



A Study on Socio-economic Profile of Small Tea (*Camellia sinensis*) Growers in the State of Assam

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ABSTRACT

The study was carried out to study the socio-economic profile of small tea growers in Sonitpur district of Assam. The primary data were collected from 100 small tea growers (STG) drawn from 15 randomly selected villages of two randomly selected blocks of Sonitpur district of Assam. It was observed that the majority STG (65.00%) were in middle age group (30-40 years). 58.00 per cent of the sample STG had medium size of households (5-7 members). Huge proportion of sample STG were educated up to graduation level. Larger proportion of sample STG (35.00%) belonged to forward castes followed by OBC (28.00%), SC (19.00%) and ST (18.00%). Out of the total operational land holding 95.57 per cent of land was used for cultivation of tea, and only 4.43 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. Major portion (61.38%) of annual income was obtained from tea cultivation. 57.00 per cent of the sample households had their annual income exceeding ₹ 10.00 lakh. Larger proportion of the sample respondents owned pucca houses.

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

All over the world Tea is grown in more than 32 countries covering an area of more than 2.5 million hectares. Leading tea producing countries are India, China, Sri Lanka, Kenya and Indonesia. These five countries taken together account for 75 percent of world's total tea production and 80 percent of the world's tea exports. China is the largest producer of tea with annual production of 986.36 million kg out of total world tea production of 3728 million kg. It accounts for 29.34 per cent of the world's production closely followed by India (26.44 per cent). In 2017 India's share in world tea exports was 12.9 percent (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 production of tea in India takes place in both large plantation and small gardens. Small Tea Growers (STGs) are defined, as a person or group having plantation area up to 10.12 hectares. 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.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The major tea manufacturing states of India are Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Other areas where tea is grown to a small extent, are Karnataka, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Sikkim, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Bihar. The state of Assam covers 55.55 per cent area under tea cultivation in India and produces 51.90 per cent of country's total production of tea. Hence, Assam was chosen purposively for the study. Out of all 33 districts of Assam, Sonitpur 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, Sonitpur district was chosen purposively for the study. Sonitpur district has 7 community development blocks namely Balipara, Borchalla, Bihuguri, Dhekiajuli, Gabharu, Naduar and Rangapara. Out of these 7 blocks, Balipara and Dhekiajuli were selected randomly for the study. The Dhekiajuli block has 796 number of revenue villages (census 2011) out of which 10 leading tea growing villages namely, 1.No. HugarjuliBagan, Ali SingaGaon, DhekiajuliBagan, KachariGaon, HabiGaon, Ghoramora, MazbatGaon, PirakataGaon, Salmari, and SingariAtiGaon were selected. The Baliparablock has 10 revenue villages (census 2011) out of which 5 tea growing villages namely Balipara, Chiloni, Chariduar, Dekargaon

and Ghoramari were selected randomly. Out of the selected villages from the two blocks, 50 small tea growers were selected from villages under Dhekiajuli block and 50 small tea growers were selected from the villages under Balipara 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 DISCUSSION

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. 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 more) for analysis.

Age structure

Age is considered to be an important socio-economic factor that affects human ability to make decisions. Looking at the importance of age in tea production, the age related data of sample small tea growers were analysed and the findings there of have been presented in (Table 1).

Table 1 Age structure of the sample small tea growers

Age Structure	Lower-small	Medium-small	Higher-Small	Pooled
Young (up to 30 years)	2 (50.00)	6 (19.35)	25 (38.46)	33 (33.00)
Middle age (30 – 50 years)	2 (50.00)	23 (74.19)	40 (61.53)	65 (65.00)
Old (50 years and above)	-	2 (6.45)	-	2 (2.00)
Total	4 (100.00)	31 (100.00)	65 (100.00)	100(100.00)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

The analysis showed that out of 100 respondents, majority of them (65.00 per cent) were in middle age group (30-50 years), 33.00 per cent were in young age group (up to 30 years) and only 2.00 per cent were in old age group (50 years and above). Green tea leaf production is considered as a lucrative venture in Assam and gives handsome profits to the small tea growers in the study area. Youth of young and middle age groups were physically and mentally in a better position to manage green leaf production and that was probably the reason that small tea growers were dominated by young and middle age group green leaf growers. Furthermore, there was no better income generating avenues available to the youths of the study area. That may be another reason for young and middle age group people to be attracted towards green tea leaf production. The analysis of the different categories of the small tea growers showed almost similar trend. In case of lower-small tea growers, 50.00 per cent of the respondents belonged to young age group and remaining 50.00 per cent of the respondents belonged to middle age group. The Medium-small category

of green tea leaf growers indicated almost similar trend, with about three-fourth of the respondents belonging to middle age group (30 – 50 years) and about one-fifth of them falling in young age group (<30 years). Almost similar trend was noticed in case of higher small tea growers also. It is interesting to note that among lower-small and higher-small tea growers there was not even a single household head from the age group 50 years and above (old age group).

Family size: Family size means the total number of members in a family. The economic behaviour of the family, particularly related to income and expenditure are largely affected by the size of a family. For this purpose, the sample small tea growers were categorised into three categories on the basis of the number of members in the family viz. small (up to 4 members), medium (5-7 members) and large (8 members and above). The family size-wise distribution of small tea growers has been presented in the (Table 2). The analysis of family size of sample small tea growers revealed that 58.00% of the sample small tea growers had medium

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size of households (5-7 members), 28.00 per cent of the sample small tea growers had a small size of households (up to 4 members). The proportion of sample small tea growers with large size (8 members and above) of households was only 18.00 per cent. Inter farm wise comparison of family size, indicated that in case of higher-small tea growers also, majority of tea growers (52.30%) had medium size of family, followed by those with small families (40.00%) and large families (7.69%). However, in case of medium-small

tea growers more than two-thirds (67.74%) of tea growers had medium size families, followed by those with large families (25.80%) and small families (6.45%). Almost similar trend was observed in case of lower-small tea growers also. Breaking up of joint family system was the main reason for dominance of tea growers with smaller size of families. Apart from that some other factors such as increasing level of education, urbanisation and income may also be the responsible for this phenomenon.

Table 2 Family size of sample small tea growers

Size of households	Number of grower	Lower-small	Medium-small	Higher-Small	Pooled
Small (up to 4)		-	2 (6.45)	26 (40.00)	28 (28.00)
Medium (5-7)		3 (75.00)	21 (67.74)	34 (52.30)	58 (58.00)
Large (8 and above)		1 (25.00)	8 (25.80)	5 (7.69)	14 (27.00)
Total		4 (100.00)	31 (100.00)	65 (100.00)	100 (100.00)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

Table 3 Level of literacy of sample small tea growers

Literacy level	Number of grower	Lower-small	Medium-small	Higher-Small	Pooled
Illiterate		-	-	-	-
Primary		-	-	-	-
Secondary		1 (25.00)	-	-	1 (1.00)
Intermediate		1 (25.00)	6 (19.35)	6 (9.23)	13 (13.00)
Graduation and above		2 (50.00)	25 (80.64)	59 (90.76)	86 (86.00)
Total		4 (100.00)	31 (100.00)	65 (100.00)	100 (100.00)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

Level of literacy

Literacy is defined as a particular capacity and mode of behaviour, the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential. A literate 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 small tea growers was analysed and studied and the results have been shown in (Table 3). Tea cultivation needs heavy initial investment and the growers need huge amount of capital with them. There is no provision of credit to the small tea growers from bank. For this purpose they need to be educated enough so that they could manage the heavy initial capital requirement from other sources. Moreover, Tea cultivation is highly dependent on hired human labour and to manage these labours, the growers need to be educated. It is clear from the table that cent-per cent of the respondents were observed to be educated. It was further observed that a huge proportion of sample tea growers (86.00 per cent) were educated up to graduation level and amongst the remaining 14 respondents, 13 (13.00 per cent) were intermediate educated. Almost similar trend was noted in case of lower-small, medium-small and higher-small farm categories. It was interesting to note that as the size of the farm increased, the population of graduate tea growers increased. However, the reverse trend

was observed in case of intermediate educated respondents. Higher level of awareness about the benefits of education among the tea growers and better economic status of their households are probably the reasons for larger level of education of the sample small tea growers.

Caste structure

Caste is the form of social stratification characterized by endogamy, hereditary transmission of a lifestyle which often includes an occupation, status in hierarchy, customary social interaction, and exclusion. Four groups of caste existed in the study area forward castes, other backward castes, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes recognized by Caste Amendment Act, 1976. It is said that caste plays some role in making investment in agriculture and allied sectors and adoption of new technologies. Also, the persons belonging to some specific castes are believed to be more skilled in performing agricultural activities in comparison with other castes. Considering the importance of caste factor in crop production the selected households were grouped into the above mentioned four caste categories and the caste group wise distribution of the sample small tea growers has been presented in (Table 4). The study revealed that larger proportion of sample small tea growers (35.00%) belonged to forward castes closely followed by those from other backward castes, which constituted 28.00 per cent of the total sample small tea growers. The strength of sample respondents from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes was

observed to be more or less at par with each other (19.00% and 18.00% respectively). Land holding wise analysis of the caste composition revealed that out of 65 respondents in all with small land holding size larger proportion (35.38%) were from forward castes, followed by those from other backward castes (29.23% i.e., 19 out of 65), scheduled castes (18.46% i.e., 12 out of 65) and scheduled tribes (16.92% i.e., 11 out of 65). In case of respondents with medium-small size of land holding, caste composition of the respondents exhibited almost same trend. However, there were altogether 4 small tea growers in lower-small category,

out of which 50.00 per cent of them each came from scheduled caste and schedule tribe categories. It was noteworthy here that there was no respondent in these categories either from forward castes or other backward castes. Establishment of a new tea plantation needs heavy initial investment and so far provision for credit from banks for this purpose does not exist and small tea growers have to arrange credit on their own. Relative resourcefulness of small tea growers from forward castes and other backward castes may be the reason for predominance of members of these castes among the sample small tea growers.

Table 4 Caste group wise distribution of sample small tea growers

Category	Number of grower	Lower-small	Medium-small	Higher-Small	Pooled
Forward castes		-	12 (38.70)	23 (35.38)	35 (35.00)
Other backward castes (OBC)		-	9 (29.03)	19 (29.23)	28 (28.00)
Scheduled castes (SC)		2 (50.00)	5 (16.12)	12 (18.46)	19 (19.00)
Scheduled tribes (ST)		2 (50.00)	5 (16.12)	11 (16.92)	18 (18.00)
Total		4 (100.00)	31 (100.00)	65 (100.00)	100 (100.00)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

Table 5 Land holding pattern of sample small tea growers

Land holding	Lower-small		Medium-small		Higher-small		Pooled	
	Total	Average	Total	Average	Total	Average	Total	Average
Land under tea cultivation	8.60 (90.33)	2.15	139.50 (95.75)	4.50	432.00 (95.85)	6.64	580.10 (95.57)	5.80
Land under other crops / fallow	0.92 (9.67)	0.23	6.20 (4.26)	0.20	19.75 (4.15)	0.30	26.87 (4.43)	0.26
Total operational land	9.52 (100.00)	2.38	145.70 (100.00)	4.70	451.7 (100.00)	6.94	606.9 (100.00)	6.06

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

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 (Table 5). It may be observed from the table that overall operational land holding of the sample respondents was 606.97 hectares. Out of the total operational land holding, 580.10 hectares (95.57 per cent) of land was used for cultivation of tea, and only 26.87 hectares (4.43 per cent) of land was used to produce other crops or kept fallow. It may be observed from the table that as the size of land holding increased, the proportion of land under tea cultivation also increased (90.33 per cent in lower-small category, 95.75 per cent in medium-lower category and 95.85 per cent in higher-small category). In case of lower-small tea growers the per cent of land under other crops or unproductive (9.67 per cent) was slightly high as compared with medium-small (4.26 per cent) and small (4.15 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.

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 6). It is evident from the table that a larger proportion (42.00%) of sample small tea growers were dependent on tea cultivation for earning their livelihood. Around 30.00 per cent of small tea growers eked out their livelihood from tea cultivation along with service either government or private. Around 9.00 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 fifth 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 fifty years or so. 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 service emerged as the next popular occupation mix involving a substantial proportion of the

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total sample small tea growers. Most of the small tea growers practicing this occupation mix were lower/primary school teacher which owned relatively less amount of land and tried to supplement their income by resorting to tea cultivation. Similarly, those practicing tea cultivation with

business wanted to supplement their income with earnings from petty business as selling pesticides and other chemicals to fellow small tea growers, running small grocery shop etcetera.

Table 6 Occupation of sample small tea growers

Occupation	Number of grower	Lower-small	Medium-small	Higher-Small	Pooled
Tea cultivation		2 (50.00)	10 (32.25)	30 (46.15)	42 (42.00)
Tea cultivation + Government/Private services		1 (25.00)	14 (45.16)	15 (23.07)	30 (30.00)
Tea cultivation + Government/Private services + Business		-	1 (3.22)	8 (12.30)	9 (9.00)
Tea cultivation + Business		1 (25.00)	6 (19.35)	12 (18.46)	19 (19.00)
Total		4 (100.00)	31 (100.00)	65 (100.00)	100 (100.00)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

Table 7 Sources of income of sample small tea growers (₹ Lac)

Sources of income	Number of grower	Lower-small	Medium-small	Higher-Small	Pooled
Tea cultivation		5.5 (57.82)	6.2 (62.64)	7.0 (61.94)	6.2 (61.38)
Govt. / Private services		2.3 (24.24)	2.1 (21.21)	2.3 (20.35)	2.2 (21.78)
Business		1.7 (17.89)	1.6 (16.16)	2.0 (17.69)	1.7 (16.83)
Total		9.5 (100.00)	9.9 (100.00)	11.3 (100.00)	10.1 (100.00)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

Source of income

Major sources of income of different categories of sample small tea growers in the study area have been presented in (Table 7). It may be observed from the table that major portion (61.38 per cent) of annual income was obtained from tea cultivation followed by government or

private services (21.78 per cent) in the study area. Almost similar trend was observed in all farm size classes. Tea leaf production gave higher returns to the growers and probably that was the reason that its contribution to total annual income of green tea leaf growers were higher than other sources of income such as service and business.

Table 8 Annual income of sample small tea growers

Income level (₹)	Number of grower		Lower-small		Medium-small		Higher-Small		Pooled	
	Total	Average	Total	Average	Total	Average	Total	Average	Total	Average
Low income (5.00 to 7.50 lakh)	1 (25.00)	7.48	1 (3.23)	7.40	-	-	2 (2.00)	7.44		
Middle income (7.50 to 10.00 lakh)	1 (25.00)	8.95	12 (38.71)	9.89	28 (43.08)	9.95	41 (41.00)	9.26		
High income (10.00 lakh & above)	2 (50.00)	12.35	18 (58.06)	12.41	37 (56.92)	12.45	57 (57.00)	12.40		
Total	4 (100.00)		31 (100.00)		65 (100.00)		100 (100.00)			

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

Income

The income of a household from all sources directly reflects the economic status of the household. It also gives an indication of the standard of living of the household. The annual income of the sample households was assessed and same has represented in (Table 8). For the purpose of the analysis the income of the sample households was justified into three income groups, viz. low income group, middle income group and high income group. The households earning an annual income between ₹ 5.00 lakh and ₹ 7.50 lakh were grouped as low income household, those earning between ₹ 7.50 lakh and ₹ 10.00 lakh or more per annum were constituted high income class. A perusal of the table indicated that more than half (57.00 per cent) of the sample households had their annual income exceeding ₹ 10.00 lakh. It implies that majority of the small tea growers earned more than ₹ 10.00 lakh per annum and they formed the high

income class. The average income of the high income class households was assessed at ₹ 12.40 lakh. The annual income of 41.00 per cent of the sample households varied between ₹ 7.50 lakh and ₹ 10.00 lakh and they fell under middle income category. The average income of this income household group was calculated at ₹ 9.26 lakh. These two income class taken together accounted for 98.00 per cent of the total sample households. A negligible proportion of the respondent households (2.00 per cent) earned less than ₹ 7.50 lakh per annum. Land holding size wise analysis of sample tea leaf growers exhibited almost similar trend. Higher return from green tea leaf cultivation was the main reason for dominance of people with higher income among the sample tea leaf growers.

Dwelling house: Shelter is one the basic necessities of life. By looking at the type of dwelling house economic status of

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 9). 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 were better as compared to lower-small and medium-small group of respondents.

Table 9 Dwelling house of sample small tea growers

Type of dwelling house	Number of grower	Lower-small	Medium-small	Higher-Small	Pooled
Kuchcha		-	-	-	-
Mixed		3 (75.00)	22 (70.96)	16 (24.61)	41 (41.00)
Pucca		1 (25.00)	9 (29.03)	49 (75.38)	59 (59.00)
Total		4 (100.00)	31 (100.00)	65 (100.00)	100 (100.00)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

Table 10 Ownership of farm implements and machinery by the sample small tea growers

Implements	Number of grower	Lower-small	Medium-small	Higher-Small	Pooled
Sprayer		4 (100.00)	31 (100.00)	65 (100.00)	100 (100.00)
Power weeder		2 (50.00)	8 (25.00)	9 (13.84)	19 (19.00)
Power blower		3 (75.00)	6 (19.35)	12 (18.46)	21 (21.00)
Irrigation pump set		-	21 (67.74)	28 (43.07)	49 (49.00)
Harrow		4 (100.00)	31 (100.00)	65 (100.00)	100 (100.00)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages to respective number of sample category

Lower-small STGs – 4, Medium-small STGs – 31, Small TGs – 65, Total – 100

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 10). 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 100 sample respondents, only 19.00 per cent of respondents possessed power weeders, 21.00 per cent of respondents

possessed power blowers as power weeder and power blower was not commonly used for tea cultivation in the study area. Out of 100 respondents, only 49 respondents (49.00 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 (50.00 per cent) and power blowers (75.00 per cent) was high for lower-small tea growers. 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. But 21 respondents out of 31 (i.e. 67.74 per cent) and 28 respondents out of 65 (i.e. 43.07 per cent) of both Medium-small and higher-small group of tea growers respectively used irrigation to overcome the risk of erratic rainfall.

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