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## GENDER DISCOURSE ON DISPLACEMENT AND LIVELIHOOD ISSUES: A STUDY OF WOMEN TEA PLANTATION WORKERS, NORTH BENGAL, INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

Present paper examines methods and methodological concerns of few significant conceptual constructs based on inter-sectional variables like colonial history of tea plantations, feminization of workforce, political economy of displacement, issues of sustainable livelihood; gender, labour and identity crisis or gender, space & identity; and emerging feminization of underclass at the face of declining tea economy in North Bengal. Further, observational analysis post closure of tea gardens would be included to substantiate trend analysis from a feminists' scholarship. It attempts to develop a theoretical discourse subsequently a tangible feminist framework keeping the gender-labour and displacement- livelihood issues at center space of the thematic dialogue.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since 2001 the pivotal role of tea plantations in providing stable and sustainable livelihood to tribal and other communities has tremendously dwindled. The tea industry in general had to go through crisis emanating out of high competition, price wars in the global market. This led to the retrenchment and lay-off of workers, and closure of several tea gardens in this region due to their inability to compete. Closure of such plantations not only has severe impact on livelihood but also it limits diversification or means of livelihood due to enclave nature of tea gardens. Therefore chronic closure subsequently led to starvation, illness, death and forced migration, if unable to find an alternative means to survive other than the plantations work. A total of 22 gardens closed down during the years 2001-04, severely hitting the workforce especially women (consist 55% workforce) and brought many more gardens at the verge of closure. Approximately 85,000 workforce were directly and indirectly affected by the closure and suffering continues till date. The present paper is based on longitudinal survey that examined ramifications of the closure, documented, identified empirical evidences and experience of the displaced women workers of tea gardens on their livelihood and sustainable issues. The selected region was Jalpaiguri district of North Bengal, popularly known as Dooers.

A total of 11 gardens were selected for the study out of 22 closed gardens in the district. The study examined how these women tolerated and withstood exploitation and co-opted with their living space of patriarchy, structural dominance, oppression and decades of suffering and victimization within plantation enclave they resided. Their narratives' substantiate a collective sense of suffering and belonging, especially in 'gendered' ways (as women) (Ref: Sarkar. S., 2020; 2018; 2016; 2013). The present discourse aimed at developing a working theoretical framework of the discourse that addresses displacement of women workers, closure of tea gardens, and emerging sustainability issues at the face of 'displaced women workers' as underclass in tea belt of North Bengal.

### Reflections from Narratives

- Whatever little is available we are trying to survive on that. In the morning "pantabhat" (soaked rice overnight), kachalankaa (green chilly), Pyanj(onion), if available and salt. No roti ever? She said "na didi roti kothai aar samai kothai ja ration theke pai tai khai aamra" (where is roti, and where is time to cook, whatever we get from ration, we eat that)
- My husband was 39. One day he complained of fever and stomach pain, me and my son hospitalized him at Lakhipara hospital. We have free medication provision for

general illness. But these days even simple medicines for diarrhea or fever is not available in garden dispensary. In complicated cases, hospital may demand certain medicines to buy or blood to give. In my husband's case they had told me to buy few medicines, I couldn't purchase. After a week of his third time of hospitalization he died, doctor told me 'heart attack'. I always think he was too young to have heart attack. But finally heart must have stopped, that's why he died?

- "...Since my husband passed away, I am always on lookout for jobs, which garden is giving jobs on an hour basis and at times, there are contractors who collect stones from rivers, I go and join other women. But this is not something we should do. We should do our plantation work in the garden. Our ancestors did for generations. However, I will hold this quarter (company provided place to stay at outskirts of tea garden) till end, if my son wants he can go to the cities for better options". This is my place by birth, I will not leave till my last breath
- My husband is very ill over past two years (in the closed tea plantation, majority of the male workers have been reportedly ill, more due to diarrhea, malaria, frequent fever, liver problem and malnutrition related sickness). It is me now who is doing garden work. But my wage is not that much as I only know how to pluck the leaves.
- I have two sons and two daughters. After husband died last year, I started working for my daughters. My both sons left garden and working in small shops in cities. Nearby townships are so far that "domestic work" which I wanted to do is really difficult to find. This is the reason I am still in garden areas and struggling for work.
- Sometimes few of us go to other gardens where gardens are run by contractors. They give work not specific to the workers but to the workers who are negotiating for less wage (as low as 35 Rs. a day) and equal hours. I have worked so far in four gardens including mine. All are managed by contractors, owners or management has stopped visiting gardens.
- I let my only daughter go away as I could not feed her any more. My son left this garden too. He is working in Jalpaigudi (city in North Bengal) hotel. He comes once in a while. I am looking after work and my ailing husband. Not sure how long he will survive, he complains of stomach pain and always has fever!
- We are reducing by number day by day. Many of my friends died in past seven years. I am scared to go out of this area as I cannot even speak Hindi well. My children are very young, have to be here to help them to live till they are grown up to look for jobs. They demand fish and rice for meals but how will I give that, even if we hunt a bird, we just have to burn it and eat. We don't have enough spices to make curry.
- Garden may, not be open again completely. These days no party workers come in support. It looks like they have abandoned us. We also do not need them, I don't think they have helped us in anyway or gave our long due wage to ease our struggle even for a few months.
- Garden have been closed more than six years. We know garden will not be open in future. Management has abandoned us and did not pay salary for years. Many of us have taken up jobs of collecting stones for the contractors who send their truck to nearby rivers. We have also taken up work as domestic maids with new owners of some new gardens. We also work on forest roads by cleaning up dry leaves and on some contractual construction work. We have received 100 days work permit but within 100 days. We may have got work for 40-60 days, our suffering seems never ending.
- Kusbi, was 38 and she looked frail and pale. But this is very common face of poverty at tea gardens. Majority of them are below weight and looked starved. After my three meeting she opened up one day and shared her experience to let her only girl child go out of garden. She narrated.. "If I wasn't late that morning, I would have stayed and spoken to my daughter to stay out of it. But they had lured her with the promise of good clothes, mobile, money - everything that I cannot imagine to have for my own family. She ran away. Few times she had called and now

there is no communication. I have been struggling to feed my family since the tea gardens started closing." "I miss her terribly," she paused, and then quietly muttered "She would always have my lunch box ready when I left for work".

- In Red Banks tea estate, Shanti Oraon stood up and told assertively "Children are seeing our struggle and are moving out to earn money. They are willing to go with a modest offer because we need money to survive
- There were five of them, I have been interacting within Birpara Tea range area. After they became used to seeing me coming almost every week just for chatting and spending some time with them, they were confirmed that I was not even the member of an NGO or any political affiliation as almost all of them cursed Trade Union as not for labours' interest! The last day of my meeting when I was telling that I have to go back to city again, they opened up a bit more, when I asked helplessly, "so what do you all think, will this crisis ever be solved?". They smiled and quipped "didi (elder sister), all these people (Trade Union, Politicians, NGOs, OMCs) do not want gardens to be opened, we are all seeing us to be reduced to nothing but they have been doing well, some bought new cars as well. We think as long gardens remain closed agencies have the sympathy of Govt. and International funds (baharki paisa mil rahai and news me bhidikhatahai), they have their stories on the news channels, OMCs (operating management committee was proposed to be a self-help group with major representation of workers, one contractor and few TU representation) have their new business and 'we' as underpaid workers". Just by general observations, juxtaposed to dilapidated coolie lines (labour quarters), there were suddenly visible renovated houses would catch the eyes along with Hondabike standing or a four wheeler just have made an entry into the coolie line could not have been ignored.
- Rutia took more than a week to strike a dialogue with me. Her two brothers are working in roadside hotels, where they serve cheaper food. When I generally made a comment that in this tea gardens "I saw two shops, one car and one small home parlour but none of them were from your community"? She sounded frustrated and angry, she told that "our parents have always spoken in our language, we lived in our own circle, we used 'adhivasi' language, but their children (Nepal community) go out for Hindimediumschool, they watch Hindi movies, some of them can speak even English .....will they not go ahead of us when we have been left behind by the garden owners and managers?
- Parvati, aged 52, narrated ..past six months my husband is ill. Local hospital, says he needs better treatment to be cured, I have no extra money left to take him to faraway hospital," ..hunger will slowly kill all of us. I think only death can end our sufferings?

**Note:** Interviews were taken from several gardens that can be categorized as sick gardens and completely closed ones. Tea gardens like Kalchini, Raimatang, Birpara, Dhekelpara, Lankapara, Red Banks etc were significant as they experienced months of closure and 'no pay no work' situations.

**Rationale:** Plantation space is the most significant one and central to women workers' interest. These women were trans-generationally immigrant workforce since the inception of plantation economy till present, who lost their connection from their native roots / origin of the community for centuries, resulting into perceiving 'plantation setting' as their only living space. Their attachment to social and economic space grew simultaneously. Therefore, when, economic space was challenged by closure and severe sickness of gardens economic production of space, it impacted on their social space as well.

The overtone between women and their 'natural world' was born out of exploitation by colonizers may rightly substantiate the historical backdrop of feminization of tea workers and colonized domination of men and their policies. This entrenched the bedrock of patriarchal policies, unequal gender and labour relation in these tea gardens. Women plantation workers performed their reproductive and productive roles given by the tea garden owners under colonized

policy of 'family recruitment' system as an exclusive work-status. Over decades family recruitment system became normalized had also normalized inequality into gendered division of social and economic roles to access work, rewards, positions of power, and privileges inside tea garden space.

Closure and displacement disproportionately impacted women workers than their male counterpart. It created a favourable situation for further oppression women workers by all controlling agencies, like employers, Operative Management committee (OMC) or contractors of any alternative field of work other than tea gardens. Collective voice of these displaced women at tea gardens provides their 'shared experiences', highlighted their survival illustrating their trans-generational journey of sufferings, exploitations and unequal treatment. Becoming victims of human trafficking, prostitutions, loss of their identity or becoming 'underclass' - are few prominent ones, which could not go unnoticed.

**Focus of the present paper:** The study aims to develop a working theoretical framework keeping the moot contention and theme of feminist dialogue. *Present paper* examines methods and methodological concerns of few significant conceptual constructs based on inter-sectional variables like colonial history of tea plantations, feminization of workforce, political economy of displacement and issues of sustainable livelihood; gender, labour and identity crisis or space, identity, & emerging underclass at the face of declining tea economy in North Bengal (India). These variables that have been once discussed in my previous work (Sarkar, S., 2016-2020) would be considered as a part of larger discourse. In addition, observational analysis post closure of tea gardens would be included to substantiate trend analysis from a feminists' scholarship. Therefore, present paper attempts to develop theoretical discourse subsequently a tangible feminist framework keeping the gender and labour; displacement and livelihood issues at center space of the thematic dialogue.

**Conceptualizing Theoretical Framework:** In social science parlance, a framework is a system of ideas consists of basic assumptions and conceptual structures about the nature of the social world that guides our thinking, research, and action. It provides us with a systematic way of examining social issues and providing recommendations for change. A framework also indicates how problems are defined and the kind of questions to be asked and suggests different solutions to problems. For example, inefficiencies in society can be addressed through reforming or adjusting the status quo in a gradual and rational manner, or inequalities can be abolished through transforming society to redistribute power and resources fairly. Theoretical frameworks are dynamic and continuously evolving to suit to the need and relevance of contemporary discourse. A theoretical dialogue becomes relevant only when it is applied and relevant in a certain context.

**The Feminist', Ideas, Methods & Methodology:** Feminist methodology or feminist approach relies on the argument that women sufferings, differentiation and inequality has been originated from entrenched and chronic patriarchy, an ideology regulates norms and rules of a society by & for men. The feminist quest is to delve how such subordination occurred and sustained and how it can be challenged or fought back from male supremacy. There is however, difference between feminist methodology and methods. Methodology indicates an ideological frame of discourse or a theoretical framework within which certain methods like collection of oral history, life history, in-depth interview or a large scale empirical survey could be considered. Feminist theorists since 90s are thriving for several attributes attached to feminists' debates & dialogues. Beyond the minimalist understanding of 'gender and subordination' feminists scholars try to understand on various areas of women concerns. It is important to mention here that 'women' as concept is not 'homogenous' in nature rather it is highly heterogeneous in term of its race, ethnicity, class, caste or in their socio-cultural construct. Therefore examining women's inequality and subordination with reference to all these aspects, scholars would need unique strategies and perspectives to interpret and analyze gender issues.

Feminist's theories also adhere more towards qualitative methodology and experiential reality where a component of historical backdrop is essential as feminist scholars would argue that oppression, exploitations or inequality has a deep rooted cultural pattern and history within which patriarchal foundations are enhanced by male supremacy (Krishnaraj, 2021, EPW, Vol. no.52, p: 10) argues, "...feminism in itself an intervention in history, informed by historical knowledge. Concepts and categories through which we appropriate, analyze and construct the world, has a history within which we ourselves are implicated". In adopting methods and methodology in social science idiom feminists also argue that much of our understanding of the world, our societies, and ourselves, today, rests on theories and knowledge generated historically and predominantly by men of respective nationalities and economic classes. This subsequently leads to the exclusion of women and other groups from the process of formal theorizing and knowledge-building. Therefore, when applied in research, policy, and actions, such theories and knowledge relies more on a male narrative of the reality and tend to ignore women's experience of the same reality or existing crisis. Therefore knowledge that are collected becomes partial and male centric in nature. Feminist theorists and scholars try to balance this gap of partial knowledge of androcentric approach and their culturally specific experience of reality. Feminist's scholars emphasizes on women's lived experiences and their informal theorizing into account and, on this basis, adopt specific feminist approaches in building theory and knowledge. In this context, present work attempts to explain feminist theories and methodological approaches to examine and analyze emerging phenomenon like gender identity, work, displacement, sustainable issues and women emerging as underclass after two decades of chronic closure and sickness of tea gardens in North Bengal (India). The problem is being examined through lens of women's experiential knowledge and their existential narratives with an historical underpinning of colonial and patriarchal domination of their socio-cultural setting within tea garden enclave, North Bengal, India. Displaced women Tea workers were the major stakeholder who were marginalized and voiceless and disconnected from the mainstream conventional narratives of tea plantation and crisis over decades.

**Context, Conceptual Constructs & Research Methods:** Over one decade of longitudinal study and non-participatory observation in Doers tea plantation region, I have identified few important trends. These trends evolved gradually over a decade as an offshoot of frequent sickness and closure of tea gardens. The emerging trends have been conceptually constructed with minimum two or more variables, viz., labour and displacement; displacement and sustainable livelihood; displacement & alternative livelihood issues; space & identity crisis, patriarchy, systemic economic marginalization, ethnicity, social and cultural isolation, emerging underclass and feminization of underclass etc., keeping 'gender as a constant variable. The study examined how all these variables have interacted with reference to gender during the closure and crisis period. Each conceptual construct<sup>1</sup> that was developed by me was collected from women stakeholders and their narratives at first phase (emic perspective) and later the same information was contrasted with several groups of other stakeholders, like trade union members, Operating Management Committee (OMC), male tea workers, NGOs, Tea Garden Association and data at district magistrate office (2002-2008) and so on (etic perspective). This was done throughout the phase of data collection to contrast, to validate and to substantiate aforesaid concepts (using multiple variables for situational reduction) that could help to develop one theoretical framework for the present discourse or a combined ones under ethnographic methodology and interpretative approach. Ethnographic and interpretative methodological approach was useful to address 'collective narratives of women workers' at their enclave gardens space (keeping the community in their natural/own setting). Such method emphasized on "subjective truths," of women' experiential narratives.

<sup>1</sup> Operational definition: A conceptual construct is a concept or an idea based on observational trend and data analysis consist of minimum two or more variables.

Narratives of life histories, oral histories and in-depth interview facilitated to examine prevailing gender inequities and gender specific exploitative conditions of the women vulnerable group(s), i.e., women & girls (aged 13-22) who confronted worst chaos of closure, even in the form of sexual exploitation and trafficking. One of the main perspective that I tried to argue with as to how (research question no.1) systemic patriarchy and power structures influence wage and means of livelihood post closure within and outside of tea gardens pushing down displaced women workers as the core vulnerable group as worst affected and deprived from major or even fringe (example, MNRGA schemes) benefits for mere survival. Here the trend of these displaced women emerging as 'underclass' was observed. Another ideas that I delved into was that, in a given demographic location and the reconfiguration of the labor market that had profoundly impacted on the livelihood in general, how these women had accessed in seeking alternative means of livelihood (research question no.2) post displacement in the same region, (if available). Another question (research question no.3) appeared as to why these displaced women workers chose to stay close to these tea gardens and their given existential surrounding bereft of any amenities or rights to work at garden and faced continuous exploitation of various kinds?

An adequate volume of literature from early 20's though have addressed work, class and labour relations in tea plantation discourse in North Bengal, but a large volume of unorganized and informal sectors like agriculture, domestic services, cottage industries, construction or the manufacturing, small scale mining sector in this region remained unaddressed and therefore review of literature remained scanty. Over a period of long observations, it can be mentioned that these unorganized sectors have become crucial for displaced women workers of tea gardens along with *eco-tourism* of closed tea gardens (a latest trend & remake of garden culture), to seek alternative means of livelihood and the question arise whether these means can be address as new means of alternative livelihood (research questions no.3) remained a pertinent concern. Present study could only explore alternative means for a small group of women (based on 11 closed tea gardens over a period of time) out of 1500 as population (using snow ball technique as interviewees were extremely inhibited, scared and anguished to any non-local external agencies) and sample size was finally a total 250 cases that included interviews, group discussion, collection of life histories and oral history of the tea gardens of yesteryears. Oral histories of senior women tea (retired) workers and local senior communities who were involved into tea gardens economy directly or indirectly, like for example, old journalists, trade union members, tea workers, retired managers/administrative officials and so on - represented the source of *primary data* for the study.

Present work also touched upon a cross-cultural comparison while exploring various available means for alternative livelihood. There was a homogenous pattern to seek alternative work in mining, stone collection on river bed, rural development related work, as daily wage based leaf collectors of few open gardens in the area. It is interesting to mention here that these women always moved in groups and work through referral sources and always stayed in close network. However, Nepali women workers who have a local base outside of the tea enclave and wider network, find better resources for themselves as they could speak Hindi and local language (Bengali), knew local style of cooking and had interest in beauty parlours and domestic services. These women had leverage over tribal women in the garden seeking alternative livelihood within and outside of tea belt. A significant young Nepali girls went to nearby cities like Jalpaigudi, Solitude and joined hotels or beauty parlors. Within the gardens' border, if there was any small shops or tiny parlor, it would belong to a Nepali woman unlike Santhals or Oraon or any other indigenous tribal women groups who stated and suffered in isolation. However, there was also increasing trend of inter-state migration, begging, prostitution, petty crime, selling off girl children far away from tea belt to the hands of agents by luring these poor displaced workers for few thousand bucks are important to mention.

Further, many more problematic issues like examining nexus of agents inside garden who are bringing buyers under the pretext of work outside states for children and young women, police-agent-garden interconnection, pattern and nature of human female and child trafficking etc. remained unexplained and that could be considered as *limitation* for the present work. It was interesting to examine how displaced women workers perceived 'a sense of collective' bonding of being gendered and share their collective experiences to challenging life situations post closure of workplaces (tea gardens). Trauma of their uncertain future, (as few gardens like Kalchini or Raimatang never opened after 2000), forced starvation, miscarriage, death and loss of 'work identity', loss of economic rights of 'exclusive work status'<sup>2</sup>, given to them for centuries, marginalized representation in trade unions to voice for wage or due payments, their ethno-social isolation, educational and language disadvantages, being caught inside closed wrecked tea gardens enclave - all made significant part of their 'shared narratives'.

**Note:** The methodological argument may arise that who are the 'knower' of the real problem? Are the male workers who were also displaced and confronting several hurdles to stay afloat, or the women workers whose lived experience narrated an entirely different gendered reality of exploitation, sufferings, vulnerability, systemic marginalization and cultural isolation for decades? As Harding (1987, p: 181) argued, in qualitative ethnographical research, should there be subjectivity between the researcher and the subject (here women); should researcher attempts to unfold the truth or must she be dispassionate and socially invisible to the subjects (women) to maintain 'objectivity'? Feminist argument here would be the 'pursuit of knowledge' by producing right information (factual data) and interpreting subjects' experience from their perspectives and then contrasting with other available resources to substantiate & validate the 'given information' would be sufficient to maintain an objective pattern of documentation. The purpose of the present study was to enrich feminist scholarship in general and signify displaced *women plantation workers* with specific implications, suggestions and trends of the findings. Scholar's argument in present context was besides male version of reality there can be 'women version of reality' as well and these two experiential narratives may vary on many counts as women were socio-culturally different than men. Therefore, by silencing voices of women would give the half-truth of the same problem. It was essential to deconstruct and redefine a concept that was previously examined from a male perspective and accepted as factual document. Feminist theorization in present context seeks to reveal the distinct 'gendered' thinking that critically perceived a necessary bond amongst displaced workers 'as women collective' engaging certain social and economic roles in their narratives of negotiations (socio-cultural or political) and their inherent wisdom to take decisions (benefited them few times), their chronicles of struggle and survival under punitive patriarchy, capitalist and coercive way of declining economic system - all were considered as significant part of the narrative

**NOTE:** One of the important methodological concerns was how to approach the 'field' more so as a female researcher on the field. Dorothy Smith argued (cited in Harding (1987b, pp. 7-8) in the "fault line" where between women sociologists' experience as sociologists and as women vary entirely from a male investigator. In present context, during my field visit, I felt strong resistance from male workers, union leaders and management to share their views candidly. They at times, contradicted with each other's versions and played blame game. Also it was insinuated that travelling in remote areas after sunset could be a concern of victimization which was not the case for a male researcher. Further, giving freebies like food and expensive drink were suggested by many so that these men speak and provide relevant information on closure and crisis and share some statistics, essential for study.

<sup>2</sup> Exclusive work status was a positioning given by the colonizers that would include right to work in the garden trans-generationally, right to live in the 'coolie line' (labour quarters outside of the garden), weekly ration and medical benefit.

Surprisingly even within the growing crisis situation of frequent closure, political tension, trade union conflict, majority of them felt no obligation to share their honest opinion unless they were bribed with food, alcohol or money except few. At certain phase of data collection, women workers, displaced or working would openly say that its more beneficial for agencies (TU, management, OMC, NGOs) that garden remained closed forever then open even for few months. Because they would lose the attention of media and sympathy from fund providers if there is less hunger, death and selling of children in the region. It seemed agential nexus were more in consensus to stay on conflict pages than negotiating a fair deal with management and Government bodies to end crisis of closure.

For present discourse, women' experience in the collective sphere have provided new narratives of the problem of 'closure and displacement'. The formulation of conceptual constructs highlight several ways to examine 'gendered narratives of displaced women workers' which implies an alternative reality, which was never shared before and is different from conventional mainstream labour studies and androgenic version of the reality. Further, while examining, scholar recognized that 'gendered experience' shaped women perceptions and understandings of crisis differently than their counterparts. Further multiple identities (ethnic/gender/ class/rural/ caste) played powerful determinants and therefore should be taken into consideration for the present discourse. As scholar would like to quote that "...the category "women" is pluralistic, so treating women as a homogenous group would result in theorizing a process no better than that of the traditional androcentric approach" (Jane L. Parpart, *et al.*, 2020), and, therefore could lead to methodological fallacy. To avert the distortion of the 'reality' feminist inquest must highlights 'gendered' based narratives from the 'subjects' who are under crisis situations rather than being evasive with the language of 'objectivity' (Hardings, 1987) and adhere to the conventional narratives.

**NOTE:**In the present research, researcher placed herself within the realm of closed tea gardens and real life situations of displaced women workers. Non-participatory observation of their daily chores at work and family was part of the data collection that subsequently shaped present discourse. Thus, researcher is not an invisible, anonymous voice of authority of intellect but a real, individual with concrete, specific objectives and interests in mind to examine historical past of feminization of workforce at present context of closure, sexual division of labour, structure of tea garden as 'work space' and crisis of present situations to examine issues like impact of closure, displacement, feminization of underclass and emerging crisis of alternative livelihood impairing women workers' work-life balance in the enclave setting of closed gardens.

**Few Feminists' theoretical discourse to gender, work, displacement & sustainable livelihood studies:** There are divergent perceptions, and different social and historical locations in which feminists' arguments and its theoretical discourse exist. Few relevant qualitative works in the first stage of second wave by socialist feminist writings which include discussions of women, class and work from psychological, sociological and economic perspectives were Eisenstein (1979), Hansen and Philipson (1990), Hennessy and Ingraham (1997), and Holmstrom (2002) and few more scholars who explained the categories of liberal, radical, Marxist and socialist-feminist thought and defending a socialist-feminist theory as against male domination based notion of women's alienated labor. Others such as Jaggar and Rothenberg (1978), Tuana and Tong (1995) and Herrmann and Stewart (1993) include classic socialist feminist analyses in their collections, inviting comparisons of the authors to others groups under the categories of liberal, radical, psychoanalytic, Marxist, conflict, postmodern, postcolonial and multicultural feminisms and so on. But these work fall short in the context of Asian societies. As scholars (Chhachhi's, 1988; Hardings, 1987; Baksh, 1993) argued, rejection of feminist theories as "western," "Eurocentric," or "ethnocentric" results from a failure to distinguish between the application of feminist theories to the historical, political and socio-cultural specificities to other sections of women ethnically or geographically located in non-western part of the world, for

example, black or Asian women or women in Third World. Colonialism' in context of Asia (India) or Africa when western scholars tried to liberate women in this context, it became a sort of maternal imperialism (krishnaraj, 2021, vol, LVI, No.52, p: 12). Western feminism therefore lack multi-cultural, ethnic or Asia-African contextual values.

However, black or third World feminists both from liberal and socialist perspectives have emphasized the need for historically specific research as there are many socio-cultural context where women have a history of slavery or colonized domination that created impeccable dependency trans-generationally making them vulnerable (Albert Memmi, 1957) and subsequently impacting at their present day struggle for survival under certain crisis situation. For example, displaced women tea workers in North Bengal have a systemic colonized history of trans-generational feminized formation of workforce (60%) at tea plantation economy and at present more than 50, 000 women have been affected by displacement and closure of tea gardens in North Bengal. The issues of displacement, closure and sustainability would remain incomplete if gender & labour are not examined with a historical underpinning of colonization in present context.

Marxist Feminist objection to the formulation of social structure argued, that just by the conversion of reproductive roles and positioning them into paid workers will not liberate women. If the structural ideology that is patriarchy remains consistent, any conversion of material production would ploy to retain sexual division of labour and therefore favour men as privileged and women as doubly burdened of work status and social positioning (production-reproduction roles). Socialist feminist scholars point at unequal power structure between sexes and reproduction. They attempted towards a unified framework where gender and class could be equally treated in relation with capital, production and reproduction. However, both schools of feminist thought perceived that as long sexuality is controlled by men, the power structure would remain unequal and gender biased. Subsequently, various patriarchal indices perpetuating inequalities between the 'sexes' serve the purpose of male interest and their narratives.

Another step forward to feminist dialogue is 'gender and development or women and development' (WID/ GAD) approach that tries for a synthesis of economic aspects of political economy and the radical-feminist issues of patriarchy and ideology (patriarchal ideology). Drawing on the socialist-feminist perspective, the GAD/WID approach argues that women's status in society is deeply affected by their material conditions of life and by their position in the national, regional, and global economies. It also recognizes that women are deeply affected by the nature of patriarchal power in their societies at the national, community, and household levels (Sen and Grown 1987; "Framework F: socialist feminism"; Young *et al.* 1981; Moser 1993; Elson 1992). Unfortunately, western schools of GAD/WID has been void of colonial consciousness, and also lean on hierarchy of world economic order. Further, neo-liberal scholars (post 90s) was influenced by capitalist ideology and assert that development is the mission of private sectors and State should have very little to do with it. The issues of redistribution of wealth and social welfare reform were felt important by these scholars (Blackden, 1993).

Third world perspective of GAD identifies women as **agents**, not simply as recipients of development thus question both gender relations and the development process. Gender and labour (production) relations, intermediate level like patriarchy, gender & mode of production, social status or sexual identity; historically specific analysis of concrete social phenomenon, like slavery, colonialism, or misogynist cultural practices like dowry in south East Asian societies etc. (Chhachhi, 1988) are imperative to Indian feminist discourse as these variables influence perceptions and experience of women to a larger socio-cultural context dominated by patriarchal agencies, like family, social or economic institutions or organisations. However, there is a paucity of data in Indian context.

As krishnaraj (epw, 2021, Vol.,LVI, no. 52., P: 12) stated “..except for the link with gender and caste we do not have a unifying theory. There is a large section women in third world and revolution cannot be only with industrial working class”. Such argument demands more probing into gender, labour, production-reproduction discourse (Moser 1993; "Framework G: black feminism" and "Current debates and critiques", 2000).

**Concluding remark:** Present section critically examines various feminist', Ideas, Methods & Methodology. It also tries to explore feminists' theoretical discourse to gender, work, displacement, sustainable and alternative livelihood issues. It has also developed various conceptual constructs based on significant variables to generate a pattern/trend to the present discourse with a feminist methodological approach.

The discussion at the initial phase highlights few methodological concerns as against traditional, androcentric approach to theorize and discuss various research problems. These approaches not only take into account differences in experiences of women and men but also recognize that women's experiences of reality could be a vital inclusion to construct an objective view of certain reality (narrative), for example, gender and labour, class or ethnicity, family structure and patriarchy, gender discrimination and wage structure, gender roles & domination, gender, inequality & power dynamics etc., under few plausible feminist theoretical framework & scholarship. The discourse could be partially brought under the 'gender and development (GAD)' debates as it largely emphasizes on issues of poverty, health and challenges in sustainable livelihood. However, none of the single theoretical proposition was adequate to justify present discourse with its entire conceptual construct put together under one theoretical frame or conversation and therefore a pluralistic or synthesis of few relevant theoretical approach would be more appropriate to substantiate present discourse .

Present work is also socio-economic and culturally intertwined due to its indigenous contextualities. It has various components of theories especially when scholar is emphasizing on 'feminization of poverty' referring to displaced' women workers who are socially backward or economically deprived appearing as 'underclass' at the declining face of tea plantation economy. The study also addressed the paucity of feminist methodological approach that are lacking in Indian academic scholarship.

Present work also attempts to show how cultural analysis in ethno-sociological study can provide an understanding of gender-labour relation as constructed by and dependent upon power axis within the hierarchy of an enclave setting. Conceptual constructs (gender with reference to space, identity, class, underclass, ethnicity, social seclusion and economic marginalization, emerging issues of sustainability & alternative livelihood) those were developed to analyses present discourse has provided a framework that could highlight the trend and various factors emerging gradually post closure of tea gardens with reference to displaced women plantation workers as stakeholder. It is evident that capital & class domination prevailed through systemic economic marginalization, social seclusion and cultural isolation over the years within a male centered socio-cultural setting of enclave tea gardens in North Bengal since its inception from colonial era.

Finally, the work provides a comprehensive knowledge enabling a wide cross sectional experiences of tea garden communities, various groups and classes. This may be beneficial in developing policy measures and intervention to address the chronic crisis of displacement and livelihood issues post closure of tea gardens in North Bengal region.

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