



RESEARCH ARTICLE

**PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS OF SMALL TEA GROWERS IN TERAI & DUARS
OF WEST BENGAL, INDIA**

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 15th November, 2015

Received in revised form 21st

December, 2015

Accepted 06th January, 2016

Published online 28th February, 2016

Key Words: Small Tea Growers, Terai &
Duars, Prospects & Problems.

ABSTRACT

The present work focuses on the prospects and benefits of small tea cultivation in Terai & Duars as a source of self employment. Being a labour intensive industry, it is the source of employment for the people and it is the ideal area of mass and quality tea production along with Darjeeling hill of West Bengal. It has positive economic impact that ensuring a new employment opportunity towards the young generation and proper utilisation of local resources also ensure the source of revenue of state as well as the country. It is estimated that around 28, 000 small Tea Growers (STGs) in Terai & Duars creating employment for around 1.7 lakh local peoples and it gradually changing the socio-economic status of the rural areas of these sub-Himalayan region of India.

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INTRODUCTION

The River Tista on arrival at sub-Himalayan plains of North Bengal creating undulating lands on its right bank known as *Terai* and left bank as *Duars*. The soil of this area is sandy humus mixing with variable sized boulders and harbouring a large dense continuous tract of green forests system interrupted by various large and small tea gardens. The climate of this area provides ample opportunity to establish various tea gardens and are famous as ethno museum of India. Several tribal communities such as *Mech*, *Oraon*, *Santal*, *Rabha*, *Munda*, *Malpahari*, etc living and working in several tea gardens of remote places of *Terai & Duars*. These ethnic groups are completely dependent on those tea gardens for their survival.

Tea is the most popular drink in the world and its demand is increasing day by day from last few decades. The tea industry in India is one of the old agriculture based industry since 18th century (Borborah & Gogoi, 2007) and became a economical backbone in tea cultivation areas of Assam and Northern part of West Bengal. In Terai and Duars area of North Bengal Tea production is only major and key industries on which tea gardens, workers, tea trader are dependent for their major economy.

In India, tea has grown in an area of 5.10 lakh hectares and producing 23 per cent of the global tea (in 2010). Since the

introduction of tea plantation in India (in 1823), the industry has contributed immensely towards the socio-economic development (Hazarika & Borah, 2013).

In India, tea plantation were successfully established in 16 states among them Assam, West Bengal, TamilNadu and Kerala account for about 95 per cent of the country's total tea production (Hazarika & Borah, 2013). In India, there are two types of plantation takes place in tea production one is large plantation and small plantation. Small Tea Growers (STGs) is defined, as a person or group having plantation area up to 10.12 hectares (as per the norms of Tea Board of India).

METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on both primary and secondary data sources have been collected through extensive survey in different tea garden and factories. Primary data have been collected mostly by direct contact method from the different tea garden authority and garden workers of Terai & Duars of West Bengal. The Questionnaires and interview schedules have been taken to carry out the whole investigation. Secondary information have been obtained from different literatures like magazines, newspapers, journals, books, reports published by Government authority. Most popular gardens and factories are repeatedly visited and various information's were documented time to time.

OBSERVATION AND DISCUSSION

In India several big tea gardens were established by British in various states of North-east and a Southern part as the tea was very popular beverage during 1800s. Among the various tea plantation, Darjeeling tea is most famous in world for essence and colour. But to fulfil the need of demand a good number of such big tea gardens were established in Assam, West Bengal of North east India. From last few decades, the appearances of Small tea growers (STGs) were developed. Most of the suitable land for tea plantation was already occupied by the large tea plantation (Hannan, 2008). Tea cultivation in small scale was initiated 1930's (Chai Time, 2007). After a long period small scale cultivation spread to the other tea producing states of India like West Bengal and Assam. The Tea board of India adopted the concept of STGs during the eighth five year plan (Hannan, 2008).

Table 1 Distribution and Production of Small Tea Growers in India

State	Number of STGs	Area(in ha)	Production (Million Kg)
Assam	42,492	41,249	62770
West Bengal	8,398	9,500	32245
Tamil Nadu	61,985	43,157	78764
Kerala	5,999	4,810	1969
Other states	7,382	8,032	2108
Total	126,256	106,748	177,856

[Source: Tea Board of India]

Table 2 Tea Industry in India at a glance (2011)

Types	No. of gardens	Area (hectors)	Production (million kg)	Employment
Small Tea Garden	157504	1.62 lakh	260 mkg	1 million
Big Estates	1686	4.18 lakh	728 mkg	2 million

[Source: Tea Board of India]

Small tea growers are largely concentrated in North Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and at the foothills of Darjeeling hills *i.e.* Terai & Duars. There are around 30,000 such small tea growers in North Bengal and producing around 91 million kg of tea leaves that covers almost 32.5% of North Bengal's total tea production *i.e.*, 280 million kg (TBI).

40% land of the Terai & Duars is occupied by the large and small tea plantations area and around 35% of the total population of this area is residing within or nearby tea garden areas. Around 65 bought leaf factories are regularly purchasing fresh green tea leaves from various such small tea growers. Now small tea plantations are the main economic force of the study area that creates a green socio-economic revolution in the rural areas of sub-himalayan North Bengal. Following three types of tea plantations that are prominent in this areas.

- **Estate Garden:** Estate gardens are privately owned or run by corporate companies with more than 300 hectores of land and producing leaves, process the teas and market their tea individually.
- **Medium Size Garden:** This category comprises above 10.12 hectores of land called project garden and only producing tea leaves.
- **Small Tea Plantation:** This category comprises plantation holding up to 10.12 hectores (25 acres) under

tea (tea board India defines as Small Tea Growers) and only producing tea leaves.

Tea cultivation in Terai & Duars has immense potential for both employment as well as income generation. It can be a profitable business venture and can play an important role in improving socio-economic condition of the rural people of West Bengal. The young educated enthusiastic unemployed peoples are taking tea cultivation as their profession. However, the young small tea growers are facing various problems related to the availability of finance, low price of green leaf, processing of leaves etc. Hence, considering the above aspects, following objectives will be highlighted in this paper:

- Potency/Prospects small scale tea cultivation
- Problems faced by the existing Small Tea Garden of Terai & Duars.

Potency of Small Tea Cultivation

Scope for entrepreneurship

Cultivation of tea in small scale is said to be the outcome of the entrepreneurial ability of a group of local youth in the latter part of 1970's (Goswami, 2006). Encouraging the youths in taking up small/ medium level tea cultivation would strengthen the backbone of the rural economy (Barker, 2007). Small scale tea cultivation provides an ample opportunity for making the enterprise or entrepreneurship.

Sources of income generation

Small scale tea cultivation plays an important role to generate the income. Most of the peoples directly depend on this sector. This sector produces huge income and helps to build the people as financially sound.

Employment to the rural people

Small tea cultivation provides an ample opportunity for self-employment of the rural educated unemployed youths (Baruah, 2008). The cultivation itself creates many employment opportunities in the field of manufacturing, supply of garden equipments, transportation of green leaf etc.

Utilization of unused land

Most of the land of STGs may be considered as second grade land for growing tea. Some of them grow tea in ceiling surplus land, waste land, grazing land or government vested lands which were either underutilized or unutilized.

Chances establishment of Bought Leaf Factory by small tea growers

The bought leaf factories (BLFs) are the major buyers of green leaves from small tea growers and they are now paying at the rate of purchase of green leaves Rs 6 – 7 per kg, whereas the sale price is Rs 15 – 16 a kg. Frustrated with the low price by bought leaf factories, a group of small tea growers from the Duars is ready to set up the first factory

of their own. As a result Panbari Primary Producer Society is going to start their first manufacturing unit soon and the Tea Board of India has agreed to give the Panbari growers Rs 1.25 corer (TBI) to set up their own factory.

Major problems of small tea growers

Small tea growers of Terai & Duars are facing some internal and external hurdles such as:

Low price of green Leaf

In present scenario, the most significant problem of the STGs of Terai & Duars is the absence of fair price of the green leaves produced by the small growers. The STGs do not possess their own processing unit; and have to sell their production to the big tea estates or BLFs where price is entirely decided by the large grower or BLF.

Highly perishable

Green leaf is a perishable product which needs to be processed within twelve hours of plucking. Therefore the STGs compel to take the price whatever offer by the factory owners.

Financial problems

Whatever growth the small tea cultivation has, it entirely depends upon private initiative of individual growers. Institutional finance to this sector is very less. Lack ownership of land, non-registration of tea gardens etc., the institutional finance and help from Tea Board of India are not enjoyed by the small tea growers, which hinder the growth of this sector.

Lack of marketing of green Leaf

In the absence of proper marketing channel of green leaf, the small tea sector has to depend on the buyers, like large tea garden owners, BLFs, etc. Recently, some agents are coming as new intermediary between small tea growers and factory owners. Lack of market information, absence of proper storage facilities, problem of transportation etc. ultimately bring down the price of green leaf.

Lack of technical knowledge of the 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. These unskilled cultivators are facing problem in certain areas like- pest management, menu ring, drainage system etc. that are most essential for the growth and development of this sector.

Lack of co-ordination between producer and the buyers of green Leaf

As small tea growers are scattered and the amount of production also heterogeneous in quality. It becomes very difficult to set up a common price for the production of small tea gardens.

Unregulated growth of small tea growers

Unregulated growth of tea garden in Terai & Duars has given rise to the problem of price fluctuation of green leaves in the tea market. Without going through the marketing and economic holding many small tea growers started cultivation of tea in the remote areas of Terai & Duars and which ultimately leads to the uneven development of this sector.

Emergence of global plantation company

One of the major problems of small tea growers is the emergence of global plantation company. In this changing scenario, Indian company moving out of production and helps the global largest plantation company to emerge.

Pest problem

One of the most devastating problems of small tea growers is the severe attack of various pest such as; *Helopeltis theivora*, *Oligonychus coffeae* (Red spider mite), *Buzura suppressaria* (Looper caterpillar), *Empoasca flavescence* (Jassid) etc. Lack of proper scientific knowledge of small tea growers how to control the pest.

Gap of collaborative research

Moreover, till date, no collaborative research work has been conducted on any aspects to solve the problems of small tea growers of study area. Hence, the present study suggests making collaborative research for the productivity and prosperity of tea estates of West Bengal.

Policy recommendations

The small tea growers of Terai & Duars are a major economic force within the tea industry. From the above discussion, it is clear that this industry may build the socio-economic structure of the rural people. Sincere effort is needed from the Government side and look these small tea gardens a new development initiative for the state.

Recently Tea Board of India is going to inaugurate one research station at New Jalpaiguri for the quality test of tea. This research facility will also be helpful to the small tea growers for the process of uses of herbicide and pesticide.

Major suggestions from the present study

- All the small tea growers should coordinate with the Tea Board of India in the management of the proper price of green leaf.
- Small tea growers should establish the required storage systems locally for keeping their green leaf as fresh as possible for sustaining its better quality.
- Small tea growers must have to register with the Tea Board of India for the various types of help such as; financial, technical and research oriented activities etc.
- Small tea growers should sell their product to the person or organization authorised by Tea Board of India only (not to any agents).

- All the small tea garden owners should attend in various workshops related with tea.
- Good co-ordination is needed between producer and the buyers of green Leaf.
- Small tea growers should have to stop the unregulated growth of small tea growers
- Collaborative research is very much needed for this industry.
- Small tea growers should have a little knowledge about the pest and weed management.
- Small tea growers should have to participate in various tea competitions nationally as well as internationally.
- It has been suggested that the management authority should create grievance cells to receive the complaints and for its appropriate solution.
- Small tea growers should conduct a frequent medical camp to take care of the workers health.
- Small tea growers should have to conduct various training programme for the workers.

CONCLUSION

There are various reasons for the unique growth of STGs such as favourable climate and soil, infrastructures like technology, labour, market, government support etc. For these reason, farmers have opted for tea cultivation because it has limited risk for the factors like climate change, crop failure, dearth of markets etc. Establishment of small units of production would provide youth of the state their fruitful opportunities for self employment. This silent economic revolution by small tea growers in the rural areas across the study areas has helped to tackle unemployment problem. There for support should be come from every site to sustain this socio economic revolution.

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