



Problems of Small Tea Growers in Assam with Reference to Lakhimpur District

* Dr. Niranjana Kakati

* Associate Professor, Deptt. Of Commerce, Bihpuria College, Lakhimpur (Assam)

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Introduction

Assam, a state of India situated at North Eastern Region is also known as land of tea which is famous for its flavor. India produces 44% of global tea followed by Sri Lanka and Kenya. Assam produces 50% of India's total tea. Therefore Assam produces 22% of global tea, out of this small tea growers provide 30% of tea to this pool. It means small tea growers of Assam are producing 6.6% of world tea.

Regarding the meaning of small tea Growers there exists some different views:

According to Government of Assam a person planting tea up to 10 acres of land is called a small Tea Grower.

According to Tea Board of India a person cultivating tea plants up to 25 acres of land is called A small Tea Grower.

However, All Assam small Tea Growers Association demands that a person has 33.33 acre of land tea plantation should be recognized as small tea grower. In simple, small tea growers are those individuals who are engaged in Tea cultivation with the following activities:-

- Planted Tea plants
- Maintains the garden with or without employing labour.
- Earning money by selling green leaf in the factory of a company having big tea estate

Area Of The Study:

There are about 60,000 Small Tea Growers in Assam employing 10,000 personnel in different kinds of activities such as clerks, driver, labours etc. In Lakhimpur district which is our study area there are only 182 Small Tea Growers, out of these a sample of 20 Growers have taken at random for this study.

Objectives Of The Study:

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

- To know the problems faced by the Small Tea Growers for selling their green leaf.
- To give a picture of the earning position of Small Tea Growers.
- To know the contribution of Small Tea Growers towards made tea of Assam
- To suggest measures for the upliftment of Small Tea Growers.

Methodology:

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were mostly collected from a sample of 20 Small Tea Growers of the Study District through Interview

method by providing some questionnaires. Secondary data were collected from the Journal of All Assam Small Tea Growers 7th Tri-ennial conference and the Journal of International tea conference which was held at Guwahati on 21st Nov., 2007 to 24th Nov., 2007.

Findings:

The major findings of the study are:

- 60% of Small Tea Growers opined that sometimes they have to sell their green leaf to the factory at very low price because the factory authority is the king to fix the price of green leaf.
- 50% Small Tea Growers carry their green leaf in a common vehicle starting from their unit organization to factory place.
- 30% Growers give their earning position to this researcher. According to them in 1 acre of land the minimum Gross Income is Rs. 79,200/- say Rs. 80,000/- p.a
- According to 20% Growers 50% of their Gross Income goes as maintenance cost of the garden which includes labour cost, pest control, herbicide cost, disease control and transportation.
- All the sample growers are of the view that the Monitoring Committee constituted by the State Government at District level with Deputy Commissioner as its chairman has failed to stabilize the price of green leaf due to unfair practice of the big Tea Estate with its bureaucrats.
- About 80% Growers say that due to the non receipt of periodic patta (Land Ownership Document) from the State Land and Revenue Department they could not get the Subsidy and Loan etc. from the Tea Board of India and Financial Institution respectively. Instead of issuing periodic patta the Government of Assam issued Land Possession Certificate to these Growers.
- The contribution of Small Tea Growers in the form of green leaf to made tea of Assam from the year 2004-05 to 2006-07 are shown in the following Table:

Year	Green leaf production (in Million KG)	Made Tea Production (in Million KG)
2004-05	1940	646
2005-06	2100	700
2006-07	2250	750

Source: Journal of International Tea Conference (2007)

- During field survey it was found that out of 20 sample growers 3 were lectures, 2 were doctors, 1 was civil service officer and 2 was engineer who have taken this occupation as their side business.

Suggestions

To overcome the above problems of Small Tea Growers of Assam in general and Lakhimpur District in particular the following points are to be taken:

1. State Government should provide the Patta (Land document) to each Tea Growers by charging a premium on their land so that the growers may take a Loan from the Bank and subsidy of the Central Government provided by the Tea Board of India. In return it will increase the Government Revenue.
2. State Government should make a provision for price stabilization of green leaf through the Monitoring Committee functioning at District level.
3. Small Tea Cultivation can play an important role to solve the unemployment problem up to a large extent. It was observed that this sector provides employment

opportunities to almost 10,00,000 personnel in different activities.

4. Small Tea Cultivation can help to preserve eco-friendly relation with nature, because apart from Tea plantation the Growers have to plant some valuable shade tree in the garden.

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that enhancement of Small Tea plantation will not only uplift the Growers and employed personnel of this sector but also to the State Government as it has imposed a tax of 25 paisa per Kg. of green leaf as Agricultural Tax. It is the green Gold of Assam.

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