

Problems of Tea Gardens of Dooars

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Abstract: This particular work mainly focuses on the problems of the tea gardens which they are facing from one or two decades in the Dooars region that mainly falls under the district of Jalpaiguri and the impact it had undergone economically, geographically, socially and culturally under the colonial economy.

Jalpaiguri has been called the land of ‘Tea ,Timber and Tourism’, with vast stretches of forest cover undulating green slopes of tea gardens, rivers and their surrounding natural beauty. As part of the Dooars region, Jalpaiguri landscape is sprinkled with thousands of tea gardens. The total area of Jalpaiguri district is 6245 sq.km of which tea gardens constitute 1987 sq. km. Thus tea gardens are a major portion of the landscape.

Keywords: Tea estates of Dooars, Tea Statistics, Problems.

I. INTRODUCTION:

The tea industry culture found its way into India with the help of the British imperialists though tea was indigenous to India and was known by the aborigines from time immemorial. Tea called the ‘boon of the orient’ has been regarded universally as a pure, safe and helpful stimulant which is produced in nature’s own laboratory. Other than being an important non- alcoholic beverage tea also occupies a significant place in world commerce in the past centuries and does so also in the present time. The earliest step towards the introduction of tea cultivation occurred in 1778 with the help of the great English naturalist Sir Joseph Banks. Tea plantations were started in Assam, Kumaon, Dehradun, Garwhal, Kangra and Kullu valleys, Darjeeling and in the Terai regions of West Bengal.

The river Teesta is the main one flowing through the sub-Himalayan plains of North Bengal has created undulating lands ,on its right bank known as Terai and left bank as Dooars. . The soil of this area is sandy humus mixing with variable sized boulders and harboring a large dense continuous track of tea gardens.

As part of the Dooars region, Jalpaiguri landscape is sprinkled with thousands of tea gardens which are also mainstay of the economics of the district. The district is consisting of seven C.D blocks though most of the tea gardens are located in Mal, Matiali, Nagrakata, Dhupguri and Sadar blocks of the district.

Sub Division wise breakup of Dooars tea gardens is as follows:

Dooars Region: Jalpaiguri Sub Division – 33 Tea Estates
Malbazar Sub Division – 56 Tea Estates
Alipurduar Sub Division – 61 Tea Estates

II. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Literature review is an integral part of a study .it helps to gather information about the study. Different relevant journals, published reports about the tea gardens of Jalpaiguri were consulted for the Study. Significant among these is a Techno Economic Survey by the Tea Board (1995) into the problems of the tea industry. It was conducted as Dooars according to it occupies a significant position in the national tea map.

Kumar et al (2008) discussed on the overall situation in India with regard to India’s status in global tea production where they mentioned that declining global prices was affecting the sustainability of tea. The report by “Shodhganga” –‘SURVEY OF THE TEA GARDENS OF JALPAIGURI DISTRICT’ helped in this work very much.

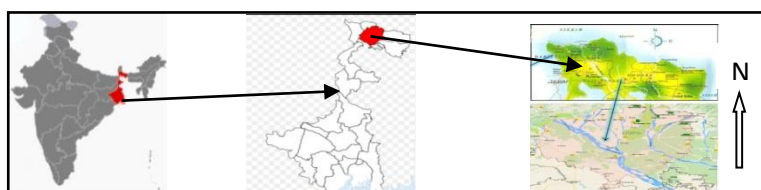


Figure -1 location of Dooars (source google)

III.METHODOLOGY:

The secondary data have been collected from literatures available in journals, published/ unpublished PhD thesis etc. also from reports published by Tea Board of India (TBI), Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers Association (CISTA) , Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Land Reforms Department of West Bengal, Paschim Banga Khet

Majoor Samity, Tea Marketing Control Order (TMCO), Small Tea Growers Association in West Bengal, Agricultural Department of Jalpaiguri, Tea Board Regional Office in Siliguri, Siliguri Auction Committee, some newspapers/Gazetteers and some websites etc.

Primary data has been collected from the visit to several tea gardens in Jalpaiguri district of northern West Bengal. Through the personal interviews using printed questionnaire semi structured in nature and was applied on various stakeholders including managerial persons of the factories. Focus group discussion outcomes with the laborers have also been analyzed.

IV. DISCUSSION

Producing about 24% of the total tea in 20% of tea cultivated area; West Bengal is India's 2nd largest tea producing state. There are 377 tea estates among them 290 belong to Terai (Darjeeling plain and Uttar Dinajpur) and Dooars (Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri). According to January 2015- October 2015 tea statistics, the tea production in west Bengal is lower compared to the figure one year ago (listed in table -2).

Maximum tea estates of Dooars were established long years ago (listed in table -1). Now they become old that leads the poor quality of product with high production cost which placed the tea industries in lower position in both national and international level.

Table -1 Growth of tea gardens in Jalpaiguri district during the period of 1876-1907

Year	No. of Gardens	Area Under Plantation(in sq. km.)
1876	13	333.29
1881	55	2523.15
1892	182	1526.12
1901	235	30943.22
1907	18	32941.81

(Source: GunineJ.F.Eastern Bengal Assam District Gazetteerrs.Jalpaiguri Allahabad .1911)

Table - 2: Tea production (qty. in M.Kgs) in Dooars during 2005-2017:

Years	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
In Dooars	129.15	139.18	138.83	142.03	138.62	144.80	148.42	156.51	177.90	189.16	133.96	143.70	219.58
In India	945.97	981.80	986.27	980.81	978.99	966.40	1115.72	1126.33	1200.41	1207.31	1208.60	1267.36	1321.76

(Source: Tea Board India)

Problems faced by the tea gardens of Jalpaiguri district

Plantation work is the main occupation of the people. But the economic condition of the people has remained precarious. It is real that man has no control over the nature. During the past 70 years' history it is revealed that floods and droughts are the main natural calamity, and these affect the annual tea production on that very year of occurrence. On the other hand, export of Indian tea to the foreign markets has been reduced significantly during the last few years. As a result, the tea planters are now in deep economic trouble. In this context four major problems are recognized in the study area-

- A. Physical problems
- B. Socio economic problems
- C. Management problems
- D. Other socio-cultural problems

A. Physical problems

Very high humidity, hot temperatures in lower altitude region, the distinct climate like hot summers accompanied by monsoon rains while cold winters accompanied by foggy environment (reflected by Table - 3) in this area influences the qualities of the tea.

The main ecological constrains for lowering the quality of tea is being discussed in the following paragraphs.

Table - 3: Statistical weather characteristics of Dooars

Annual rainfall(mm)	3500
Maximum Temperature(degree c)	28-35
Minimum Temperature(degree c)	15-20
Soil pH	4.5-5.5
Soil category	utisols

(Source: Tea Research Association, India; India Metrological. Department, Ministry Of Earth Sciences, Govt. Of India)

A.I. Uneven distribution of rainfall:

It is seen that the study area enjoys a sub-tropical type of climate where rainfall during monsoons from July to September is heavy and dry during the other months of the year. During the rainy months floods occur whereas the rest of the year, rainfall is less. This phenomenon not only affects the surface run off but also tea cultivation. It also brings natural hazards like floods in the tea gardens.

A.II. Floods:

Exceptionally high precipitation during the monsoon period along the lesser Himalayas causes a very sharp increase in the discharge rate of rivers in the area. The heavy sediment loads brought down by the rivers from the hills get deposited on the river

bed once they debouch into the plain causing serious swallowing of the river beds. Consequently they become incapable to carry sudden increased discharge during monsoon. This causes bank overflow and extensive flooding of wide areas leading to serious damage of life and property.

Floods of 1993 have caused havoc in various parts of Jalpaiguri district including the town of Alipurduar. Few tea gardens in Banarhat police station also had been affected. Road and rail communications in the district had been disrupted due to major breaches on the National highways and other link roads.

A.III. Drought :

Drought is another factor for quality of tea. Though drought is not a common feature in this area but occurs in certain years. It is noticed that drought is common in every next year of flood. After the devastating flood in 1993, the only industry of North Bengal faced a deep trouble due to intense drought.

Naturally annual growth was reduced. About 18% of total annual tea production occurs between January and April. Already 9% less production has occurred in Dooars. On the other hand, export of Indian tea to the foreign market has been reduced significantly. As a result, the tea industry is in deep economic trouble.

A.IV. Soil erosion:

Soil erosion is another menace in this area. The entire Dooars economy solely depends on the top soil as it contains most of the food for growth and nutrition of plants. The soil erosion is a problem in the tea gardens which are located in the Nagrakata P.S. Bank erosion and bank failure have been seen to aggravate during post monsoon period when the rivers become effluent and ground water feeds the rivers. Erosion of land has created a great problem which has been intensified further after 1993 flood. Dolomite mining in the neighbouring country Bhutan is now-a-days an important news. Experts think that due to such dolomite mining in Bhutan and adjoining tea garden of India are undergoing land erosion.

A.V. Deforestation:

The area possesses full of natural forest resources. Bio-diversity of this forest is of great significance. But now-a-days deforestation has become a severe problem of the region. The consequences of deforestation is brought about through increased erosion and declining water table which is associated with reduction in atmospheric humidity and cloud cover, increased heat reflectivity and lowering of rainfall.

B. Socio-economic problems

Socio-economic problems arise in the tea plantation due to low rate of wage structure and high rate of population growth. The following are some of the socio-economic problems of the tea garden workers: (i) Low rate of literacy (ii) Limited occupation pattern (iii) Paucity of different amenities. (iv) Social customs and superstitions (v) other social disorders.

B.I. Low rate of Literacy

The study area depicts totally rural characteristics where literacy rate is much below than the district, state and national level.

Table – 4 literacy rate

	Population	Literates (2011)	Literacy rate (%)
Total	3872846	2498780	73.25
Male	1983064	1396622	79.95
female	188972	1102158	66.23

Source: Census data, 2011

B.II. Low transport and communication system

Field study reveals that the major portion of the study area has a poor transport and communication network. This is because of the physical constraints and the presence of tea plantation. This infrastructural constraint affects the tea garden labourers.

B.III. Paucity of different amenities

i. Health

Though health to all by 2000 A. D. was the motto of health department in Jalpaiguri district, the area faces acute shortage of health facilities. From the field survey it is revealed that distribution of health services, tea garden wise is uneven. Though the big Agency house tea gardens give the better health facilities to the workers, the medium and small tea gardens' workers are still not getting better health facilities. The medicine, Doctors and nurses are inadequate. Most of the gardens have primary health facilities. So most of the garden workers have to go to long distances (Jalpaiguri) to get proper medical care. Sometimes this results in the death of patient before reaching the care unit.

ii. Low transport and communication system

Field study reveals that the major portion of the study area has a poor transport and communication network. This is because of the physical constraints and the presence of tea plantation.

iii. Poor marketing Facilities

There are only four daily market places for total 39 tea gardens. These markets are located far off from most of the tea gardens. Because of poor communication with these markets, the workers are found to buy their basic needs from the traders at a very high price.

iv. Poor Electricity and Water supply

Though the plantation labour Act has a clause an adequate supply of water shall be made available in every labour line at all times, but most of the tea gardens do not have these facilities. Even an adequate supply of drinking water is not made available in every plantation at work sites, during working hours. Electricity is also absent in most of the laborer's quarters. They live in 'Kuchha' house with thatched roof. Sometimes wild animals destroy their living apartments, including life.

C. Management problem

Tea industry was started in 1874 in this region. About 10 lakhs of workers are directly related to the tea industry in North Bengal and about 45 lakhs of such workers are indirectly dependent upon it. Though India is still first in tea production in the world and West Bengal is in the second position in the country, but it suffers from various management problems. These are (i) Land management problems; (ii) Wage pattern vis-a-vis management problem; (iii) Problems in world trade and marketing; and (iv) Administrative problems.

C.I. Land management problems

Several tea estates have come up on disputed land throughout the North Bengal. These gardens were set up when tea prices were abnormally high, in the districts of Uttar Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Koch Bihar.

C.II. Wage pattern vis-a-vis management problem

Analyzing the trends of wages, it is found that money wage rate of the workers of Dooars increased at a very slow rate.

C.III. Problems in world trade and marketing

Export of Indian tea to the foreign market has been reduced significantly. As a result, the tea industry is now in deep economic trouble. Nearly 50 countries in the whole world produce tea. Once Indian tea had a monopoly in the tea markets in the world; but recently Sri Lanka, Kenya, Japan and China are also important participants in this respect.

V. STAKE HOLDER ANALYSIS ON TEA INDUSTRY

STAKE HOLDERS	EXAMPLE	INTEREST	STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION
Primary Stake-holders	Garden workers	Source of income, job opportunities, income security	Increase developmental schemes, take policies for maintaining gardeners and workers profit.
Secondary Stake-holders	Employees, Manager, Tea tester, Small businessman, Research Scholars	Source of income, job opportunities, income security	Give chances to the out siders on the basis of qualification, Research Scholars must be encourage to study on tea.
Key Stake-holders	Owner of the gardens/factories, Tea related organizations	Take steps to develop tea production ,profit by exporting tea	Improve in production of tea, high quality of packaging and bagging to cover more market.
External Stake-holders	Ministry of export-import, State and Central Government.	Tea exporting provides a huge amount of profit to the national economy.	Help in tea production and develop high mechanism in tea gardens.

(Based on primary survey, 2018)

VI. Major Suggestion From The Study

Collaborative research is very much needed for this industry.

Tea growers should have some knowledge about the pest and weed management.

All the tea garden owners should attend various workshops related with tea.

Good co-ordination is needed between producer and buyers.

The tea owners should conduct various training programmes for the workers.

The tea owners should participate in various tea competitions nationally as well as internationally.

The owners should conduct frequent medical camps to take care of the workers health.

VII. Conclusion

The entire economy of Jalpaiguri is mainly dependent on the Tea Entrepreneurship. Nearly 5×10⁵ people directly or indirectly depend on the tea sector. The tea industries are facing number of problems from the 1980s. Based on field observation and interaction with various stakeholders it is seen that lack of interest the owners and also by the taken steps of Central and State Government is responsible for the worst situation of tea production. The tea production and also the export of tea decreased from the past earlier decades. In the recast of tea industry in Jalpaiguri the State Government plays a huge role by entering new in industries; like tea tourism, providing food and income security of the workers. Tourism plays a big role in changing economic share; many upcoming projects are going on here to attract people more by exploring the natural resources. For the sustainable development the nature is also disturbed, so the Government has to be choosier to sanction any more projects in this area.

VIII. Acknowledgement:

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