

Cooperative Tea Factories: A Panacea for the Small Tea Growers in Nigiris District, Tamil Nadu

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Abstract:

Cooperation is the very basis of human civilization and the inter-dependence and the mutual help among human beings are the basis of social life. In India, the spirit of village communities was predominately cooperatives. Thus, cooperation is the essence of social life and human progress. A cooperative is an organization that applies commercial strategies to maximize improvements in human and environmental well being rather than maximizing returns for shareholders. Cooperative firms are socially-oriented firms: they are entrepreneurial and mutual benefit organizations that are usually controlled on an equal voting rights basis, but by different types of patrons viz., producers, workers, consumers. Hence, Cooperatives are well placed to contribute to sustainable development's triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental objectives plus the governance agenda, not least because they are enterprises that endeavor to meet the economic progress of members while satisfying their socio-cultural interests and protecting the environment.

Indian cooperative movement is one of the oldest and largest, as the number of cooperatives functioning is around 6 lakhs. More than 20 per cent of the population is members of any one types of cooperative and covers all the villages. In this regard, the author has chosen a cooperative enterprise that is unique and started with an intension to protect the neglected, suppressed and downtrodden people of the society i.e., the Tamil Nadu Small Tea Growers' Industrial Cooperative Tea Factories' Federation Limited.

The major objectives were to study the background under which the cooperative was started; how this cooperative is helping the members in uplifting them socially and economically and also to draw strategies to survive and sustain under the competitive environment so as to render services to its members.

The primary and secondary data were collected. Secondary data were collected from the cooperative enterprise records and other relevant documents. Primary data was collected by contacting the members of these cooperative enterprises. Appropriate statistical tools were used to analyze the data and interpretations made accordingly.

The early 1930s saw a steady increase in the area under tea cultivation in the small tea grower sector. These small tea growers faced problems such as very low rates for their leaves, heavy rejection of leaves and manipulations of quantity etc. It was the scenario that prompted the government to form INDCOSERVE, a guardian of small tea growers in the Nilgiris district of south India in the year 1958 with 120 small tea grower-members in order to develop their socioeconomic conditions. As this venture was a great success, it encouraged the formation of more cooperative tea factories in different areas of the district, wherever there was

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concentration of small tea growers. The Tamil Nadu Small Tea Growers' Industrial Cooperative Tea Factories' Federation Limited, briefly called the INDCOSERVE was established in 1965 and during the year 2015-2016, there were 16 Industrial Cooperative Tea Factories under regular production covering about 36,327 acres of smallholdings and 25,115 small tea growers with the main object to transform the socio-economic conditions. The very existence of Cooperative Tea Factories has given the Small Tea Growers the requisite collective bargaining strength and developed them socially and economically.

Keywords: Cooperative Tea Factories, Small Tea Growers, Socio-economic, Sustainable Development.

I INTRODUCTION

Tea is the most popular beverage in the world-popular among rich and poor alike, apart from water. One reason for its continuing popularity is that no harmful properties have been associated with tea over the period since the time no harmful properties have been associated with tea over the period since the time of its discovery. Tea is a pleasant and stimulating beverage, possessing nutritional and pharmacological effects, which are beneficial to health.

Tea is made of leaves from the "tea bush" **Camellia Sinensis**, a small evergreen plant with shiny, dark-green leaves. It originated in china about 2700 BC. In the 17th century, it spread to the countries in Europe. Then in the 18th and 19th century, tea took over the coffee's position today it is by far the most popular drink. East India company's George Williamson in 1893 brought commercial tea production to India with an idea to develop an alternate source of supply to china. Now, things are very different, china is way behind India in the global tea trade.

Global Trend in Tea Production and Export

World production varies between 1850 and 2015 million kgs. India's tea production is 780 million kgs, which is roughly 8 percent of the global production. The largest export of India tea is to the Russian market, and this is followed by the United kingdom (UK) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). With the formidable threat of El Nino affecting crop production across the world, major tea producers expect an average to poor with firm price trends in global markets. Any significant change of India production, the largest producer in the world, would definitely have an adverse impact on global demand-supply equilibrium and thereby price trends.

Tea Production in India

The production rapidly grew in the country. Darjeeling, Assam, Nilgiris-three distinctly different teas grown in different regions of the country. Darjeeling tea, the Champagne of teas is grown only in the Darjeeling hills of West Bengal in North-East India. It is acknowledgement as the superlative standard for flavour. Assam tea offers rich, full-bodied, bright liquor. The climatic conditions and landscapes of the Blue Mountains or the Nilgiris favour fine flavour and brisk liquor. The combination of fragrance and briskness makes Niligiri tea a truly unique, found nowhere else in the world.

India's average productivity is 1,787 kg per hectare while in the Southern States, it is more than 2,854 kg per hectare. Both these figures are much lower than those achieved internationally as in the case of Kenya which produces 5,340kg per hectare. Area under cultivation was 4,25,966 hectare in the year 1994, which increased to 4,34,376 at present. Assam produced more than 50 percent of the total tea produced in India and 22 percent of the

tea produced globally. Tea production is divided in the ratio of 3:1 between Assam and Bengal and the Southern States. Normally in the total production 20-25 per cent is exported.

Cooperative too has a place in the tea sector. In the country's total tea production, Cooperatives' contribution is nearly two percent.

Role of Cooperatives in Tea Sector

Cooperatives play vital role particularly for small and marginal tea growers. There are 29 Cooperative Tea Factories in India spread over four states of country, with a total production of around 15 million kgs. The Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu state alone has 15 cooperative tea factories, even though Tripura has nine cooperatives, Himachal Pradesh has four Cooperatives, and Kottayam district of Kerala state with very meagre production. Further, it is evident that the Nilgiri District of Tamil Nadu has more number of Cooperative Tea Factories and accounts for 90 percent of the tea production of the Cooperative Tea factories in Nilgiris District. With this background, an attempt has been made to study the functioning of the cooperative tea factories in Nilgiris District of Tamil Nadu and the services rendered to uplift the members socially and economically.

Objectives of the study

- ✓ To study the historical background under which the cooperative tea factories were started and the functioning.
- ✓ To explore the extent of social and economical development of the small tea grower members through the cooperative tea factories

Methodology:

There are 15 cooperative tea factories functioning in Nilgiris District and it federated under INDCOSERVE. Out of which four factories were personally visited by the researcher. From each factory 25 members were randomly selected and in toto 100 members were contacted and ascertained their opinion on the general functioning and the extent of services utilised by them and the change in their livelihood status. Both Primary and secondary data were collected and simple statistical tools used to analyse. The study results are discussed below.

II PERFORMANCE OF INDUSTRIAL COOPERATIVE TEA FACTORIES IN NILGIRIS DISTRICT

Formation of INDCO Tea Factories

Historically, tea plantations were developed by the British in the 19th century and, since then, these have been mostly in the form of tea estates, the normal size of which in South India is 300-500 hectares. Since 1930s, there has been steady increase in the area under tea cultivation in the small grower sector, which is typical to the Nilgiris District. Today, there are around 63,000 small growers in South India, cultivating an area of approximately 30,000 hectares and it is estimated that around 75 Million Kgs of tea per annum is contributed by this sector.

Initially, these small growers had to supply their green leaves only to private tea factories. These small tea growers faced several problems such as low rates for their leaves, heavy rejection of leaves, manipulations in quantity of leaf supplied, etc. This scenario prompted the Government to form Tea Factories under Cooperative Sector. With the establishment of the first Industrial Cooperative Tea Factory at Kundah in 1962, these small growers were able to realize a better price for their green leaf.

Functions

The Industrial Cooperative Tea Factories are procuring green tea leaf from their Small Tea Grower Members and paying green leaf rate by converting the Green leaves into Made Tea through the modern Tea Machinery by adopting latest technology and selling the made teas in Tea Auction Centres. Today, there are 15 Industrial Cooperative Tea Factories (INDCO) under regular production covering about 38,000 acres of small holdings and 25,000 Small Tea Growers out of 63,000 Small Tea Growers of the Nilgiris District. The total production of tea, both Orthodox and CTC, of these factories, is around 17 Million Kgs per annum commanding 13 per cent of the total production of the Nilgiris. The details on the installed capacity of all the 15 Industrial Cooperative Factories, number of member growers enrolled, their holdings, working result, etc. are furnished below.

Table 1: INDCO Tea Factories Installed Capacity, Members, Land Holdings

Sl. No.	Name of INDCO Tea Factory	Year of Starting Operation	Installed Capacity (In lakhs kgs)	No. of members		Acreage covered	
				(As on 31.03.2015)	(As on 30.04.2016)	(As on 31.03.2015)	(As on 30.04.2016)
1	Kundah	1962	28.10	1,994	2,319	2,005	2,827
2	Karumbalam	1966	10.00	944	1,441	954	1,666
3	Mercunad	1967	15.60	1,849	2,717	1,869	2,717
4	Mahalinga	1967	14.05	2,734	3,495	2,755	3,516
5	Manjoor	1967	28.10	1,690	2,371	1,678	2,294
6	Ithalar	1967	28.10	2,519	2,864	2,531	1,308
7	Pandalur	1974	20.10	1,519	2,842	1,589	2,925
8	Kaikatty	1976	12.50	1,850	3,484	1,856	3,436
9	Kattabettu	1976	15.60	1,223	2,253	1,224	2,265
10	Salisbury	1983	28.10	1,548	3,519	1,545	3,511
11	Frontier	1986	20.10	2,145	2,958	2,166	2,983
12	Kinnakorai	1989	12.50	956	1,308	957	1,308
13	Bikkatty	1991	15.60	1,370	1,537	1,417	1,553
14	Ebbanad	1997	10.90	969	1,685	969	1,685
15	Bitherkad	1998	14.05	1,600	2,283	1,600	2,283
	TOTAL		273.40	24,910	37,076	25,115	36,327

The total installed capacity of the cooperative tea factories is 273.40 lakh kilograms from an area of 36,327 acres and 25115 members. The factories provide direct employment to 1187 and indirect to 22000.

Table 2: Growth of the INDCO Tea Factories

Sl. No	DETAILS	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17 (April 2016)
1	Number of members	19586	22,525	24,474	24,852	25103	25115
2	Acreage (Acres)	32376	33,706	36,049	37,050	36298	36327
3	Quantity of green leaf purchased (in lakh kgs)	627.55	613.99	661.61	610.81	581.12	31.38
4	Quantity of made tea produced (in lakh kgs.)	165.90	164.96	179.15	160.01	150.95	8.62
5	Rate paid for green leaf (Rs. per kg)	8.97	15.15	13.72	7.56	8.94	15.38
6	Tea sales (in lakh kgs)	164.76	165.83	162.73	175.88	160.39	8.88
7	Value of tea sales (Rs.in lakhs)	9509.51	14,055.22	13,334	9,823.10	10183.51	761.98
8	Sale Average (Rs./Kg)	57.72	84.76	81.94	55.85	61.94	83.51

It is evident from the above table the membership and the acreage under tea cultivation are growing. Whereas the green leaves purchased, made tea produced and the sale of tea except in the year 2015-16 shows an increasing trend. The rate paid to green leaf paid by the INDCO ranges between Rs.8.11 per kg and Rs.10.72 during 2015-16.

Table 3 reveals that except three INDCOs other cooperative tea factories have accumulated loss. The Cumulative Loss upto 31.03.2016 by INDCO was Rs.3389.10 lakhs. This is due to fall in price and variations in the short period. The quality of the tea was also one of the reasons as the members sometimes supply the tea leaves with stem. The production in other countries increased and demand came down.

Table 3: Working result of Industrial Cooperative Tea Factories (₹. in Lakhs)

Sl. No.	Name of the Factory	Cumulative Loss / Profit as on 31.03.2016	Profit Loss during 2016-17 (upto 30.04.2016)	Cumulative Loss / Profit as on 30.04.2016
1	Kundah	(-) 55.72	(-) 4.79	(-) 60.51
2	Karumbalam	(-) 191.04	(-) 1.59	(-) 192.63
3	Mercunad	(-) 371.46	(-) 4.61	(-) 376.07
4	Mahalanga	(-) 50.06	(-) 4.91	(-) 54.97
5	Manjoor	(+) 24.64	(-) 0.48	(-) 0.48
6	Ithalar	(-) 304.91	(-) 0.44	(-) 305.35
7	Pandalur	(+) 4.25	(+) 0.55	(+) 0.55
8	Kaikatty	(-) 8.29	(-) 4.34	(-) 12.63
9	Kattabettu	(-) 191.66	(-) 4.21	(-) 195.87
10	Salisbury	(+) 15.21	(+) 5.05	(+) 5.05
11	Frontier	(-) 249.74	(-) 0.60	(-) 250.34
12	Kinnakorai	(-) 383.14	(-) 4.27	(-) 387.41
13	Bikkatty	(-) 147.12	(-) 2.74	(-) 149.86
14	Ebbanad	(-) 924.50	(-) 3.84	(-) 928.34
15	Bitherkad	(-) 511.46	(-) 7.28	(-) 518.74

PERFORMANCE OF INDCOSERVE

After the formation of first Industrial Cooperative Tea Factory at Yedakkad village in the year 1962, the Small Tea Growers realized the benefit of the factory and they demanded the formation of more number of Industrial Cooperative Tea Factories. Subsequently, number of Industrial Cooperative Tea Factories was established in various places of the Nilgiris District and it was felt necessary to promote an Apex Organisation to coordinate the activities of all the Industrial Cooperative Tea Factories. Accordingly, the Tamil Nadu Small Tea Growers Industrial Cooperative Tea Factories Federation Limited, “THE INDCOSERVE”, was established in the year 1965.

Objectives of the INDCOSERVE

The objectives of INDCOSERVE specified in its Bylaw are:

- ❖ To promote the economic interest of the Small Tea Growers / Members of INDCO Tea Factories in the Nilgiris District.
- ❖ To coordinate and facilitate the purchase of Machineries, Tools, manure, consumables, etc. required by the INDCO Tea Factories.
- ❖ To render services to the member factories in the area of Legal, Technical, Financial, Social, Manufacturing, Transport, Marketing, Warehousing, Sales, etc.
- ❖ To market branded and un-branded teas, packeted and straight teas, green tea, Instant Tea in India and Abroad.

- ❖ To help the growers to get reasonable price for their produce.

Functions

The INDCOSERVE provides various services to the Industrial Cooperative Tea Factories such as warehousing facilities at Coonoor, Coimbatore and Cochin, supply of fertilizers, supply of jute bags for packing of teas, machinery spares, and other inputs to the small tea grower/members through the INDCO Tea Factories besides helping to market the teas of the factories to their best advantage. INDCOSERVE also provides financial support to the member INDCO Tea Factories, in case of necessity.

Management of INDCOSERVE

The By-Laws of INDCOSERVE provide for Management with an elected Board. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of this Board are to be elected from among the elected Chairmen of 15 Industrial Cooperative Tea Factories. The elected Board was assumed charges from 11.06.2013. The Managing Director in the cadre of Indian Administrative Service is administering the affairs of the INDCOSERVE. One General Manager in the Cadre of Deputy Director of Industrial Cooperatives and five managers in the cadre of Industrial Cooperative Officer drawn from Industries and Commerce Department are assisting the Managing Director.

The Main Areas of Business

- Supply of Tea to Defence Department
- Sale of “Ooty Tea” to State Civil Supplies Corporation and Cooperative Stores under Public Distribution System.
- Supply of tea to recognized export houses.

The performance of INDCOSERVE for the past five years is furnished below.

The members of the INDCOSERVE increased from 16 to 17 as the Government become member by providing share capital. The share capital increased from Rs.354.50 lakhs in the year 2012-13 to Rs. 324.55 lakhs in the year 2015-16.

Table 4: Sales Turnover and Working Results

(Rs. in lakhs)

Sl. No.	DETAILS	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15 (Tentative)	2015-16 (Tentative)	2016-17 April 2016 (Tentative)
1	OOTY TEA sales through P.D.S.	3966.90	5078.52	4294.40	4513.66	375.34
	Sale of Leaf Grade Teas		.....	.....	24.71	.....
2	Sale of Packing materials to INDCO Tea Factories		.....	110.00	158.64	....
3	Warehouse Income	127.53	158.56	153.41	138.33	11.23
4	Total	4094.43	5237.08	4557.85	4835.34	385.57
5	Profit for the year	184.89	557.19	1048.04	841.02	15.86
	Less:					

	1. Rebate paid to INDCO Tea Factories	120.00	495.00	....	206.73	....
	(a) For 5 th Cut CTC	.....	.....	29.24	....	....
	(b) For ENCON Motors	.....	.....	5.05	....	....
	2. Contribution to Price Stabilization Fund	.....	.....	736.50	630.77	....
	3. Provision for providing Lath workshop at two places of INDCO Tea Factories	.....	.....	40.00	....	....
	4. Provision for additional lath, New Lath, Digital scales, Impact Pulverizer, Maintenance works at ICTFs	.....	.....	150.00	.....	.....
6	Net Profit	64.89	62.19	87.25	3.52	15.86

Table 4 reveals that the total turnover of the federation, INDCOSERVE increased from Rs.4094 lakhs to Rs.4835 lakhs, that includes sales through PDS and other input to INDCOs. Whereas the net profit of the federation decreased due to the price fluctuation in the world market. The direct employment provided was 35 numbers and indirect employment to 113.

Ooty Tea

The Government of Tamil Nadu launched the sale of “OOTY TEA” to the general public through the Public Distribution System on 28.08.2001. INDCOSERVE is supplying about 250 M.Ts. of blended teas, per month, under the brand name of “OOTY TEA” through Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation and District Cooperative Wholesale Stores of Cooperative Department. Under the above said scheme, INDCOSERVE is purchasing teas from various Estate Factories, which includes INDCO Tea Factories also through Tea Auction Centers at Coonoor and Coimbatore. The teas thus purchased and blended by INDCOSERVE are subjected to repeated tests to maintain quality and conformity with the Prevention of Food and Adulteration Act, so that the public are provided with good quality of tea at reasonable rate. Moreover, OOTY TEA also provides the required cuppage and good flavor. The quality of OOTY TEA is on par with other well known branded teas, by breaking the myth that only low quality of product would be available at low price.

It is to highlight that, after having resorted to the purchase of Teas by INDCOSERVE for blending in their Ooty Tea production, the sale average of some of the teas of factories in the Nilgiris District have gone up considerably. The market intervention by INDCOSERVE is helping all the tea factories in the Nilgiris to realize better sale average and consequently the Small Tea Growers are getting better rate for their green tea leaves. From and out of the profit earned by Ooty Tea, INDCOSERVE has so far paid a sum of Rs.3610.46 lakhs as rebate to the Small Tea Growers of the Industrial Cooperative Tea Factories.

The selling price of OOTY TEA by INDCOSERVE is at Rs.130/- per kg (including VAT) and Maximum retail price of OOTY TEA by Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation Ltd and Cooperative Stores is at Rs.150/- per kg (including VAT). The tea is being sold @ Rs.15/- per pouch of 100 grams, through the Fair Price shops all over Tamil Nadu.

Achievements

As a land mark achievement, INDCOSERVE has got the prestigious ISO 9001:2008 Certification from “DET NORSKE VERITAS (DNV)”, NORWAY for its Quality Management System covering Tea Blending, Packeting and Marketing of teas and Warehousing facilities. Ooty tea is now a Registered Trade mark and INDCOSERVE is also accredited with ISO:9001-2008.

The role of INDCOSERVE and INDCO Tea Factories in improving the economic conditions of small tea growers has since been recognized by one and all. The Small tea Growers today have a dignity and identity of their own, thank the Cooperative effort and are looking forward to a bright future confidently.

PERFORMANCE OF TEASERVE

TEASERVE – The World’s first Electronic Tea Auction Centre:

In acceding to the representation made by the Small Tea Growers of the Nilgiris District, the Government have accorded permission for setting up of an Electronic Tea Auction Centre vide G.O. MS No.36, Small Industries Department, dated 17.07.2002. Accordingly, the new Tea Auction Centre under Cooperative sector in the name of “TEA MANUFACTURERS’ SERVICE INDUSTRIAL COOPERATIVE SOCIETY LIMITED, shortly called as “TEASERVE” was Registered on 28.08.2002 and started on 13.09.2002 at Coonoor in the Nilgiris District. The TEASERVE commenced its Electronic Auction proceedings with effect from 01.10.2003.

TEASERVE- A Cooperative Federation of Small Tea Growers:

As the entire Auction proceedings of the TEASERVE are computerized, the exploitation of middleman is avoided and the registered buyers alone could participate in the electronic auction proceedings.

Membership and Share Capital:

Seller Members: The TEASERVE have 172 Seller Members on its roll with a paid up share capital of Rs.44.20 lakhs, which includes the Government Share Participation of Rs.5.00 lakhs. The details of the sector-wise tea factories enrolled as Seller Members in TEASERVE are as follows:

(i)	INDCO Tea Factories	16
(ii)	Private Bought Leaf Tea Factories	124
(iii)	Private Estate Factories	31
(iv)	TANTEA	1
(v)	Government of Tamil Nadu	1
	Total	173

Registered Tea Buyers: there are 204 Tea Buyers so far have registered in TEASERVE. The advantages when compared to other auction centres is that is lesser transaction time.

III FINDINGS

Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile of the Members of the Tea Cooperatives

Age of the Respondent

It is observed that fifty three per cent of the members are relatively old in age with more experience. But the members in the age group from 30 to 40 or members from the age 40 to 50 have changed their profession from tea cultivation to white colour jobs and also moved to cities in the plains. It is noted that only five per cent of the respondents are in the age group

from 20 to 30 and it is very clear that the younger generations are not interested in their traditional tea plantation.

Community of the Artisans

It is inferred that 90 per cent of the small tea grower belong to Thodas, Kurumbas, Kothas and Irulas community.

Size of the Family

The proportion of below four members of the family category respondents were 47 per cent and 53 per cent are with four members in their family. When the family size increases, according to the number, the work has not been shared as the younger generation are sent for studies to other places.

Gender

The study reveals that out of 100 tea grower members, 77 are male and 23 per cent are female. Irrespective of the gender, every member of the family works together and the participation of them is so important in carrying out the agricultural operation. Female members look after the plucking of tea leaves and the male members take care of finance and outside activities. Above all, the female members nourish the family and look after their children and during their leisure time they complete the agriculture work.

Education

It is understood that 17 per cent of the respondents are illiterates. However, variation in educational status has also been noticed among them, 42 per cent of the respondents had primary education, 24 per cent of them have finished their secondary level school education, 11 per cent of them have higher secondary level and the remaining six per cent of the respondents have completed their degree and post graduation.

Occupation

It is observed that more than ninety per cent (93.40 per cent) of the respondents are tea planters as their primary occupation. They don't go to other work. But, the younger generation as well as the members from the educated members family works in travels, electrical work, tailoring, real estate and printing press, etc. To earn more, the youngsters choose other occupation. Only seven per cent of the farmers consider it as a secondary occupation, but continue to carry out the primary occupation.

Traditionality of Tea Farming

As far as tradition of the tea growing is concern, more than two-thirds (86.6 per cent) of the respondents are traditional tea planters. These tea planters were performing farming operation for more than three to five generations. It is noted that thirteen per cent of the respondents have acquired the land newly over a period from the traditional farmers or developed the forest land.

Income of artisans

It is inferred that more than one-third (36.7 per cent) of the respondents earn a yearly income of Rs.5,00,000. And 14 respondents' income ranges between Rs.5,00,000 and Rs.10,00,000. Only six per cent of the respondents earn more than Rs. 10,00,000 per year by doing the tea growing effectively. This income was earned by the members when they supply the tea leaves to tea cooperatives. The tea leaves sold were spent for their household expenses, educating their children and medical expenses.

Expenditure made by Tea Grower Members

It is observed that more than one-third (32.80 per cent) of the respondents are spending around 60 percent of the income because they have school going kids in their house. Twenty six per cent of the respondents are spending 50 per cent, as these tea growers have elderly people in their house. It is noted that 16 per cent of the respondents are spending from 30 to 40 per cent, as these tea growers work in other factories and serve outside.

Nature of Accommodation

It is found that more than ninety five per cent of them have their own house out of the 100 member respondents. The analysis reveals that only five per cent of them are living in the houses taken on lease.

Possession of Land for Tea Plantation

Ninety eight percent of the tea growers' members own the land for tea plantation. Only two per cent of the land of the tea plantation is taken on lease. Among them, sixty five per cent of the tea growers own land between half acres to two acres, 25 per cent of the tea grower members own land between two and four acres and ten percent of the members own more than four acres of tea plantation.

Possession of Vehicle

It is found that more than fifty two per cent of the artisans travel by their own motorcycles and 21 per cent of the tea growers still moving by their foot and using public transport, whereas, remaining 27 per cent of the respondents owned jeeps and cars.

Possession of Assets

Out of 100 respondents, only 35 of them have furniture, 10 women tea growers have Jewells; all of them possess household utensils like radio, television, mixie, grinder, fridge etc. All of them posses cooking gas and more than ninety artisans own mobile phones. It is found that all young people possess mobile and used by the elders only for making and receiving calls. There is also variation in terms of the value of these assets possessed by the respondents' families.

Interestingly, among the member tea growers two percent own houses in the plains like Coimbatore, Gankeyam, Annur, Erode etc. The reason was that they wanted to provide good education to their children and wanted their children to be settled in the plains than in the hills of their native.

Sanitation, Health and Social Status:

The tea grower members focus more on the sanitation and conscious on health of themselves and their family members. This mind set is due to the exposure that the members got over a period of time from the tea cooperative factories. All the respondents are of the opinion that now they all could lead a decent life and live healthy because of the tea cooperative factories service rendered to its members. The member could feel the difference and felt that they gained more knowledge from the cooperatives than non member relatives on sanitation, health and general awareness.

Education

The member tea growers have more awareness on educating their children than the non members, was opined by all the members. Almost, all the members children are provided with better education by sending them to good educational institutions in the state. More than forty per cent of the tea grower members' children are holding professional degrees. Around 20 per cent members' children are in abroad. All these achievement could be attributed to the cooperatives and their association with the tea cooperative factories.

Economic Factors:

The tea grower members economic status has improved over a period of time after joining the tea cooperative factories was opined by all the members. The income level has increased compared to the situation before joining the cooperatives. This has made the members to invest in land and building. The income was spent for buying additional land for plantation of tea was opined by forty percent of the respondents. Twenty per cent of the respondents have purchased a house or constructed a house in the plain lands like Coimbatore, Gankeyam, Mettupalayam, Annur etc. because of better income from their tea plantation and their membership in tea cooperatives.

Better Farming

The members opined that they were trained with better farming practices for getting more yield. New variety of tea saplings were given by the cooperatives and growing techniques were also oriented by the Tea Cooperatives. Better leaf plucking techniques were also taught to the farmer members to get better price for their tea leaves.

Sustainability

The cooperative tea factories are doing a yeoman service to its small tea grower members by paying a good price to the tea growers, providing input and orienting the members on better farming practices etc. This has helped the members to come out from the exploitation of the private bought leaf factories and improve socially and economically. The members are well aware that cooperative tea factories are the only hope to depend for their regular income to lead a decent life. On the one hand the cooperative tea factories are well established and lending a helping hand to the small tea growers and on the other hand, the small tea grower members do not have a better dependable alternative for their livelihood and sustenance. The relationship is mutual and the bond could not be broken.

V CONCLUSIONS:

The small and medium tea growers' social and economic status was uplifted by the cooperative tea factories particularly during the time of misery. The government played an important role in establishing the factories at the place where these growers were exploited much by the private bought leaf factories. Till date one could witness the mutual trust between the member tea growers and the tea cooperatives. The sustenance of the cooperative tea factories depend on the extent of support and effective utilisation of the services by the members. At the same time, the factories should continue to provide better services in future as provided now. The members should also should really own the cooperatives and participate in all the activities. Once the mutual bond is reinstated, the sustainability will not be a botheration for both the members and the cooperative tea factories.

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