

Women Entrepreneurship in Tea Industry: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract – The tea industry of Assam is more than 180 years old by now. The cultivation of tea on small holding is comparatively a recent development. Over the last few decades, tea has become one of India’s most important commodities. Not only is tea indigenous to India, it is also something that the country takes a lot of pride in as India is the second largest tea producer in the world after China. Tea contributes greatly to the country’s GDP growth as well as foreign exchange earnings. Now, production of tea in India takes place in both large and small scale. It is a labour intensive industry and highly dependent on a large workforce. Assam produces more than 50% of the tea produced in India and about 1/6th of the tea produced in the world. Tea industry has contributed substantially to the economy of Assam. About more than 6 lakh people are daily engaged in the tea gardens of Assam. Assam tea industry is India’s largest tea industry and second largest tea production region in the world after China. There are around 2500 small tea gardens and the total production of tea in Assam per year records to be more than 500 million kgs. This paper is to highlight the prospects and challenges associated in the promotion of tea entrepreneurship amongst the women through examining their present situation in the tea sector.

Keywords – Gender Wise Distribution, Sub-Groups of Women Population, Economic Ventures etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tea is the most popular drink in the planet and it occupies that position only after water. Its first use is believed to be about 5,000 years back and has remained popular as the most pleasurable and efficacious beverage in the world. Tea drinking has rather been gaining further acceptance now due to its natural health benefiting properties. The heritage drink has withstood the test of time and it may well be the drink of the future. The journey of the beverage through the passage of time has been glorious and fascinating. The origin of tea in China,

myths associated with it, spread across the world, perceptions, culture and habits, discovery in wild forests of Assam, and tea drinking habit of the tribes of the state are all amazing like the mystic brew itself.

The tea industry of Assam is more than 180 years old by now. The cultivation of tea on smallholding is comparatively a recent development. Over the last few decades, tea has become one of India’s most important commodities. Not only is tea indigenous to India, it is also something that the country takes a lot of pride in as India is the second largest tea producer in the world after China. Tea contributes greatly to the country’s GDP growth as well as foreign exchange earnings. Now, production of tea in India takes place in both large and small scale. It is a labour intensive industry and highly dependent on a large workforce.

Assam is blessed with a high potential for development of resource based and demand based industries. There are number of industries in the state like tea, petroleum, plywood, paper, fertilizer, cement, coal, sericulture, handloom and handicraft, cottage industries, etc. Of the agriculture based industries, tea occupies an important place in Assam which is grown both on Barak and Brahmaputra plains. Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Nagaon and Sonitpur are the districts where tea gardens are mostly seen.

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Table 1.1: Tea Industry in India at A Glance as On 2011(Dec)

	Number of gardens	Area under production (in hectare)	Total production (million k.g)	Employment
Small Tea Gardens	157504	1.62 lakh	260 mkg	1 million
Big Tea Estates	1686	4.18 lakh	728 mkg	2 million

Source: Tea Board of India

II. TEA LABOURERS OF ASSAM

Assam's tea industry is dependent on about two million labourers almost all of whom are the descendants of those who were brought to Assam as slaves first by the East India Company and later by the British rulers and

Entrepreneurs from 1830’s through 1920’s, mostly from the Santhal Parganas district of Bihar (now in state Jharkhand). The descendants of these slaves are now called tea tribes. The tea tribes form the backbone of the Assamese tea industry. As described by the Wikipedia, the Tea-tribes of Assam are among the backward and most

exploited tribes in India, though their newer generation is comparatively educated and now it has intellectuals and professionals in various fields. The Tea tribes, being basically labourers, live in villages inside tea-estates (established by tea-planters). These estates are located in interior places and this contributes to the backwardness and exploitation of them by the tea-planters.

Producing tea, either on small holdings gardens or large tea plantations is hard work. Cultivation of tea on small holding of land is a new concept in India. In this plantation Industry, women workers constitute a big chunk of labour force as their softer hands are most suited for the tea leaf pruning and plucking jobs. Cultivation of tea on small holding can be one of the most convenient sectors to develop entrepreneurship culture among the rural people of Assam. The main labour intensive activities of tea women workers include harvesting, fertilizing, weeding, pruning, soil conservation, control of pests and diseases. Women form over 50% of the workforce and are concentrated in plucking operations which constitutes 70% of the work in tea production. Tea growing in any scale, either big or small is an enterprise since it encompasses all elements of production viz. land, labour, Capital and organization. In Assam, the cultivation of tea in small scale is an outcome of the entrepreneurial ability of a group of women.

III. WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

All entrepreneurs are bound to face challenges, but women because of their gender often experience additional challenges when compared to their male counterparts. Some statistics indicate that women are starting up new businesses more than their male counterparts because of their innovation and creativity and the high success rate of these businesses shows that women are more focused and resourceful than their male peers. Lack of career advancement, autonomy, passion, power and determination to succeed are some of the reasons why women go into business. Women are mostly motivated to make a difference in society. Their conceptual skills are one of the key factors that drive and sustain their achievement.

In 2012, an estimated 126 million women were starting or running new businesses in 67 economies around the world. In addition, an estimated 98 million were running established businesses. These women are not only creating jobs for themselves and their co-founders, but they also employ others. A projected 48 million female entrepreneurs and 64 million female business owners currently employ one or more people in their businesses. In addition, these women plan to grow their businesses. A predicted seven million female entrepreneurs and five million female established business owners plan to grow their businesses by at least six employees over the next five years.

In Developed Asia, women entrepreneurs are slightly less likely than female non-entrepreneurs/ business owners to have post-secondary degrees. In addition, compared to male entrepreneurs, they are over one-fourth less likely to

have this level of education. This gap is highest in Korea, where female entrepreneurs are little more than half as likely to have a post secondary degree as female non-entrepreneurs/ business owners, but less than half as likely to have this level of education as male entrepreneurs. Secondary education levels are typically high in Developed Asia, with well over 90% of the population earning a secondary degree. There is a gender gap at the higher education levels, however, and this gap is magnified for entrepreneurs.

IV. REVIEW OF PERTINENT LITERATURES

The problems of tea labourers are not a virgin field to explore. Several studies both at the state & national levels have already been made covering various aspects to which the tea labourers are subjected to. Some of the studies are briefly reviewed here under:

Gogoi, Khirrod C. (2005) in their paper, 'Occupational Mobility among the Tea Garden Labour Community of Assam', discussed on the occupational mobility of the tea community. The women folk are still far lagging behind than men expectancy in the medical profession as nursing. The comparative physical weakness, social backwardness of women, there for lagging behind in respect of general education and professional knowledge and training and the sex biased attitude of our society, giving still predominance of men over women or some obstacles on the way of occupational mobility among women.

Khound, Sujata Phukan (1994) in their paper, 'Income, expenditure & savings of the tea garden Labourers of Assam- A case study in Jorhat district', discussed on the literacy rate. The paper also discussed on work participant's rate for male & female populations which were found to be higher than all India work participant rates and per day per capita wages.

Khawas, Vimal in his study, 'Status of tea garden labourers in eastern Himalaya: A case of Darjeeling tea industry', attempts to focus on the social and economic situations of tea garden labourers in Darjeeling Hills. The study highlights the conditions of tea garden labourers in Darjeeling Hills in the context of wide spread crisis in Tea Industry Sector in the country and its consequent impact on the labourers.

Dacholia, A. etal in their study report, 'Public Systems Management Project Report Study of Labour condition in Tea Gardens of New Jalpaiguri', state the sickness of tea labourers of New Jalpaiguri. They observed that the labourers lived in poor conditions in general, there were some who were much better off than the others. They face an unfair situation as the Plantation Labour Act 1951 which classifies tea industry as industrial operations even though ninety-five percent of the labour, mostly unskilled, is employed in primarily agricultural operations. This entails fixing of the minimum wage for the tea workers unequal to, and in fact at a much lower level, than the agricultural workers. This study implies the people's participation and empowerment in decision making among the tea labourers.

Sarma, Gadapani in his study, 'A Study on the Socio-economic Conditions of Labourers in the Tea Gardens of Jorhat District, Assam', state that the Tea Labourers are the ingredient part of the tea industry of Assam. Assam's tea industry is dependent on about two million labourers almost all of whom are the descendants of those who were brought to Assam as slaves first by the East India Company and later by the British rulers and entrepreneurs from 1830's through 1920'. Thus tea tribes form the backbone of the Assamese tea industry.

Kifle, Abiy in his research paper, 'The Rapid Assessment Study on Child Labour in Selected Coffee and Tea Plantations in Ethiopia', explained the child labour situation in selected tea and coffee plantations around the neighbourhood of Jimma town. His paper highlights on the conditions and characteristics, causes and consequences of child labour. The majority of children working on the farm are either the children of farm workers or the children of the farmers residing near the plantations. The poorer the family the more its children were prone to child labour activities.

V. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of this paper is to highlight the prospects and challenges associated in the promotion of tea entrepreneurship amongst the women through examining their present situation in the tea sector.

VI. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data of the study has been collected from the women tea labourers of Margherita Tea Estate through direct interaction with the respondents. Simple statistical tools have been taken to draw inferences from the study. Secondary data was collected from office of the Margherita Tea Estate, Asom Chah Mazdoor Sangha, Margherita (Sub Branch) and from the Hospital. Journals, Magazines, books have also been referred. Collected data have been tabulated and analyzed.

VII. THE AREA OF THE STUDY

The sub-division of Margherita has seven big tea gardens with their factories aimed by the industrial giants like the Mc Leod Russel and Tata groups in addition to six other small tea processing units and large plantation areas owned by the local entrepreneurs. The present study is conducted on the labourers (women) of the oldest tea gardens of the sub-division viz. Margherita Tea Estate. The sub-division of Margherita is the pioneer in the industrial history of the entire North Eastern Region. The Railway and Trading (AR&T) Co. began their network of industries by opening coal mines and raw-mills in this locality during the later part of 19th century. They looked around and found the soil and climate suitable for the tea and the southern bank of the river Burhi Dehing- that passes through the heart of the sub division; and in 1891 established the Tea Estate with an area of 78 bighas of

plantation. The management of the tea plantation was handed over to M/s Makum Assam Tea Co and in 1892 Dr. John Berry White was induced as the founder Chairman of the Co. in 1894 an area of 1000 bighas of found was acquired and a total of 1500 workers were engaged for plantation purposes. With this, Margherita began to quicker with the excitement of throbbing economic activities. At present, owned by the industrial giant of Mc Leod Russel, the Margherita Tea Estate has 613.92 hectors of plantation area and employing 1582 permanent workers, yield close to 12, 40,000 kg given tea leaf per annum. The factory manufactures CTC and orthodox tea thus fully utilizing its installed capacity. The present study takes into consideration only the women population out of the 1582 permanent workers of the Margherita Tea Estate.

Table 1.2: Showing Gender Wise Distribution of Total Labourers of Margherita Tea Estate

Male	Female	Total
956	626	1582

Source: Office record

The above Table 1.2 shows the gender wise distribution of Total Labourers of Margherita Tea Estate. The total population of labour in the tea estates is 1582 consisting of 956 male and 626 female. Maximum of their families belong to different family groups, which to be categorized as single-family and joint families. The total number of members in these families varies from 2 members, 4-5 members and some had 8, 10 to 12 members respectively. In some families only the male members works in the estate, while the female manages to keep the household activities and also works as part timers outside the tea estates and engaged in entrepreneurial activities. While in some families it can be seen that the female member's works in the tea estate while the male member's works outside the garden. While in some families, both the male and female works in the garden.

Research studies indicate that Indian women of today have taken many strides towards business ownership. The broad classification of women business owners include women who establish, inherit, or acquire a business; women who start businesses with spouses or business partners but are either at the forefront or behind the scenes; and finally, women who start fast-growing or part-time or slow-growing firms. Although earlier researches on women entrepreneurs have suggested that significant differences existed between female and male entrepreneurs. However, more recent studies have shown that there are far more similarities than differences between women and men entrepreneurs in terms of psychological and demographic characteristics. In general, the urge for starting a business venture or going for entrepreneurship starts from the very young age. The study revealed that the interest for entrepreneurship in different age groups ranging from below 24 to above 40 years as follows:

Table 1.3: Showing Sub-Groups of Women Population of Margherita Tea Estate Who's Ages Are Between 20 to 44 Years

Age Group (in years)	Below 24	25 - 29	30 – 34	35 - 39	Above 40	Total
No's of Women	94	192	125	95	120	626
No's of Women Interested in Entrepreneurship	18	42	27	29	23	197
No's of Women Interested in Entrepreneurship (In %)	19.14	21.87	21.6	30.52	19.16	31.46

Source: Field survey

Table 1:4 Showing Women Population Involved In Economic Ventures

Age Group (in years)	Tea Cultivation	Small Retail Shops	Local Liquor	Total
In No's	06	14	17	37
In %	16.21	37.83	45.94	100

Source: Field survey

VIII. ANALYSIS

1. It is encouraging to note that 31.46 percent women of the tea estate are interested on entrepreneurship.
2. Another important aspect that has come out in the study is that a majority (30.52%) of the respondents are between the ages of 35-39 years.
3. From the sample, it has been inferred that 78% are married and rest are un-married.
4. Of the total sample, the majority (79.87%) belonged to nuclear families. When analyzed on the basis of number of children, the majority (84.18%) had up to three children.
5. From the study it has been found that 45% of the children of these women are in the age group of 08-10 yrs. As children at this age does not require consistent attention so it provides time and space to these women to be engaged to do something worthwhile to keep themselves busy and productive.
3. Most of these women are not much concerned about their savings. Whatever their families earn is not sufficient for them. They cannot even manage their basic family needs with it. As the income of these families are very low they were trying to seek some economic ventures but they cannot afford to start a big business. So , it has been found that most of these women operate small retail shops within the garden periphery. Some 06 No's (03.04%) out of the 197 interested women responded that they have started cultivating tea plants in their own lands (maximum two bighas) in the nearby villages. Few responded that on Sundays they use their time to sell local liquor very commonly available in Tea Estates.
4. Regarding seeking male help, while initially it was taken, a majority of respondents felt that they could manage entirely on their own.
5. It was disconcerting to note that despite several incentives available to women entrepreneurs, not even single respondent had heard of it. It was found that all women spent from their own sources without taking any financial help from Government agencies.

IX. SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

1. Women entrepreneurs enter business mainly to keep themselves busy. Although the initial motivation is very low, they tend to become high achievers once they actually get involved in it. In the survey conducted, it has been seen that a very few women are interested towards entrepreneurship. It has been revealed from the study that a very few no's of women are engaged in entrepreneurial ventures. Of the interested population, when they were asked about their opinion regarding their urge for entrepreneurship, they show their interest for entrepreneurship.
2. It seems that the economic condition of the Tea Estate labourers is very poor. The state of literacy in Tea Estates is significantly low and also they are not much determined towards achieving progress. They like to stay as they are. Mostly they cannot think of better opportunities of life due to the fact of economic backwardness and exploitation by Tea Estates owners.

X. CONCLUSION & SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings, along with comments received from the respondents, the following suggestion has been put forwarded as concluded remarks:

1. The need for professionalism in women cannot be overstressed. Professionalism would help these women entrepreneurs to extract the maximum from the business and help to reduce grey areas. As from the study it has been revealed that only 31.46% of women interested in entrepreneurship but the present status of entrepreneurial spirit of these women is not at all satisfactory as only 37 No's of women directly engaged in the some sort of economic ventures and engagement in tea cultivation is very poor as only 06

No's of women is cultivating tea plants in their own lands in the nearby villages.

2. Management of the Tea Estates should come forward to develop the atmosphere of the Tea Estates premises particularly to provide the basic amenities.
3. The women of the Tea Estates, although being very innocent have the capacity to think something new and innovative. Therefore they should come up with some other innovative ideas other than that of the small retail shops and other ventures they have opened up that would act as a source of their economic upliftment.
4. There is a need for sufficient training facilities for these women entrepreneurs. The Government must make greater efforts to publicize the various schemes announced from time to time to attract women entrepreneurs of these areas. The Govt. has special schemes for small tea cultivators which need to be publicised as it may reach to these segments of women from tea sector.
5. The procedure for availing of special schemes for women entrepreneurs of these category or special funding should be streamlined, so as to avoid unnecessary delays and thereby, dispelling the feeling that these schemes only exist on paper.

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