

PERFORMANCE OF SMALL-SCALE INDUSTRIES IN ASSAM: A REVIEW OF PRODUCTIVITY AND GROWTH

¹Hemanta Saikia

¹Assistant Professor ¹Department of Economics ¹Debraj Roy College, Golaghat, India

Abstract: Small-scale industries play a vital role in the economic development of regions by generating employment opportunities and promoting local entrepreneurship. In Assam, these industries have contributed significantly to growth, reducing regional disparities and fostering socio-economic development. This review paper explores existing research on the productive performance of small-scale industries in Assam, emphasizing key findings, methodologies employed, and identifying gaps in the literature. The paper aims to determine if the available literature adequately reveals the micro status and problems faced by small-scale industries in Assam. Additionally, it seeks to establish a well-structured theoretical framework by examining ideas, theories, information, and hypothesis explanations. The paper also identifies gaps in the existing literature and appropriate research methods to understand the research problem better. Drawing on historical experiences and modern perspectives, various authors and researchers have observed small-scale industries. This paper analyzes the overall development of the research problem and examines theoretical backgrounds, conceptual issues, and productivity and production behavior. Furthermore, it highlights gaps in the theoretical inferences within the economic literature concerning developing countries.

IndexTerms - Small-scale Industries, Assam, Economic Development, Productivity.

1. Introduction:

Assam, located in the northeastern part of India, is a state known for its natural resources and unique cultural diversity. With a population of over 35 million, Assam has recently emerged as a vital hub for small-scale industries. These industries have played a crucial role in economic development by contributing significantly to employment generation. Small-scale industries have limited capital investment and employ fewer people than large-scale industries. In Assam, these units are engaged in various sectors, such as food processing, handicrafts, textiles, chemical products, and engineering goods. The Government has been promoting small-scale industries through various policies and initiatives to encourage entrepreneurship and boost local employment opportunities. Small-scale industries in Assam encounter various challenges that hinder their productivity. Smallscale industries play a crucial role in the economic development of any region. In Assam, small-scale industries have become essential, contributing significantly to employment generation and income enhancement. However, their performance in terms of productivity and growth has been a matter of concern for policymakers and researchers alike. The paper aims to analyze the factors affecting these industries' performance and evaluate the Government's policy interventions to promote their growth. By examining data from various sources, including government reports, academic literature, and field surveys, this paper provides insights into the challenges faced by small-scale industries in Assam and identifies critical areas for future research. Since the evolution of the Industrial Revolution, much study is already conducted to analyze different features of small-scale industries in various countries. This paper is designed into two sections. In section-A, an effort is made to provide a brief review of the literature on the productivity of small-scale industries in light of developing perspectives. In section B, an overview of the various problems faced by Small-scale Industries is synthesized and elaborated. The main aim of this paper is to examine whether the available literature is sufficient to disclose the micro status and problems of small-scale industry in Assam. In the meantime, this paper has also attempted to identify the ideas, theories, information, and explanation of the hypothesis to form a well-grouped theoretical framework for the study. Another objective of this paper is to identify the gaps in the existing literature and methods that could be relevant to the study and to identify the issues and aspects contributing to a better understanding of the research problem. In light of historical experience and modern views, different authors and researchers have made several observations on small-scale industries. In the history of economic literature, the gaps between the various theoretical inferences are also highlighted relation to developing countries.

h738

2. Methodology:

To conduct this literature review, relevant scholarly articles, reports, and studies were identified through a comprehensive search of academic databases and online resources. The selected literature covers the period from the early 1958s to the present, ensuring a representative and up-to-date analysis of the topic. The review focuses on the critical themes of productive performance, challenges faced by small-scale industries, policy implications, and recommendations for improvement.

4. Analyze and Discuss the Literature:

4.1. Small-Scale Industries of India:

Dhar (1958) analyzed small-scale industries in Delhi, considering investment, output, and employment. The study analyzed the investment outline, composition of fixed and working capital, the relative substance of fixed and working capital in the small-scale sector, elements of cost, capital-output ratios, labor, output ratios, and net value added per worker in different industry groups surveyed and in another study of finances on the small-scale industry in India, undertaken by Ramakrishna (1962) pointed out the character and enormity of the monetary problem faced by the small-scale industrial sector of India and the role of the Government, State Financial Corporations and Banks in financing this sector. Dhar used CMI/ASI14 data to analyze the small-scale industry, and the first four studies reported a positive relationship between the size and capital-output ratio. This is attributed to economies of scale and better management in relatively large units. Mehta classifies the firms into different size classes according to the fixed asset value.

On the other hand, earlier studies use employment as the criterion for size classification. Furthermore, they use total productive capital as a measure of capital input, while Mehta uses fixed capital. Mathur (1979) investigated the reasons behind the sluggish growth of small-scale industries since independence. The factor responsible for the improper utilization of raw materials also pointed out workforce and capital resources. The study pointed out that scarce supply and working capital was the most significant bottleneck in the growth of the small-scale industrial sector. The study estimated that the proprietors contributed 81 percent of the capital invested by the sample units. His study is an improvement over the previous studies in that the essential data source for the study is the census of SSI units(CSSI), conducted by the Development Commissioner of small-scale Industries (DCSSI) in 1973-74, which has broader coverage. A comparison between the census sector 16 of the ASI, the sample sector 17 of the ASI, and the CSSI reveals that the capital productivity of SSI units is lower than that of large-scale units suggesting efficiency differences in line with the findings. Goldar (1985) estimates a production function using firm-level data from CSSI for the washing soap industry to obtain technical efficiency measures of partial and total factor productivity. The positive relationship between farm size and efficiency and the high capital intensity of relatively larger units suggest a tradeoff between output gains and employment loss. Goldar (1988) uses a total factor productivity index based on the Cobb- Douglas production to assess the relative efficiency of 37 three-digit industries of the NIC18. In almost all industries, labor productivity in small-scale units is less than in large-scale units.

Conversely, capital productivity in small units is higher in 22 industries when gross invested capital is used and in fifteen industries when net invested capital is used as a measure of capital input. His study reflected that the SSIs are relatively less efficient than large-scale units, and the study observes that economies of scale and better management are significant sources of efficiency for large units. A study by Sengupta (1990) estimates the factor intensity for different producing sectors in India. He has found that the importance of intermediate inputs, as prevailed in 1979-80 in the Indian economy, results in a net saving of capital and a net additional labor cost, using firm-level data drawn from CSSI.

Bhavani (1991) attempts to measure the technical efficiency of 4 four-digit level metal products industries using a production frontier with three inputs: capital, labor, and materials. It is observed that for all four metal products industries and five size groups within each one, the average efficiency level is relatively high, and efficiency measures increase with the increase in size up to a size class and then decrease. Ramaswamy (1993) studied capital intensity, productivity, and returns to scale in modern small industries in India using the data from the Reserve Bank of India Survey of small-scale industrial units (1977). The analysis is confined to four industry groups which indicate that capital intensity and partial productivities are sensitive to alternative measures of firm size, and total factor productivity are not found to be systematically related. In the State Institute of Educational Technology Institute (1993), Hyderabad, a systematic survey of 150 small-scale units selected from the twin cities of Hyderabad, Secunderabad, Warangal, and Mahboobnagar was made. The study threw new ideas for streamlining the credit facilities to small industries and the technical, social and economic infrastructure needed for dispersing industries. The study observed that idle capacity was dominant in units of all sizes, either because of the non-availability of raw materials (68 percent) or inadequate working capital (30 percent).

Shah (1994) studied the inter-firm linkage of small-scale industries in India. He found that inter-firm linkage was limited to two third industries, and marketing linkage is predominant in the Indian small-scale industrial sector. Romijn (1996) reviewed the approaches of technology support for small-scale manufacturing enterprises in developing countries since the early 1970s. According to him, early programs tended to suffer from several weaknesses, stemming from a limited conceptualization of technology and an inadequate understanding of the role of the small-scale sector in industrial development more broadly. Sivayya and Das (1996) remarked that handicraft and small-scale industries constitute the major elements in developing the industrial sector in India. They pointed out one of the fundamental problems of the small-scale industry: they have to compete with large-scale industries to capture the limited market. Nath (1998) examined the relative efficiency of SSI in seven states and observed some general patterns. In Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, most small-scale industries are relatively more efficient.

On the other hand, they are relatively less efficient in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. According to Laxmi (1999), in all developing countries, there is a planned industrialization process, so small-scale industries have come to acquire an important place. He emphasized the industrial infrastructure of the small-scale industries concerning Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (APIIC) to develop the Industrial Estates.

Laxmi and Anuradha (1999) conducted to evaluate the performance of small-scale industrial units in industrial estates in the district of Anantapur of Andhra Pradesh. It revealed that shortage of industrial input and lack of marketing products are the significant plunks in the growth of small-scale industries in Andhra Pradesh. He concluded that starting more industrial estates would help the small-scale industries go a long way. Bala (2007) examined the effect of economic reforms on the growth and performance of the small-scale industrial sector. In this study, an attempt was made to analyze the impact of economic reforms on

h739

the growth and productivity of the small-scale industrial sector. The results stated that the Govt globalization policy is almost a complete failure in growth. The analysis of the Total Factor Productivity growth highlights that the small-scale sector has observed a downward trend in the TFP growth, which was entirely driven by the technological progress during the economic reforms process. Last, he has remarked that Govt should not apply the general policy framework for small-scale industries.

4.2. Small-scale Industries of Assam:

The small-scale industry has a vital role in the process of industrialization of Assam. There are 27913 SSI units in Assam, providing employment to 131099 persons until the end of 2006-07(NEDFI Data Bank, 2009). Some studies were mainly conducted to highlight the problems and prospects of small-scale industries in Assam. In line with this, Sharma (1976) conducted a state-level study on problems of the small-scale enterprises in Assam, which was made assuming empirical data collected from 80 small-scale units over the state. The study exposed that only 21 percent of the sample units were operating at total capacity, and the most crucial reason behind the existence of at rest capacity was the lack of power. The study observed that the managerial deficiency in the small-scale industrial sector was because the owners managed almost all the units and, therefore, recommended that the owners instruct and employ some executive powers in the industries.

Borooah's (1977) study concentrated on prospects and problems of small-scale industries in the Lakhimpur district and found that lack of modern selling practices and shortage of commercial skill were the significant causes of the slow growth of the small-scale industries in the Lakhimpur district of Assam. The Small Industry Extension Training Institute (SIETI), Hyderabad (1978), conducted a comprehensive study of entrepreneurs in the NER of India in 1976-78. The study has expressed that most of the entrepreneurs in the NER of India were drained from upper caste Hindus and relatively fewer from tribal and poorer sections, and productivity is very low in the NER of India. Dey (1980) conducted a study on small-scale industries of the Cachar district and observed a shortage of raw materials as a significant operational problem of the scale industries located in the industrially backward district of Cachar. It was found that 95 percent of the units were suffering from capacity underutilization, while the average capacity utilization of the district was only 47 percent. The study pointed out that educated youths should give up their narrow attitude of remaining in search of better Jobs. It was recommended that to motivate private enterprise as an occupation among the educated youths, mass public relations in the educational institutions schools, colleges and universities concerning the prospect available for setting up self-employment schemes on a small scale were essential. Dhusan Dey (1980) highlighted the problems of small-scale industries in a backward district like Cachar. He covered the areas such as economic profit, sickness, market, and finance of small-scale industries in Cachar. He had found that many problems result from the joint ventures nature of small-scale industries in Cachar. Bora (1980), in his research work on problems and prospects of small-scale industries in the Lakhampur district, examined the potentialities, organization, and operational analysis of small-scale industries. He found that poor technique results from low wages, earnings, and productivity of the workers.

On the other hand, the non-availability of skilled labor is, according to him, another constraint in the development of small-scale industries. Baishy (1986) pointed out the role of small-scale and cottage industries in the Kamrup district of Assam and found that the cottage industries were gradually dying, and the small-scale industries were developing in the district during the ten years from 1970-71 to 1980-81. This study pointed out some traditional industries which faced hard struggles from the contemporary sectors.

A case study on the role of small-scale and cottage industries in the Kamrup district of Assam by Baishya (1972) found that employment in the cottage industry declines from 2.4 percent to 0.39 percent from 1961 to 1971. During this period, small-scale industries and employment increased by 47.22 per cent and 88.30 percent, respectively. Small-scale industries are traditionally skill-based and raw material-oriented, and investment mainly depends on installed capacity. A study on the role of the industrial estate in the production of small-scale industrial undertakings in Assam by Sarma (1990) found that industrial estates in Assam were established with a broad framework of national objectives. Deb (1993) examines the multifaceted problems of the modern small-scale industrial growth, the study analyses the constraints relating to marketing, financial, material, labor, and power, transport and climate, etc., which stand in the way of utilizing their full capacities. Apart from this objective, the study highlighted the effectiveness of various government incentives and supporting measures for small-scale industries. Nayak and Dey (1996) tried to find the location and category-wise productivity of small-scale industries in Assam. They mention that production and employment per unit were high in ancillary units, followed by small-scale industry and enterprise.

Labor productivity was estimated to be the maximum in small-scale industries and the minimum in small-scale enterprises. However, capital productivity was maximum in ancillary industrial undertakings and minimum in small-scale enterprises. A study by the Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (2003) for the Ministry of Small-scale Industries, Government of India in the North Eastern Region found that in Assam, the total number of small-scale industries registered in Assam is 23,151, where 67.44 percent are manufacturing industries. They have identified the main problems as lack of demand, shortage of working capital, lack of power availability, etc. According to Daimari (2008), small-scale, Industries are integral parts of the economy of Assam. The small-scale industries absorb quite a lot of rural people, providing them with income and employment, thereby raising their standard of living, which helps to bring about technological change and a balanced and integral rural economy. He concluded that the growth and performance of the small-scale industries were prolonged during the planning periods.

Sen (2008) pointed out that the state of Assam played a prominent role in installing the first oil refinery, the first tea plantation industry, and the first coal field in the country. However, the state of Assam also failed to attain its predominance in the industrial background as it possesses less than 2 percent of the country's medium and large-scale industries. Conversely, the state occupied a prominent place in the map of the sericulture industry through its production of silk-like Eri, Muga, and Mulberry. A total of 27913 units of small-scale industries in the state play a pivotal role in the network of industrialization and generation of employment opportunities for nearly 1 lakh persons. Unemployed youths of the state have been encouraged by setting up small-scale industries through Prime Minister Rojgar Yojana's scheme. Lastly, he pointed out that the Economic development of Assam and the entire North East India is not at all possible without accelerated development in the industrial sector, as the agriculture sector alone cannot make an impressive breakthrough.

Singh (2009) remarked that the recent slowdown in the global economy had seriously affected the business of micro and small-scale industries in Assam. The existing VAT laws in Assam were heavily loaded against the local industry. If major buyers

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in Assam, like the Indian Railways and significant public sector industries, went in for local products, they had to pay Assam VAT @12.5 percent, while if they purchased goods manufactured outside Assam, they had to pay CST @ 2 percent only. Therefore, even if the actual cost of production of an item made in Assam is competitive, the buyer prefers to buy goods produced outside Assam since they save 10.5 percent in taxes. Because of this, the local industry cannot meet the considerable local demand from public sector buyers. They added that immediate action on the part of the Government is necessary to remove this significant hurdle.

4.3. Summary of Findings:

Measuring productivity in small-scale industries involves various approaches, including labor productivity, total factor productivity (TFP), and value-added analysis. Studies have employed different methodologies to assess productivity levels and factors influencing productivity. Key determinants identified in the literature include technology adoption, human capital development, access to finance, infrastructure facilities, supply chain management, and market linkages. The availability and quality of data for productivity measurement in small-scale industries in Assam have been identified as a challenge in some studies.

The literature highlights several challenges that affect the productivity of small-scale industries in Assam. Infrastructure deficiencies, including inadequate transportation facilities, erratic power supply, and limited access to raw materials, are identified as significant hurdles. Moreover, financial constraints, such as limited access to credit and high-interest rates, pose challenges to investment in modern technologies and capacity expansion. Additionally, the shortage of skilled labor, outdated technology, and regulatory complexities hamper productivity in small-scale industries.

Researchers and policymakers have proposed various strategies to improve the productivity of small-scale industries in Assam. The literature suggests the importance of infrastructure development, including better road connectivity, reliable power supply, and access to raw materials. Access to finance and credit facilities, including tailored schemes and lower interest rates, is also crucial. Skill development programs and vocational training initiatives can address the shortage of skilled labor. As key strategies, encouraging technology adoption, promoting innovation, fostering market linkages, and supporting entrepreneurship through favorable policies are also identified. Studies have highlighted infrastructure bottlenecks, such as inadequate transportation facilities, erratic power supply, and limited access to raw materials, as significant hurdles to productivity. Additionally, financial constraints, including the limited availability of credit and high-interest rates, have been identified as significant impediments to the growth and expansion of small-scale industries in the region.

Researchers and policymakers have proposed various measures to enhance the productive performance of small-scale industries in Assam. These include promoting cluster-based development, providing infrastructure facilities, skill development programs, financial support mechanisms, and adopting appropriate technological interventions. The literature emphasizes the importance of policy initiatives that address the unique needs and challenges faced by small-scale industries in Assam, considering the region's socio-cultural context and resource constraints.

Infrastructure deficiencies pose a significant hurdle to the growth and development of small-scale industries in Assam. Inadequate transportation networks, unreliable power supply, and limited access to basic amenities hamper productivity and increase operational costs. Research highlights the urgent need for improved infrastructure facilities, including better roads, power supply, and telecommunication networks, to enhance the competitiveness of small-scale industries in the state.

Access to finance is a significant concern for small-scale industries in Assam. Limited credit availability, high-interest rates, and complex loan procedures create obstacles for entrepreneurs in securing the necessary capital for business expansion and modernization. The literature emphasizes the need for financial institutions and government agencies to develop specialized schemes and provide easy access to affordable credit to address the financial constraints faced by small-scale industries.

Small-scale industries in Assam often face difficulties marketing their products due to limited market linkages and inadequate marketing support. Lack of exposure, weak distribution channels, and absence of market intelligence restrict their ability to reach broader markets and compete effectively. Research suggests that establishing marketing support institutions, targeted promotional activities, and market development programs can help small-scale industries overcome these challenges and improve their market access.

The literature highlights technological obsolescence as a critical problem faced by small-scale industries in Assam. Insufficient investment in technology upgradation, lack of technical expertise, and limited access to research and development resources hinder innovation and limit competitiveness. Adopting modern technologies, promoting research and development collaborations, and facilitating technology transfer are crucial steps in addressing this challenge. Policies' effectiveness and implementation play a vital role in supporting the growth of small-scale industries. Inconsistent policy frameworks, bureaucratic delays, and inadequate implementation mechanisms have been identified as significant issues. Research calls for comprehensive policy reforms tailored to the specific needs of small-scale industries, simplified regulatory procedures, and effective monitoring systems to ensure the timely and efficient implementation of policies.

5. Research Gaps and Future Directions:

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into the productive performance of small-scale industries in Assam, some notable research gaps deserve attention. Firstly, more in-depth studies are needed to focus on specific sectors or industries to gain a deeper understanding of their unique challenges and opportunities. Additionally, the research could explore the role of government policies and interventions in fostering the growth and competitiveness of small-scale industries in Assam. Moreover, studies examining the impact of technological advancements, innovation, and international trade on the productivity of small-scale industries in the region would contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

While there is a significant body of literature on the problems faced by small-scale industries in Assam, a research gap exists regarding the impact of digitalization on these industries. Digitalization, encompassing the adoption and integration of digital technologies and processes, has the potential to transform the operations and competitiveness of small-scale industries. However, limited research has specifically explored the role and implications of digitalization in the context of Assam's small-scale industries.

h741

6. Potential Research Questions and Directions:

6.1. Digital Adoption and Technological Capabilities:

How are small-scale industries in Assam adopting digital technologies, and what factors influence their technological capabilities? Investigating the extent to which small-scale industries in Assam have embraced digitalization and identifying the factors that facilitate or hinder their adoption can provide insights into the current digital landscape and the challenges faced.

6.2. Impact of Digitalization on Productivity and Efficiency:

How does digitalization affect the productivity and efficiency of small-scale industries in Assam? Exploring the impact of digital technologies on various aspects of business operations, such as production processes, supply chain management, inventory management, and customer engagement, can shed light on digitalization's potential benefits and challenges.

6.3. Digital Marketing and Market Access:

What role does digital marketing play in enhancing market access for small-scale industries in Assam? Investigating the use of digital platforms for marketing, e-commerce, and reaching wider consumer bases can provide insights into the opportunities and barriers associated with leveraging digital channels for market expansion.

6.4. Digital Skills and Capacity Building:

What are the digital skills gaps among small-scale industries in Assam, and how can capacity-building initiatives support their digital transformation? Assessing the digital skills and training needs of small-scale entrepreneurs and employees and identifying effective capacity-building programs can facilitate the successful integration of digital technologies into their business operations.

6.5. Policy Framework and Digitalization Support:

What policy interventions and support mechanisms are necessary to foster digitalization in small-scale industries in Assam? Exploring the existing policy landscape and identifying gaps in digitalization support can inform policymakers about the measures needed to promote digital adoption and facilitate the growth of small-scale industries.

By addressing the research gap on the impact of digitalization on small-scale industries in Assam, researchers can contribute to understanding how digital technologies can enable these industries to overcome challenges, improve productivity, and enhance their overall competitiveness in the dynamic business environment.

7. Conclusion:

The literature review reveals that small-scale industries in Assam face significant challenges that hinder their productive performance. However, it also highlights various policy implications and recommendations that can help improve their productivity and competitiveness. To further advance knowledge in this area, future research should address the identified gaps and provide actionable insights to policymakers and stakeholders for formulating effective strategies to support the growth and development of small-scale industries in Assam. The literature review underscores the multifaceted problems faced by small-scale industries in Assam. The key challenges identified are infrastructure deficiencies, financial constraints, limited market linkages, technological obsolescence, and ineffective policy support. Addressing these problems requires collaborative efforts from the Government, financial institutions, industry associations, and other stakeholders. Policymakers should focus on improving infrastructure, facilitating access to finance, enhancing marketing support, promoting technology adoption, and implementing supportive policies effectively. By addressing these challenges, small-scale industries in Assam can thrive, contributing significantly to the region's economic development and employment generation.

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