Role of Small Tea Growers in Socio-Economic Development in Rural Assam with Reference to Dibrugarh District of Assam.

Dr. Moheswar Rajkhowa
Associate Professor, Deptt. of Commerce
D.D.R. College Chabua. Dibrugarh (Assam)
Email- m.rajkhowa@yahoo.in

Abstract

Tea cultivation is a rural based agro-industry. Being a labour intensive industry, it is the source of opportunity towards the young generation basically rural and semi-urban area. As per the report of All Assam Small Tea Growers Association in the year 2018 there are nearly 144,222 Small Tea Growers (STGs) in Assam creating employment for around 3 lakhs people. They also contribute a significant portion (42.17 %) of the total tea production of Assam. The objectives of the study are to examine the role of small tea growers in socio-economic development and also identify the major problems faced by them. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The findings of the study revealed that small tea growers not only provide employment opportunities but also contribute for the development of the society. The study also examined the problems faced by small tea growers and provides suggestions.

Key words: Small Tea Growers, Socio-economic development, rural area, Problems.

Introduction

Tea cultivation is a rural based agro-industry. Tea industry plays a significant role in our economy as it serves major livelihood opportunities for its countrymen. Assam is the largest tea producing state in India. Assam alone produces more than half of India's tea production. The estimated annual average production of tea in Assam is about 630- 700 million kg. Tea production in Assam was approximately 702 million kilograms in the fiscal year 2019. West Bengal came second that year with close to 395 million kilograms. The East India Company first established tea garden in Assam in 1835. In 1837 the first experimental tea estate in Assam was established at Chabua in Dibrugarh district in Upper Assam. Production of Small Tea Growers of Assam is estimated at 285.24 million kilograms (2018) which are around 42 % of the total production of Assam and 21.53% of India's total production. Average productivity of Small Tea Growers of Assam is 3,250 kg made tea par hector. There are 22 districts where tea grown out of 33 district in Assam. The Total number of Small Tea Growers found in Assam are 1,44,222 as per the report of All Assam Small Tea Growers Association in the year 2018 and cultivate 80,948 hectares of land.

Small Tea Growers (STGs) in Assam

The definition of Small Tea Growers varies from country to country. Most of the countries define on the basis of their holding size. In India, small holders/small growers are those who grow tea on land size 10.12 hectors (75 bighas) or less and not possessing his/her own tea processing factory. On the other hand government of Assam considers small Tea Growers are those who have holding land less than 30 bighas. According to All Assam Small Tea Growers Association small tea growers are those who have land holding less than 250 bighas under tea cultivation.

Initially, the tea industry in Assam was colonial in nature without the involvement of local people. Because of some legislation the indigenous people of Assam were deprived from this outstanding entrepreneurship. No one was permitted to plant tea without permission granted to him in writing by or on behalf of the Tea Board, India. The concept of tea cultivation in small scale was initiated during the seventies of the last century by the then Janata Government of Assam. In the year 1978, the Government of India as well as the Government of Assam abolished all the barriers and allowed the local people to cultivate tea on small holdings. The Assam Agricultural University was entrusted to see the possibilities of growing tea in small scale. In October, 1988, “Tea Advisory Cell” was established in the department to promote the concept of small scale tea cultivation and provide all possible help and guidance to the growers in Assam. In 1987, 'All Assam Small Tea Growers Association' was formed. Since then, both the organizations worked together to popularize tea in small sector. In 1991, “Tea Advisory Cell” was reconstituted as 'Small Tea Growers’ Advisory Programme' (STAP) and, has made tremendous impact by providing technical guidance to small tea growers and also served as a main centre for spreading small scale tea cultivation among the farmers.

Objective of the study:

The objectives of the study are-

1. To examine the role of Small Tea Growers in socio-economic development of the area under study and also,
2. To identify the major problems faced by small tea growers in Assam.

Methodology of the study:

Dibrugarh district play an important role in this agro-based industry in Assam. According to the All Assam Small Growers’ Association in Dibrugarh District there are 29,908 numbers of registered Small Tea Growers in the District (as in 2017-18). The area of study is confined to Dibrugarh district of Assam. This paper is based on both primary and secondary information. Primary data have been collected from owners of Small Tea Gardens and secondary information has been gathered from various books and journals, news papers magazines etc. For the present study 80 Small Tea Growers are randomly selected as sample from the study area. Required information have been collected from the respondents with the unstructured interview schedule.

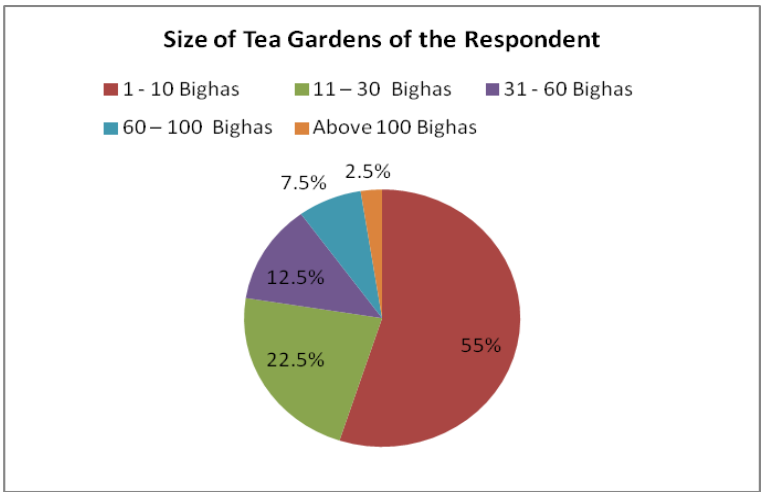
Analysis and Discussion

Table: 1
Table showing the size of Tea Gardens of the Respondent

Sl. No.	Size of gardens (in Bighas)	Number of respondents	Percentage
1	1 - 10 Bighas	44	55%
2	11 – 30 Bighas	18	22.5%
3	31 - 60 Bighas	10	12.5%
4	60 – 100 Bighas	6	7.5%
5	Above 100 Bighas	2	2.5%
	Total	80	100%

Source: field survey

Figure: 1



From the Table -1 it is observed that out of 80 selected Small Tea Growers, more than half (55%) of them have very small size of tea garden, i.e. 1 to 10 bighas followed by 22.5% percent respondents whose land holdings are 11 to 30 bighas. 12.5% Percent respondents' size of gardens are 31 to 60 bighas and 7.5% percent respondents' size of gardens are 60 to 100 bighas. Only 2.5% percent Small Tea Growers are found in the sample Small Tea Growers whose size of gardens is above 100 bighas. It is observed from the study that majority of the Small Tea Gardens are very small in size.

Employment opportunities provided by small tea growers:

Small tea cultivation promotes not only self employment but also create employment opportunities for others. The recruitment of workers generally depends on the size of tea garden.

The number of employment opportunities provided by the respondents in their tea gardens is depicted in the Table – 2 given below.

Table: 2

Table showing the number of workers employed in the tea gardens

Sl.No.	Number of workers	Number of respondents	percentage
1	1 - 5	40	50%
2	6 - 10	22	27.5%
3	11 - 20	12	15%
4	above 20	6	7.5%

Source: Field survey

The Table – 2 shows that out of 80 respondents, 40 respondents (50%) have employed 1 to 5 workers in their tea gardens. The number of respondents who provide employment opportunity 6 to 10 persons constitute 27.5%. It is followed by 12 respondents (15%) who provide employment opportunity 11 to 20 persons in their tea gardens. Only 6 (7.5%) respondents provide employment opportunities more than 20 persons in their tea gardens. It is observed that majority of the respondents provide employment opportunity up to 5 persons in their tea garden.

Terms of employment of workers:

In the present study, terms of appointment of workers employed is confined to permanent and temporary workers. The workers who have worked regularly and throughout the year considered as permanent workers and those who have casually employed and have worked less than one year (generally plucking season) considered as temporary workers. The Table – 3 shows the percentage of permanent and temporary workers appointed in the gardens.

Table: 3

Terms of Appoint of Workers in the Small Tea Gardens

Sl. No.	Terms of Appointment.	Percentage of workers appointed as permanent and temporary basis.	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	Permanent	0%	40	50%
	Temporary	100%		
2	Permanent	10%	12	15%
	Temporary	90%		
3	Permanent	20%	20	25%
	Temporary	80%		
4	Permanent	30%	6	7.5%
	Temporary	70%		
5	Permanent	40%	2	2.5%
	Temporary	60%		
Total			80	100%

Source: Field Survey

The Table- 3 shows that majority of the respondents (50%) have not employed any person on permanent basis. 15% of the respondents stated that have employed only 10% workers on permanent basis. 20% respondents have employed 20% workers on permanent basis. 7.5% respondents have employed 30% workers on permanent basis and only 2 respondents (2.5%) have employed 40% workers on permanent basis. It is observed from the study that most of the workers working in the small tea garden seasonally. It may be due to the their low holding majority of Small Tea Growers need less number of workers (permanent workers) for maintaining tea garden and only plucking season they need more workers. Although, majority of the Small Tea Growers have temporary workers in the tea garden, yet the expansion of size of tea gardens and tea factory brings a good job opportunity to unemployed youth to employ themselves as tea garden labour and non-labour.

Problems faced by small tea growers

Small Tea Growers are facing problems such as marketing problem, low price of green leaf, labour problem, land problem, technical problem etc. Marketing of green leaf is the most dominant problem faced by small tea growers. Green leaf is a perishable product. In the absence of their own processing unit and proper marketing channel of green leaf, they have to depend on big tea garden owners or Bought Leaf Factories (BLF) and price is entirely decided by them. Many of Bought Leaf Factories (BLF) are not properly maintained the quality of the made tea and for that such teas are not realizing good price. Due to poor realization in price, the owners of bought leaf factories are not able to pay reasonable price to the small tea growers. Moreover, lack of market information, absence of proper storage facilities; ultimately bring down the price of green leaf.

The large tea estates provide living quarters and all the facilities to the employed labourers but Small Tea Growers unable to provide all such facilities to the employed workers. The main source of labour to work in the small tea gardens are generally, the ex-tea garden workers and the causal workers engaged in tea estates and daily wage earners from the respective villages. Basically, the crisis of labour supply is apparent during the festival period. Big tea garden owners offer gifts as well as monetary bonus to the workers during festivals. Therefore, big tea gardens ensure the availability of labour during festival period but Small Tea Growers unable to provide such incentive to the workers. Therefore scarcity of labours is one of the major problems they faced.

Small Tea Growers have one problem which is settlement of government occupied land. Most of the growers do not have land pattas. However, Assam government moves to give settlement of land to Small Tea Growers. Recently our chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal distributed land pattas to 471 Small Tea Growers of Dibrugarh district. The state government has authorized the Deputy Commissioners to make the settlement to expedite the process.

Another problem faced by Small Tea Growers is technical problem. From the conversation with Small Tea Growers it is found that most of the Small Tea Growers are not technically sound

and having lack of proper knowledge in the field of tea cultivation. Most of them are not participated any training programme conducted by Assam Agricultural University. Because of having lack of proper knowledge regarding the field of tea cultivation, they are facing problem in certain areas like- planting, plucking, plant protection, balance use of agro chemicals etc.

The Economic Importance of Small Tea Gardening:

As compare to others sectors, the contribution coming from tea industry is very remarkable. Tea gardens owners have been providing a large number of employment opportunities to unemployed youth of different communities since long time. Tea gardens in Assam have been providing golden job opportunities and also the one of the best work of the utilization of unutilized land.

Small tea gardening in Assam is one of the important entrepreneurial activities. They contribute a significant portion (42.17 %) of the total tea production of Assam. Small tea gardening have been a vital source of absorbing number no of persons in rural and semi rural areas. They are considered as labour intensive activity, which contribute to the society by enhancing the employment of skilled and unskilled, educated and uneducated labour force. Besides unemployment, to overcome some of the basic unsolved problems like poverty, illiteracy, poor health, etc. small tea growers play significant role. Many times small tea growers raising their helping hand for the construction of school, bridge, temple etc. for the society. This business venture may cultivate the spirit of entrepreneurship which will empower the economic growth of the society as well as the nation.

The small tea cultivation has changed the surrounding natural environment. It has also changed economic activities of the people from traditional rice and cereal crops to cash crop. The small tea cultivation has also contributed in changing the socio-economic development of the region particularly in rural area.

Suggestions and Conclusion

Tea cultivation is a rural based agro industry and considered as an important part of Indian economy. Small Tea Growers play an essential part in tea production. According to the All Assam Small Growers' Association small tea growers contribute 42.17 % of the total tea production of Assam and 21.53% of India's total production (as in2017-18). In Assam, the Small Tea Growers are playing a significant role in changing socio-economic life of the tea growers, tea garden workers and middleman. It is estimated that there are nearly 144,222 Small Tea Growers (STGs) in Assam and total labour force engaged in this sector is about 3 lakhs as per report of All Assam Small Tea Growers' Association (as in 2017-18).

As the tea industry is the leading industry in the state of Assam, therefore it is very imperative from the side of the govt. to lay much emphasis upon tea industry. For the greater interest of the society the government should support them financially and politically. Our government should

take step for the fixation of minimum fair price of the green leaves produced by the small growers every year. Moreover, government should collect surcharge from the purchaser of green leaf instead of Small Tea farmers or if possible exempted surcharge on green leaves.

The state and local authorities should provide easy and quality training facility to the existing Small Tea Growers and also interested tea growers so that they can acquire proper knowledge in the field of tea cultivation. The Small Tea Growers training and research centre would work to lend capacity building of the small tea growers.

One of the greatest weakness of Small Tea Growers sector in Assam is, still this sector is not organized. Therefore, Tea Board takes step for registration of small tea firm. Otherwise they are not able to get financial assistance from financial institution.

Some problems of Small Tea rowers can be solved by their own effort. They should participate various training programme organized by Assam Agricultural University or other organizations to expertise in the field of plantation. Small Tea Growers should take quality tea production as their mission. They should purchase tea plants only from the nursery recommended by Assam Agricultural University. This will help to increase production as well as quality of green leaf. To solve their marketing problem Small Tea Growers need to establish a marketing pool to sale their green leaves. Due to not having their own tea factory, they are fully dependent on other factories for processing their leaves. Therefore, All Assam Small Tea Growers' Association should build up a very strong Mutual Aid Fund so that they can set up their own tea factory.

In conclusion we can say that, in a developing country like India the economic importance of small tea cultivation is much more than innovative and invention. They have been a vital source of absorbing different kinds of labour force such as skilled and unskilled, educated and uneducated which may otherwise remained unutilized. Small tea cultivation may also cultivate the spirit of entrepreneurship which is important to empower the economic growth of the society and the nation.

References

1. *Banerjee, G.D. – 'Tea Plantation Industry' published by Lawyer's Book Stall.Guwahati.*
2. *Boruah, Pradip (2008). 'The Tea Industry of Assam: Origin and Development', Guwahati: EBH Publishers.*
3. *Bezbaruah, H.P., (1999), 'Origin & History of Development of Tea',Global advance in tea science ; A journal by Aravali Books International pvt Ltd; New Delhi; India.*
4. *Hazarika, U. (2014). 'Asomot Chah Khetir Etibrita', Guwahati: Bani Mandir.*

5. *Hazarika K. and Borah, K.(2013), 'Small Tea Cultivation in the Process of Self-Employment: A study on the Indigenous people of Assam (India)', Int. J Latest Trends Fin. Eco. Sc.. vol- 2*

6. *Jaganathan1, A and Palanichamy, K. (2017), 'A Study on Small Tea Growers Satisfaction Level and Problems with Special Reference to the Nilgiris District of Tamil Nadu, International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)', Volume 6 Issue 6.*

7. *Saikia Bipin & Hazarika Pradip. 'Asamor Khudra Chahkheti' published by Small Tea Growers Association, North Lakhimpur. (In Assamese).*

8. *The Directory of Small Tea Growers. (2014). All Assam Small Tea Growers Association Volume-4. Sen Benoy(2008), Origin and Development of Tea; EBH Publisher; Guwahati; Assam.*

9. *Chowdhury A,, Mandal P, Sarkar S and Chowdhury M, (2016), 'Prospects and Problems of Small Tea Growers in Terai & Duars of West Bengal, India', International Journal of Current Advanced Research, Vol 5, Issue 2, pp 587-590, February 2016*

****