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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Problems of Small Tea Growers (STGs) in Sivasagar District of Assam: A Sociological Study

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#### Abstract

Small Tea Industry is a significant part of tea industry. It is a rural based agro industry. Assam is the pioneer of producing tea and known as the 'Garden of tea world'.

Small Tea Growers (STGs) constitute an integral part of tea industry. The STGs covered 2.5 lakh hectares of land in India. Tea Board of India defines the Small Tea Growers holding area up to 10.12 hectares. Small Tea Growers contribute 25 per cent of total tea production of Assam, which is 500 million kg per year. The STGs of Sivasagar district play initiative role in tea production. Sivasagar alone has 10116 Small Tea Growers out of 1.2 lakh in the state. This study is based on primary data collected from 100 respondents of Sivasagar District by using purposive sampling method. We will highlight the Small Tea Growers socio-economic condition, various problems of Small Tea Growers.

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#### Introduction

The tea is a significant part of Indian agricultural system. India is the world's largest producer, consumer and exporter of tea. It is a rural based agro-industry. "The tea sector of India ... serves as a major livelihood opportunities for its countrymen, therefore the role of tea industry is significant" (Das, 2014:1). Out of 4907104 tones of tea produced in the world, India produces 1200410 tones (2013), which is about 24.46 per cent of the world tea production. Assam is the largest tea producing state in India. Assam produces about 629050 tones (2013) which are about 52.4 per cent of Indian tea production. Production of Small Tea Growers of Assam is estimated at 220168 tones (2013) which is around 35 per cent of the total tea production of Assam. (Barbora 2014:181) Small Tea Growers contributes 35 per cent of the total tea production. The Small Tea Growers cultivate 88674 hectare of land in 2012.

#### Small Tea Growers (STGs):-

'A small tea grower, as defined by the Tea Board of India, is one whose holding does not exceed ten hectares.' (Reddy and Bhowmik, 1989: 145). The Government of Assam considers only those growers as small tea growers with a maximum tea holding size at 30 bighas (4.0 hectare). (Neog, 2009:13)

#### Origin of Tea in India and world:-

Tea originated in China about 3000 years ago and it was first cultivated in South-East China. The word 'Tea' is derived from 't' e' of the Chinese Fukien dialect. (Baruah, 2006:23) Tea originated in China and it became popular as a beverage in many European countries, particularly in the United Kingdom. Mitra(2010:13) writes that a Chinese emperor Sheh Nung, accidentally discovered tea in 2737 BC when a leaf of tea dropped into his bowl of hot boiling water while he was in the garden near the tea plant. The East India Company traded tea and imported huge quantities to London for internal consumption in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century as tea was very popular among the British (Baruah, 2006:1). The discovery of indigenous tea in Assam in 1823 led to the origin of the tea industry in India. A local Assamese nobleman Maniram Dewan, who later worked in the Assam Company for some time, discovered the tea plant of Assam. India started tea cultivation in 1834 after the Tea Committee of Lord William Bentinck decided to encourage planned cultivation of tea.

Tea is considered as important crop in India. India is the second biggest foreign earner and it exports tea to about 85 countries. The tea as a plantation industry was developed in British colonial period. The Tea industry is a labour intensive industry because employees (labourers) play a major role in tea industry.

In India, tea is grown in different regions. Banerjee and Banerjee write that “The tea grown in different regions of India like Assam, Darjeeling, Tripura, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Orissa, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, and Uttaranchal, have a distinct class” (Banerjee and Banerjee, 2008:1). Assam is the pioneer of tea production and known as the ‘Garden of the Tea World’. (Sengupta, 2009: 63) Different types of tea like- Orthodox tea, green tea, instant tea, CTC tea are found in India.

#### **Origin of Tea in Assam:-**

Assam is the biggest producer of tea in India. Assam contributes 51% tea in India. Sir Joseph Banks initiated the first physical steps towards tea cultivation in 1788. In 1815, Colonel Letter had noticed the tea drinking habits of the Assamese tribes. The Singpho tribes of Assam called tea as ‘Fanap’. The agreement between Singpho Chief and East India Company helped in developing tea cultivation in Assam. Therefore, in 1823, Major Robert Bruce took steps to discover indigenous tea plants growing near Rangpur in Assam (Chakravorty, 1997:28). In the development of tea cultivation in Assam Bessa Gaum, Maniram Dewan, Robert Bruce had significant contribution.

Maniram Dewan, a freedom fighter of Assam, was the first Indian Tea planter who started tea plantations at Cinnamara near Jorhat and Singloi near Sonari followed by Assamese tea planters namely Roseswar Barua and Hemdhar Barua. Roseswar Barua started with seven gardens of which Laidegorh, Neginijan, Madhupur etc. were prominent. (Chakravorty, 1997: 30) Maniram Dewan first started private tea garden in India.

The East India Company first established tea garden in Assam in 1835. The first experimental tea cultivation in Assam started in 1836. The first experimental tea estate in Assam was established in 1837 at Chabua (Cha means tea, bua means to grow) in Dibrugarh district in Upper Assam. In 1838, for the first time ever, tea sold in London market. In 1839, the tea made in Assam was sent to London auction, and received a very positive feedback. Therefore, it helps in the development of tea in Assam. The first private tea company named Assam Company was established in 1839. The Assam Company was established in London for the purpose of cultivation of tea in Assam and of importing the product to London. The Assam Company divided into two divisions. C.A Bruce was made superintendent of the Northern Division with its headquarter at Jaipur. J.W Masters was made superintendent of the other divisions with headquarter at Nazira.

#### **Origin of Small Tea Growers in Assam:-**

The advent of Small Tea Growers in Assam started with the small tea plantation carried out in the district of Golaghat in 1986, heralding a new era in plantation history of Assam. In 1978, Someswar Bora, the then minister of Agriculture and co-operative of Assam from Janata party announced freedom to establish tea garden movement in Assam. His pioneering role in encouraging homestead tea growing earned him the title ‘Father’ of small tea garden in Assam. (Neog 2009:12)

Tea became a farmer’s crop, ushering in new avenues for employment. The abundance of uplands, availability of proven agro-technologically skilled labour, established and assured green leaf market, advantages of a long-term plantation crop is comparison to the other seasonal agricultural crops, blessings of suitable soil, climate were some of the factors that encouraged the small and marginal farmers as well as the unemployed to take up tea plantation. The growth of this sector was phenomenal as it assumed a form of a socio-economic revolution within a short period and served as a vehicle of social transformation in the state. It led to the establishment of a large number of tea factories in small-scale industrial sector, which also opened up employment opportunities in the tea estate. (Neog, 2009:13)

**Growth of STGs in Assam:-**

Year	No. of Growers	Area (in hectare)
1978	16	60.836
1983	279	1154.871
1988	875	3359.637
1993	4594	14051.838
1998	16759	41423.303
2003	45444	89334.217
2008	67463	118058.304
2011	68465	N.A

**Source:** Estimated Directory of Small Tea Growers, Department of Ministry of Commerce, Govt. of Assam  
Labourer, middlemen (tea agent), maharis (sadar), All Assam Small Tea Growers Association are inseparable parts of small tea cultivation. The middleman in tea business operate as brokers as well as agents. The middleman make an agreement to sell a certain amount of tea leaves in factory and Tea Estate in a year. The middleman are helping to create a relationship between Factory or Tea Estate and Small Tea Growers.

The labourer helps in plucking leaves, spraying pesticide and maintaining the garden etc. in tea cultivation. The labourers help in the development of tea industry in India.

A multi tasked staff popularly known as maharis (sadar), employed by some Small Tea Growers with large landholdings for supervisory activities and transportation of the leaves feel that it is better to work as wage earner than to engage in job of transportation.

**Review of Literature:-**

Many sociological studies were made on industrial structure. Such study explains the tea industry from industrial relation and globalization perspective. The tea Industry plays a major role in Indian economy.

Deb et al. (2008) highlights the globalization process and tea cultivation in context of North- East India. The globalization process influences in tea sector and production of North-East India.

Baruah(2006) in his book 'Tea industry of Assam: Origin and development' describes the importance of tea industry in India. Baruah mainly focuses on tea industry of Assam, which is playing a major role in economy of Assam. The small tea growers are also important part in tea cultivation.

Reddy and Bhowmik (1989) describe the tea factories and role of small tea growers in tea production. Reddy and Bhowmik in his article describe relationship between the small tea growers and co-operative tea factories in Nilgiris. The Nilgiris tea factories help in development of small tea growers. They play a vital role in tea production.

Bulow and Sorensen(1993) describe the necessity of gender in agricultural development. This study is based on smallholder tea production in Kericho District in Kenya. Mainly the low productivity in small tea is related with conflict of spouses. They also highlight the labour as key in tea smallholdings.

The problems and prospects of Small tea Growers explained by Kakati(2011), Goowalla(2015), Barua (2015) reveal that the Small Tea Growers face lots of problem like- poor infrastructure, information deficit regarding tea, low price of tealeaf, exploitation from tea agents etc.

Kakati(2011) in his article describes the problems of small tea growers in Lakhimpur district of Assam, mainly the low price of green tea leaf, minimum income from tea production, patta related problem etc. faced by the small tea growers.

Goowalla(2015) in his article highlights the problems and prospect of STGs in Assam. The financial problem, land related problem, marketing of green tea leaf, labour supply, poor infrastructural facilities etc. are the problems faced by small tea growers.

Barua (2015) describes different problems of STGs like- labour scarcity, irrigation facility, pressure from militant groups etc. faced by their. The small tea plantations sector occupies important place in tea economy of Assam. The small tea sectors induce setting up tea factories known as Bought Leaf Tea Factories.

Ahmed (2012) in his editing book highlights various problems of STGs like- indebtedness, financial crisis, problem of green tea leaf price etc. The women workers are important part of tea industry. The women tea labours face many problems in tea industry like- ignorance from the owner, lack of skill etc.

Goowalla (2015) in his article describes the problems and prospects of small tea growers in Jorhat district of Assam. The STGs are integral part of tea industry of Assam. The financial problem, land problem, lack of training in tea culture and practices, marketing of green leaves are the problems related with STGs.

Das (2014) describes the small tea holdings of Assam. In Assam, the smallholders are vibrant and dominant production mode in the tea sector. He also describes the role of labour in small tea holdings.

Hannan(2013) describes the organizational innovations regarding various issues of Small Tea Growers. He also highlights the BLTF as an important part in tea production.

Ganguli (2014) in his article describes existing theories and practices of tea cultivation which are defied by this home grown entrepreneurs. The small tea growers play a major role in new tea cultivation, administrative practices and marketing strategies.

#### Objectives of the study:-

1. To trace the history of Small Tea Growers in Assam
2. To analyze the social background of the respondents of this study.
3. To study the various problems of Small Tea Growers in Assam.

#### Methodology:-

The STGs of Sivasagar district of Assam are chosen for the present study because the growers of Sivasagar district play an important role in this agro-based industry in Assam. In Sivasagar District, there are 10,116 numbers of registered Small Tea Growers. The purposive sampling method used for this study. The sample size of this study is 100. The study takes into account the STGs 10, labourer 50, middlemen 10, All Assam Small Tea Growers Association (AASSTGAs) members 10, 10 Tea Board members and 10 Tea Estate members are chosen for this study. The data of the study carried from both primary and secondary sources.

#### Analysis:-

Small Tea Growers (STGs) has played a vital role in tea economy. The Tea Estate and Small Tea Growers are depended on each other. The STGs supply green leaves to the big tea gardens to meet the expected production.

#### Social Background of the respondent:-

In this study, both male and female respondents are selected. Besides the Small Tea Growers (STGs), the labourers, middleman, Tea Board worker, All Assam Small Tea Growers Association (AASSTGAs) members, Tea Estate worker are also selected in Sivasagar District for this study. The size of the respondent is 100.

**Table: 1.2:-** Age distribution of the respondent

SL. NO	Age group	Small Tea Growers	Labourer	Middleman	AASSTGA's member	Tea Board worker	Tea Estate workers	Total
1	21-30	1	15	3	1	-	1	21
2	31-40	2	11	4	2	3	2	24
3	41-50	4	20	2	5	4	2	37
4	51-60	2	4	1	2	3	3	15
5	61-70	1	-	-	-	-	2	3
	Total	10	50	10	10	10	10	100

This table shows that the highest number of respondents, that is, 37 belongs to the age group of 41-50. The lowest number of respondent belongs to the age group of 61-70, which consist of only three respondents.

### Family Composition:-

Family is an important social group of human society. In this paper, it is found that families of the respondents are both nuclear family and joint family.

**Table: 1.3:-** Family size of the respondent

SL:No .	Types of Family	STGs Nos.(%)	Labors Nos.(%)	Middleman Nos. (%)	AASTGA Member Nos. (%)	Tea Board workers Nos. (%)	Tea Estate Workers Nos. (%)	Total Nos.(%)
1	Nuclear family	6 (60%)	35 (70%)	7 (70%)	6 (60%)	7 (70%)	6 (60%)	67(67%)
2	Joint family	4(40%)	15 (30%)	3 (30%)	4 (40%)	3 (30%)	4 (40%)	33(33%)
	Total	10	50	10	10	10	10	100

Table -1.3 reflects the size of the family of the respondents', that is, Small Tea Growers, labours, middleman, All Assam Small Tea Growers Association (AASTGAs) member, Tea Board workers, Tea Estate workers. The highest numbers of respondents, that is, 67% is nuclear family. On the other hand, 33% belongs to joint family.

The respondent belongs to different religious groups such as- Hindu 60%, Christianity 20% and Islam 20%. The educational qualifications of Small Tea Growers as found in the study are matriculation (20%), higher secondary passed (40%), graduate (30%) and master degree holder (10%). Average monthly income of the Small Tea Growers in the study is Rs. 10000 to Rs. 30000.

### Problems of Small Tea Growers:-

Small Tea Growers are facing various problems in tea production. The problems like- scarcity of labours to work in the tea gardens, problems regarding the price of the tea leaves, problems created by middleman, economic problems, family problems, patta related problem and problem related to implementation of Government schemes are faced by Small Tea Growers. They are not aware of the facilities of the Tea Board Schemes. On the other hand, Small Tea Growers are facing problems such as unaware about the advanced method of cultivation, ignorance regarding organic cultivation. Moreover, they have been facing lot of financial problems as well.

The most dominant problem that is faced by the Small Tea Growers is the problem of labours. The frequent fluctuation in the labour price is the main problem in this cultivation. The labours are demanding daily wages above two hundred rupees (Rs 200 and move) but the Small Tea Growers are not satisfied by this demand. It is significant that the selling price of green tea leaf rises up and down season wise. In March to August, the price rate rises to 17-25 Rupees. After the month of October to November, the price rate comes down to 7-15 rupees. Therefore, the demand of hike in labour price is not justifiable with such fluctuating price of tea leaves. The selling price is also a major problem of Small Tea Growers. The low quality of tea leaves is also a cause of decreasing selling price. Sometimes the Small Tea Growers also faces the patta related problem such that most of them have no own land therefore they have to cultivate on the leased land.

### Conclusion:-

Tea cultivation is considered as an important part of Indian economy and is a rural based agro industry. Small Tea Growers play an essential part in production of tea. About 33 per cent Tea is contributed by the Small Tea Growers in Assam. The big tea gardens are also depended on Small Tea Growers' production. In Assam, the Small Tea Growers are playing a significant role in tea production system. Small Tea cultivation system helps in changing socio-economic life of the growers, labours and middleman. The labours' economic position have also been changed due abundance of working opportunities provided by the Small Tea Growers. Not only the labour's life style have change due to STGs but also the life style of another section of people has also been changed, that is, the middleman who earn money through this cultivation because they are the linkage between the STGs and Bought Leaf Tea Factories. The Small Tea Growers are facing certain problems in tea agriculture like- price fluctuation of tea leaves in every month, the demanding wages rate by the labour, no own land for tea cultivation etc. Sometimes the middleman create problem among the STGs because they want to earn more profit by cheating the STGs. On the other hand, this cultivation also helps in solving the problem of unemployment. There are some schemes such as- Nehru award and Human Resource Development for the Small Tea Growers. However, no proper implementation of

these schemes is made so far. Therefore, for the development of tea cultivation, the tea growers have to come out of the traditional ways of cultivation and adopt scientific method for production of tea.

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