women workers face the same nature of patriarchy. This will be later explored in the following sections of my study. Besides patriarchy, gender as a theory is also helpful to understand how women’s gendered identity is produced and reproduced in different situations and context thereby limiting their political representation.

Gender is defined by feminists “as a way of referring to the social organization of the relationship between the sexes” (Scott 1986). Among the many feminist thinkers in different academic disciplines, I mainly use J.W Scott’s analytical framework in my research. Hence, I am limiting my study to just one gender: women.

Workers in general face discrimination by plantation management. However, the atrocities faced by women workers tend to be more than those faced by men. Women are seen to be discriminated both by male counterparts as well as their employers (*plantation management*) which rises the need for a gender analysis. Scott uncovers gender by analyzing four elements namely – Institutions, Ideologies, Symbols, and Identities. In my research, I choose two elements out of the four i.e. Institution’s and Identities.

Institutions in Scott's analytical framework of gender is a gendered bias (Scott 1986, p.1068). According to Scott, while experts consider a normative concept of gender construction being limited to only one social organization i.e. kinship; it fails to consider other complex institutions like nation, state, political institutions, labour market etc. My research is focused on two institutions i.e. family and trade unions. I will de-construct both family and trade union to analyze ways in which gender gets produced and re-produced in relation to women workers inside tea plantations of Assam.

Identities in Scott's analytical framework are considered unstable and fluid across time and space (Scott 1986, p.1068). They are produced and reproduced according to different socio-cultural norms in a society. In my research, I will study the different identities of a women worker as a mother/wife/worker etc. Further, I will analyze ways in which the gendered identity of a woman worker is constructed and perceived in different situations inside tea plantations of Assam.

Furthermore, analyzing woman's gender as a social category from the lens of Scott's framework and impact on their socio-economic lives by exploring patriarchy inside tea plantations of Assam, though useful gives rise to certain questions. Questions like – why are women workers subordinated based on their gender? what/who places them at the lowest hierarchy in the tea plantations in India? etc. triggers one to study elements of social oppression of which one is sexual division of labor in the Indian context.

3.2 Sexual Division of Labour

“A sex/gender system is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied” (Rubin 1975). (Mies 1981) in “The Social Origins of the Sexual Division of Labour” argues that without knowing the disproportionate relationship between men and women; the foundation of inequalities based on sexual division of labor in each society cannot be known.

In Mies' work, she explores how the concept of labor is a 'male biased' under the capitalist system. Despite surplus labor production by women, they are termed as “housewives” and “non-workers”. This is mainly due to the biologicistic determinism of women's relationship with nature. It is believed that because women have a close relationship with nature; their roles of giving birth or domestic roles and taking care of children etc. is not considered as “work” or “labor” (Mies 1981). Thus, the concept of labor is said to be reserved only for men, whose work is considered as “productive” under capitalist system. Such a similar situation is also seen inside sexual division of labor. While both men and women divide tasks among themselves; it hides one important fact. Men's task is determined as truly human (rational, productive etc.) while women's task is determined by (nature). While differentiating both men and women as “human” and “natural” it hides the relationship of “male dominance” and “women's exploitation”(Mies 1981).

Rubin gives a completely different ideology on sexual division of labor where she unravels the system of relationships between men and women (Rubin 1975). According to Rubin, women are raw materials for men, as women are fashioned into domesticated beings. She criticizes classical Marxism and the ideologies held by Freud and Levi-Strauss. For classical Marxism, there is no place to express sexual oppression while on the contrary, Levi-Strauss and Freud focus on a gendered meaning of sexuality in social life. Hence, Rubin analyses women's oppression and the origins of asymmetrical division of labor through a historical and moral element (Rubin 1975).

Historical element refers to the notion that under capitalism, women cannot lead or inherit and remains oppressed. Whereas moral element means that men needs a 'wife', and

the household is solely a women's job (Rubin 1975). It is this moral and historical element which provides capitalism with elements of masculinity and femininity. Marx was criticized by Rubin because though he explored the social life, he leaves majority of it unexamined. Examining these elements would have defined formation of sex oppression.

In this study, I follow the theory of sexual division of labor by Rubin expanding on how it is a product of the capitalism era and colonial exploitation (Rubin 1975). In the context of this study, class and gender oppression of women workers set during the colonial era is prevalent inside tea plantations of India. Colonialism and capitalism act together to marginalize women workers inside the economic space of tea plantations in Assam. Although women serve to be the main source of production and reproduction process inside tea plantations; their labor power is least acknowledged.

3.3 Feminization of Labor

Feminization of labor is directly and indirectly affected by sexual division of labor. According to Standing, a job can be referred as feminized in several ways (Standing 1999). For example: more women engaged in traditional jobs taken part by men or men taking part in feminized jobs or a job's characteristics could change to include historically women's pattern of labor force participation. This further depends on the form of remuneration, skill types and extent of security provided etc. (Standing 1999).

While on one hand, feminization was introduced to incorporate more women into regular wage labor, the nature of employment and patterns of labor participation has led to their work being precarious and filled with insecurities. This precarity in labor work was started mainly in the industrialized economies across the globe. It started with a response to provide entitlements to only a few people; and women were forced into labor markets during recession. This very phenomenon gave rise to what is called as "black economy" and precarious forms of work stated in (Standing 1999).

Despite the precarity of work there is an increasing labor force in both developing and developed regions (Elson, Pearson 1981). Elson and Pearson explained two situations for the same: First that labor force is basically female dominant as it is regarded as "women's work" and secondly, capitalist companies are forced to choose labor force based on profitability and not any ideology as most jobs are sex-stereotyped. According to Elson and Pearson, it is assumed that the cost of production in case of female workforce tend to be lesser than the male workforce and maybe female workforce tend to have greater productivity. This led to questions like – what really produces this difference between both male and female workforce? Why is female's labor cheaper than that of a male labor or why is female productivity higher than male?

It is believed that it is the "natural differentiation produced by innate capacities and personality traits of women and men, and by an objective differentiation of their income needs in that men need an income to support a family, while women do not" (Elson, Pearson 1981). The real differentiation between women and men characteristics is more than just being natural. For instance: women alongside having "nimble fingers" are also considered to be hardworking, suited to do repetitive, tiring, and monotonous work with ease (Elson, Pearson 1981).

However, the objective fact regarding nimble fingers of women workers according to Elson and Pearson is because of training and not of inheritance. Nimble fingers are not a result of inheritance like color of skin; but rather of training received from mothers and other women (Elson, Pearson 1981). During the early years of infancy, kids (*mostly girls*) are

subjected to learning roles appropriate to women's role through social construction of gender. In this case, training, sewing, embroidery work and needlework etc. were imposed on girls.

While many scholars have described feminization of labor in different ways; I will use Elson and Pearson's theory of nimble fingers to study how physical traits like nimble fingers leads to a skill which effects women's social and economic situation inside tea plantations of Assam. In Assam, feminization of labor is existing based on a social and sexual division of labor. While plantation colonizers wanted cheap laborers to maximize production; their motive was exploitation of laborers at the cost of women laborers hard work and efforts (Baruah 2018). It is believed that women's work of 'plucking' tea leaves is not a 'skill' but is something which she attains naturally.

3.4 Intersectionality

Intersectionality as a concept is relevant and useful in understanding tea plantation workers. Women in Assam tea plantations have multiple identities that are produced and reproduced to serve the basis of multiple layers of oppression they face. Women in tea plantations of Assam are marginalized based on their religious/caste/class and gender identity. Because these factors are interwoven and interconnected to each other in time and space; I use the concept of intersectionality to analyze ways in which workers deal with the multiple oppression which also effects their political representation.

The term "intersectionality" was coined in the 1990's by Kimberle Crenshaw as a response to issues faced by Black women in employment and other relevant aspects of life in the US (Crenshaw 1990). It started with connecting not just one or two forms of social inequalities but multiple oppressive categories together. Intersectionality is defined as a term which "denominates reciprocities between gender, race and class" (Winker, Degele 2011). In addition, it allows integration of other social categories like nationality, age, or sexuality. However, what is left unclear about this definition is that, at which stage does the reciprocals in relation to social structure, identity construction and symbolic representation is applied. Crenshaw's concept while deals mostly with race and gender, Winker and Degele went beyond these two categories to include gender, race, and class in their definition of intersectionality.

(Yuval-Davis 2006) considers a different yet similar definition of intersectionality by analyzing the different issues to understand the interrelatedness of gender, class, race, ethnicity along with other social categories. In her study, she provides a broader concept of intersectionality. She considers gender, class, race, ethnicity, and other social divisions to explore the various critical issues engaged to theorize the inter-connectedness of these social divisions.

In my thesis, I am employing the approach provided by Nira Yuval – Davis towards understanding intersectionality. A central space of the approach was developed by Crenshaw in 2001 as she stated:

"Intersectionality is what occurs when a woman from a minority group ... tries to navigate the main crossing in the city.... The main highway is 'racism road'. One cross street can be Colonialism, then Patriarchy Street.... She has to deal not only with one form of oppression but with all forms, those named as road signs, which link together to make a double, a triple, multiple, a many layered blanket of oppression" (Yuval-Davis 2006).

Participants in my study includes indigenous women workers located in Assam. Women worker's position as a worker in tea plantations is deemed at the lowest level of plantation hierarchy based on one's gender, caste, class, and religion etc. Hence, I will focus on gender, caste, class, and religion as factors to portray how these inequalities intersect with each other

to form multiple oppressions thus marginalizing women workers inside the public space of the tea plantations of Assam.

Chapter 4 Trade Unions and Family

4.1 Rise of Trade Unions: National and Independent Women Trade Unions

Madras Labor Union was the first labor union formed in India in 1918 followed by Textile Labor Association formed in 1920. While Madras Labor Union was formed in response to labor strikes towards colonial exploitation; Textile Union was formed as a result of Mahatma Gandhi's effort to solve a bonus dispute in Ahmedabad textile industry. The formation of these two unions further led to growth of central trade unions in India since 1920's. AITUC, the first national trade union was formed in 1920 with the help of INC. The Trade Unions Act was introduced in 1926 by the colonial Britishers to legalize unions and contribute towards industrial growth (Sundar 2008).

In post – independent India, much of the trade union activities and regulations were taken over and legalized by the Indian government. By 1970, there was a total of five national trade unions spread across four major cities and industries (Ratnam, Jain 2002). All these unions have a separate women's wing focusing on women's issues. Out of five, three trade unions were affiliated to political parties namely INTUC, AITUC and BMS. Out of these, there is one union which is not affiliated to any political parties i.e. HMS.

Hind Mazdoor Sabha is the trade union led by two women in the late 90's (Ratnam, Jain 2002). Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) on the other hand was started by Ela Ben in 1972 with a motive of organizing the unorganized women, initially within an around Ahmedabad in India. Its goal is to provide voices to unprotected women workers thereby securing their work and living conditions. While its key responsibilities include organizing self-employed women; it also promotes women's assistance and leadership at the rural level through unions and other groups etc. (ILO 2020). Since SEWA operates only in selected districts of India; currently it is not operational in Assam.

4.2 Trade Unions inside Assam Tea Plantations

4.2.1 Patriarchy is not constant

Women workers face various socio-economic and cultural issues inside tea plantations of Assam. Membership into trade unions are affected by male domination and patriarchal forces operating both inside trade unions and families. Since both membership and participation is inter-related; a study of both helps us to understand leadership of a women worker inside the tea trade unions of Assam.

In earlier times, it was seen that the wage earned by women workers were controlled and managed by men inside the family. Women were not allowed to go for wage collection due to certain patriarchal restrictions on their social life and visibility in public. This reflects a dominant role held by men members towards exercising a major control over women counterparts, and their co-workers (Duara, Mallick 2019). However, these scenarios cannot be assumed as universal across all tea plantations as it is said to have changed with respect to time and place. For instance: though majority of indigenous plantation families inside Assam are patriarchal; this is not the case in all families. There are a few families where men are supportive towards their women counterparts. Alongside decision making, men tend to support women inside household doing chores, taking care of children, cooking, and cleaning etc.

Further, women's membership in unions is influenced by patriarchy inside tea plantations of Assam. A study conducted in Assam showed that out of a total of 37 women worker respondents only 9 women workers held membership position inside tea trade unions (Dura, Mallick 2019). Because of a small percentage of women workers holding membership; their issues are hardly represented in important meetings. Another study on women's membership position inside tea plantations of Darjeeling showed a different scenario (Sarkar, Bhowmik 1998). It showed a higher response of women's membership inside the trade unions. However, even though women workers held highest percentage of membership, none were seen in higher positions of a Secretary or President.

The bottom line is that even though women workers hold highest membership percentage; their position remains lowest below all positions inside trade unions of Assam. Because for the majority women holding membership position is not due to their own choice. Rather they obtain membership because of the influence by men counterparts. While married women joined unions of which their husbands are a part of; unmarried women joined unions of which their father/brother/men relatives are part of (Sarkar, Bhowmik 1998). Besides this, women workers even though hold membership inside trade unions were unaware about it and came to know only at their old age. This was shared by one of my participants who said that she was not aware whether she was a member of ACMS. It was only during the interview; she came to know that she has been an active member of ACMS since the past 40 years. ACMS in Assam generally take a membership fee of INR 20 (*0.27 US dollars*) from every union member for development and logistics. But there was no mention of a fee in the pay slip (*see page 40*). This is due to a lack of political consciousness of women workers inside tea plantations of Assam.

Moreover, holding a higher membership status by women worker inside tea plantations does not always mean a higher participation rate and consequently a leadership position. Thus, patriarchy seems to play a dominant role in limiting women's membership inside tea trade unions of Assam thereby limiting a leadership position.

4.2.2 No leadership position for women workers

One of the crucial aspects of any organization specifically in trade union is a leadership position. A leader takes care of various activities ranging from day-to-day activities to policies etc. and acts as a communication link between the management and workers inside the trade unions (Sarker 1996). There are five elements which determines whether a worker can hold a leadership position. They are occupational status, ethnicity, age, gender, and educational level of workers inside tea trade unions in Assam.

In terms of occupational status, *sardars* are the ones who has total control over the workforce in tea plantations (Bhowmik 2011, p.240). Sardars are mainly known as the sub-staff who takes care of the major responsibilities and are effective leaders of the union. In Assam tea plantations, most of the sardars are male members. In terms of other elements like sex, age, education, and ethnicity men are more in privileged positions in default terms. Majority of the women workers are illiterate and belong to an indigenous group. Thus, positioning themselves at the lowest strata of the plantation hierarchy.

Because of low literacy level of women workers, most of the women are not aware about union activities and their rights as workers. This is because they are not informed regarding the activities, since they are expected to be unable to manage their time working alongside household chores. In most of the studies, it is found that due to low education status and lack of awareness women fail to join union activities. For instance - in a study conducted inside tea plantations located in West Bengal to determine the literacy levels of women workers; the literacy level of the 157 women workers interviewed was found to be only 11 percent (Sarkar, Bhowmik 1998).

Most trade unions inside tea plantations of Assam are associated with political parties. The political dimensions of trade union though positive also have some negative impacts on the lives of the tea plantation workers. For instance: people holding top executive positions in the central trade unions are also holding top positions inside the same political party. Due to a lack of political unionism, trade unions do not encourage development of worker leadership. This contributes to women workers inside tea plantations holding a passive position as compared to men counterparts (Rai 2004, p.194).

Besides issues like lower levels of membership, participation, and leadership, lack of political unionism within trade unions is crucial to understand why women workers issues are not considered and mostly remains unheard.

4.2.3 Non-recognition of women workers issues

There is only one dominant trade union which is affiliated to a political party in Assam called Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS). ACMS practices non-inclusivity. Non-inclusivity means excluding some groups, issues, and welfares etc. Women workers inside the tea plantations have lesser chances of representing themselves and presenting their issues in ACMS (Duara 2017, p.10). Inside tea plantations, most of the workers issues in relation to collective bargaining, low wages and harsh working condition etc. are not considered thereby limiting their voices to be heard. It is believed that union leaders inside ACMS are very close to plantation management and highly influenced and controlled by ideologies held by them. This does not serve laborers purpose who are dependent on trade unions for better welfare and interests. This attitude of negligence is mostly experienced by women workers who have expressed their frustration over unions lack of interest to take up workers issues.

Besides ACMS there are other trade union like CITU affiliated to the Communist party of India; strongly interested in investigating industrial relations of the state within tea plantations. CITU is a national level trade union working towards reforming lives of workers and classes in the country. Apart from this, there are student unions like ATTSA which demands for identity status of indigenous groups inside tea plantations of Assam. Both ATTSA and CITU though was operational inside tea plantations of Assam is currently not functional.

In this context, women workers in Assam opt to approach Adivasi Labor Union (*independent labor union*) and associations like Mother's Club.

4.2.4 Recognition of women worker's issues

There are a few independent labor unions inside tea plantations of Assam. These labor unions constitute members from the workers of tea garden community and are women centered. Inside independent labor unions, all women can take part in activities irrespective of different socio-economic status they come from. The main purpose of these labor unions is emphasized on solving laborers issues like conflicts or resolving broader social issues of religion and caste issues etc.

One such union is Adivasi (*indigenous*) Labor Union. Adivasi (*indigenous*) Labor Unions was formed in 1990's to solve women workers issues emerging within the labor lines. There are no criteria for women workers to participate and it comprises only of women tea garden workers. The leader of the union is a women worker currently working in the tea plantations. It has been found that workers feel comfortable to put up their issues in this labor union rather than ACMS. For instance: in my study, a Hindu women worker while facing a religious conflict with a Christian woman went to ACMS for a solution. Despite addressing the conflict from her point of view, members of ACMS blindly took sides of the worker belonging to Hindu religious group. With heart full of disappointment, the women worker who is a practicing Christian approached the Adivasi (*indigenous*) labor union. The union called upon

both women workers (Hindu and Christian) and decided to come to a mutual conclusion after hours of continuous discussions with those involved and other union members.

Hence while ACMS dealt with this issue through their political ideologies; independent labor unions believed in justified solutions rather than biased solutions based on situational factors like workers identity etc. Since then, women workers inside tea plantations started approaching Adivasi labor union; despite existence of ACMS in their tea estates.

This is because women workers do not have faith and belief in ACMS who solve women workers issues for political gains. Moreover, women are comfortable keeping their issues in front of the Adivasi Labor Union because all members and leaders are women workers with no men workers involvement. They consider trade unions to be their last option when they feel other options have not worked out (Duara, Mallick 2019). Thus, due to a strong politicized motive held by big trade unions, women workers issues are never given priority and mostly remains neglected. This further adds up to the reason why participation of women is less in number in big political party affiliated trade unions.

Besides Adivasi (*indigenous*) labor unions, there are small associations called Mothers Club. These clubs are formed in a few tea plantations of Assam with an aim to improve lives of rural women. Formed in the late 1990's, this club have taken up issues which cover main problems of women workers. Lack of awareness regarding basic health, nutrition, education, childcare and alcoholism are the bigger issues focused by Mother's Club. Besides solving these issues, the clubs are also motivating women to take up training in poultry and handicrafts etc. They hold regular club meetings where members (*only women*) discuss their problems related to day to day lives related to their community (Telegraph India 2020).

Formation of Mother clubs and Adivasi (*indigenous*) labour union though has been helpful to improve socio-economic conditions of women workers; there are still a lot many issues to be addressed. Issues like lack of political consciousness, establishment of women committees, and lack of protests for low wage payments are few of the many problems which requires immediate attention.

To contribute to this, women workers need to be empowered enough to have the political knowledge and commitment to fight for their issues independently.

4.3 Families inside Assam Tea Garden Communities

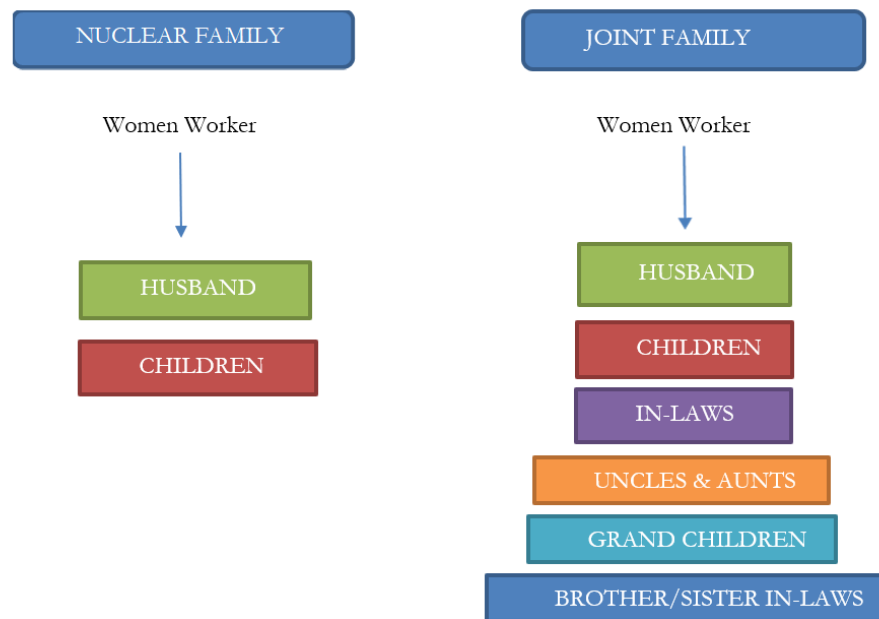
Families form the foundation of every household inside tea garden communities of Assam. While most families are patriarchal in nature, the degree of patriarchal authority has lessened since the past few generations. There are two types of families existing inside tea plantations of Assam— namely nuclear and joint families. While majority of women workers in my study come from joint families; only a few are from nuclear families.

4.3.1 Family structure

Family structure inside tea garden communities of Assam is based on the labor recruitment policy adopted by the colonial government. Since labor recruitment was family based, entire family was taken as one unit of employment. Thus, the whole family including men, women and children worked inside tea plantations which is seen to be practiced even today decades after India's independence. This practice of whole family working inside tea plantations is formally established by the PLA Act 1951. PLA Act 1951 is an "act to provide for the welfare of labor and to regulate the conditions of work in plantations" (PLA 2014). With this act, the unit of employment inside family later got divided into four categories namely men and women (*above 18 years of age*), adolescence (*between 15 and 18*) and children (*below 15 years of age*) (Bhowmik 2011, p.252).

A typical family inside tea garden community in Assam comprises of joint and nuclear families. Both family types comprise of casual and permanent workers. While both men and women work as a *permanent/casual worker*, children are supposedly seen doing small chores alongside their parents inside the garden areas. Majority of *permanent workers* are first generation learners who came to be situated in the gardens during the indenture period. Casual workers are *second generation/third generation* learners whose identity are positioned from that of their parents (*workers*) who are *working/retired* as a worker from the plantations.

Figure 4.1



Family Structure inside Assam tea plantations

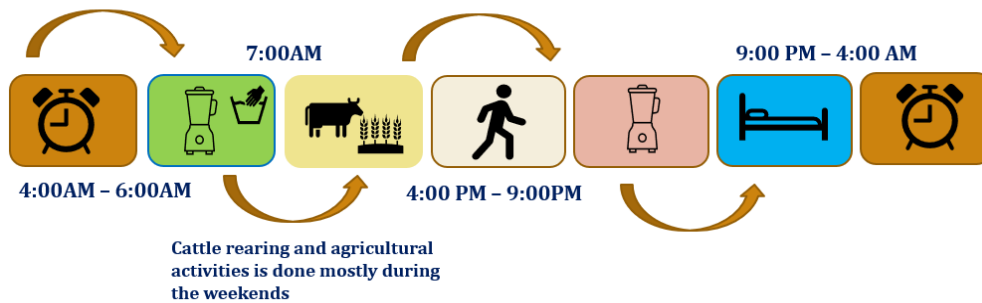
Source: Author's Calculation.

4.3.2 Hectic daily routine

Women's socio-economic participation tends to be very hectic inside both family and tea plantations in Assam. Alongside their primary work of tea plucking, they are also involved in doing agricultural work. Women are seen alongside men doing agricultural activities starting from sowing till harvesting to domesticating cattle stock which is distributed among other family members e.g. son/husband etc. (Rai 2004, p.172).

A normal day of a women worker inside tea plantations of Assam is very hectic shaped by her role as a mother/wife/daughter-in-law/sister through the everyday situations and activities taking place inside the family. Woman's day begins with completion of household chores which includes cooking, cleaning, fetching water/firewood, taking care of children, etc. It is mostly a woman's responsibility to collect firewood and fetch water for the family for cooking and cleaning purposes (Rai 2004). It is tiring as they need to walk for 2kms to the forests to collect firewood. After these chores, she starts her day with plucking of tea leaves from 8am until 4pm in the evening. Apart from these, women do agricultural work and cattle rearing when she gets time during the weekends. Her day ends by 9 or 10 pm at night. A timeline map to understand life in a day of a women worker is provided below:

Figure 4.2
Everyday routine of a woman worker inside tea plantations of Assam



Source: Online Telephonic Interviews 2020.

For a women worker, cooking does not mean just food preparation but also collecting firewood, fetching water, and making mud stove etc. This shows the intensity of work women is burdened with despite their primary work of tea plucking. In most of these cases, it is the women who performs these activities alone without any support from others inside the family. While in few families, women's work burden at home is shared by their husbands and sons who make it easier for women to carry out household chores with much comfort. An instance from one of my participants reflected support from husbands and sons as she narrates:

"Now that I have a son, he helps me with most of the small chores apart from his studies, while my husband helps me in a way that I don't have to come and work after coming back to home and sometimes son-husband duo cooks everything and keeps it ready".

4.3.3 Family income not just women's responsibility

Inside family, women are the sole providers managing the household by contributing to family income (Baruah 2018, p.213). This is not true in all families inside tea plantations of Assam.

While in some families, the family income is a contribution made by both women workers and her husbands and/or children (sons/daughters) etc. This situation contradicts the standard cultural role of a women as a housemaker and men as a breadwinner. Because the so-called household labor seems to be divided equally among women workers and their husbands thereby implicating an era of change to the gendered attributes. Hence there is no one definite pattern to understand contribution to family income inside tea plantations of Assam. To quote from one of my participants as she shared:

"My son is working as a farmer to help me with the family income. Because the income received after plucking tea is not sufficient to run the entire family and hence my son and husband share their salaries to keep the house running".

Further, family member's behavior is different towards a women worker as per their age/gender/education level etc. For example: a son/daughter's behavior towards their mother (*women worker*) would be very different from that of a son-in-law/daughter-in-law towards their mother (*women worker*) etc.

To understand the varying dimensions of family members behaviors towards women worker, I divide the following section into two parts – Nuclear and Joint families.

4.3.4 Joint and Nuclear families of women workers

Inside a nuclear family, a women worker is seen to be burdened with multiple responsibilities starting from household chores to taking care of children etc. In cases of women workers whose kids are small, she needs the creche facility before leaving for work every morning. Creche facility is provided by plantation management which is a part of workers benefits under the PLA Act 1951. However, for workers whose children are grown up or adults; the burden of household chores is less. This is because daughters/sons of women worker contribute to household chores when their mother is working inside the gardens.

Besides this, women worker gives importance to her children's education which is also one of the sole reasons for her working hard day and night. A worker got very emotional as she was sharing this:

"I never went to school because of being poor but I never wanted my children to face the same. Hence, I made a promise to myself that I would never let my children face what I underwent".

At times, women are also helped by children regarding any documentation work related to their wages. Educated children educate women workers to an extent that they become knowledgeable regarding plantation policies and other basic information etc. Moreover, many worker's husbands who are also workers supports her in doing household chores as well as taking major decisions inside the family. Husbands in most cases act as the support system as he works hard to earn extra money to cover the family expenses. Extra income is very essential inside garden communities as the wages paid are not sufficient to run the entire family.

For example: in my study, husband of a women worker took up cattle rearing to contribute to family expenses. When realized that the overall family income was not sufficient to cater kids' educational needs; he took up cattle rearing as a side job. The women worker said:

"My husband rears cattle like pigs and dogs to get extra income. As it takes eight to nine months to take care of them; the question is about the amount of patience and determination one can hold".

In another example: a women worker opened a side cloth business to manage overall family income.

"When I realized my earnings were not enough for my kids' education, I thought of starting my own business to pay their schooling expenses. I found a person who gave me knowledge of starting my own business".

A typical nuclear family does not always portray a similar image shown above. There are families where husbands of the women worker are irresponsible regarding household chores, family expenses and other major activities etc. This can be due to alcoholism, carelessness, and lack of responsibility towards his family.

In case of a joint family, it can be assumed that the role of a women worker is not as hectic as inside a nuclear family. Because of an extended family structure, a typical day's work of a women worker gets divided and distributed among other family members with respect to managing household chores. Responsibilities like taking care of kids, cooking, cleaning, and others gets distributed among members as daughter-in-law/daughter/son given that they are not working inside the tea plantations. This gives women workers with an extra amount of time which she utilizes in doing other work besides household chores. Such a situation though existing is not universal inside all joint families inside tea garden communities of Assam.

Furthermore, women's decision-making power also differs with respect to the family one comes from. While women workers inside a nuclear family has more freedom of taking decisions based on family matters; the same is not the case for joint families. Because inside joint families, decision-making regarding family matters are mostly taken by husbands or in-laws thus making women workers to accept the decisions already made by husbands or in-laws (Rai 2004, p.179).

It has been useful to study these different angles existing inside tea garden communities of Assam to better understand how women workers as a unit is treated inside the family sphere and their relationships with other family members affecting the political representation of women workers inside tea trade unions.

Chapter 5 Discussion and Analysis of the Findings

5.1 Trade Unions and Families are both Gendered Institutions

Scott's theory is relevant in my research to analyze and understand different ways in which a woman's "gender" is produced and reproduced inside two institutions of family and trade unions. Tea plantations in Assam is based on a strict gendered hierarchy where women's status is deemed lower than men. Family as a social institution is the sphere where a woman worker spends most of her time inside tea plantations. Women's gender is produced from the very time she is born into the family of a plantation worker. Her gendered identity gets shaped from the moment of her birth inside the family until she gets married and moves to her in-law's family.

Before moving to the following sections, I have provided with anonymous pseudo names for my research participants. So, they are named by the names of Kamla, Roshni, Trisha, Sonali and Sapna. This was done to make the analysis clearer to understand. In the following section, I will discuss two crucial issues of women workers in the tea plantations. Firstly, education attainment was limited to women workers and secondly, household chores are solely considered a "woman's" job inside the social institution of family.

During historical period, girl's education was not considered important inside India's family sphere. Child marriages were very common inside Indian family traditions. Such a situation also existed in Assam where boy's education was given preference over girls. This left girls with lower levels of education, thus adding to higher illiteracy rates inside tea plantations of Assam. In India, when girls get married, they move into her in-law's family from her parent's family. This shift in family acts either as favorable or unfavorable for the girl depending on family member's perception towards her gendered identity. I argue that a girl's education attainment can change overtime based on the family she moves into with after her marriage. Similarly, on the issue of gender division of labor, household chores can be equally divided between men and women in the family.

5.1.1 Household work not just a "woman's job"

The gendered plantation system reveals higher work burden of women as compared to men inside both private and public spaces of Assam tea plantations (Saha et al. 2019, p.75). Women workers in tea plantations do much more work than men. They hardly get enough time for recreation as they need to rush home and do household chores after a day's work. Since household chores is perceived to be a women's job and not a men's job. These leaves woman workers with serious time constraints where they hardly get enough time to participate in other activities outside the private space (*family*).

Such a time constraint is reflected as one of the main problems for participating inside trade union activities which further reflects a low political representation of women workers inside tea plantations of Assam. Hence, if household chores were equally divided among both genders then there would be ample amount of time for women to take care of herself or doing other productive work. One can assume that by equal division of household chores among both genders, women will be able to participate inside trade union activities and be more efficient. While in my study, few of the women workers are supported by their husbands and children in doing household chores, this is not the same in all houses. In many households, women workers still do household chores by themselves and this has not changed since the colonial times.

5.1.2 Women's "gendered" identity as a function of illiteracy

According to a recent study on decent work for Assam tea plantation workers it has been found that 78% of women workers are illiterate and the only literate activity they can do is to sign at the time of wage collection (Saha et al. 2019). A similar pattern can be noticed from my study where most women workers are illiterate.

Lack of importance to girl's education is imbibed into family culture since many generations now. It is also strongly linked to child marriage which existed in tea plantations of Assam both during pre- and post-colonial era. After independence, incidents of child marriage though lessened; its consequences are still faced today by most women workers (Konwar et al. 2017). Girl's education is not considered vital inside the tea plantations since most Indian societies' practices dowry system. Parents of the bride needs to pay cash or movable properties etc. as a condition of her marriage to the bridegroom. Hence, girls are mostly considered a burden and remain less educated. It is so believed by families of workers that if someone needs to be educated it should be the boy.

Out of a few reasons provided by research participants in my study, some provided lack of income and parents' negligence of the girl as reasons for illiteracy. As narrated by Kamla (*pseudo name*), for her family, her need for education was of least concern; rather it was her brother's education which mattered the most.

"I was the eldest among all my brothers. Even though I wanted to study, my parents did not send me to school. I had to take care of younger siblings when my parents were busy working in the tea plantations".

Roshni (*pseudo name*) further narrated her family's poor financial status alongside ignorance as reasons of not going to school.

"My mother died when I was born. My father could not take care of both of us and sent my brother to school. Because of economic instability my father couldn't send me to school and was mostly ignorant about the importance of it".

Such situation of a girl unable to receive education changes as she grows and gets married. In my study, most women workers did not go to school during their childhood. They were mostly engaged into household chores and followed their parents to tea plantations for doing small chores. But after they got married and moved to their in-law's place; a different situation was experienced. Women workers became motivated and open to engage in different socio-economic activities. This is because of the knowledge gained from either their husbands or children. Thus, this is one of the major reasons why most women want to educate their kids irrespective of the gendered identities. Roshni says:

"I never went to school because of being poor and having no income but I never wanted my children to face the same". Now, my younger son is pursuing nursing, the eldest is doing polytechnic engineering and the younger daughter is working in a laboratory".

5.1.3 Trade Unions are highly male dominated

Women's gendered identity becomes the sole reason for her marginalization and low status inside tea trade unions of Assam. Issues like low pay, gendered injustices, discrimination, and abuses by men are not heard and remain invisible. This is largely because women have no membership and active position in the trade unions of tea plantations. Their membership is largely affected by term called "Glass-Ceiling" which positions women workers at the lowest level of power and choice based on their gendered identity. Women workers are highly marginalized in trade union activities giving rise to vertical immobility placing them at the lowest level of the occupational hierarchy (Duara, Mallick 2019). Even if women workers want to

hold a leadership position it seems next to impossible. This means that even if they have their own choice; their choices will not be accounted for because it is the men's opinion which is considered and not of women. In my study, it is observed that while few participants hold a membership in the unions, they still do not have a say inside the trade unions. As Trisha narrated this:

“The unions in our tea plantations are not good. Once I joined for a meeting organized by ACMS, but I could not speak up freely because there have been times women got suspended from their work because of raising issues. Plantation management are biased towards us, and they do nothing to support us in difficult times”.

This reflects the bias trade unions hold against women. By analyzing both social and political institutions of family and trade unions, one can assume how gendered both institutions are.

Identities in Scott's analytical framework aims to analyze the gendered identity which is subjective in nature. In my study, women workers inside tea plantations of Assam hold multiple identities inside public and private spheres. Public space refers to factories, tea plantations and trade unions or independent labor unions and associations while private refers to her house. She holds different identities that of a mother, wife, daughter, daughter in law, worker, member, and entrepreneur etc. These multiple identities get shaped as per the socio-cultural norms and practices wherein the women worker is situated at a particular time and place.

I argue that while multiple identities of women workers are shaped differently according to different time and location; these situations cannot be considered universal across all generations. To analyze this, I divide women workers multiple identities in tea plantations of Assam into two spaces— public space (*tea plantations, factories, trade unions, independent labor unions and clubs*) and private space (*inside house*).

5.2 Multiple Identities lead to Women's Marginalization

5.2.1 Abuses are not “new” for us

Women workers identity inside the public space (*plantation area*) is that of a “*working class*” indigenous women. They are strictly monitored by the supervisors⁴ inside the gardens. At times of difficulty with even small tasks they are scolded and abused by the management. This makes women workers vulnerable to their situation inside the tea plantations. Trisha shared her story of how each and every activity inside the gardens are controlled by the management. She says:

“I am a diabetic person, and these days I cannot pluck leaves the way I used to do before. Once, I could not pluck that much and hence received threats in the form of shouting and abusive words in front of other female pluckers. I personally felt very sad and depressed”.

She further said getting abuses and scolding's are common and women workers do not raise any words in protest. If anyone raised voices; they get suspension threats from the management.

⁴ One who supervises and controls labors work inside tea plantations of Assam (Saha et al. 2019, p.6).

5.2.2 Family as supportive space

In contrast to the plantation workspace, most women workers said that their private space is free from physical violence. Women inside the family carry identity of a “*mother/ wife/ daughter-in-law/ sister*” etc. Their identities get shaped by social practices of sexual division of labor, less patriarchal authority etc. Patriarchy though existed inside all families of tea plantation since the colonial regime, currently is less seen in some families. There are families where patriarchal authority exercised by men is less or absent.

In my study, families of women workers did not follow patriarchy. Husbands, in-laws, children, and other family members of women workers are supportive towards her. Because of such an environment, most women workers have a private space which is favorable. As a woman, she has the freedom and liberation to make independent choices in contrast to public space.

Another interesting element found is women workers identity of an “*entrepreneur*” inside her house. Two women workers in my study holds an identity of an “*entrepreneur*”. It is interesting because there are rarely many women workers who opened business amidst their busy schedules and stiff family income. When asked about Kamla’s business; she smiled confidently and said:

“This was not possible without my family’s support. I had to open a side-business (*clothing store*) to cover my kid’s educational expenses. Honestly, I feel happy to be doing this because I am doing it for my children”.

Thus, while women workers identity inside tea plantations of Assam gets shaped differently; none of the situations above can be taken as fixed.

5.2.3 ACMS least worried about women workers

Generations of oppression of women workers inside tea plantations of Assam is not just limited within the plantation premises. Injustices also takes place inside tea trade unions of Assam. Here I will elaborate on women workers identity as a “*member*” inside trade unions and as “*member or leader*” inside independent labor unions and clubs.

In my study, only a few women workers hold membership status inside ACMS. Others hold membership position inside mother clubs and independent labor unions as mentioned in the previous sections of my study. Women workers identity of just being a “*member*” inside trade unions does not make them feel secure or protected. Instead they are always in fear from abuses by trade unions leaders and others in higher authority. Because of a male-dominated environment inside trade unions, women workers can hardly voice out their opinions. Even if they did, their issues remain marginalized. This is because the plantations are not owned by colonial planters now but by management authority where the maximum power is vested.

While women workers “*member*” identity inside larger trade unions like ACMS do not seem favorable; the situation is different inside independent labor unions and mother clubs. I take both independent labor unions and mother clubs as one unit because of its existing similarities inside tea plantations of Assam.

5.2.4 We feel open to voice our issues inside other unions/clubs

Independent labor unions and mother clubs inside Assam tea plantations are constituted of only women workers. Because of no men members inside both the union and mothers club; women feel free to voice their opinions. Thus, women worker’s identity of a “*member*” here makes them feel empowered and motivated as they make decisions with other women members without any interference from ACMS.

Hence, one can assume from the above analysis that while trade union as ACMS and tea plantation areas shapes women worker's identity in a way which is less favorable; private space and their space in independent labor unions tend to do the opposite. Unraveling these elements inside both social and political institutions of family and trade unions not only depicts the various dimensions of marginalization a women worker faces in different situations based on her multiple identities but also gives rise to new questions.

Questions like why and how women workers are dominated by men inside the tea plantations when they do not have the same experience at home. This leads my study to the next section which will analyze patriarchy both inside public and private space. I will analyze ways in which patriarchy started operating as a process inside tea plantations of Assam thereby placing women at the lowest level of plantation hierarchy.

5.3 Patriarchy varies in time and place

With the start of the family recruitment policies; migration of indigenous women and children began inside tea plantations of Assam. However single women who wanted to migrate were not allowed entry to work inside the tea plantations. Only married women or relative (*women worker*) of men group was included as migrants. Women who were not approved by its male relative are not allowed entry to work inside tea plantations. This is a strategy implemented under this policy that stabilizes men migrants and prevents them from returning to their homes. This system of family recruitment during the colonial era was the beginning of patriarchy inside tea plantations of Assam.

Gradually, a patriarchal system of recruitment was followed by a system which also controlled women workers sexuality relating to reproduction of labor. Women workers were forced to reproduce to secure a stable labor force inside the tea plantations. While men were seen to control wages earned by women as well as having the decision-making power. The plantation management exploited women workers in multiple ways that further led to abuses and marginalization of women workers.

I argue that patriarchy though was prevalent inside both social and economic space inside tea plantations of Assam; it does not remain the same across time and space. In my study, role of patriarchy though has been the same across workspaces today; is not the same across social space of families.

Earlier times, women were used as sex objects by the plantation management. Due to lack of awareness and education women were disadvantaged that placed them at a higher risk of sexual exploitation in the tea plantations. A study conducted in Assam, depicted 83% of women workers face verbal abuses every single day (Duara, Mallick 2019). Use of slangs, scolding's and passing inappropriate comments about appearance etc. were frequently faced by women workers. A similar picture is seen inside company hospital where workers visit at times of illness. Sonali narrates that once when she was ill, she went to the hospital. When she met the doctor, he started giving her lewd comments on her dress and mocked her. She said:

“The doctor was like ‘*Look at her she is dressed so fancy despite the fact that she is ill*’”.

Further, patriarchal behavior inside ACMS is common. Women workers inside ACMS hold less membership and no leadership position. Women workers issues at work and living conditions are hardly addressed by union members inside union meetings. Hence because women workers issues are not given importance, they tend to not join the union. Women workers in my study shared a similar picture of ACMS which has done nothing to improve welfare of workers. A worker shares:

“ACMS has never done anything good to our society. If they do something for us it will be to achieve their political gains. We don’t even feel like joining the union, as there are many men inside the union who makes us uncomfortable”.

From the responses received in my study it is evident that, the role of patriarchy is not the same as traditional plantation societies which existed earlier. Now in most tea garden societies of Assam, the functional role of family has changed to a larger extent. Along with this, the patriarchal authority has diminished with a collapse of larger kin-based joint families (Bhadra 1985, p.104). Due to changes in patriarchal authority, both men and women takes care of economic aspects each contributing equally. While both men and women workers are seen earning inside Assam tea garden communities, authority is also contributed equally among both men and women inside the family. Kamla while sharing her experience said sometimes it becomes difficult to survive even with both her and husband’s salary. Hence, her son also adds to the overall family income.

“My husband and children are very supportive of me. Since they are aware about my less earnings, both support me to manage household expenses. Now, that my son is also working he helps me with the monthly groceries”.

Thus, patriarchy though is dominant inside tea plantations (*workspaces*), the authority is not same inside the family (*social spaces*). This leads one to believe that the force of patriarchy changes according to given time and space across tea plantations of Assam.

5.4 Sexual Exploitation in tea plantations – a product of capitalism & colonialism

Capitalism and colonialism inside tea plantations gave rise to class oppression, the impact of which is faced by plantation workers. Women workers both in production and reproduction process is less recognized. I argue that sexual division of labor as an outcome of both colonial regime and capitalism is still existing in economic spaces of tea plantations in Assam. These include incidences of sexual exploitation, discrimination in wage rates and other forms of violence. Further, the economic spaces of women workers are not just confined to plantation areas but any place where there is physical presence of both planter and worker.

In the colonial times, women were called upon by the color of the blouse they wore and not by their name as a practice by the management. Though a lot of cases of workers exploitation is seen during the colonial rule, the same is experienced even today but in less intensity. During the post-independent period, there were cases where manager had sexually assaulted some casual women workers. In a similar case, the plantation manager stopped two workers from uprooting tea bushes for firewood and enraged by workers reaction; he sexually assaulted the women workers, and no one complained later about this out of fear. The irony however is that generations of oppression is so deeply entrenched inside tea plantations of Assam that sexual assault and exploitation has become a common norm (Duara, Mallick 2019).

Apart from a sexual exploitation, women workers face discrimination with regards to wage payment. Difference in wage payments based on gender makes lives of women workers difficult. This is a result of such practices in the colonial period when wage rates varied across one garden to the other based on the nature of work and quality and quantity of leaves plucked. While men workers were paid fixed monthly wages of INR 5 (0,057 in EUR and 0,068 in US dollars) , women workers were paid INR 4 (0,046 in EUR and 0,054 in US dollars) and INR 3 (0,034 in EUR and 0,041 in US dollars) was paid for a child (see page 8). While workers tend to survive in wages less than the standard agricultural wage in Assam, the plight for women workers with respect to low wages have worsened.

Moreover, sexual exploitation of women is not limited to just economic spaces. During the colonial rule, workers used to get harassed on their way back home by the planters (*mainly sardars*). They used to get harassed after their working hours in the streets and plantation areas etc. For e.g. in one instance, the sardar forcefully entered workers house and harassed her. This clearly reflects that economic space for women is any place where there exists an employee-employer relationship beyond the physical premises of the garden areas itself (Mazumdar 2018).

5.5 “Plucking” tea leaves – A Skilled vs Unskilled Debate

Skill as an economic factor affects women workers position inside tea plantations of Assam. According to (Elson, Pearson 1981) women are not only said to have naturally nimble fingers; but are also inclined to do tough monotonous work with ease. Women workers in the tea plantations are engaged in a repetitious labor-intensive job of tea plucking. Even if they get tired out of working continuous for long hours; they do not tend to stop and take rest. Instead they complete their tasks in due time without any complaints. But their hard work seems to be less recognized by plantation management which is why their skill of “*plucking*” is considered “*unskilled*” and “*no skilled*”. I argue that skill of “*plucking*” by women workers is not a natural skill inherited from their mothers but is attained through training. Hence the generalized notion of skill of plucking as an “*unskilled*” cannot be assumed true and valid.

Plucking is a heavily labor-intensive job. Since tea cultivation generally opts a season; the plucking is divided into three seasons. First batch occurs in March, the next season is a peak season in June and the last occurs in November. During the first season, female workers start plucking in their morning shifts. Since June is the peak monsoon season, almost all women laborers are included in this one as the work becomes more difficult and task of harvesting and plucking reaches its maximum intensity (Baruah 2018). During this time, along with quality of plucking; women workers also needs to increase their speed of plucking to get better wages. Thus, along with the pressure of plucking more leaves in the given time, they are also burdened with increasing demands in production.

This however reflects that women workers inside the gardens during this period work more hours than men and under a lot of pressure. Women workers are mostly accompanied by their children to the tea plantations. While women would be busy plucking tea leaves; their children would observe the skill and eventually learn. As a child grow in age; they consequently master this art thereby inculcating the same as they become workers later in their lives. In my study, while most of the women are in their early 50's; their children shared how they have attained the skill of plucking, as shared by Kamla's daughter:

“When I was small, I used to follow my mother to the tea plantations. My mother used to teach me how to pluck during the break time. At first plucking seemed easy and fun as I was not familiar with the real technique of tea plucking. But now after years of watching her pluck, I released how delicate job it is”.

Hence plucking is a “*skilled*” job which is easily transferable. Further, it is not a natural skill and is learnt through further trainings and workshops. Moreover, plucking entails different meanings inside both factory as well as fields (*tea plantations*) of Assam.

There are two types of plucking technique. The first is called Orthodox division (*panitula challan*) and the second is called CTC (*crush, tear, curl*). Tea plantations in Assam consists of different divisions (*challans*) for producing different types of tea; and pluckers are categorized based on different tea types. While CTC requires pluckers to pluck long buds which is measured by workers through the length of their fingers, it is different for Orthodox. Orthodox division requires pluckers to pluck new green buds which are transformed into gold after processing. Only an experienced plucker can notice these differences (Baruah 2018).

Henceforth, the arguments that these women workers are not “skilled” by the plantation management is not valid.

Furthermore, women worker in general are exposed to multiple oppression based on their social categories like gender, caste, class, and religion. This is explored in the next section as I focus on different layers of oppression faced by women workers inside tea plantations of Assam using an intersectional approach.

5.6 Intersecting Social Categories of Women Workers

Women workers inside Assam tea plantations face multiple inequalities inside the public sphere. They face inequalities based on gender, caste, class, and religion. These multiple layers of inequalities intersect with each other to position women workers at the lowest hierarchy. However, it is not possible to discuss in detail all these factors in this study. However, below I would try to give a brief background to it.

Women inside Assam tea plantations belong from “working class” family. They are considered as the most oppressed ones because of their poor socio-economic conditions. In addition, their gendered identity of a “woman” further adds to their oppression. Experiences shared by women workers given below is a good example showing her vulnerabilities.

Company hospitals inside tea plantations of Assam are located 1.5 kms away from the labor lines. During one of the interviews, Sapna narrated a scenario where she was treated differently by a doctor inside the company hospital. She was down with high fever and cold. She said this:

“When I reached the company hospital the doctor said that I need to wait for some time even though my turn has come. I was caught up with high fever and could not even move. Still the doctor did not attend me and instead attended a staff member who was behind me”.

When Sapna’s turn came in, the doctor told her to wait and attended to a staff member (*a male*) who belongs from a higher status (*supervisor position*) in the plantation hierarchy. It is evident that women workers gendered identity that of a (*woman*) and her class of (*working class*) together contributed to discrimination.

In yet another case, Sonali said she was abused because she could not speed up her plucking process. Sonali while narrating her story mentioned that because she is a diabetic person, her work speed therefore is low as compared to earlier years of her work as a tea plucker. She said, the managers never praise workers when they complete plucking within the given time; but rather scolds them when they are not able to speed up.

Besides class and gender, the social category of caste also adds up to women workers lower status. As more layers of social inequalities are added to women workers oppression, situation for women workers becomes severe.

Supervisors inside tea plantations of Assam just like any other gardens hold a superior position over women workers. Apart from holding superior position they belong from upper caste (*Brahmin*) families and are mostly men. The problem however is that they are often found drunk abusing and scolding women workers inside tea plantations. In one incident, Roshni brought this issue of alcoholism in a local meeting inside the labor lines. Because she took up the matter of alcoholism; the supervisor of ACMS (*upper caste Brahmin*) got angry and threatened her. After few days, she was called upon by the management and got suspended from working inside the tea plantations. Later, other women workers of the independent labor union protested against this and got her job back. This reflects how Roshni’s gender identity of a “woman” layered with her caste “OBC” and “working class” categories together gave rise to a situation which propelled her to leave her job.

There are two religion followed by women workers inside tea plantations of Assam. While Hinduism is the religion followed by a majority; Christianity is followed by a small

percentage. Intersections between caste and religion among women workers is yet another dimension observed. Trisha in my study described how religious aspects dominates caste aspects of women workers inside tea plantation of Assam. She said there are often religious clashes between the Hindus and Christians in her area. While most women workers in my study are Christians and belong from OBC caste; trade union members and leaders of ACMS are mostly Hindus and belongs from Brahmin (*upper caste*) in Assam ('Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha', 2020).

While national holidays all over India is observed on Sundays; in my study a different scenario is seen. It is found that; in few plantations of Assam "Mondays" are observed as a national holiday and not "Sundays". Thus, Sundays are normal working days for all workers (*both Hindus and Christians*). The issue arises for Christian women workers who needs to go to church every Sunday. Few protests were organized by Christian minorities who demanded ACMS for a feasible solution. Instead of resolving this issue, ACMS took sides of Hindus because majority of union members and leaders belongs from Hindu religion. This reflects the injustices faced by women workers based on caste and religion effecting a fair representation in trade union of Assam tea plantations.

Chapter 6 Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

This research revealed that women workers fair representation inside tea trade unions of Assam is more limited to their public space/workspace rather than their private space/home. On one hand, colonial plantation management is exploiting women workers on the basis of different social categories like gender, caste, religion, and class. And on the other, male dominated trade unions following politicized ideologies are mostly negligent about women workers issues inside tea trade unions of Assam. This is few of the many reasons why women do not have affinity towards attending trade union activities or becoming a member inside the unions. It leads one to believe that women workers are not active members inside tea trade unions also because of their low socio-economic status. However, this is not entirely true. One of the major findings of this research highlighted a low political consciousness among women workers. It was found out that even though women workers hold membership inside the trade union; they are not even aware of this and they became aware about this only in their old age.

While inside social institution of family, women workers seem to enjoy more freedom in contrast to that of tea plantation areas or trade unions. Even though the whole plantation system in Assam was built in a colonial patriarchal system; the patriarchal authority has lessened since past few generations and hence not seen inside most families of women workers in my study as of today. This further leads us to certain questions like – How can this act as a positive space for women workers to grow or can women workers with the support of their families build an inclusive environment for women workers to actively participate in tea trade unions?

To understand the various dimensions of inequalities women workers are facing it was important to consider both families and trade unions as the focus of this research as compared to other studies which have focused on either one of them. It is not just the patriarchal plantation system restricting women's fair representation but there are also external factors. There is a lack of political awareness among women workers regarding union activities inside tea plantations of Assam. They mostly remain unaware about their rights of a worker and the benefits they should be availing. Furthermore, women workers instead approach independent labor unions and mother's club to resolve their issues.

While previous research highlighted a poor socio-economic status effecting women workers political representation, there is a need to further look beyond it. Majority of women workers are illiterate and carry a low economic status that largely restricts their political representation. Even though the PLA Act 1951 is implemented to provide workers with their necessary rights and benefits; it is not clear why it is not enforced in all regions across Assam (Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition 2016). For instance: what has the plantation management done to provide awareness regarding political matters to women workers ? or if women workers are more comfortable joining Adivasi labor unions and mother clubs; has an attempt been made to regularize it ? or are there plans to implement only women workers committee inside tea plantations of Assam ?.

This study adopted an online telephonic interview method due to current COVID crisis; otherwise a much broader response would have been possible in adopting a qualitative method with a field study. Because field studies in qualitative research tends to bring out an in-dept study and hence would have been helpful for researcher's observation on participants responses, their gestures, and emotions etc.

Focusing on both the role of trade unions and family as institutions was useful to see how each of them affects women workers fair representation. It was found out that while socio-economic factors do play a major role it cannot be assumed to be the dominant one. It is the male dominated patriarchal system and negligence of plantation management that works against the women workers in accessing a space and stand up against their problems inside the tea trade unions. Hence considering all the aforementioned aspects this research puts forward a few recommendations for future research.

Firstly, designing a report on the basis of the PLA Act 1951 (*see page 1*) (*what is working and what is not*) and in terms of workers' rights and benefits inside Assam tea plantations would be essential.

Secondly, a more detailed qualitative research with field study of both their families and independent labor unions would be essential to bring in different dimensions from women workers perspectives.

Thirdly, there should be training made available to bring awareness of policies and political programs implemented for women workers inside tea trade unions.

Fourthly, since women workers are comfortable raising their problems inside independent labor unions; an effort should be put into regularizing these independent labor unions so that they can function in equal footing and power alongside other trade union existing inside tea plantations of Assam.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 : Interview Questions for Women Workers and their Family Members

Interview Questions – Workers

What are the social, economic and political factors contributing to or restricting the representation of women workers in the tea plantations in trade unions, labor unions and tea welfare associations in Assam? – For Women Workers

Demographic Information

- Gender – Female/Male/Others
- Age –
- Location & Tea Estate Name -
- Marital Status –
- Educational Level –
- Income per day –
- Caste Certificate if any, please mention -
- Religion –
- Age of marriage –
- Number of Children –

Some General Questions

- What does your normal day look like?
- Are you happy with the work you do? (*plucking/pruning tea leaves in the garden*)
- How many hours do you spend with your family in the house?
- How many hours do you spend working in the gardens plucking tea leaves?
- How many hours do you get to sleep after a long day's work?
- Do you receive any physical/mental threats from managers/others in authority to get things done or any other purpose? Yes/No
If yes, can you describe it?
- Do you receive support/help from your family members at times of crisis/problem? Yes/No
- Do you receive any form of compensation from the government? If yes, can you specify the name and amount?
- Do you receive any social security benefits (like maternity benefit/bonus/housing

- Is there availability of creche facilities in your workplace? Yes/No
- Are you allowed to take leaves during times of illness and pregnancy time? Yes/No. If no, then can you describe any recent instances?
- How do you feel about the medical facilities provided in the hospital located in the plantation tea estate?
- Are there any health awareness programs currently provided by government?
- Did you receive a maternity benefit scheme under the special scheme for pregnant women? If yes, can you specify the amount?

Education

- Did you go to school? Yes/No
If yes, what is the level of education received -
If no, what were the reasons -
- If you dropped out of school, can you specify the reasons for dropping out of school?
- Where the education facilities in school good for a quality education? Yes/No
If No why not?
- Where there any restrictions to attaining education in your family? Yes/No
If yes, what were they -
- Do your children attend school? If yes, is it a private or a government school?
- If they go to a government school do, they receive the benefits of mid-day meal/free uniform and other benefits?
- How much on average do you have to spend for your children's education?
- Are you able to manage the expenses with the wage you receive? If no, how are you coping up with the extra expenses?

Income

- Are you the main earning member in your family? Yes/No
If no, can you specify who else is contributing to the annual family income?
- What is the amount of income you earn every day? Is the payment on a regular basis or it delayed? If payment is delayed, can you state some of the reasons provided by the management for payment delay?
the name and amount:
- Do you receive any social security benefits (like maternity benefit/bonus/housing support/insurance/other benefits from the government? Yes/No
If yes can you name them?
- How are you dealing with the current COVID situation? Is the government providing you with enough support to deal with the crisis?
- Do you receive all provisions for a safe work condition in the plantations (gloves/boots/goggles/protective gear etc.)? Yes/No

Health

- What is the type of healthcare available in your area?
- What is the distance of the hospital from your home?
- Do you have to pay for hospital expenses? Yes/No
If yes, can you specify a situation for which you paid for an illness?

- Did you observe any form of discrimination from the hospital staff against the workers community? Yes/No
If yes, can you share an incident?
- Do you have access to clean drinking water and toilet facility in the plantation area and at your home? Yes/No
If Yes, then can you describe from where do you get the water supply from?
- Is there a separate toilet facility for both men and women within the vicinity of the

you currently reside? Yes/No

If yes, can you name them

- Are you currently on a recurrent debt? Yes/No. If yes, then how are you planning to pay the debt?

-
- Do you receive payment receipts for the work you do? Yes/No If yes, are you aware of how your wages are calculated?
 - Does the earned income enough to meet your daily expenses in your family? Yes/No If No, what are the reasons –
 - Do you receive an annual bonus after the end of a year? Yes/No

Ethnicity/Caste/Religion

- Did you face any kind of caste/ethnic discrimination inside the plantation area? Yes/No If yes, could you specify?
- Where you discriminated by trade union leaders/labor association leaders towards availing an active membership because of your caste/religion? Yes/No If yes, can you specify an incident?
- Where you differentiated in the plantation's based on your religious identity? Yes/No If yes, can you specify
- Have there been any incidents of violence/mistreatment against any caste/religion/ethnicity in your workplace or within your community? If yes, can you elaborate an incident?

Political Affiliation/Trade Union Work

- Are you a member/leader of a trade union/labor association/tea welfare association? Yes/No
If yes, can you name it?
- If you are a member/leader of a trade union/labor association/other unions how did your family respond to it? Did they supported you or were against the union activities you participated in?
- Can you identify one or two labor association/trade union/welfare association who has done tremendous work for the betterment of workers in the plantations? Yes/No
If yes, can you name them?
- Do you participate in any activities conducted by the unions/welfare association/labor association? Yes/No
If no, why? And If yes please explain the activities
- Do you think trade union leaders are biased and political about taking favorable decisions for workers work/living conditions? Yes/No
If yes, can you describe why?
- At times of issues regarding work/living conditions are you able to voice out your opinions among trade union/labor union/welfare association leaders/associations? Yes/No
If yes, can you share one example?
If no, why not?

What are the government policies and intervention's contributing towards ensuring welfare of women workers and supporting or contributing towards their fair representation in the trade unions in the tea plantation sector? – For Women Workers

Government Schemes/Welfare Benefits

- Are you availing any government schemes currently? If yes, are you aware of the number of schemes available for the workers?
 - Do you think these policies are enough to cater to workers wellbeing in work and living conditions? Yes or No
If No, can you specify reasons?
 - Are you aware of any government program's which encourages empowerment of women workers to join unions as active members/leaders? Yes/No
If yes, can you name them?
 - Do you feel that the government is not giving importance to workers security and well-being because of the political relations held between them and the plantation management and companies?
 - Do you receive worker welfare benefits under the PLA Act 1951? Yes/No
If yes, briefly name them.
-

What role does the family as an institution play for or against women's engagements or active participation in the tea trade union's in Assam? – For family members of Women Workers

Household/Family

- Who takes care of the household chores?
- Do you help your mother/sister/wife/ daughter with any of the household chores?
Yes/No
- Do you support her in the major decisions she makes regarding work and household responsibilities? Yes/No
- Do you recall any incidents where your mother/daughter/wife/sister participated in trade unions activities inside trade unions/labor association and others? How was your reaction on it?
- How do you feel about your mother/sister/wife/daughter taking active participation in decision making inside trade unions of the tea plantations? Do you think it is possible/impossible/challenging? Can you explain reasons why you chose one?

Household/Family

- Who takes care of the household chores?
- Do you help your mother/sister/wife/ daughter with any of the household chores?
Yes/No
- Do you support her in the major decisions she makes regarding work and household responsibilities? Yes/No
- Do you recall any incidents where your mother/daughter/wife/sister participated in trade unions activities inside trade unions/labor association and others? How was your reaction on it?
- How do you feel about your mother/sister/wife/daughter taking active participation in decision making inside trade unions of the tea plantations? Do you think it is possible/impossible/challenging? Can you explain reasons why you chose one?
- Have you ever been a part of any trade union activities alongside your daughter/mother/sister/wife? Can you briefly explain how you experienced the life there?
- What do you think is the step necessary for your wife/sister/mother/daughter to take or act against the various atrocities faced by the plantation managers?

Appendix 2: Pay slip of a woman worker

TEA ESTATE
PAY SLIP

WORKER'S NAME : [REDACTED] CATEGORY : PERMANENT WOMEN
P. F. NO. : [REDACTED] ID NO. : [REDACTED]
PERIOD : 26/08/2019 TO 08/09/2019
NO. OF DAYS WORKED : 12 NO. OF DAYS ON LEAVE : 0 NO. OF DAYS ABSENT

EARNING		DEDUCTIONS	
GROSS+AT ALLOW:	2245.10	P. F. CONT.	289.85
DEDUCTION:	293.37	RATION AMOUNT	3.51
COIN B/F	0.69	P. F. RECOVERY	0.00
COIN C/F	0.42	TOTAL	293.37
NET PAYABLE	1952		