

Impact covid-19 on Small Tea Growers of Dhemaji District of Assam

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Abstract - Pandemic and economy always run in inverse direction. Present Covid-19 is a record-breaking pandemic over the centuries. Almost 210 countries and territories have been affected and the death toll to 4,77000(10%) by June 24/2020. Total positive cases rises to 92,40,000 including 46,10,000(90) recovered cases. In India total number of positive cases rise to 456183 including 183022 (95%) recovered and 14476(5%) death. This is a record-breaking pandemic over the centuries and still on without proper treatment. These pandemic paralyses the world economy from every angle. So tea industry over the world is not getting rescued from it. With less than two centuries Assam tea has along and rich history. Since first tea cultivation in 1833 under east-India Company, it has been becoming the main agricultural export item in India. Being the first tea producing state Assam became the major tea producing state in India. The state alone has been producing between 50-55 percent of total national tea as well as one sixth of total global production. Apart from this the state becomes the largest tea producing region just after China. Starting with large scale production by big farmer now small tea growers of the state together produces more than 45% of total state production. The maximum growth of small tea growers has been observed in between 1995-2005. As per estimation of industry and commerce department government of Assam there are 68465 small tea growers in the state. Only in two upper Assam districts, Tinsukia and Dibrugarh have 37755(55%) Small tea growers. Progress of few other districts is also escalating including Dhemaji district. As per record of Tea Board of India the numbers of small tea growers in Dhemaji district is 516, the figure is much higher as per record of Small Tea Growers Association of Dhemaji District. According to their record there are about 900 Small tea growers cultivating about 466.67 hectares of land. As per record of All Assam Small tea growers Association 144,222 small tea growers cultivating about 80948 hectares land in the state. Being commercial as well as industrial crop the cultivation has become prestigious avocation in Dhemaji district as well as state and the growing trend is still on. Due to not having own processing unit they have been largely depending on big farmers and factory for selling

their green leaf. The price received by small tea growers in Dhemaji District is about Rs.23 per kg on an average in a particular crop session. It is higher than state average green leaf selling price of Rs. 13. The small grower of the district produces quality leaf compare to other district growers is secretive of receiving higher price. Being a lucrative Avocation compared to other crops tea plantation becomes prime occupation to many other family of the District. Despite having higher rate of return compared to other commercial crops and congenial atmosphere for tea production why the small tea growers unable to earn more profit. How outbreaks of Covid pandemic disappoint the small tea growers? What will be its long term affect on the growers? In order to observe the affect of covid-19 this paper made an effort to address the problems of the growers relating to earning and production in Dhemaji district. It was found that this pandemic not only reduces the production but also break the moral of the growers. Apart from that it was also found that the growers have been exploited either by association leader or by Green leaf buyers. This was also come into knowledge that the profit of the growers are not declining only for decline in production but also rise in chemical and transportation cost. Infect the grower are in vicious circle of poverty.

Index Terms - Commercial crops, green leaves, Avocation, Quality leaves, covid-19, Vicious circle.

1.INTRODUCTION

Pandemic and economy has always inverse relationship. Present Covid-19 is a record-breaking pandemic over the centuries. Almost 210 countries and territories have been affected and the death toll to 4,77000(10%) by June 24/2020. Total positive cases rises to 92,40,000 including 46,10,000(90) recovered cases. In India total number of positive cases rise to 456183 including 183022 (95%) recovered and 14476(5%) death. The catastrophe of the Covid-19 is still on without proper treatment. None can ascertain when this tragic situation come to end. This worldwide

pandemic like any other production sector has a negative effect on the tea industry of Assam. With less than two centuries Assam tea has a long and rich history. Since first tea cultivation in 1833 under East-India Company, it has been becoming the main agricultural export item in India. Being the first tea producing region Assam became the major tea producing state in India. The state alone has been producing between 50-55 percent of total national tea as well as one sixth of total global production. Apart from this the state becomes the largest tea producing region just after China. Starting with large scale production by big farmer now small tea growers of the state together produces more than 45% of total state production. The maximum growth of small tea growers has been observed in between 1995-2005. As per estimation of Industry and commerce department government of Assam there are 68465 small tea growers in the state. Only in two upper Assam districts, Tinsukia and Dibrugarh have 37755(55%) Small tea growers. In case of tea production Progress of few other districts is also escalating including Dhemaji. As per record of Tea Board of India the numbers of small tea growers in Dhemaji district is 516, the figure is much higher as per record Small Tea Growers Association of Dhemaji District. According to their record there are about 900 Small tea growers cultivating about 466.67 hectares of land. As per record of All Assam Small tea growers Association 1,44,222 small tea growers cultivating about 80948 hectares land in the state.

Being commercial as well as industrial crop the cultivation has become prestigious avocation in Dhemaji district as well as state and the growing trend is still on. Due to not having own processing unit they have been largely depending on big farmers and factory for selling their green leaf. The price received by small tea growers in Dhemaji District is about Rs.23 per kg on an average in a particular crop session. It is higher than state average of green leaf selling price of Rs. 13. The small growers of the district produces quality leaf compare to other district growers is the secret of receiving higher price. Being a lucrative Avocation compared to other crops tea plantation becomes prime occupation to many other family of the District. Despite having higher rate of return compared to other commercial crops and congenial atmosphere for tea production why the small tea growers unable to earn more profit. How outbreaks of Covid pandemic

disappoint the small tea growers? What will be its long term effect on the growers? In order to understand these question this paper tries analysis the cause and effect relation of tea production.

2 OBJECTIVES

Under this backdrop this paper set the following objectives

1. To observe the effect of Covid-19 on small tea growers of Dhemaji district.
2. To make a policy prescription to overcome the Covid-19 impact on Small tea growers

3 HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis taken to be tested are

1. Pandemic and production are inversely related.
2. Rate of return of small farmer are affected worse than the rate of return of big growers.

4 METHODOLOGY

This paper basically empirical one based on primary and secondary data. Primary data were generated through field survey of 100 growers of Dhemaji district. However survey was conducted over telephone due to Covid -19 pandemic. Secondary data were taken from Tea Board of India, News paper, Magazine and internet . Data so collected were processed by utilising computer devices. Process data were utilized using some simple statistics devices for analytical purposes. Different growers of various holding size of Dhemaji district form the universe. Each selected growers was a unit of the study. The entire study was done by mid of June 2020.

5 LITERATURE REVIEW

Available literature reveals that each pandemic create negative impact on production and productivity. Borthakur(2020) in an exclusive article shows how Covid-19 affect on the production as well as income of the tea industry of Assam. As per estimation of tea Association of India crop loss of the Covid period unto mid June was approximately 132 mkg in North India(Assam and North Bengal).As result the organisation showed a decline in orthodox production to about 12-14mkg. It is estimated the

export will drop down to 10-15 percent that will bring down 59 percent tea auction. He also very categorically shows how the industry is heading for crisis.

As per Estimation of small tea growers association of Assam(2020) total of 500 crores are lost till the mid of June/2020 by the Small tea growers of Assam for Covid -19 lockdown. According to a statement publish in The Hindu(2020) 1.72 lakhs small tea growers donot have much resources to the major tea estate chain to absorbed week of inactivity push by covid-19 pandemic. The labourers are extreme depriver of welfare scheme provided by the government to plantation workers of the 803 major estates.

In an article Impact of Covid-19, Emerging response to tea supply chain shows how tea production globally affected for national lock down and social distancing. Export restriction and import restriction create uncertainty in tea production.

In an article published in Sentinel digital disk show how huge lost occurred in initial stage of tea production and how it will mounted if lock down will extended further.

Thus available literature reveals that covid-19 has negative impact on tea production.

6 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There are more than 900 small tea growers have been producing green leaf in 466.67 hectares land in Dhemaji District. This figure constitutes 6 percent of the state total small growers of 1.5 lakhs and 3.6 percent 2.5 lakhs of national level. It is seen only 3.8 percent growers have a direct link with the big garden or factory for selling their green leaf. In Dhemaji more than 90 percent of green leaf has been selling to only two big Garden Madhpur Tea Estates and Aananda Tea Estate. Only after opening of bogibeel Bridge over Brahamaputra growers now start selling their green leaf to the factories of Dibrugarh and Sivsagar district. As a result price of green leaf is hiking by 31.73% from Rs.26 to Rs.32.5 till June/2020. The factory owners themselves are coming forward to purchase the Green leaves of Dhemaji district with an agreement of bearing all transportation cost. This indicates about the quality of leaves of Dhemaji district growers when the numbers of growers are maximum in Dibrugarh and Tinchukia district. This

pleased situation become fed due to covid outbreak since March 2020.

The plucking session is the earning session begin at March and stay continue till December. Seventy five percent growers of Dhemaji district starts plucking from the last half of the March. Announcement of first stage lock down on 24th March,2020 infect took away the hope of the small growers. Farmer become fad and the green leaf production start decline and the trend is still on (Diagram-).It is estimated a decline of 107percent of green leaf production during the first three month of current harvesting session. It is observed that total green leaf lost of the small tea growers of Dhemaji district is 64000kg amounted to be about Rs.7625000. The Small tea growers employed 8 percent labour force of the total and the total of 135,00 mandays have been lost due to Covid outbreak.

It is also seen that range of operational holding own by different growers is very high in Dhemaji district. On the basis of Indian Tea Board data it is observed that above the three hector plantation there are only 34 growers, highest numbers of growers were in between .5 to .9 hectares land. 89 growers have only .1 to .2 hectares of land out of recorded 516 growers of Dhemaji district (Diagram-1). It also seen that the rate of lost of marginal growers (.1 - .2 hector) is higher than the big growers. This is due to higher maintenance cost of marginal farmer. Apart from this it is also observed that 15 and 9 percent of plantation are owned by Businessman and service holder while 76 percent are owned by the farmer (Diagram-2). It is also seen that 74 percent growers are taking Tea plantation as secondary occupation while 26 percent are taking as primary occupation. And those taking tea plantation as primary occupation are heated hard by covid outbreak.

All growers being mere green leaf seller no alternative was opened to utilise their product for green Tea, Orthodox tea production. It is noticed that profit has been declining sharply and this trend may be continue till the end of the harvesting session. This is because of rise in production cost due to rise and paucity of chemicals, herbicide, pesticides, vitamins and fertiliser. For the lock down and restriction impose on transportation, transportation cost become high and very herd.

On the other hand after reopening the industry subject to maintaining of social distance and well define time

the growers are unable to utilise their labour fully. As a result timely plucking of green leaves become impossible and quality leaves production were getting deteriorate. Sometime following the strict rule of the government, the growers have to expense transportation cost for the transporting of labour from their place. Due to rule set by government the growers unable to supply their product directly to the tea factory in order to avoid gathering in the workplace. As a result some union leader is involving in cutting weight of the green leaves adopting some unfair means. Some time they have to sell the green leaves to the middleman at a rate much below the actual rate. Factory owners also reduce the weight of green leaves for rain up to 20 percent which is not possible. These the prime causes of lost of the growers. Thus in all cases growers were the maximum loser, some time they are not able pluck in time due to constrain impose by covid-19. This also lead to quality of green leaves decline, mounting their production cost and lost escalation. However the price of green leaves raise up to Rs. 38 to 52 which was all time high more than 79.3 percent hike compared to previous years. This hike in price in fact compensate 57.23 percent lost of the growers.

7 POINT TO THE PONDERERS

The lost of growers cannot be compensated as labour cannot be saved. But this type of lost could be minimised by employing technology to reduce labour intensity specially situation like Covid- catastrophe. Technology may not always growers friendly but government support to purchase plucking, spray and digging machine at subsidise price may encourage the farmer to adopt technology. It is mentioned worthy that technology always minimise cost as well as risk. In most cases it is seen that non adoptability of technology is their higher installation cost and sophistication mode of operation. Thus subsidise scheme with proper training make technology more familiar. That ultimately will reduce risk and increase profit. This is the only alternative open to the growers to minimise lost and maximise profit. Care need to be taken for continuous flows of chemicals, fertiliser, and medicine to the growers. Any break of supply chain of these products will definitely harm the growers in near future. Factories should be open subject to screening and testing the workers, labourers and green leaf

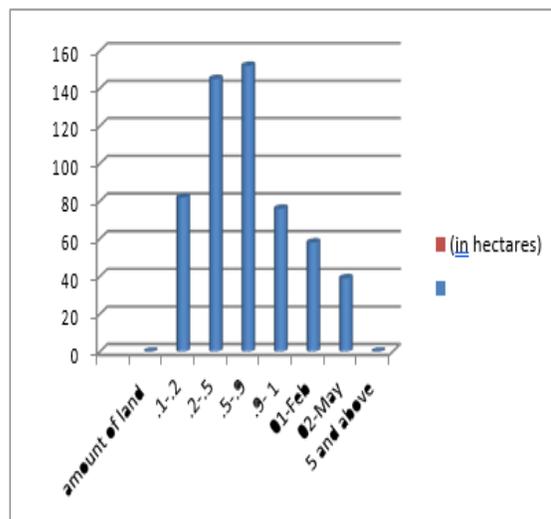
suppliers in 24× 7 digits of a day maintaing social distancing and wearing of musk.

8.CONCLUSION

What was happened today was unprecedented and no one ready for that. The small Tea growers become victim like any other sector. There is a negative relationship between in pandemic and economic development and no one actually be rescued from that. But the covid-19 catastrophe teach us what may be next to development. Though there is no immediate solution to the problem both government and the stakeholder need to be prepared to minimise risk in production without the break the production chain. Being a labour-intensive industry, lock down of the industry may put down the flame of kitchen to many families. Perhaps the income of the small tea growers is more evenly distributed between employer and employee. Thus any lost will affect both of them severely. On the other hand both the big farmers and the government are the oxygen to the small farmer. Without their support the growers become one leg animal to move.

Diagram-1

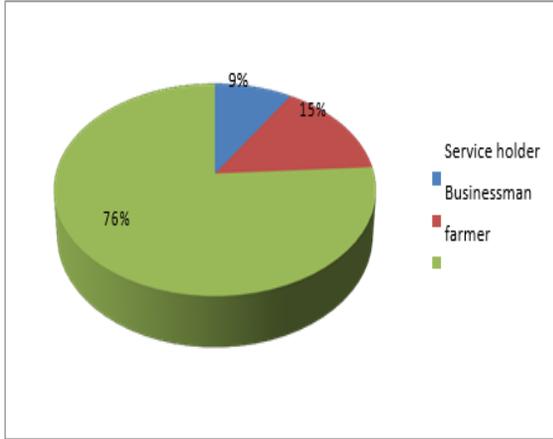
Land holding Pattern of Small Tea Growers of Dhemaji District



Source: Tea Board of India

Diagram-2

Different group of Growers in Dhemaji District



Source: AASTGA, Dhemaji District.

Diagram-3
Percentage of growers taking Tea production as Primary occupation

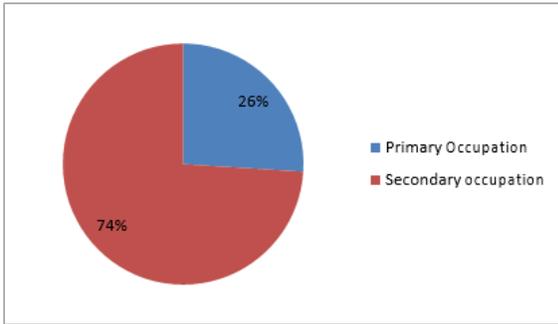
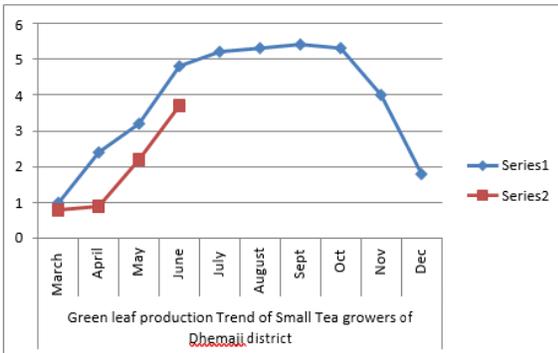


Diagram-4



Source: Field Observation, 2018, 2020

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