



The Growing Popularity and Development of Assam's Tea Industry

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Article History	Abstract
Received: 06 June 2023 Revised: 05 Sept 2023 Accepted: 11 Sept 2023	<i>Natural resources abound in Assam, the north-eastern state with the highest level of economic prosperity. Numerous enterprises focused on agriculture, mining, and forestry are present there. Assam's tea business is the largest agricultural sector, accounting for a significant portion of the state's GDP and having a significant impact on both the local and national economies. Assam's tea industry was established in the 1830s after the state fell under British control. Over the course of the 120 years that the British governed Assam, there were more than 1,000 tea gardens. About 55% of India's entire tea output comes from Assam alone. When it comes to tea-growing countries throughout the world, our tea used to be something to be proud of. Assam tea has an international reputation and is in high demand in the global tea industry because of its distinctive flavour. In this essay, an effort has been made to emphasise the different obstacles the Assamese tea sector has to overcome, as well as its growth potential and the government's initiatives to promote development.</i>
CC License CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0	Keywords: Tea gardens, Economy, Production, Prospects, Initiatives

1. Introduction

The tea industry in Assam has a long history and is seen as the backbone of the state's economy. Assam tea offers the area a particular identity both inside and outside of India due to its distinct aroma and burgundy colour. It plays a key role in the world tea market as well. The production of tea, which is grown in the Brahmaputra and Barak plains, is highly valued in Assam's agriculturally oriented economy. Sonitpur, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, and Tinsukia have the largest concentration of tea estates. Assam produces more than half of the tea produced in India and around one-sixth of the tea produced globally. The tea industry has been very beneficial to the Assam economy. Assam further exports tea to Europe and the Middle East in addition to Pakistan, Egypt, Japan, and Israel. The Assam tea industry also contributed the most by generating the most job possibilities. It is the largest industry in the state and employs more than six lakh people in Assam on a daily basis, accounting for more than half of all wage workers state wide. However, Assam tea is today less economically profitable than it was in the past due to rising production costs and stagnant production prices.

2. Literature Review

According to Sonowal (2014), Assam's tea industry is the state's largest industrial sector and a significant contributor to the state's economy. Through its annual exports, it has been making a sizable contribution to both the state's revenue and the federal exchequer in the form of foreign exchange earnings. It has played a part in creating jobs for both skilled and unskilled employees. The Assam tea business has also helped women by providing them with career options.

According to Narzary, S. (2016), the number of tea gardens is growing, and the regions where they are located are also expanding, both of which are positive developments for the state's and the nation's economies. The study discovered differences in tea production and average yield, which may be the

result of several visible and invisible state-available elements. The study also discovered that the growth of the state's tea gardens and factories creates strong employment opportunities for young people who are unemployed, allowing them to work in the gardens and other related jobs.

The state government was considering registering small tea plantations with the labour department, and the Tea Board had established a cell at the Assam Agricultural University to provide small tea producers with training in an effort to raise the quality of Assam, as Sharma (2013) noted in his study. At Tocklai Research Station, a similar training course for small producers would begin. As he previously noted, a delegation of Assamese small-scale tea producers recently travelled to the Kangra Valley in Himachal Pradesh to study innovative techniques for pruning and mechanised tea bush plucking.

Objectives:

This essay's primary goal is to emphasise the development and promise of Assam's tea business as well as its difficulties.

3. Materials and Methods

Secondary data is used to back up the statements made in this analytical, descriptive essay. The data is compiled from comparable studies that have been published in a number of e-journals, blogs, books, newspapers, reports, etc. in order to analyse the economic contribution of the tourism sector in Assam. The data has been evaluated using a wide variety of different tables.

3. Results and Discussion

An overview of Assam's tea production:

Tea statistics of Assam, 2001 to 2020:

Year	No. of Tea Gardens	Area under Tea (in '000 Hectare)	Total Tea Production (in 000 Kg.)	Average yield (Kg/Hectare.)
2001	40795	269	453587	1685
2002	43272	271	433327	1601
2003	43293	272	434759	1601
2004	43293	272	435649	1603
2005	49102	301	487487	1622
2012	78856	322	590120	1833
2013	69220	322	629050	1953
2014	77710	304	610970	2010
2015	83566	316	526185	1665
2016	85344	311	659740	2121
2017	88442	314	665330	2119
2018	101850	338	691910	2047
2019	108136	337	716490	2126
2020	122440	347	618200	1781

Source: Economic Survey of Assam 2013-14, 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2021-22

The dataset, which spans the years 2001 to 2020, offers a thorough analysis of the tea business, including statistics on the number of tea gardens, the size of tea cultivation, the annual output of tea in thousands of kilogrammes, and the typical yield in kilogrammes per hectare. This information not only shows how tea output has changed over time, but it also highlights possible problems and areas that the industry should investigate further. The steady rise in the number of tea gardens throughout these years is a noteworthy trend that can be seen. This predicts that the tea sector will see rapid growth as more players enter the market and support industry-wide expansion. Additionally, this expansion shows that tea planting is still a desirable and lucrative industry to engage in.

The analysis also reveals a gradual increase in the amount of area used for tea production, with a notable increase in 2020. The increasing demand for tea on a worldwide scale or modifications in farming practices may be the cause of this increase. What's amazing, though, is how inconsistently tea is produced overall. Although it would seem that output would expand along with agricultural areas,

there are definite inconsistencies, especially in 2020. The mean production, a significant indicator of the sector's efficiency and productivity, tells a compelling tale. The average output increased steadily between 2001 and 2017, peaking at 2119 kilogrammes per hectare in 2017. Tea growing had a period of increased productivity and efficiency throughout this time. Nevertheless, the mean yield has been declining since that time. The reasons for this drop might vary and include adjustments to agricultural practices, the control of pests and illnesses, or other elements that require more research.

When we look at the relationship between the quantity of tea gardens and overall tea output, the number of tea gardens and overall tea output have a positive association between the years (2001–2020). The overall production often grew as the number of gardens climbed, demonstrating that additional tea gardens frequently resulted in higher productivity. This association points to increased tea output as a result of the growth of tea gardens. Let's now think about the connection between the overall area used for tea production and the area used for tea cultivation. We find that these two factors have a positive association when looking at the data from 2001 to 2020. Total tea output tended to rise as the area used for tea planting grew. This association highlights the significance of growing a greater area to fulfil the need for tea production. In conclusion, we find a constant upward trend from 2001 to 2020 when examining the link between the year and total tea output. This suggests a connection between the year and the overall output of tea. The output of tea gradually increased over this time, illustrating the industry's progress and adaptation.

A prominent year in the dataset is 2005, which stands out for having the most tea-growing land (301,000 hectares) and a reasonably high average output (1622 kilogrammes per hectare). On the other side, 2016 had the greatest average yield (2121 kilogrammes per hectare) and highest overall tea output (659,740,000 kilogrammes), suggesting an unusually prosperous year. Long-term trend analysis demonstrates that, up to 2017, the number of tea gardens and the area under cultivation have typically increased in the tea business. Production has since seen volatility, calling for a more thorough examination of the forces at play in the tea sector.

In conclusion, the information in this dataset offers a comprehensive insight into the development of the tea business. It emphasises a rise in the area used for cultivation as well as the quantity of tea gardens, signifying a developing market. However, there has been a considerable gap between recent increases in cultivation space and actual production, which raises critical concerns about the industry's capacity to adjust to and endure outside pressures like the COVID-19 epidemic. In order to address falling average yields, it is also critical to carefully review agricultural practices and put in place productivity-boosting measures. This will guarantee that the tea business is long-term viable and continues to significantly influence the world tea markets.

Issues facing Assam's tea industry:

Although Assam, in particular, produces the majority of the tea produced in India, the Assam tea industry is gradually disintegrating owing to a number of issues. It currently confronts a variety of difficulties. The list is as follows:

- 1. Low tea price:** For a variety of reasons, Assam tea prices have been steadily declining over time. Many tea growers and industry stakeholders in Assam are concerned about the average auction prices of tea falling below the cost of production.
- 2. Less tea is produced:** The Assam tea sector had several issues, including a financial crisis, labour issues, a bad communication system, higher revenue taxes for tea estates, and a subpar labour programme, among others, all of which contributed to a fall in productivity.
- 3. Sick Industry:** In Assam, a large number of tea gardens have collapsed owing to poor management, a lack of capital creation, a lack of modernization, and a lack of infrastructure.
- 4. Quality decline:** Improving quality receives less attention than increasing production. If not taken care of, Assam tea, recognised for its outstanding flavour, might lose its market on the global stage.
- 5. Government Ignorance:** Neither the federal nor the state governments have adopted any effective strategies for the Assam tea business.

6. Climate Change: Unpredictable rainfall and warming temperatures brought on by climate change have impacted the development and crop output of tea bushes.

7. Other problems: Other issues, such as improper export communication, restricted use of scientific tools or mechanisms, industrial expansion, a lack of investment capital, etc., are partly to blame for the challenges the Assamese tea sector is currently facing.

The Assam tea business has persevered and adapted despite these obstacles. In an effort to increase production and lessen the environmental impact of the tea business, several tea estates have started to use sustainable and environmentally friendly practices, such as organic growing and water conservation. Initiatives like fair trade and social welfare programmes are gaining traction as efforts to enhance the working conditions and living standards of tea workers.

4. Conclusion

The current study sheds light on a variety of facets of the Assamese tea business. The study unequivocally demonstrates that there are growing numbers of tea gardens and a growth of tea garden areas concurrently, which can be viewed as a positive development for the state's and the nation's economy. Additionally, the state's growing number of tea gardens and factories offers young people who are jobless good opportunities to work in tea gardens as labourers and non-labourers. Because the tea business is the top industry in the state of Assam, it is crucial for the government to place a lot of focus on it. For the sake of society as a whole and the state, the government should financially and politically promote both large and small tea gardens.

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