

Role of Small Tea Garden in Empowering Rural Economy : A Study of No. 1 Gazpuria village in Dibrugarh District of Assam

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Abstract

India is known as an agriculture based country, as most of the population of rural areas depends on agriculture. The economy of Assam is also fundamentally based on agriculture. Tea is considered as the next most important agriculture in Assam. The tea industry in Assam has a long history. Assam is the leading tea producing state in India. In Assam, tea plantation in a small plot of land was established in Golaghat District in 1978. At present more than half of the total tea produced in the country comes from Assam. The present study has been conducted in the No. 1 Gazpuria village in Dibrugarh District of Assam. The paper is an attempt to examine rule of small tea garden in empowering rural economy and its impact on socio-economic life of small tea growers. Both primary and secondary data have been used in this study. The respondents of the present study were selected randomly by using sequential list method. The head of the sample families were the respondent in the present paper. The study reveals that small tea garden has been played a vital role in empowering economic structure of rural people. Besides, small tea garden in Assam has greatly impact in uplifting and determining socio-economic status and lifestyles of small growers and rural people as well.

Keyword: *Economy; Rural economy; Small tea growers; Socio-Economy status.*

Introduction:

Economy consists of the production, distribution or trade and consumption of limited goods and services by individuals in a given geographical location and society as well. The economy may be treated as a system or a sub-system. It is a sub-system in the wider social system. The economic activities are so multifaceted, varied and complex that they constitute what is known as an economy (Rao 2018 : 380). The rural economy basically depends on nature and agricultural activities. Agriculture and allied activities are the main occupation in

rural areas. India is predominantly a rural country. As per census report 2011, 68.8% percent of country's population and 72.4% workforce resided in rural areas. India's rural economy constitutes 46% of national income. India is known as an agricultural country, as most of the population of rural areas depends on agriculture. Agriculture forms the backbone of the country's economy. The agricultural sector contributes most to the overall economic development of the country. Assam's economy is also fundamentally based on agriculture. Rice is the most important Crop in Assam. After rice, tea is considered as the next most important agriculture.

The tea industry in Assam has a long history. The history of tea industry in Assam was developed with the discovery of indigenous tea bushes in the Mishimi hill of upper Assam (at present Arunachal Pradesh) of the Brahmaputra valley by Robert Bruce in 1823. The first tea cultivation in Assam was started in 1835 near Kundilmukh in Sadiya circle in undivided Dibrugarh district (Saharia 2005 : 7). After death of Robert Bruce (1824) his daughter Charles Alexander Bruce was the superintendent of these nurseries. In the same year, experimental Tea plantation was started at Chabua in present Dibrugarh district.

Assam is the leading tea producing state in India. At present more than half of the total tea produced in the country comes from this state. The estimated annual average production of tea in Assam is about 630-700 million kg. (Govt. of Assam, Industries & Commerce online). The main tea growing areas in Assam are parts of central Assam in Brahmaputra valley and Barak Valley. The leading tea producing districts in Brahmaputra valley are Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat and Sonitpur.

The idea of Small Tea Growers (STG) is rather a new phenomenon in Assam. The growth of Small Tea Growers in Assam brought in to use new method of practice in management, marketing and tea culture. The Small Growers produces only green leaf, they do not possess a tea factory to process green leaves. The leaves are to be sent in a tea factory to convert to "made tea". The concept brought structural changes in tea cultivation, fostering growth in the rural economy of the state. The concept introduced not only a new model for tea cultivation but delivered a better livelihood for rural people of the state (Ganguli 2014). The growth of Small Tea Growers started with a call from state Government in 1978 under the leadership of the then state Agriculture and co-operative minister Late Soneswar Borah. In the same year, the first commercial tea cultivation in a small plot of land was established (Mahanta 2013 : II). Since then, tea cultivation in small plot of land is increased gradually. In

mid 90's, there was a phenomenal growth in the number of small tea growers. In the year 1987, the All Assam Small Tea Growers Association (AASTGA) was registered. The AASTGA has brought in a silent green revolution in rural Assam by cultivating tea individually and Small Scale Organized system in unutilized and underutilized uplands and bringing about socio-economic changes in rural Assam. As per a survey report of state Government at present there are 68,465 small tea growers in 14 districts of Assam. Major concentration of the small tea growers is in five upper Assam districts, which accounts for 94 % of small growers in 14 districts of the Brahmaputra valley (Singh Bikash & S. Ghosal : 2011). The peak growth of small tea growers, according to the Assam Government, came in 1995-2005. The Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts are the witnesses of the highest number of small growers. Presently 1,17,000 acres of land are in the unorganized sector of small tea growers in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. The above mentioned survey has also revealed that around five lakhs families are involved in this sector where 87% of holdings are less than 3 acres and only 0.4% holdings are above 15 acres.

In the light of the above discussion, this micro level study has been made an endeavour to examine how far small tea garden helps the rural people in their socio-economic life.

Objectives of the Study:

The basic objectives of the present paper are

1. to focus the role of small tea garden in empowering rural economy.
2. To examine the impact of small tea garden in determining socio-economic status of small growers.

Methodology:

The Field of Study:

The field of present study has been confined in the No. 1 Gazpuria village in Dibrugarh district of Assam, India. Assam is a North Eastern state of India. The state of Assam covers an area of 78438 SQ Kms land with 3,12,05,576 population (census Report : 2011). Out of total population, 85.90% are rural population and only 14.10% are urban population. The population density is 398 per sq.km. which is higher than the national average 382 per sq.km. The state is bounded by the Himalayan foot hills and bordering states of Bhutan and Tibet on the North; On the south of it, there are Myanmar and its hills and to the west, Bangladesh. At present, the state of Assam has 33 districts including BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Areas districts) four districts and 78 subdivisions.

The Dibrugarh district is situated on the southern bank and the upper reaches of the river Brahmaputra and lies in the north eastern corner of Assam. The total area of district is 3381.00 sq.km. with 3330.36 sq.km. rural areas and 50.64 sq.km. urban areas. The total population of Dibrugarh district is 13,26,335 of which 6,76,434 (51.00%) are males and 6,49,901 (49.00%) are females. The rural population of the district is 10,82,605 (81.62%) and urban population is 2,43,730 (18.38%). The average literacy rate in Dibrugarh district is 76.05% whereas male literacy rate is 82.82% and female literacy rate is 68.99% (census : 2011).

The No. 1 Gazpuria village is situated under Gazpuragaon Panchayat of Khowang Development Block, which is within the jurisdiction of Moran revenue circle of Dibrugarh district. There are two Lower Primary Schools in the village. The first one is established in the year 1940 and another is established in the year 1972. There are two Anganwadi Centres along with these Lower Primary Schools of the village. Besides, one cultural community hall, one medical sub-centre and one sub post office are also in the village. There are 1068 populations in the village. Out of 1068 populations 556 i.e. 52.06% are male and 512 i.e. 47.94% are female populations in the village (source : Field Data).

Respondents:

There are 259 families in the studied village. Out of 259 families, we have randomly selected 104 families (40% of the total families) by applying sequential list method i.e. serialization of families of the village. All the head of the sample families were the respondents in the present study.

Collection of Data:

Both primary and secondary data have been used in this study. The primary data are collected with the help of interview, interview scheduled and Observation method. The secondary data are collected from various books and journals government official records and by using internet.

Findings and Analysis:

The small tea garden in Assam are now an economic force for the entire state. Though small tea growers in Assam has emerged as a big economic force, but still this sector is not organized in a systematic order. They have no tea processing factory, they are fully dependent on other company factories for processing their producing green leaves. Despite that small tea garden plays a pivotal role in economic development of rural Assam. In this

particular study, researcher has been tried to examine the role of small tea garden in empowering economic structure of rural people. For this purpose, researcher trace out first the land holding pattern and income of the small holders. The following table shows the land holding pattern of the respondents. In this land holding pattern only tea cultivating land holding are shown.

Table – 1
Land Holding Pattern of the Respondents

Land Holding in Bighas	Respondents	%
1 – 5	73	70.19
5 – 10	23	22.12
10 – 15	5	4.80
15 – 20	3	2.89
Total	104	100%

Source : Field Data

The table -1 shows that majority of the respondents lies in the land holding group 1-5 bighas. In this group 70.19% respondent were found. Followed by 22.12% respondents as well as small growers were in the land holding group 5-10 bighas, whereas 4.80% respondents were in the land holding group 10-15 bighas and only 2.89% small growers were found in the landholding group 15-20 bighas.

It may be stated that land holding is an important component for understanding socio-economic background of individuals. It has been observed during field work that most of the small tea growers land holding level is low in the studied village. They cultivate tea in their small plot of land for their economic support as a profitable agriculture, which assisting them in maintaining their household affairs. Hence, in this study understanding income structure of small tea growers is pertinent, which may be reflected the role of small tea garden in socio-economic life of the rural people. In this context, income earn from tea garden of the small holders are tried to focus in this study. The following table depicts the monthly income of the small growers.

Table – 2
Monthly income of the respondents (from their tea garden)

Monthly Income in Rs.	Respondents	%
Up to – 5,000	13	12.50
5,000 – 10,000	27	25.96
10,000 – 15,000	31	29.81
15,000 – 20,000	21	20.19
20,000 – 25,000	6	5.76
25,000 – 30,000	4	3.84
30,000 – 35,000	2	1.94
Total	104	100%

Source : Field Data

From the above table – 2, it can be inferred that highest number of respondents 31 i.e. 29.81% have their monthly income earned from their tea garden within the range from Rs.10,000 – Rs.15,000, which is lower medium group of income range in the present competitive market scenario. Followed by 27 numbers of respondents i.e. 25.96% in the income range from Rs.5,000 – Rs.10,000. The table shows that number of respondents 21 i.e. 20.19% lies 13 number of respondents consisting 12.50% are found in the monthly income range Rs.1,000 – Rs.5,000. On the other hand, 6 numbers of respondents i.e. 5.56% are found in the income range between Rs.20,000 – Rs.25,000, whereas 4 numbers of respondents i.e. 3.84% are found in the income group Rs.25,000 – Rs.30,000. The lowest number of respondents i.e. only 2 consisting 1.94% are found in the income range between Rs.30,000 – Rs.35,000.

It is noteworthy that individual's status, attitudes, aspirations etc. are largely determined by income of the individuals. It has been observed in the field situation that income earned by the small growers of the studied village from their tea garden has been reflecting their standard of living as well as economic condition. It is known from the field situation that the small growers earn income from their tea garden for 8 or 9 month only, not for the whole year. The rest months of the year, normally November mid to March mid are off pluck season. In this period, they do not get income from their tea garden. It has also been, noticed that beside tea cultivation. This section of rural people have other income source, as for example rice is the prime cultivation for them. Some villagers have other agri-

allied auxiliary income sources like fisheries, livestock etc. and few of them have grocery shops and Govt. service too.

Despite all these, the income earned particularly from their tea garden highly helps them in their socio-economic life. In this context, the researcher put a question to the respondents for understanding the role of small tea garden in the socio-economic life of the villagers. The researcher put the question to know whether income earned from their tea garden helps the small growers in smoothly running their family or not? In this question, all respondents i.e. 104 answered positively. They opined that their tea garden income greatly helps them in smoothly running their family. They have also expressed their view that the income earned from their small tea garden is strengthening their overall economic structure, without which it would not be possible for them to maintain their socio-economic life style.

It has been observed in the field situation that the small holders sell their producing green leaves to the company tea garden factory and some other nearby bought leaf factory and thereby earn money. Some middle men as well as contractors purchase these green leaves from the village level small tea growers and supply these to other factories with some profits. It reflects that there is also a system of syndicate, for which small holders are not able to get more profit. If they can directly sell their producing green leaves to the factory then more profit they would hope for. But, still small tea growers are within the capitalists mood of system.

At the same time, for understanding more clearly about the perspective of present study, the researcher put forward another question to the respondents. Respondents were asked whether income earned from their tea garden helps them in purchasing other household assets or not. In responding to the query, a majority of the respondents i.e. 75.96% provided a positive opinion, that they have already purchased various household properties. On the other hand, 24.04% respondents replied that they are not able to purchase any valuable property. Because they have only 1 or 2 Bighas of tea garden land, they are only able to combat with the problems faced by them in their family life. For the first group of respondents, who have provided a positive opinion to the query, the researcher put another questions to know what type of property they purchase from tea garden income. In this context, 13.72% respondents replied that they have purchased motor cycle and car from their tea garden income with the help of Bank finance and 38.71% respondents have purchased motor cycle for their convenience in household affairs, a few of them have purchased vehicle for business purpose. Responding

the query rest 47.57% respondents replied that they have purchased computer laptop for their children, android mobile phone, and other household utensils, furniture etc. Besides, they use their tea garden income in construction and renovation of their houses.

Thus, it seems that income earned by the small tea growers from their tea garden plays a significant role in empowering their economic structure. Simultaneously it focuses inequalities in socio-economic life of small growers and village people as well. At the same time it reflects the impact of small tea garden in determining and uplifting socio-economic status of small growers on the basis of land holding, income, household assets etc.

Conclusion:

On the basis of above discussion, it may be concluded that small tea growers have been developed their tea garden gradually with respond to the sustainable demand of the hour. They have more scope for bright future prospects. Though small tea cultivation is considered as second most important or subsidiary occupation, now it has become as main occupation irrespective of all classes of people in rural areas. Obviously small tea garden empowering the economic structure of rural society. It plays vital role in alleviating poverty and unemployment problems from rural areas of Assam. Of late, educated youth are interested for this occupation as it is a self-reliance occupation. They acquire new scientific and technical knowledge of using pesticide, chemicals and organic manure etc. and try to engage themselves in this occupation. This is a positive sign of Socio-economic change and development of rural areas of Assam and country as a whole.

This study has been confined only in one village, based on sociological stand point. So, there is earnest need to study about small tea garden as well as small growers in a wider framework from different perspective to draw a conclusive remark on the particular aspect.

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