



# A Study on the Status of Growth and Development of Tea Industry in Assam

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**Abstract:** Assam is located in the North-East of India surrounded by seven states viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura and West Bengal. It also shares its two boundaries with two countries viz. Bangladesh and Bhutan. The total geographical area of the state is 78,438 sq kms which is about 2.4 percent of the total geographical area of the country. According to the 2011 census the population of Assam stands at 3, 11, 69,272 of which 1, 59, 54,927 are males and 1, 52, 14,345 females. The economy of Assam continues to be primarily agrarian and the agricultural sector is providing employment to more than 50 percent of the rural population. This sector contributes 25 percent to the State Domestic Product (2010-11). Even though Assam is rich in natural resources and has a few agro and mineral based industries, still the state is industrially backward by Indian standard in many aspects. Economic development of the state depends on the production of the state. The government had been making continuous efforts to develop the already existing agrarian economy and to improve the other sectors of the economy in the state. Tea is considered as one of the main agricultural produce in the state and is reputed all over the world for its aromatic quality. The other agricultural produce in the state are rice, potatoes, pulses, jute, sugarcane etc. Different fruits like bananas, jackfruits, pineapples, mangoes, guavas are also produced in the state. The major industries in the states are petroleum and natural gas, coal, tourism, limestone, granite and tea industry, some other industries are fertilizers, sugar, paper, rice mills food processing and sericulture. Some traditional industries are brass-metal.

**Keywords:** Tea, Industry, Assam, Economic, worker.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

At present India is the largest tea producing country in the world (according to the data of 2004) followed by China, Sri Lanka, Korea, Turkey, Indonesia, Japan, Nepal etc., but the majority of tea in India comes from the gardens of Assam. Large tea plantations as well as many medium and small plantations have been established in North East India including Assam. From the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s, the industry was relatively profitable, and common farmers and tea estates were interested in setting up tea estates/Tea is closely linked to the lives of Assamese people as tea estates employ 17 percent of Assam's people. Assam tea is known as black tea by some, or red tea by others. A few small plantations in Assam have recently produced green tea, white tea.

**2. Objective of the study:-** our main objective of the Study are

I. Assamese private enterprise development of tea industry and increase in tea production.

II. Economic recession in tea industry and its prevention measures.

III. The British government intervened in the great labour crisis and the misery of the workers continued.

**3. Methodology:-** This paper totally based on primary and secondary Source materials like books, articles and relevant website which are critically and analytically examined.



**4. Export of Assam tea and establishment of new plantations:** In 1834, the British East India Company, after losing its tea monopoly to China, became desperate to expand the tea industry in India anyway. In 1834, Governor General William Bentinck appointed a Tea Committee to explore and develop tea in Assam. Tea plantations were started experimentally in Assam during Lord Auckland's tenure. Mr. Gordon then Mr. C. A. Bruce was appointed Superintendent of Govt Tea Forest and he was the real originator of tea plantation industry in Assam. He found many tea tracts in Lakhimpur. 1835 AD The first tea garden was opened in Lakhimpur. In 1837, Mr. Bush brought 46 boxes of tea from Assam to Calcutta and some of it was exported to England. Thus Assam tea began to be sent from Assam to other places as well. But the government had no intention of running the tea business. The company government wanted to hand over the experimental tea cultivation to private enterprise if successful. The first official tea industry was located at the confluence of the Brahmaputra and Kundil rivers. But as the land there was not suitable for tea, the tea industry was shifted from here to Jaipur and new plantations were established there. In 1839, a business organization was formed for the cultivation and production of tea. In 1840, the government experimentally handed over the tea gardens to the Assam Tea Company. The Assam Company then imported seeds from China and started production. The income of the Assam Tea Company was not at all promising in the early years, but by 1852 AD the company's tea production was satisfactory. In 1850 AD another tea plantation was started in Upper Assam. In 1854, tea plantations were opened at Kamrup and Erang. In 1855, indigenous tea plants were discovered in Cachar and the first tea garden was opened in the district in the same year. Around the same time a tea garden was opened at Srihatta. 1859 AD 760,000 pounds of tea were cultivated on 4,000 acres of land.

**5. Tea Industry development in Assam:** One of the main reasons for the progress of Assam under the British rule was the emergence and expansion of the tea industry which was indicative of Assam's commercial prosperity. The discovery of tea as an international trade commodity opened the door to great economic potential in Assam. Robert Bush and his brother Charles Alexander Cross are credited with discovering tea in Assam. Mr. Robert Rusch was the first Englishman who visited Gargaon as a Political Agent in 1823 AD and learned about the existence of tea in the Upper Brahmaputra Valley from a Singpho Sardar. Ai, Singpho Sardar gave some tea plants to Alexander Cross, father of Robert Brush. Robert Brush died in 1825. Charles Alexander Bush gave the tea seeds to David Scott, Agent to the then Governor General, who in turn forwarded them to the Botanical Garden Authority in Calcutta for extensive testing. Dr. N. Wallich was an officer of the Botanical Garden who was sent to take charge of the Tea Committee formed. Mr. Gordon was sent to China to procure trees, seeds and skilled workers from China, but no further progress was made in this matter until 1832 AD. That year Captain Jenkin's was asked to report on the wealth of Assam. Referring to tea in his report, he said that it is the national wealth of Assam.

**6. Assamese Private Enterprise Tea:** As a section of the well-to-do Europeans with the Assam Company aspired to own tea plantations in Assam themselves, some wealthy individuals of Assam were not far behind in this regard. Maniram Dewan was the first Indian tea garden owner who is hailed as the father of Assam's tea industry. Stanley Baldwin has recognized Maniram's role in Assam's Tea. Other wealthy Assamese who built tea gardens were Rai Bahadur Jagannath Barua, Rai Bahadur Kurukant Bandhuya, Rai Bahadur Shivprasad Barua, Sarbananda Barakati, Kaliprasad Chaliha, Hemdhar Barua, Ganga Govind, Phukan, Radhakant Handik, Arya Barbra Bholanath Barua, Dinnath Bejbarua. Other capitalists did not want a conflict with the Company or British arms.

**7. Development of tea industry and increase in production of tea:** After the establishment of tea plantations, the development of tea industry continued for several years. Many companies have acquired land for tea plantations in the Surma and Ayaputra valleys. In the greed of more profit, without considering the quality of the land and the supply of workers etc., tea gardens started to be established everywhere. Hence well-planned and well-regulated tea cultivation became a profitable industry. Therefore, for 30 years after 1869 AD, the number of tea plantations increased, the scope of tea cultivation expanded and the production of tea was encouraged. In 1872 AD, 27 thousand acres of land in Brahmaputra valley, 23 thousand acres of land in Cachar and 1 thousand acres of tea garden were established in Srihatta. Total production at these three locations was 6 million, 5 million and 3 million pounds respectively. In 1878 AD the production of tea was 28 million pounds, in 1885 AD 53 million pounds, in 1901 AD 134 million pounds and in 1920 AD the production of tea increased to 234 million pounds. 1922 AD saw some decline in tea production amounting to 199 million pounds. But in 1923, tea production rose again to 237 million pounds, of which 160 million pounds came from the Brahmaputra Valley and 77 million pounds in Surma Valley. The land used for tea plantation was 4 lakh 12. 1000 acres amounting to a total of 14 million pounds sterling of capital employed in the tea gardens of Assam.

**8. Increase in tea exports to various destinations:** Around 18-66 AD, 96 percent of tea was exported to Britain via China and 4 percent from India. But in 1886 AD. This ratio has changed. At that time, the amount of exports from China



to Britain was 59 percent and the amount of exports from India stood at 38 percent. Meanwhile, tea exports from Sinhalese to Britain began to be 3 percent. In 1903 AD, the amount of Sinhalese tea exports increased to 31 percent. China's tea exports are 10 percent. India's export volume is 59 percent. In the early days of the tea industry, the price of tea was high. That is, in 1831, the price of 1 pound of tea was 8 shillings, then the price of tea was 2 shillings per pound. In 1878, a pound of tea cost 1 shilling 5 pence. In 1882, 1 pound cost 1 shilling. In 1886 AD the price of 1 A pound was pence and in 1903 AD the price of tea fell to pence in the Brahmaputra valley. In the valley is Pence. Between 1893 AD and 1898 AD, tea production increased enormously. The supply of tea was more than the demand. The price of tea was reduced from the cost of production. In this situation, the tea industry experienced economic depression. All efforts have been made to protect the tea industry from this situation such as reducing the cost of production and finding new markets. This protest led to the resurgence of the tea industry. After World War I, the price of tea began to rise again. And in 1923, the average price of tea in the Ragnaputra valley was 15 annas 10 paise per pound. while in the Surma Valley it was 13 and 11 paise per pound. The consumption of tea increased in Great Britain and Ireland due to the fall in the price of tea. In 1866 tea consumption per person was 32 pounds which increased in 1903 Ad ,6 pounds. In 1919, consumption of tea rose to 82 pounds per village. Thanks to the efforts of Indian and Sinhalese tea growers, the enjoyment of tea began to spread outside of Britain. And in 1895, the amount of tea sold outside Britain was 39 million pounds, which increased to 140 million in 1923. pound .

**9. Shortage of labor hampers the development of tea industry-Condition of laborers:** Shortage of labor poses a major obstacle to tea production in Assam. Tea plantations needed cheap labor for some but local labor was dreamy and unsuitable for tea production. That need is met by the workers of small industries who were overthrown by the colonial rule who rush to Assam from different parts of the country for the need of livelihood. To procure these labourers, the tea garden owners appointed agents, popors known as arkathis. It lured workers to Assam. And in an unfamiliar environment, the black shadow of disaster came down in their lives. Like the intolerable life of indigo farmers described in Neeldarpan, contemporary folk literature also reflects the ironic image of tea coolies. The tea porters had no way to escape. Trying to keep them in debt by intoxicating them 23. The problem of tea coolies in Assam was the subject of Congress Madras in 1887 AD. Although it was raised in the session, it did not get importance. However, for tea cultivation and production, workers have to be brought from West Bengal, Chotonagpur, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha etc. Today, special laws are also passed to regulate labor-owner relations. However, the condition of the workers was not satisfactory at all. A severe labor crisis in Assam has created special difficulties in tea production. The tea growers employed outside workers following the Arkathiya practice. But due to Assam's capricious weather, black fever, diet, lack of medical treatment, communication, difficulties and other reasons, the death rate of foreign laborers employed in Raiputra and Surma valleys increased. The labor crisis did not end when this fear of death forced workers to leave Assam. The British government took the initiative to intervene after learning the reasons for the tea plantation coolies leaving Assam, but there was no solution to the plight of the workers.

**10. Government Laws Introduced to Improve the Conditions of Tea Industry Workers:** Many laws were introduced by the government regarding the improvement of the conditions of the workers and the land allotted for tea production. By the 1833 AD Act, land of 100 to 10,000 acres was leased for 45 years, from which no tax was levied for 5 to 20 years. In 1854 AD this rule or law was changed and the lease period was made 99 years. A system of fee simple grants was introduced in 1861 AD by which land was sold at 2 to 8 rupees per acre. In 1876 the sale of land was stopped and land was leased for 30 years. By 1905 the economic boom was strong and continued until World War I, when the short-term crisis in the tea industry ended. Increasing production per acre and increasing prices in the world market led to an increase in both production volume and total value during that time as fine chapata collection systems were in place. A large number of laborers remained in Assam in spite of the coming and going of laborers and other difficulties. Tea plantation coolies started farming in the fallow lands surrounding the plantation. The Assam Labor Inquiry Report of 1906 AD recommended some legislative changes to improve the conditions of tea industry labourers. It abolished the right of the tea growers to keep the laborers captive. Tea workers in Assam could not acquire the right to form a trade union until the Trade Union Registration Act was passed in 1926 AD. When workers in Assam moved from one plantation to another due to low wages, outbreak of epidemics, personal rivalry, machinations, etc., the labor chiefs would seize them and prosecute them for breach of contract. Sometimes the plantation manager and the growers together punished them. On the whole, the worker-owner relationship was a master-ghost relationship. However, due to the nationalist activities during the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920-22 AD and the gradual strengthening of the trade union movement from 1927 onwards, capital-labour relations in the manufacturing economy began to be driven in a new direction.



## 11. CONCLUSION:-

The present study throws light on many aspects of tea industry in Assam. The study clearly reveals that there takes place increasing number of tea gardens and the expansion of tea garden areas at the same time which can be considered as good shine for the state as well as for the country's economy. It is found in the study that there existed disparity in tea production and average yield which might be the result of many seen and unseen factors available in the state. More number of tea gardens and more tea production were concentrated in the Dibrugarh district followed by Sivasagar among the selected districts. One more finding of the study is that the expansion of size of tea gardens and tea factory in the state brings a good job opportunity to youth unemployed people to employ themselves as tea garden labour and non-labour. Thus it is very imperative from the side of the govt. to lay much emphasis upon tea industry as the tea industry is the leading industry in the state of Assam. The govt. should support both big and small tea garden financially and politically for the greater interest of the society and for the benefits of the state.

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