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A REPORT ON PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF SMALL TEA GROWERS OF ASSAM - A CASE STUDY OF MINI TEA ESTATES OF NORTH LAKHIMPUR TOWN

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ABSTRACT

Tea, the most ancient beverage of mankind has been enjoying is still the most popular drink in the world. In India it is grown in an area of 5.10 lakh hectare. Since the first auction of Assam Tea made from indigenous plants held in London in 1839, tea plantation in India has been contributing immensely towards the socio-economic development of the people of the tea growing region in the country. Tea Industry contributes substantially towards the national and state economy by way of enriching the foreign exchange reservoir and state exchequer besides employment. In Assam several tea growers who are paddy farmers do not have ownership of land they cultivated. They are thus deprived of access to bank loans which is essential if they wish to expand, set up own processing unit or go in for organic cultivation. Marketing their produce is another major challenge before the small growers who are processing their own leaf specially those who are going organic. The rest of green tea is sold to tea factory. Since production is limited financing is a problem. Unless production and certification hurdles are cleared by small tea growers, the time and money needed for such products will continue to elude most.

Keywords: Organic Cultivation, Marketing Attributes, Land Acquisition And Resettlement.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 An Introduction of Small Tea Growers

Tea, the most ancient beverage of mankind has been enjoying is still the most popular drink in the world. In India it is grown in an area of 5.10 lakh hectare. Since the first auction of Assam Tea made from indigenous plants held in London in 1839, tea plantation in India has been contributing immensely towards the socio-economic development of the people of the tea growing region in the country. Tea Industry contributes substantially towards the national and state economy by way of enriching the foreign exchange reservoir and state exchequer besides employment. Today the major tea growing States are Assam, West Bengal, Tripura, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand are also traditional tea growing states, albeit to less significant extent. Besides tea

plantation has come up recently in states like Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Sikkim, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Bihar, Orissa, etc. Mizoram has also the potentialities for development of commercial tea plantation.

India is one of the major tea growing countries in the world producing about 28 % of the world's production annually. The other leading producers are China, Kenya and Sri Lanka. Area under tea plantation (as of 2001) in major tea producing states of the country is as follow-

Assam	26870052.6
West Bengal	11010021.6
Tripura	67001.3
Others	105922.1
North India	39609277.6
Tamil Nadu	7548014.8
Kerala	368007.2
Karnataka	2120.4
South India	11440022.4
Total All India	510492100

It may be observed that about 78% of the country's total area under plantation of tea is located in North India. Out of the total 53% is exists in Assam and 22% in West Bengal.

The improvement in quality along with reduction in cost of production and increasing production and productivity are the important issues concerning the Indian Tea industry today.

Definition and extent of Small Tea growers :

The Tea Board has defined a person as a small tea grower who is having tea plantation area up to 10.12 ha. The bank and other institutions/organisations may like to accept this definition. South Indian Tea Industry is having a traditional sizable segment of small growers. Of late a large number of small growers of tea have come up in Assam, North Bengal and Bihar also. In Assam alone the number is as high as 39780 covering 39000 ha of tea plantation over 17 districts. More than 110000 holdings accounting for 18% of the all India Tea production belongs to small plantation sector. Of late, the concerned governments of tea growing states and states having potential have been taking keen interest in promoting development of tea plantation through some schemes such as NRLM Bagan Bazar, for the benefits of small farmers and unemployed youths.

1.2 Small Tea Growers of Assam

Assam is one of the major producers of Tea in India. Since its discovery in the year 1823, Assam tea has traversed a long distance before the commercialization of tea begun in Assam, the leaves of tea plant were chewed by locals with little or no processing. This still continues in certain inaccessible regions of south eastern Assam as well as in neighbouring regions of Burma (Myanmar). Robert Bruce is said to be the person who re-discovered the tea plant growing wild in the region at the behest of nobleman, Maniram Dewan and before his death in 1825, Robert passed on his knowledge to his brother Charles, who sent seeds of plant to Calcutta in 1831.

In 1833 British lost monopoly of tea trade with China and the Tea Committee dispatched its secretary George Gordon to China to study the methods and begin Tea plantation in Assam. He returned with Chinese variety crossing with the Chinese Tea plant led to India Hybrid Tea, which has great variability and vigour. This has been called the most important evolution of tea commercial plant. In the meantime workers were also imported from Orissa and Bihar who later form a significant demographic group in Assam, and the Tea Industry flourished in Assam.

Today the scenario is different. By virtue of the cola wars and other beverages like coffee and the rising popularity of Beer and alcoholic beverages among the new generations the Tea Industry is facing severe competition. Added with labour problems and subsequent lack outs the Tea Industry in Assam is facing major crisis. However there seems to be some protective steps taken by the government. The announcement of the Union Ministry of a revival package for Tea Industry and the first round of loan agreement under the special purpose Tea fund for Assam that was signed is a welcome move towards development of this sector. Various companies participated providing loan agreement with Crores of fund. It is also important that in order to overcome the problem of sick gardens replantation is necessary. The old and diseased areas which are beyond redemption should be uprooted. The removal of senile tea bushes would provide better yield. The loans would enable the Tea Companies to go for replantation of 1925 ha of land spread over 82 different gardens. Many tea gardens in Assam are in dire need of replantation as the ageing tea bushes are contributing to the decline of tea production. Mention ably those gardens that have been unable to pay salary and wages of labours including provident funds would not be able to avail the specific fund as they do not fulfil the eligibility criteria for obtaining benefits under the fund. However it is alleged that the govt. of India had not paid the dues including the capital investment subsidy due to the gardens under the North East Industrial policy.

1.3 Various Problems and Prospects of Small Tea Growers of Assam

1.3.a. Indian Tea Industry and Assam

India, the largest producer and consumer of tea in the world, accounts for about 28% of world's production and 13% of world trade. However the production as well expected of tea has shown a declining trend in the recent years of the current decade. Thus while the production increases from 835.6 million Kg in 1997-98 to 846 million Kg in 2001-02 it started declining thereafter from 847 million Kg in 2001-02 to 830 million Kg in 2004-05 and further down to only 667 million Kg in 2005-06. Exports of tea have shown a further deterioration from 211 million Kg in 2003-04 and just 101 million Kg in 2005-06. In spite of almost stagnant rupee value in the period, the value of Indian tea exports has come down from Rs.2192 Crores in 1998-99 to Rs.1637 Crores in 2003-04 and to less than Rs.1000 Crore in 2005-06. Thus our tea export has declined from 24% in 1998-99 to 15% in 2005-06, though it was 25% in the previous year.

In recent years some quality of tea is also imported for blending and re-exports. The quantity of such imports went up from just 9 million Kg in 1998-99 to 32.5 million Kg in 2004-05 and it declined to 8 million Kg in 2005-06.

One cannot forget the major driving forces behind the country's tea sector growth is the prospect of Eastern India's Tea Industry, particularly Assam which not only produces around 53% of the country's total production but also employs more than 10 % of the state work forces or around 12 lakh people. However the

share of Assam in the country's tea production in course of last three and half decade has remained confirmed to a narrow range from 51% in 1970-71 to 53% in 2003-04 due to decline in per hectare productivity through the area under plantation rose from 182 thousand hectares in the period with the number of tea estates rising from just 750 to as many as 32000.

It may be noted that the sudden use in the number of tea gardens of Assam is its area under tea(to around three lakh hectares) particularly since later half of 1990's was due to the unemployed youths taking to small scale tea production as their profession. There are around 2500 small tea gardens adding to the state's total production by more than 50 million Kg. This is certainly a welcome move but since they grow in small scale they cannot go to factory manufacturing and hence have to sell out only green leaves to large estates which often subject them to exploitation. The addition to tea hectare by around 50 thousand hectares in the latter half of 1990's was possible mainly through conversion of agricultural land with below ten hectares being cut off land for small tea growers.

There are however a number of problems of Tea Industry of Assam. A considerable number of tea gardens of the state have gone sick over the period due to lack of infrastructure, modernization and efficient management. The Assam Tea Corporation, a state level public sector enterprise is not functioning at all. The amount of goodwill that Assam tea had long been enjoying in the international market has now been eroded to a great extent. Though Assam Tea is still earning around 50% of the foreign exchange earned by India's tea Industry, its demand is already in recession due to better quality supplied by countries like Sri Lanka, Cuba, etc at comparatively lower prices.

That the faith of India's Tea Industry is largely dependent on what happens to its eastern sector of Assam and West Bengal is well known. What is seriously worrying the tea Industry is that even though India still produces 27% of global tea output, the quality of product is sadly doubted in the global market. It is a fact that the planters of major tea growing states themselves were not careful enough about the deterioration of quality during heydays and their negligence gradually turned more than 30% of tea bushes into infarcts plants. Studies confirmed that the root cause of closure of a number of tea gardens in parts of the country was low productivity and lack of investment in plant development activities.

India's Tea market is facing yet another paradox which could be explained in terms of glorying gulf between the price received by producer and the price charged by dealers and retailers. The common consumer in the market is confused of the fact that while the producers are facing the crisis created by a market gulf and decline of prices often voiced by corporate, the benefits of low prices does not come to the common consumers. The reason perhaps lies in non conformity with regulated market behaviour of producers among whom many are found to be selling out their produce directly without routing it through auction centres.

This apart the most serious ailment remains not only low productivity but also with quality of produce due to low investment on infrastructure and low managerial efficiency. The problem of high cost production and stagnant productivity need to be addressed on an urgent basis. It is heartening to note, however that some important steps in recent times have been taken for development and modernization of this sector. The most important of them is withdrawal of excise duty of Re.1.00 per Kg on tea as announced in the Union Budget 2005-06. Sanctioned of schemes such as Grant of subsidy for production of orthodox tea and assistance to the two research institutes viz. Tea Research

Association at Tocklai (Assam) and United Planters Association for south India Tea Research Foundation with an estimated outlay of Rs. 93 Crores for financing planning commission was very positive about funding a solution of the tea crisis which the Industry has long been suffering from. Union commerce ministry proposed to unveil a 15yr programme for massive replantation and rejuvenation of the Tea Industry.

1.3.b. Small Tea Growers of Assam face uncertain future

More than 65000 no's of Small Tea Growers are facing uncertain future due to unilateral decision of state govt. imposing surcharge on green tea leaves @ of Rs. 0.20 per Kg in addition to a fine of Rs.200 per bigha w.e.f July 1, 2003. The cees utilization policy has not at all being implemented which was collected for the development of small tea growers of Assam. The cees which was further raised to Rs.0.25 per Kg nearly Rs.200 crores been collected from small tea growers since 2009. The Assam Taxation(on Special Lands)(Amendment) Bill, 2018 was passed by the assembly paving the way for waiver of a 10-paise cees on green leaves produced by small tea growers. The waiver will be applicable for tea growers with holding of 40ha or less land. The waiver will come into effect from the date of notification. The bought leaf factories ought to be told. In 2016 the cees was brought down to 15paise and in 2017 it was bought down to 10paise. In both the cases the bought leaf factories were never told. According to the association there are nearly 1.34 lakh small growers in Assam and they produce 42% of the tea. For more than three decades since year 1978 indigenous youths of Assam with their capital and labour established more than 65000 small tea gardens in the state. These small growers through scheme of self employment earn livelihood for their families. Besides they provide indirect rehabilitation to about 9 lakh people. These tea firms help in building socio economic structure and also protect the land in use around state tea borders.

Depending upon the green leaves from the small farmers 220 brought-leaves factories came up in the state. The small tea growers in Assam have been supplying green leaves to about 300 factories. It is a matter of great regret that even after seven decades of independence of the country the indigenous people of this state have not been given proper settlement of land.

Out of 65000 unsettled small tea farmers only 3000 have got registered with the Tea Board of India. These small farmers are in a position to get monetary assistance from the financial institutions. In neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh, all small growers get registered with the Tea Board, as they have been given settlement of land. It may be mentioned that in Tamil Nadu all are registered with the Tea Board.

All Assam Small Tea Growers Association (AASGA), an organization of small tea growers established in 1987, appealed to the state Chief Minister and higher officials several times and launched agitations, has discussions, but it did not get any fruitful results. All efforts have gone to deaf ears. On the other hand increase in revenue and fine though marginalised, the govt. is trying to deprive them by getting even their livelihood. According to Land Reform Act 1997, the small tea growers having land up to 30 bighas were exempted from all type of taxation. During the last decade the rate of leaves produced by small tea growers was Rs.8.00 per Kg., whereas the production cost of green leaves was Rs.7.50 per Kg. The production per bighas varies from 800 to 1500 Kg's. Keeping the average production at 1200 Kg the expenditure on production comes to Rs.9000 and income Rs.9600. with this income of Rs.600 per bigha on 30 bigha land, the total

earning comes to Rs. 18000 annually, which is even not sufficient to support a small family. Assam Small Tea Growers Association (AASSTGA), has approached previous Chief Minister several times and the present Chief minister has given full assurance regarding this issues. The act of negligence may have negative impact on economical development of the state. As agricultural income in Assam is too poor, the people do cultivate tea in high area and more or less it is a family affair to educate their children in institutions outside Assam, as the educational infrastructure is not well developed. People of Assam are coming out of the insurgency problem and the govt. should realize these basic ideals before falling on being tax neutral for the state.

1.3.c Processing of green leaf

Until self sufficiency is achieved growers are at a major disadvantage while dealing with factories they sell their produce to them. In Assam 99% Small Tea Growers sell their leaves to the 200 add factories in the state. In the Trai area of West Bengal about 69% of these posses the leaf of small growers. CTC the fine and granular variety that is mostly consumed is produced by these factories in Assam and West Bengal. Since a capital investment of around Rs.50 lakh is required for setting up a tea processing factory these units are totally profit oriented. In comparison to large scale industry small scale tea processing units present a totally different picture. Lachit Neog and Hemanta Gohain bought 9.5 ha tea garden at Amlongchang in central Assam in 2002 and converted to organic production. It was certified by SKAL Holland in 2006. They both set up a small tea processing unit in the garden itself, the machine cost Rs. 6 lakhs, two generator sets cost Rs. 2.9 lakh, the building and sheds cost Rs. 80000 and a furnace fired by paddy husk cost Rs. 30000, a grand total of Rs. 10 lakh. This unit is processing about 120 Kg of green leaf per day and fine quality orthodox tea, with future plans for producing green tea. There are about 30 such tea processing units in Assam. John Marbaniang with 3.6ha tea plantation produces about 1000kgs orthodox tea per year. Even the best of garden have to be sensitive to issue of labour management since the tea industry is labour intensive good management practices play a big role in the requirement and retention of labour. In West Bengal and Assam the tea tribes have dominated the scene ever since they were brought to tea gardens by British Planters. There are more problems in the states of North East. In Meghalaya outside labour is prohibited by law and Local labour is expensive. In Arunachal there is shortage of tea garden labour since it is difficult to persuade tea tribes to come to work in this region.

These small tea growers are certainly better off than cotton, tomato, and orange farmers in Maharashtra who have been committing suicide. With an emerging benefit of going totally organic they are perhaps on the brink of a major shift in cultivation practices.

1.3.d Problems of small tea growers

In Assam several tea growers who are paddy farmers do not have ownership of land they cultivated. They are thus deprived of access to bank loans which is essential if they wish to expand, set up own processing unit or go in for organic cultivation. In West Bengal several pineapple farmers has gone in for tea industry, however in the slump of 1999 these small tea growers were compelled to revert to pineapple growing. Growing tea can be risky.

Marketing their produce is another major challenge before the small growers who are processing their own leaf specially those who are going organic. The rest of green tea is sold to tea factory. Since production is limited financing is a

problem. Unless production and certification hurdles are cleared by small tea growers, the time and money needed for such products will continue to elude most. The biggest problem for the majority of small of tea growers of North East is negotiable remuneration price for this green leaf with the large tea factories. In this context some Nepali growers in Darjeeling about 125 in numbers have been organised into an NGO called Organic Ekta. They sell their leaf to the Molaibari tea factory in Kurseong at a fair price. They combine green leaf production is about 1000 Kg per day. Those processing their own green leaf in small units have to find good market for buyers for their produce, mostly orthodox or green leaf.

2. Research Design

2.1. Objective under the Study

The review of this project consisted of appraising technical, environmental, and social information gathered in the course of an appraisal mission by some members of Small tea Growers Association. The following potential environmental, health and safety (and Social) impacts of the project are analysed.

1. Land acquisition and resettlement
2. Water and power supply
3. Management procedures
4. Occupational safety
5. Pesticides and chemical fertilizers handling and application
6. Labour in the supply chain
7. Various problems and prospects
8. Measures to solve the problem

2.2 Research Questions

The study is based on the following questions:-

1. What are the problems faced by Small Tea Growers?
2. What are the future prospects of Small Tea growers?

2.3 Coverage

The Study has covered nine Small Tea Gardens of North Lakhimpur town of Assam. The local area where these gardens are located were as follows-

1. Rampur Kachari Gaon
2. Saraimoria
3. Seajuli
4. Nakari
5. Dolohat
6. Silonibari
7. Ananda
8. Khanajan
9. Harmoti

A comparison study of these gardens will represent a better developed idea.

2.4 Period of Study

The present investigation has been conducted in these gardens during the period of February, March , April 2020.

2.5 Research Methodology

For the purpose of the study of Problems and prospects of Small Tea Growers of Assam, a descriptive and analytical method will be followed. The primary data were collected through personal interview of the selected beneficiaries. In addition to this, secondary data were collected from seminar papers, news articles etc. related to the subject matter of this study.

3. Analysis of Data

The Analysis is done through three ways-

3.1. Sample profile

3.2. Response analysis

3.3 Opinion Survey

3.1. Sample Profile

The sample profile of the study has been understood through the special characteristics of small tea growers which have been divided into various sub-variables.

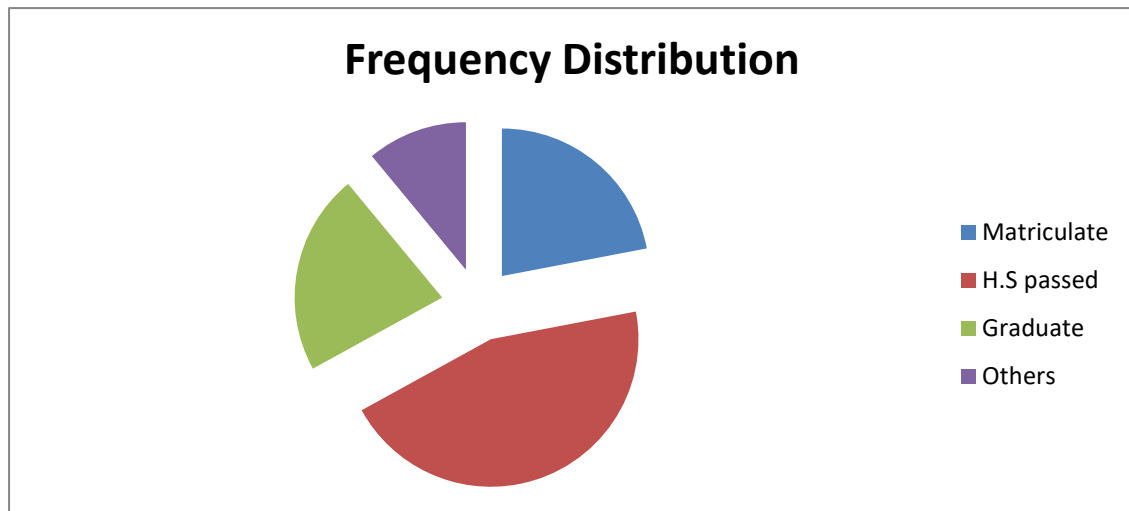
- A) Educational Qualification of the owner
- B) Other occupation of the owner
- C) Size of the Garden.

3.1.a. Responded according to educational qualification

Table 3.1.a.(i) Distribution of Small Tea Growers according to Educational Qualification

Sl.No.	Category	Frequency distribution	Percentage
1.	Up to matriculation	2	22.22
2.	H.S passed	4	44.45
3.	Graduate	2	22.22
4.	Others	1	11.11
	Total	9	100

The above table can be represented with the help of a suitable pie diagram.



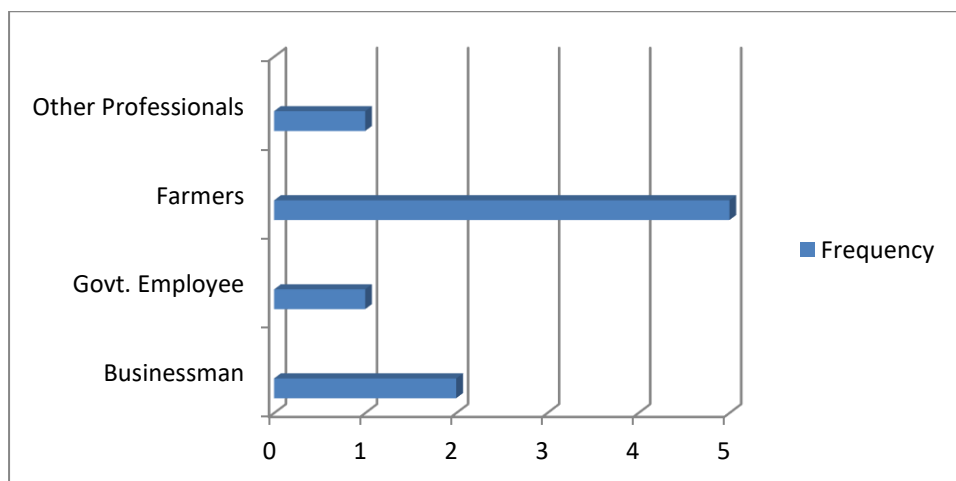
3.1.b. Other Occupation

The distribution of other occupation has been categorized as under-

Table 3.1.b(i) Other Occupation

Sl.No	Category	Frequency
1.	Businessman	2
2.	Govt employees	1
3.	Farmers	5
4.	Other professionals	1
	Total	9

The above table can be represented diagrammatically with the help of a suitable bar diagram



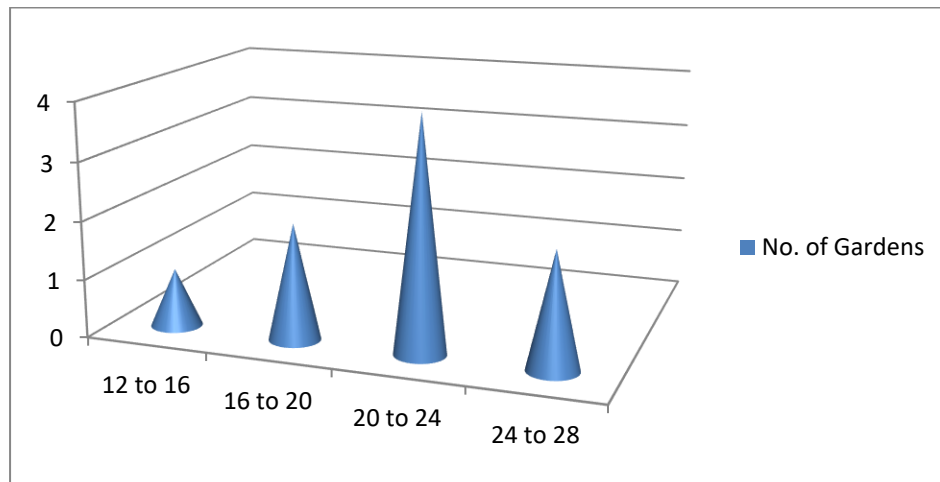
3.1.c. Size distribution of the garden-

Table 3.1.(c)(i)

Size of Gardens(bighas)	No. of gardens
12-16	1
16-20	2

20-24	4
24-28	2

The following table can be represented with the help of a suitable histogram



3.2 Response analysis

This response analysis of the study has been understood through the primary data collected from the small tea grower. Their responses have been summarized as follows-

A). Problems faced while starting the garden

Most of the small tea growers during the study we came to know that they were paddy farmers. They land for cultivation of paddy, but not scientific and suitable for cultivation of tea. To overcome that problem and extend their gardens to make more production and hence increase their profit.

Another problem faced by the small tea growers while starting the tea garden is in monetary term. The response analysis of tea gardens reveal that in Assam 10ha garden would cost Rs.30 lakh to get started. The tea growers require Rs.2 lakh per Ha for land and Rs.1 lakh per Ha for plantation of tea. A basic processing unit including machinery, electricity, generators and building would cost at Rs. 10 lakh. A minimum investment of Rs.40 lakhs is required to start a 10 ha garden in Lakhimpur.

Now the problem is that as most of the small tea growers are small farmers, so they cannot afford such a huge amount of money required to start the garden.

3.2.b. Sources of Finance

It is one of the most important factors which are required to start a small tea garden. As most of the farmers are growers they can't afford their own finance. They have to go private. In Private finance the interest is very high which they are not able to make up such a huge burden. On the other hand most of the small tea growers are farmers/villagers who are unaware of modern banking facilities. In our survey we found that most of the farmers lack adequate finance.

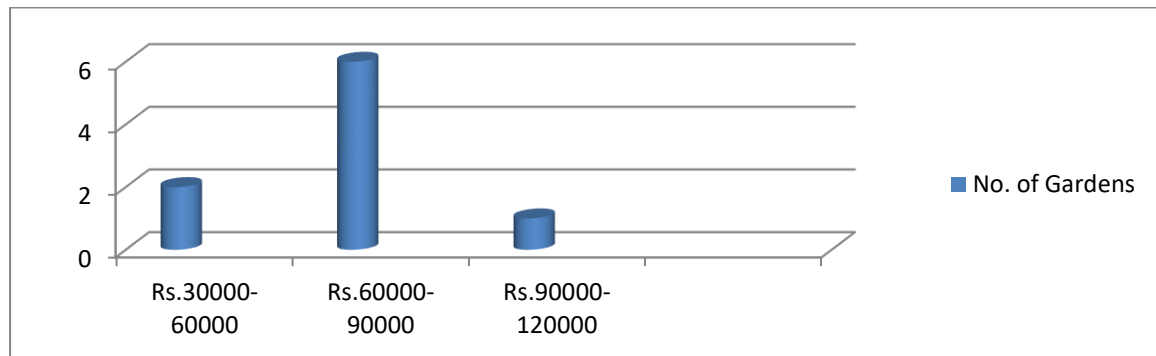
3.2.c. Labour requirement

Since tea industry is labour oriented we found that it is very difficult and expensive. The following table shows the yearly wages of labour payments by small tea growers-

Table 3.2.c(i)

Wages per year	No. of gardens
1. Rs. 30000 – 60000	2
2. Rs. 60000 – 90000	6
3. Rs. 90000- 120000	1

The above table can be represented with the help of Histogram-

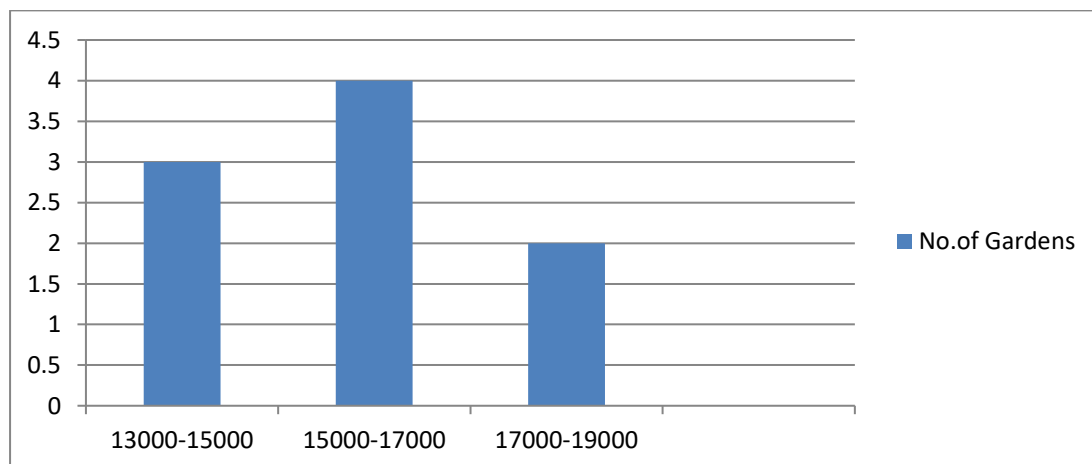


3.2.d. Marketing Attributes

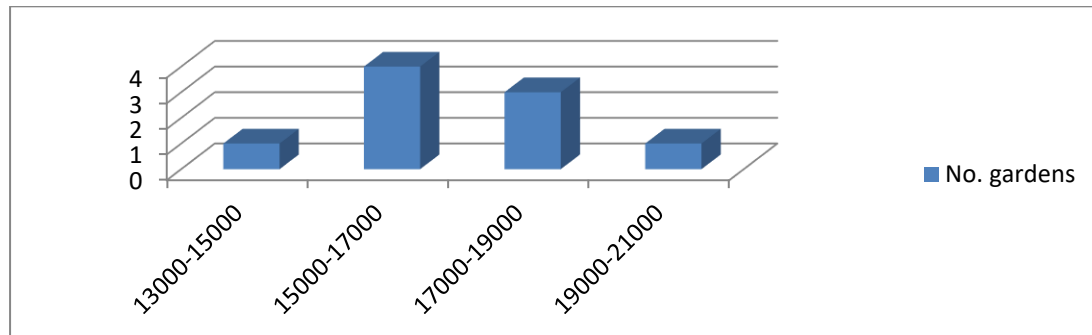
During our study we came to know that in Assam 99% of small tea growers sell green tea leaves to odd tea factories in the state. In our research area we came to know that the rate of tea leaves produced is Rs 17.50 whereas the production cost on green tea leaf was Rs. 16.50. The production per bigha also varies from 800 to 1500 kgs. If we take the average production as 1150kg then its expenditure on production is Rs.18975, its income is Rs. 20125. This was the income of Rs. 1150 on 30 bighas of land. Its total earning is Rs. 34500 annually which is not sufficient to support a small family. This is why small tea growers are seeking other sources of livelihoods. This small amount of earning is having a negotiable economic effect on the small tea growers.

The following histograms shows the production of the nine small tea gardens for the last three years-

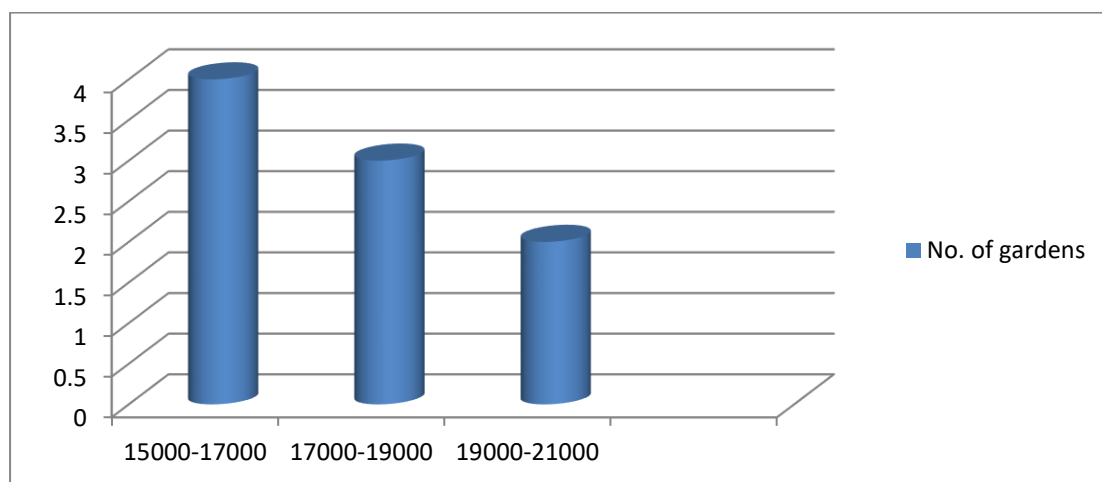
2017



2018



2019



3.2.c. Annual income

The annual income tends to rise whose garden are large. The tea plantation is more and hence production and income is more as compared to the others. 12 to 16 bighas annual income is Rs 40000, 16 to 20 bighas annual income is Rs.60000, 20 to 24 bighas annual income is Rs. 80000 and 24 to 28 bighas of land income is above Rs.100000.

3.3Opinion Survey

The opinion of the tea gardens was collected under the study. They were indigenous youths of North Lakhimpur who have set up their tea gardens. Besides supporting their families they have employed local labours. They being supplying tea to factories they are protecting land boundaries. Despite the contributing factors the govt is neglecting their issues. The problems are regarding land, finance, labour, marketing their produced. Now the question is that do they have land possession certificate, are they being registered with the tea board. Without proper financial assistance they can't increase productivity. Weak technical, managerial are also factors. Cost of production is also high due to lower productivity. So there must be improvement in quality along with reduction in cost of production which is all important issues of a small tea grower today.

4. Suggestions and Conclusion

4.1. Suggestions

In order to remove these limitations the following suggestions have drawn for improving the position of small tea growers:

1. In case of marketing, the All Assam Small Tea Growers Association can set up co-operative form of cultivation and a standard for production of green leaf for proper price, Government can come to rescue the small tea growers with a minimum support price concept, which is applicable with other Agricultural products.
2. The integration of small tea grower's area wise under a single management to synchronize farm activities to the tune of market requirement.
3. Setting up of multi point advisory centres at different locations is essential to encourage small tea growers with proper scientific and technical backup.
4. Creating better awareness among small tea growers about the credit facilities, subsidies, and other functional schemes of Tea Board.
5. Government may strengthen the mechanism for price fixation for small tea growers.
6. The small tea growers may take up organic tea cultivation in a later stage after gaining experience in Tea cultivation for year.
7. There is a need to frame Government policies for allotment of land pattas to those farmers taking up tea plantation on govt/quasi govt lands to enable the farmers to register with Tea board.
8. Facilitating term loan/working capital loan for expanding existing gardens and creating better awareness among small tea growers about the credit facilities, subsidies, and other functioning schemes of Tea Board.

4.2. Conclusion

The quality aspect of tea is imperative to say that quality of tea is a relative term. It is basically acceptability by the consumers. Some tea may be liked or disliked by people. There is absolutely no definite term about quality of tea. Tea quality generally hovers around maintaining bush hygiene and sticking to judicious use of agro inputs. As tea is a perennial crop and its life span continues to be about 100 years, is why tea one needs to keep his eye open so that undue contamination is prevented as far as possible. The first Assamese newspaper, Orunodoi, carries a news item in its second issue of February, 1846 that the annual production of tea of Assam Company (India's first joint stock company to be incorporated with limited liabilities under an act of Parliament in August, 1854) was 194000 pound (97000 seers or 89730 Kgs). The export of this quantity of tea to England would get Rs. 2 lakh@ Rs.2 per seer.

The February 1847 issue of Orunodoi reported that Chinese exported more than five lakh pounds (227000 Kgs) of tea to England. The April, 1853 issue of Orunodoi reported that the Atlas, a newspaper of London of those days, had carried a news item in its January issue stating that the demand of the Chinese tea, in spite of being cheap, was very low and on the other hand, the demand for Assam Tea, though its price was higher than the Chinese tea was more than the Chinese tea. Further the Atlas stated that the quality of Assam Tea was the best and that the tea cultivation was profitable.

The role of Commerce Ministry and Tea Board's London office seems to be riddle. They have remained unconcerned. One have every reason to be suspicious

about the commerce ministry on the other hand asking promptly the tea board to suggest an alternative to the Tea(marketing) control order,1984 and on the other hand, turning deaf ear to the complains of importer of Indian Tea. The Commerce Ministry did not do anything to the exporters who indulge in unfair trade practices. Smelling a rate in the Commerce Ministry's apathy, the Assamese may be provoked to take such steps as would not allow the industry to be ruined by ravenous appetite of the unscrupulous elements. The commerce Ministry should be able to recognise the signs of strong local disaffection and level of competence of the state govt. it would better for all concerned to understand that tea has become the symbol of Assamese nationalism and the Assamese love to recall Maniram Dewan as the "first individual to open out private tea garden in India".

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