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A SOCIO-ECONOMIC STUDY ON THE STATUS OF SMALL TEA GROWERS IN CHARAIDEO DISTRICT OF ASSAM

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Abstract

Charaideo district having maximum small tea growers which have immense potential from the point of providing both employment and generating revenue. It can be a lucrative profession and can play a vital role in improving the socio-economic condition of the economically backward district. The Small Tea growers are an important and integral part of the tea industry of Assam. But small tea growers have been confronted with multiple existential challenges. The study was carried out to study the socio-economic profile of small tea growers in Charaideo district of Assam. The primary data were collected from 50 small tea growers (STG) drawn from 10 randomly selected villages of two randomly selected blocks of Charaideo district of Assam. The above analysis showed that out of 50 respondents, majority of them (58.00 per cent) belonged to the middle age group (30-50 years), 22.00 per cent were in the old age group (50 years & above) and only 20.00 per cent were in the young age group (up to 30 years). 40.00 per cent of the sample STG had small size of households (up to 5 members). Huge proportion of sample STG were educated up to graduation level. Out of the total operational land holding 67.50 per cent of land was used for cultivation of tea, and only 32.50 per cent of land was used to produce other crops or kept fallow. Larger proportion of STG were dependent on tea cultivation for earning their livelihood. It may be observed from the table that major portion of the annual income was obtained from the tea cultivation followed by govt or private services. There may be a variation in annual income from the green leaves as there is always a possibility in the fluctuation in prices of green leaves. When the price of green leaf is high, the income is also high.

Key words: small tea grower, Lower-small tea grower, Medium-small tea grower, Higher-small tea growers

Introduction:

The tea industry in Assam is about 172 years old. It occupies an important place and plays a very useful part in the national economy. Robert Bruce in 1823 discovered tea plants growing wild in Upper Brahmaputra valley. A tea garden was started by the government in 1833 in erstwhile Lakhimpur District. With the arrival in London of the fine quality tea from the garden in 1838, the commercial tea plantation was started and a company known as the Assam Company was formed in 1839 to take over the experimental holdings of the East India Company's administration over the tea gardens established in Assam till then. This was the first company in India to undertake the commercial production of tea. (Das and Saikia, 2011). The tea states in Assam cover a whopping 2,82,100 hectares of land comprising 800 tea estates. In 2017 India's share in world tea exports was 203.86 million kg out of the total export of 1578.56 million kg (Tea Statistics, Tea Board India, 2018). Assam is the largest producer of quality tea in India, contributing about 51.90 percent of the country's total tea production. During the year 2017, out of a total area of 480.20 thousand ha and production of 983 million kg, Assam alone accounted for 282.10 thousand ha of area and 657.24 million kg of production, constituting 58.72 per cent and 56.11 per cent of area and production respectively (Tea Statistics, Tea Board India, 2018) The tea production was mostly confined to large tea gardens which may be called as "Tea Estate". However, tea production scenario has been complete change after the emergence of new concept "Small Tea Growers". Small Tea Growers (STGs) are defined, as a person or group having plantation area up to 10.12 hectares. This model was first introduced in South India and later on it was transmitted to Assam. The production of tea in India takes place in both large plantation and small gardens. STGs are producing nearly 35 per cent of the total tea production of the country (Erani Mohan 2013). Socio-economic profile of a farmer reflects his attitude towards growing of any crop. It shows that, how much he is capable of doing his farm work based on his age, caste, education, family size, income, way of income, land holding, etc. In Assam, the ascent of small tea growers has been remarkable. As of now, it is more than 1.2 lakh small tea growers. The Small tea growers in Charaideo district have immense potential from the point of providing both employment and generating revenue. It can be a lucrative profession and can play a vital role in improving the socio-economic condition of the economically backward state. But the small tea growers are facing many problems related to availability of finance, processing of tea leaves etc. They are forced to sell their tea leaves to big tea gardens at a low price due to absence of tea factories of their own. Hence, this study aims at identifying the constraints and factors that influenced the small tea growers. The Small Tea growers are an important and integral part of the tea industry of Assam. But a small tea grower has been confronted with multiple existential challenges via finance, land problem, labour supply, lack of training in tea culture and practices, marketing of green leaves, natural disasters like flood, erosion, climate change, poor infrastructural facilities

Objective:

1. To examine the present Socio-Economic status of the Small Tea growers of Charaideo district.
2. To explore the relationship between the income generation and land under small tea cultivation as well as reason for diversification of land to the small tea cultivation.

Significance of the study:

The small tea growers forms an interesting field in economic geography. There are many intensive studies which have been carried out on tea industry in different disciplines in different parts of the world, but very little contribution was available from the geographers as well as economists on the importance of cultivation by small tea growers in Assam as well as in other parts of the country. The economic contribution and employment opportunity generated by these small tea growers have great significance in Assam. Therefore, it is an interesting field of research how it has changed people's attitude in their occupational structure, thus providing better economic condition and employment opportunities.

Review of Literature:

Baruah P (2015) in the study “Problems of Small Tea Growers: A Study in Sonitpur District, Assam” highlights that the small tea plantation sector plays an important role in economy of Assam and also contributes towards employment generation. However, the sector is not free from problems.

Bindhu K (2008) in the thesis entitled “A study on livelihood issues of small tea grower of the Nilgiri district” highlights that fall in the tea price have serious impact on the small tea growers livelihood of the Nilgiri districts.

Chowdhury A (2016) in the study entitled “Prospects and Problems of Small Tea Growers in Terai and Dwars of West Bengal” focused on the establishment of small units of production would provide youth of the state opportunities for self-employment.

Ganguli P (2014) in the thesis “Small Tea Growers of Assam: Theories, Practices and Challenges of an Indigenous Entrepreneurship” mentioned about the challenges faced by the small tea growers along with the innovative indigenous small scale enterprise.

Guwalla H (2015) in the study “A Study on the Problems and Prospects of Small Tea Growers in Assam with special reference to Jorhat District” focused on the various challenges faced by the small tea growers namely financial problem, land related problem, labour supply, lack of training in the culture.

Methodology:

The present paper is based on descriptive and exploratory research. It is descriptive in the sense that it studied the socio-economic status of the small tea growers. It is also exploratory as the various problems encountered by the small tea growers have been properly identified. The researcher has made the use of both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected from the study area from 50 respondents through a well framed questionnaire. The secondary sources include journals, newspapers, articles, government sources such as Tea Board etc.

Out of all 35 districts of Assam, Charaideo district is one of the leading tea growing districts of Assam and the rate of growth in the number of small tea growers in the district is very rapid and noticeable. Hence, Charaideo district was chosen purposively for the study. Charaideo district has four community development blocks namely Mahmara, Sonari, Lakuwa and Sapekhati. Out of these 4 blocks, Mahmara and Sapekhati were selected randomly for the study. Out of the 10 selected villages from the two blocks, 25 small tea growers were selected from villages under Mahmara block and 25 small tea growers were selected from the villages under Sapekhati block randomly. The raw data thus collected were summarized and analyzed in such a form that end product which was given in a tabular form, became pertinent to the objective of the study. The subsequent master tables were prepared benefitting to various objectives of the study. The entire information was arranged in a manner to provide base for future analysis, thus, facilitating interpretation of the result

Results and discussions:

The information related to socio-economic profile of the small tea growers obtained from the study area is presented in the following paragraphs under the different sub heads

A. Land Holding:

The small tea growers were divided in three categories according to their land holdings, viz. lower-small tea growers (0-2.5 ha), Medium-small tea growers (2.5-5.0 ha) and higher-small tea growers (5.0 ha and above) for analysis. The Table 1.01 indicate the area of plantation held by the growers under study

Table 1.01: Area of plantation of the respondents under study

SI No	Particulars	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Lower small tea grower(0-2.50ha)	24	48.00
2	Medium small tea growers (2.5-5.00ha)	18	36.00
3	Higher small tea growers (5.00 ha & above)	08	16.00
	Total	50	100.00

From the above Table No.1.01, it is transparent that 48% of the lower small tea growers holds land less than 2.50 hectare, 36% of the medium small tea growers holds land between 2.50-5.00 hectare while 16% has an area between 5.00 hectare and above land under small tea cultivation. It has been opined that majority holds land between 0-2.50 hectare

B. Age of the small tea growers:

The small tea growers were divided in three age groups according to their age, viz up to 30 years (Young), 30-50 years (middle age) and 50 years and above (old age) for analysis. The Table 1.02 indicate the age wise distribution of growers under study

Table 1.02: Age distribution of the sample tea growers under study

SI No	Particulars	0-2.50ha	2.50-5.00ha	5.00 ha & above	Total	Percentage
1	Up to 30 years (Young),	6	4	-	10	20.00
2	30-50 years (middle age)	14	12	3	29	58.00
3	50 years and above (old age)	4	2	5	11	22.00
	Total	24	18	8	50	100.00

The above analysis showed that out of 50 respondents, majority of them (58.00 per cent) belonged to the middle age group (30-50 years), 22.00 per cent were in the old age group (50 years & above) and only 20.00 per cent were in the young age group (up to 30 years). Green leaf production is considered as a lucrative venture in Assam and gives handsome profit to the small growers in the study area. Youth and middle age group respondents were physically and mentally in a better position to manage the small tea gardens. As such young people are dominant in this venture. Moreover, there is no scope of employment generation to the young people in the study area. They have converted their high land to the small tea garden which were either empty or cultivation under areca nut or other horticultural crops. The analysis of the different categories of the small tea growers showed almost similar trend. In case of lower small tea groups 60 per cent of the respondents belonged to young age group. It is interesting to note that in case of lower small tea growers, there was not even a single household had more than 5ha and above tea cultivation.

C. Family size: Family size means the total number of members in a family. The economic behavior of the family particularly related to income and expenditure is largely affected by the size of the family. For this purpose, the sample of small tea growers were categorized into three categories on the basis of numbers of the family-very small (up to 4 members), , medium (5-7 members) and large (8 members & above). The family size wise distribution of small tea growers has been presented in the Table 1.03.

Table 1.03: Family size of Small Tea Growers

SI No	Family size	Lower STG	Medium STG	Higher STG
1	Small (up to 4)	12	8	
2	Medium (5-7)	7	4	2
3	Large (8 and above)	5	6	-
	Total	24	18	8

The analysis of family size of sample small growers revealed that 50 per cent of the lower small tea growers had small size of households (up to 4 members), 44 per cent of the medium small tea growers had a small size family. The proportion of sample tea growers with large size (8 members & above) households were only 22 per cent. Inter farm wise comparison of family size indicate that 40 per family had population size up to four members followed by 26 per cent in case of medium family size. Breaking the joint family system was the main reason for dominance of tea growers with smaller size of family. Apart from other factors such as increasing level of education, urbanization and income may also be responsible for the phenomenon.

D. Level of Literacy: Literacy is defined as a particular capacity and mode of behavior, the ability to read, write, speak and understand in a way that make us communicate effectively and make sense of world. A literacy person is expected to adopt agricultural technology more quickly than those who are illiterate. By recognizing the enormous importance of literacy in day-to-day activities of human beings, the educational status of the sample tea growers analyzed and results have been presented in Table 1.04. tea cultivation needs heavy initial investment and growers need huge amount of capital with them. The growers need to educate enough so that they could manage the heavy capital requirement from other sources. Tea cultivation is highly dependent on hired human labour. As such growers need to be educated.

Table 1.04: Literacy level of sample tea growers

SI No	Literacy level	Lower STG	Medium STG	Higher STG	Total
1	Illiterate	-	-	-	-
2	Primary	-	-	-	-
3	Secondary	4	3	-	7
4	Intermediate	4	6	2	12
5	Graduation & above	16	9	6	31
	Total	24	18	8	50

It is observed from the Table 1.04 that cent percent respondents were educated. It was also observed that 62 per cent respondents were graduate and above. Only 14 per cent respondents studied up to secondary level. Irrespective of Small Tea Growers class, majority were graduate and above. In indicated that due to lack of employment opportunities, STG engaged themselves in the tea cultivation. It was interesting to note that as the size of farm increased, the population of graduate tea growers increased.

E. Land holding pattern:

Economic status of the respondents can be studied by the size of land holding they actually have. In this section an attempt has been made to analyze the land possessed by sample respondents. Data related to land holding pattern of sample small tea growers have been presented in the Table 1.05.

Table 1.05: Land holding pattern of sample small tea growers (Area in ha)

Sl No	Land holding	Lower STG		Medium STG		Higher STG		Total	
		Total	Average	Total	Average	Total	Average	Total	Average
1	Land under Small Tea Plantation	43.20	1.80	62.10	3.45	45.20	5.65	150.50	3.10
2	Land under food crops	28.8	1.20	27.0	1.50	6.80	0.85	62.60	1.25
3	Land under Misc Cultivation	5.28	0.22	3.24	0.18	1.28	0.16	9.80	0.196
	Total	77.28	3.22	92.34	5.13	53.28	6.66	222.90	4.546

It may be observed from the table that overall operational land holding of the sample respondents was 222.90 hectares. Out of the total operational land holding, 150.50 hectares (67.50 per cent) of land was used for cultivation of tea, and only 72.40 hectares (32.50 per cent) of land was used to produce other crops or other miscellaneous cultivation. It may be observed from the table that as the size of land holding increased, the proportion of land under tea cultivation also increased (55.90 per cent in lower-small category, 67.25 per cent in medium-lower category and 84.83 per cent in higher-small category). In case of lower-small tea growers the per cent of land under other crops or unproductive (37.26 per cent) was slightly high as compared with medium-small (29.23 per cent) and small (12.76 per cent) group of tea growers, as the economic status of the lower-small tea growers was low as compared to Medium-small and small group of tea growers.

F. Occupation:

Occupation of an individual or household gives an indication about its economic condition of concerned household. The various occupation of the sample small tea growers are represented in Table 1.06.

Table 1.06: Occupation status of the sample small tea growers

Sl No	Occupation	Lower STG		Medium STG		Higher STG		Total	
		Total	Per cent	Total	Per cent	Total	Per cent	Total	Per cent
1	Tea cultivation	8	34.00	4	21.00	3	37.50	15	30.00
2	Tea cultivation + Services	6	25.00	6	34.00	2	25.00	14	28.00
3	Tea cultivation + Services +Business	2	7.00	2	11.00	1	12.50	5	10.00
4	Tea cultivation +Business	8	34.00	6	34.00	2	25.00	16	32.00
	Total	24	100.00	18	100.00	8	100.00	50	100.00

It is evident from the table that a larger proportion (30.00%) of sample small tea growers were dependent on tea cultivation alone for earning their livelihood. Around 28.00 per cent of small tea growers depended their livelihood from tea cultivation along with services either government or private. Around 10.00 per cent of sample small tea growers depended on tea cultivation, service and business for their livelihood. The occupation mix of tea cultivation and business was the basis of earning livelihood for about one third of the total population of small tea growers. Inter land size wise comparison of occupation of sample small tea growers revealed similar trend. In all type of small tea growers may be lower, medium and higher, larger proportion of the sample tea growers were dependent on tea cultivation alone for their livelihood. These tea growers owned larger land holding and were satisfied with their earnings made from tea cultivation. In fact, tea plantation establishment is a once-in-a-lifetime activity. Once established, it gives handsome returns for near sixty years or so. As the tea plantation is done once, the annual maintenance cost is lower in comparison with the return and that is probably reason for popularity of this activity in the study area. Tea cultivation coupled with business emerged as the popular occupation mix involving a substantial proportion of the small tea growers.

G. Source of income:

The income of households from all sources directly reflects the economic status of the households. It also indicates the standard of living of the households. The income has been assessed and has been presented in the Table 1.07. for the purpose of the analysis, the income of the sample households was justified into three income groups. The household earning annual income between Rs 5.00-7.50 lakh were grouped as low-income group. Households whose earning between Rs 7.50-10.00 lakh per annum were considered in middle income group. A person who earned more than Rs10.00 lakh and above per annum considered in high income group. Major source of income of different categories of small tea growers in the study area have been presented in Table 1.07.

Table 1.07: Annual income of the sample small tea growers

Sl No	Occupation	Lower STG		Medium STG		Higher STG		Total	
		Total	Per cent	Total	Per cent	Total	Per cent	Total	Per cent
1	Low Income group	8	34.00	4	22.00	-	-	12	24.00
2	Middle Income group	8	33.00	8	44.00	2	25.00	18	36.00
3	High Income group	8	33.00	6	34.00	6	75.00	20	40.00
	Total	24	100.00	18	100.00	8	100.00	50	100.00

It may be observed from the table that major portion (40%) of the annual income was obtained from the tea cultivation followed by govt or private services. There may be a variation in annual income from the green leaves as there is always a possibility in the fluctuation in prices of green leaves. When the price of green leaf is high, the income is also high.

H. Dwelling house:

Shelter is one the basic necessities of life. By looking at the type of dwelling house economic status of Socio-economic Profile of Small Tea (*Camellia sinensis*) Growers the sample respondents can be predicted. The distribution of the tea growers on the basis of the type of dwelling house has been presented in Table 1.08. By looking at the different categories of the sample respondents it is clear that higher-small group respondents owned more pucca houses as compared to lower-small and medium-small group respondents (Borah and Das 2015, Borah 2015). It revealed that the economic condition of the higher-small group respondents was better as compared to lower-small and medium-small group of respondents.

Table 1.08. Dwelling house of sample small tea growers

Sl No	Occupation	Lower STG		Medium STG		Higher STG		Total	
		Total	Per cent	Total	Per cent	Total	Per cent	Total	Per cent
1	Kutchra	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	Mixed	16	67.00	8	45.00	-	-	24	48.00
3	Pucca	8	33.00	10	55.00	8	100.00	26	52.00
	Total	24	100.00	18	100.00	8	100.00	50	100.00

I. Ownership of farm implements and machinery:

Farm implements like sprayer, power weeder, power blower, pump set, harrow are required for various operations related to tea cultivation. Possession of farm implements indicates the economic status of farm households. Different category wise ownership of farm implements has been shown in Table 1.09.

Table 1.09 Ownership of farm implements and machinery by the sample small tea growers

Sl No	Occupation	Lower STG		Medium STG		Higher STG		Total	
		Total	Per cent	Total	Per cent	Total	Per cent	Total	Per cent
1	Spayer	24	100.00	18	100.00	8	100.00	50	100.00
2	Power weeder	4	25.00	6	38.00	6	37.00	16	100.00
3	Power sprayer	3	15.00	5	25.00	12	60.00	20	100.00
4	Irrigation pump set	-	-	4	40.00	6	60.00	10	100.00
5	Pick-up van	-	-	2	33.00	4	67.00	6	100.00
6	Harrow	24	48.00	18	36.00	8	16.00	50	100.00

Green tea leaf production is a labour-intensive activity. Most of the operations in the process of tea leaf production are carried out manually; therefore, use of machineries is not very common for tea leaf production. However, sprayers are commonly used for spraying pesticides and micronutrients and harrows are used for preparing and cleaning drains. Pump sets for irrigation purposes are also very common. The table revealed that cent-per cent of respondent tea growers possessed sprayers. Tea plantation was heavily infested by insect pest, it might be because of the fact that sprayers were used by tea growers for spraying chemicals for plant protection. Out of 50 sample respondents, only 35.00 per cent of respondents possessed power weeders, 34.00 per cent of respondents possessed power weeder and power weeder was commonly used for tea cultivation in the study area. Out of 50 respondents, only 10 respondents (20.00 per cent) owned irrigation pump sets for irrigation purpose. All the respondent tea growers had ownership of harrow for digging, manual weeding and drain cleaning. Inter farm size group wise comparison in respect of ownership of machineries revealed that ownership of power weeders (34.00 per cent). The probable reason was that they tried to reduce the labour cost on spraying plant protection chemicals by using their own machineries, as they were unable to provide regular wages to the workers. The table further revealed that none of the lower-small tea growers owned irrigation pump set as they were totally dependent on natural precipitation. Only six respondents possessed their owned pick-up van for carrying their green leaves to the nearby factories.

Conclusion:

The study has given the researcher an opportunity to interact with the small tea growers of the Charaideo area and see how their livelihood is influenced by the small tea cultivation. The survey has been conducted upon 50 respondents relating to the tea cultivation. During the study, it was found that employment generation was the foremost prospect of small tea growers. They can improve their standard of living by engaging in tea plantation. Although income is generated from the tea production sector, they are not free from problems and challenges. Market related problem is the major challenge faced by the small tea growers of the area. The green leaf prices have been fluctuated throughout the past five years which is very bad indicator for the small tea growers. The establishment of Bought leaf factory can minimize the risk of fluctuation of prices. If the problems are taken into consideration by the initiation of government policies and NGO's then tea plantation will be very potential business in this area and also can be considered as one of the important prospects for income generation, employment generation and revenue generation of the state.

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