

## Problems, Prospects and Challenges of Tea Entrepreneurship in Jalpaiguri, A Northern District of West Bengal, India

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### Abstract

The entire economy of Jalpaiguri is mainly dependent on the Tea Entrepreneurship. Nearly  $5 \times 10^5$  peoples directly or indirectly depend on the tea sector. The tea industries are facing number of problems such as the lacking of long term development planning, the problems related to labours, difficulty of maintaining the quality by small tea growers, continuous drop in the prices of tea along with high production cost, sluggish rate of increase in household demand and competition from foreign tea producers which are perturbing the economic status of the district. Due to some legal lacunas, small tea growers deprive of getting financial support from the Government. Also they have no any self-industries. As a result, they are deprived of the actual price of the green leaves. The main object of this work is to highlight the problems, prospects and challenges of tea entrepreneurship in Jalpaiguri, a northern district of West Bengal.

**Keywords:** Tea Entrepreneurship, Jalpaiguri Tea Estates, Tea Estate Labours, Small Tea Growers.

### 1. Introduction

It is not clear that when the drink of tea, the oldest drink was started. According to existing literatures tea was discovered around 2700 B.C. by a Chinese Emperor Shen Nung. But from the page of history, investigators claimed that tea was used as early as the twelfth century BC and from china it had been carried by Marco polo to the court of famous Emperor Harsha Vardhan. Now this manufactured drink becomes a 'hero' drink not only for the cheapest one after water, but also for important therapeutic compounds of it as well as large employment capacity<sup>[1, 9]</sup>. Engaging approximately 6 - 7 crores of employees (especially women) for different purpose like production, processing, packaging, distribution etc., India becomes a one of the largest tea producer country in the world. In West Bengal, the source of livelihood of almost all the people in the northern two districts (Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling) directly or indirectly depends on the tea plantation. In 1874, tea had been first introduced in the Jalpaiguri district from the adjoining Darjeeling district where tea plantation first commercially started in 1852. First tea garden of Jalpaiguri district was at Gazilduba (on the bank of Tista River) established in 1874 by Dr. Richard Haughton, the pioneer of tea industry. The Gazilduba garden was then owned by Dr. Brougham, who had the owner of Dhutaria garden in the Darjeeling district since the year of 1859. Mr. Pillans established the next tea estate of Jalpaiguri at Fulbari in the year of 1876<sup>[10, 11]</sup>. Mainly in these two northern districts, producing around 24% of the total of Indian tea West Bengal got 2<sup>nd</sup> rank. But in the recent years, the tea entrepreneurship in Jalpaiguri is facing a number of challenges such as continuous drop in the prices of tea along with high production cost, sluggish rate of increase in household demand and keen competition in the global market for tea export<sup>[12]</sup>. The main object of this work is to highlight the problems, prospects and challenges of tea estates in Jalpaiguri.

### 2. Material and Methods

This paper is mainly based on primary data and secondary data. Primary data have been collected randomly in Jalpaiguri district of northern West Bengal through personal interview using printed schedule and questionnaire. 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/Gazette and some recommended websites etc.

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1 Problems of Tea Estates in the Jalpaiguri district

Producing about 24% of the total tea in 20% of tea cultivated area; West Bengal becomes India's 2<sup>nd</sup> largest tea-producing state. There are around 377 tea estates among them 87 are belong to Darjeeling hills and the rest are belong to Terai (Darjeeling plains and Uttar Dinajpur) and Dooars (Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri). According to January 2015 - October 2015 tea statistics, the production in West Bengal is lower at 274 million kgs compared to the figure of one year ago, with the ~188 tea estates in Dooars accounting for a key part of the fall.

Maximum tea estates of Dooars had established long year ago (listed in Table - 1). Now they become very old that leads to the poor quality of product with high production cost which placed the tea industries in lower position in both national as well as international level.

**Table 1:** Growth of tea gardens in the Jalpaiguri district during the period of 1876 – 1907

Year	Number of gardens	Area under Plantation (In hectares)
1876	13	331.29
1881	55	2523.15
1892	182	15626.12
1901	235	30943.22
1907	180	32941.89

Source: Gruning, J.F., Eastern Bengal Assam District Gazetteers, Jalpaiguri, Allahabad, 1911, p. 103.

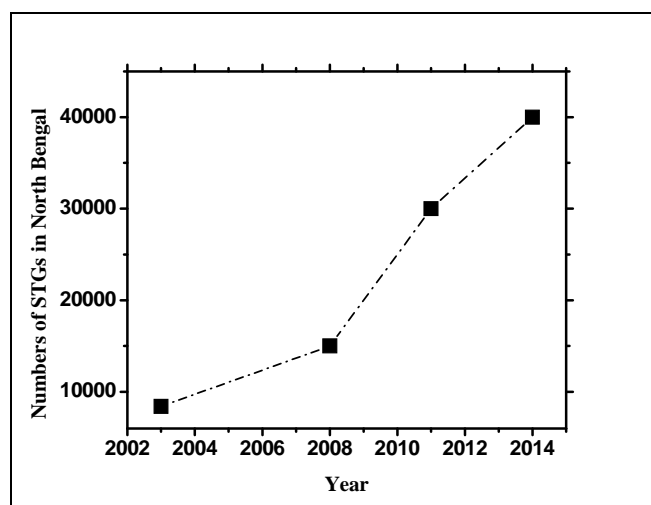
**Table 2:** Growth of small scale tea gardens compared to traditional one in two major districts of West Bengal in 2001 and 2009.

Name of district	Land Size in 2001 (In hectares)		Land Size in 2009 (In hectares)		% Of growth	
	Traditional estate	Small scale	Traditional estate	Small scale	Traditional estate	Small scale
Darjeeling	68442	2077	66737	3782	-2.49	82.10
Jaipalguri	115135	7084	112528	9691	-2.26	36.80

Source: Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Ministry of Agriculture, Govt. of India & Small Tea Growers Association, West Bengal.

Growth of unorganized small scale tea plantations which have been started by inexperienced new comers. By this unorganized managements of inexperienced have been affected the quality of production as an example the pesticides used by them can be that much harmful for which not only test of tea is affected but it can also destroy a fetus of pregnant women. It is cleared from the Table – 2 and Fig. – 1 that how the small scale tea plantations are increasing and the large estates declining not only in Jalpaiguri but also in other districts of North Bengal<sup>[13]</sup>.

Since production of tea is a labour demanding process, the food and health conditions of labours affect the productivity. Due to financial mismanagement, many estates are not giving proper wages and not depositing the provident fund. In Jalpaiguri plantations daily wages is only Rs 95 whereas it is in Kerala gardens at Rs 225 per day plus the statutory benefits (medical and housing facilities that are statutory requirements under the Plantation Labour Act of 1951) or Rs 151 per day in case of employment guarantee scheme. On the other hand, in Jalpaiguri tea estate area housing and medical services are in a shambles. So many workers belong to Jalpaiguri tea estate cannot remember when they had a full meal last time and many have been died to starvation. But according to owners, besides the daily wages, the tea industries have to supply free housing, subsidized ration, educational infrastructures, medical facilities, sanitation etc., these can increases cost of production. Nearly 2, 62,426 permanent workers engaged in 273 tea estates of northern district of West Bengal among them 1, 66, 591 workers are getting houses facilities which mean 95,835 workers are left. Three tea estates only in the dooars region have not provided even a single house to their workmen. In case of total North Bengal 53 tea estates in 2009 and 62 tea estates in 2012 did not spend a single penny on housing purpose. Only in dooars, houses of 12 tea estates have no any electricity. Among the 273 tea estates of North Bengal, 10 have no any hospital as well as dispensary and 85 have no any dispensary. In the tea industry, since participation of women labours is significantly high, district wise education of women in North Bengal tea gardens has been shown in the Table – 3 which reflect a poor education in Dooars.



**Fig. 1** Numbers of small tea growers (STGs) in North Bengal.

Source: Bengal entrepreneurs look at tea production as a source of income". Economic Times. Sutanuka Ghosal, Dec 27, 2011 and Tea Statistics (2003), Tea Board of India.

**Table 3:** District wise education of North Bengal tea garden's women in percentage

District	Not literate	Below primary	Primary	Madarsa and other
Darjeeling	-	49.50	50.50	-
Jalpaiguri	38.72	20.37	40.91	-
Cooch Behar	50	50	-	-
Uttar Dinajpur	-	-	-	100

Source: NSSO 68th Round on Employment and Unemployment, 2011-12, calculated.

With workers managers also have no any proper training. In North Bengal approximately 188 tea estates have managers

who are may be graduates but have no any professional training or technical diploma or degree related to tea. Due to

illiterate non trained workers the plucking rate (~ 24 Kg daily/labour) is very low not only in Jalpaiguri throughout the India compared to Kenya and Zimbabwe where the plucking rate is around 45 Kg and 68 Kg respectively. Some of the gardens of Jalpaiguri are managed by the promoters who almost not concern about the long term development planning like replantation. According to medical point of view, Chinese green tea gives more health benefits (blood pressure, blood sugar, heart diseases etc.) than Bengal black tea. So recently people prefer green tea which is affected the business of black tea in international markets. Bandh, Hartal etc. which regularly seen in the tea garden area are also decreased the rate of tea production.

### 3.2. Prospects of Tea Entrepreneurship in the Jalpaiguri district

A major portion of the Dooars, a low altitude floodplain area at the Himalayan foothills has been located within the Jalpaiguri district. 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 and preferably weathers throughout the year (reflected by Table - 4) in this area influences the qualities of the tea<sup>[14]</sup>.

**Table 4:** Statistical weather characteristics of the major Indian tea growing regions

characteristics	Assam	Terai	Dooars
Annual Rainfall (mm)	2000 - 3000	3500 - 4000	~3500
Highest Temperature (°C)	35 - 38	38 - 45	28 - 35
Lowest Temperature (°C)	6 - 8	14 - 16	15 - 20
Soil PH	4.2 - 5.8	4.5 - 5.5	4.5 - 5.5
Soil Category	Ultisols	Ultisols	Ultisols

Source: Tea Research Association, India; India Meteorological Department, Ministry of Earth Sciences, Govt. of India.

Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India is organizing different programme which can provide lots of knowledge about the tea to the people associated with tea plantation and processing.

For the purpose of tea leaves plucking a machine already developed by a Japanese collaborator (Mutsumo Kiko) of Tea Research Association. Use of such mechanical techniques may increase the productivity increasing the efficiency of works as well as reducing the wastage. Using modern technology in harvesting process, cost production can be reduced.

Activities of market promotional have been taken not only for domestic but also for export front. Previously, the tea produced in Jalpaiguri is sold elsewhere, including Siliguri and Calcutta tea auction centre. In Jalpaiguri, a regional auction center has been opened in 2005 though it is not running properly since 2009<sup>[15]</sup>.

To increase the national and international consumption, Tea Board has already started advertisement campaign in different media through television and internet.

A very recent directive has been issued by the state school education department to provide the cooked meals for all school-going children on holidays also in the distressed as well as closed tea garden of north Bengal are being. The project director of the cooked midday meal programme, said that the department of school education has arrived at a conclusion on the basis of analysis of the reports based on a recent visit and the reports of the District Inspector of Schools, to supply the cooked meal on irrespective of holidays, Sundays, unit test days and after annual examination, etc in the closed and ailing tea gardens areas, in order to reduce malnutrition/starvation amongst the school going children of those areas.

### 3.3 Challenges of Tea Entrepreneurship in the Jalpaiguri district

Approximately 87 tea estates of North Bengal have no registration certificate or registration number so the Jalpaiguri district regional labour offices could not supply proper information regarding the registration under the Plantation

Labour Act, 1951. It is necessary to start a fresh drive of de novo registration immediately.

A large number of the tea gardens in Jalpaiguri have old bushes of tea, resulting in low production. Big efforts will be required to uprooting and replanting for better production. Beside these Tea Board of India with other concern bodies should organize the programme to make such environment for producing large amount of green tea as well as popularized the consumption of black tea as well.

In spite of being industrial corporate sector workers, the tea garden labours get the insufficient wages. The Government should take specific measures to provide food, house, medicine, education etc. to the tea estate workers. Peoples in these areas should be made eligible under Indira Awaas Yojana by making the required exceptional provision in the scheme such that all houseless workers get houses. For medical purpose Hospitals/health centres may be provided to the peoples of tea gardens.

Especially in Jalpaiguri tea estate area, more number of deep tube wells or other drinking water services is required such that workers can get fresh drinking water. The Tea Board of India may support the supply of drinking water according to the Labour Welfare Scheme under the Human Resource Development for twelfth five year plan.

Government of West Bengal should supply electricity at discount rate with a rural electrification Scheme to the all houses of Jalpaiguri Tea Estates in which the all night are under complete darkness<sup>[16]</sup>.

### 4 Conclusions

In the conclusion it can be said that the maximum tea estates of Jalpaiguri are very old and remotely located for which production cost is high. Here the tea sector workers are highly depriving in all respects like wages, foods, medicine, education etc. On the other hand some unexpected incidents are continuously affecting the tea production. For direct monitoring and instant step the govt. should set up a department exclusively for tea. This department can take much more effective steps for both welfare of tea sector workers and

registration, management and coordination of tea entrepreneurship etc.

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