



Planters Welfare Association

(AN ASSOCIATION OF MUTUAL BENEFITS)

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Thirty - Sixth AGM held at The Delhi Gymkhana Club Ltd. on 15th December 2024

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President: A. Batra

Vice – President: Capt V.K.Mehra

Ex- Officio: V.Lall

Secretary : R.K.Patney

Treasurer: B.Chhabra

Members : A.K. Saxena / R.Wazirchand / A Ganguly / S. Chaudhary

Members Meeting (Socials): Mrs. Nirmla Lall, Mrs. Rani Patney, Mrs. Sunanda Chhabra, Mr. Rajiv Wazirchand

Member Mailing: Mrs. Rani Patney

Editor: Ashok Batra

Period 1 – April
2025



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members, Spouses, Families and Friends,

We need to put the PWA out a bit more, and the easiest way to do this, is to get as many as we individually can, to read our Newsletters. We have tried to add as much of interest as we can, with anecdotes which do stir up nostalgia – maybe we can all try to forward this to our contacts who we think would be happy to read these; could be a morning's read on the throne ! or before an afternoon nap, or before you turn in for the night !



Welcome to what is predicted to be an even hotter summer and already we can see what the on going climate change is doing to our lives, as well as to the industry we love. A disastrous last season in terms of crop loss of 100 million; a good start, but immediately interrupted by huge pest attacks and further climate vagaries; the seasons first sale reflecting Rs. 20/25 lower levels than the opening last year; but still the entire season ahead. So lets wait and watch.

The E.C. has got a fairly full calendar of events this year as well, and will keep working relentlessly to try to keep improving. Suggestions please !

Keep good health , take care and carry on enjoying a great life, despite the challenges we face.

With Best wishes,

Ashok Batra



MEMBERS MEETING (SOCIAL) FOR THE YEAR 2024 – 2025

The Events held and the up – coming Activities for the year 2024 – 2025, are as under -

S.No.	Date	Venue	Venue booked /hosted
1.	Sun 11 th August 2024	D.S.O.I. Dhaulakuan, New – Delhi (Lunch)	Capt. V.K.Mehra
2.	Sun 22 nd September, 2024	D.S.O.I Gurgaon (Lunch)	Mr. A.K.Saxena
3.	Sun 17 th November 2024	Delhi Gymkhana Club, New – Delhi Jamun Tree (Lunch)	Mr. B.Chhabra
4.	Sun 15 th December, 2024	Delhi Gymkhana Club , New – Delhi Party Cottage – 1), (Lunch) (Sponsored by Tea Co.'s / Members)	Mr. A. Batra
5.	Sun 22 nd January 2025	Hosted at their Residence, (Sponsored by Mr. & Mrs Sayal) (Lunch)	Mr. & Mrs N.Sayal
6.	Sun 23 rd February 2025	Residence of Mr.& Mrs.P.S Tibb Mr. & Mrs P.S Tibb (Lunch)	
7.	Sun 27 th April 2025	Delhi Gymkhana Club, Jamun Tree (Lunch)	Mr.B.Chhabra

All the events held during the Financial year 2024 - 2025, were again, and as usual, a roaring success, and thoroughly enjoyed by us all. The events were well attended , great comradery and bonhomie, super and delicious lunch menu's, and to top it all, super memories of yesteryear, bringing us back to those days, both in action and spirit.

Thanks to all the Members of the Executive Committee who made booking at the various venues for our events, as well as the super arrangements and logistics.

Our thanks and gratitude to Mr. & Mrs. N.Sayal for sponsoring the event in the month of January 2025 . This is the third Consecutive year when the Couple have sponsored this much awaited event at their residence. THIS IS INDEED IS A MILESTONE IN THE HISTORY OF THE ASSOCIATION.

Our Thanks and Gratitude to Mr. & Mrs P.S Tibb for holding the February 2025 event at the lawns of their residence and for all the arrangements made by them . This event has been taking place at their residence since the year 2014, WHICH TOO, IS A MILESTONE IN THE HISTORY OF THE ASSOCIATION.

THIRTY SIXTH AGM – 2024

The Annual General Meeting for 2024 was held at the Delhi Gymkhana Club, New – Delhi (Party Cottage -1) on Sunday 15th December 2024 .

The event was sponsored by Messrs. Goodricke Group Ltd, Badulipar Ltd (Koomtai “B” Tea Estate) Brig M.J.S Bains (Retd) , J.Thomas & Co. Pvt Ltd., Jorehaut Tea Pvt. Ltd., Rossell India Ltd., Contemporary Tea Brokers Pvt. Ltd. , Palashbari Tea Co.,

Our Sincere Thanks and Gratitude to the above for their generous contribution and unstinted support.

The event was attended by a large number of members and was a run - away success . We are thankful to Mrs. V.Lall and Mrs. S.Chhabra for arranging the menu and their assistance along with Mr. & Mrs. R.Wazirchand for all the

arrangements made by them for the event. Mrs A.Ganguly and Mrs. Choudhary did a great job of registering the members who attended the AGM. .



CHAMPAGNE & ROSES

Births & Weddings: Nothing to report

Note: Members are once again requested to inform us by email or by post regarding Births, & Marriages. This helps us to include the announcements in the Newsletter.

NEW MEMBERS – (MEMBERSHIP GRANTED FROM OCTOBER 2024 TO APRIL 2025)

Miss Ruvneet Bains , Mr Suveer Singh , Mr Kunal Singh , Mr. Karan Singh , Mr Rajesh Mehra, Mrs Rupila Tandon , Mrs Renu Sehgal, Mr Rahul Srivastava , Mr. Jaiveer Kant

(Address & Contact details are available on our Members Directory)

We are pleased to inform that 12 new members joined the Association during the year 2024.

We are happy to report that we have 268 members which includes NCR / Out Station / Honourary Members.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS / E MAIL/ MOBILE NO

All changes , if any , have been made our Directory , which is circulated to the Members at regular intervals for their perusal and records. The same is available on our website www.pwa.in

OBITUARY – (DECEMBER 2024 – APRIL 2025)

Our Member :

- Mrs Asha Sahgal (W/o Late Mr. T.R Sahgal)
- Mr Sudhir Prakash,
- Mrs N.Jalnawala, w/o Late Mr N.G Jalnawala,
- Mrs V.Rautela, w/o Late Mr R.S Rautela

Near & dear ones :

Sister of Mrs. Buntu Uppal.

Friends:

- Mrs Manju Srinagesh,
- Mrs Nazma Chaterjee ,
- Mr Ajay Atal (Ex M/s J.Thomas) ,
- Mrs Ibala Syiem Pariot
- Wife /o Mr J.M.Pariot

Letter expressing our heartfelt condolences have been sent to the bereaved families.

COMMUNICATION

E-mail - As communicated earlier all our communications are forwarded by e mails.

We earnestly request those members who have not yet forwarded their e – mail ID , to kindly forward the same , to the Secretary at rkpatney@gmail.com to enable us to update our records and forward all documents by e – mail. It is our fervent hope that more and more members will opt for communication by e mail.

WhatsApp Messages - Our WhatsApp group (PWA – NCR) Some members who do not use WhatsApp, are requested to install the same so that they could be added to this group. The information may be forwarded to the Hony. Secretary at mobile 9810020533. The few members who have exited the group , are again requested to join the group, which does not have junk or forwards, but only relevant information, administered only by our Hony. Secretary.

Website - Has been up – dated regularly and also recently . You are requested to view and give your comments to enable us to improve further.

SUBSCRIPTION:

Annual subscriptions for the year is due. There are a few members who have not paid their subscription for the year 2024/25 and 2025/26, and are requested to clear their dues . It may please be noted that our annual Subscription for NCR members is Rs 500/- per annum and Rs 200/- for out station members.

Kindly note that Annual subscription is payable by all members irrespective of their Age, as per the resolution passed at the A.G.M 2018.

The rules under the Societies Act are very stringent . As per the rules of the Association for delayed payments are as under -

- 1 – One year default - Member will not be able to vote at the AGM
- 2 - Two year default -Member will not be allowed to attend the AGM.
- 3 – Three year default Membership will be terminated.

We are aware that members have all good intentions to pay their Annual subscription within the stipulated period. However due to oversight, such payments are not received from few members and the list of defaulting members does increase, and leads to added efforts to follow up. In this context, we wish to thank Mr. R.Wazirchand , who has taken the onus of the thankless task of following up with members. He has relentlessly been doing the exercise for the last two years, which has yielded desired results, whereby 97% percent of members have remitted their subscriptions . His efforts are greatly appreciated.

Mode of Payment of Subscription –

a) **Cheque** - Cheque favouring PLANTERS WELFARE ASSOCIATION, may please be forwarded by Courier/ Speed Post to our Registered Office (Residence Of Mr. B.Chhabra) Addressed to Mr. B.Chhabra , D- 247 (GF) , Defence Colony , New – Delhi 110024
Mobile no – 9818025579.

b) **Bank Transfer** – The required details are as under –

- 1 – Name of Beneficiary – Planters Welfare Association
- 2 – Saving bank account - A/C no 004601050068
- 3 – IFSC Code - ICIC0000046
- 4 – Bank & Branch- ICICI Bank, New Friends Colony , New – Delhi 110025

c) Kindly note that Subscription will not be accepted in cash.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Two of our very Senior members have made us all very proud for the honour and recognition they have received for their exceptional work and dedication for their Company and the Tea Industry.

Mr Sagar Mehta - The North Eastern Tea Association (NETA) have conferred "LIFE TIME ACIEVEMENT AWARD" to

Mr. Sagar Mehta named as "THE

EXEMPLAR" for his distinguished service to the tea Industry and a builder of Social Fabric of Assam tea industry, as the oldest serving Tea Planter at the ripe age of 96.

<https://www.facebook.com/share/19pp7MXb1Y/?mibextid=wwXlfr>



Northeast tea body names two nonagenarians associated with beverage industry for first lifetime achievement awards The awards are scheduled to be conferred upon 96-year-old Sagar Mehta and 93-year-old Apurba Kumar Barooah

Northeast tea body names two nonagenarians associated with beverage industry for first lifetime achievement awards

Published - February 07, 2025 02:03 pm IST - GUWAHATI
The Hindu Bureau

An association of tea producers has named two nonagenarians for its first lifetime achievement awards. The awards are scheduled to be conferred upon 96-year-old Sagar Mehta and 93-year-old Apurba Kumar Barooah at the 'Chairman's Dinner' in eastern Assam's Golaghat on February 8, 2025. The dinner is a biennial event of the North Eastern Tea Association (NETA).



Northeast small tea growers flag impact of massive imports

Tea Exemplar award would be conferred upon Mr. Mehta for his exemplary contribution to the tea industry and the social fabric of Assam, while the Social Statesman award would be presented to Mr. Barooah for providing visionary leadership for the betterment of society.

NETA chairman, Ajay Dhandharia said the two are considered legends for their extraordinary achievements, commitment and dedication to the tea industry in Assam.

"The chairman's dinner is expected to be a good gathering of tea producers, buyers, auctioneers, small tea growers, and tea scientists," he said.

“NETA is honoured and privileged to confer lifetime achievement awards to two great personalities. Their contributions shall continue to motivate generations to come and shall always be remembered with great honour and dignity,” NETA advisor Bidyananda Barkakoty said. In 2017, the association conferred the title of Tea Doyen to planter-philanthropist Hemendra Prasad Barooah posthumously. “Our awards are not time-bound. We will confer these awards only if we find someone eligible,” Mr. Barkakoty said.

Established in 1981, the NETA is headquartered in Golaghat and has 179-member tea companies in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Nagaland. They account for more than 150 million kilograms of processed tea annually, about 20% of Assam’s total production.

Oldest tea garden executive Mr. Mehta, India’s oldest serving tea garden executive, insisted that he is in no mood to hang up his boots. A labour management specialist from Kolkata’s All India Institute of Personnel Management, he was among the first batch of Indian officers recruited by the British in the tea industry.

He joined the Gandhapara Tea Estate in the Dooars region of West Bengal in 1954 and won the Tea Board of India’s top recognition for the growth of tea in the Dooars in 1965.

He is currently the president of the Badulipar Tea Company, whose Koomtai Tea Estate in the Golaghat district he helped become one of the prime tea gardens of Assam. He visits the company’s tea gardens regularly and plays golf whenever he gets some time off.

A pioneer of Assam’s cooperative movement seven decades ago, Mr. Barooah made a mark as a tea planter, poet and writer. He founded Golaghat’s first weekly newspaper – Saptahik Dhansiri – and also started Tea News, a one-of-a-kind monthly magazine dedicated to the achievements, concerns and hopes of the State’s tea industry.

He has also written a handbook in Assamese for small tea growers of Assam to encourage more and more youth to engage with the industry. He turned a part of his house into a reference library for the residents of Golaghat.

Published - February 07, 2025 02:03 pm IST

Mr Raj Berry – For the first time in India, a Tea estate has been renamed to honour a living Planter.

M/s M.K.Shah Exports Limited has announced the inauguration of “ROSEBERRY TEA ESTATE” marking a historic Milestone in Assam Tea Sector . Formally known as Daimukhia Tea Estate, this has been renamed in tribute to Raj Berry’s unwavering dedication to tea craftsmanship. A legendry tea planter, whose Six decade long contribution has shaped India’s tea Landscape. Mr. Raj Berry , known for cultivating roses in Assam , earned the affectionate nickname “ ROSEBERRY” – A name now immortalized through this Estate.

First ever: Tea Estate in Assam renamed to honour living planter*

The newly inaugurated Roseberry Tea Factory, located within the 840-hectare estate in Tinsukia district, is Assam’s first purpose-built orthodox tea factory in decades. Guwahati: For the first time in India’s tea industry, a tea estate has been renamed to honour a living planter. MK Shah Exports Limited has announced the inauguration of Roseberry Tea Estate, marking a historic milestone in Assam’s tea sector.

The newly inaugurated Roseberry Tea Factory, located within the 840-hectare estate in Tinsukia district, is Assam’s first purpose-built orthodox tea factory in decades. More than just an infrastructure upgrade, the factory represents a commitment to excellence, sustainability, and Assam’s rich tea heritage. “This isn’t just about bricks, steel, and machines. It’s about the people who built it, the partnerships we forged, and the legacy we are carrying forward,” said Jaydeep Shah, Director of MK Shah Exports Limited, who played a key role in bringing this project to life.

Himanshu Shah, Chairman of MK Shah Exports Limited, added, “Renaming Daimukhia Tea Estate to Roseberry is our way of paying tribute to Raj Berry’s unwavering dedication to tea craftsmanship. His vision and expertise have shaped the industry, and we hope this estate becomes a beacon of quality, just as he has been.” Berry, known for his passion for cultivating roses in Assam, earned the affectionate nickname ‘Roseberry’—a name now immortalized through this estate.

With an annual tea production capacity of almost 2 million kilos, Roseberry Tea Factory is set to produce orthodox teas of exceptional quality, upholding the highest industry standards. The estate’s steadfast commitment to ethical sourcing, sustainability, and craftsmanship will strengthen Assam’s reputation as a global tea powerhouse. The inauguration ceremony on March 23 witnessed overwhelming support from industry leaders, dignitaries, and the local community, all celebrating this momentous achievement.

A seasoned planter, Raj Berry began his career in the 1960s. Now 88 years old, he serves as the Executive Director of MK Shah Exports Limited (MKSEL). Since joining MKSEL in 1999, he has played a key role in over 16 tea plantations acquired by the company over the past two decades. A walking encyclopedia on all things tea, he is always eager to share his vast knowledge with those who seek his guidance.

**Formerly known as Daimukhia Tea Estate, the estate has been renamed in tribute to Raj Berry, a legendary tea planter whose six-decade-long contributions have shaped India’s tea landscape.*

With a deep passion for planting and a remarkable green thumb, he has led ground-breaking R&D initiatives at MKSEL. His pioneering contributions include the company's renowned rejuvenation technique, which extends the productivity of 60- to 70-year-old tea bushes, yielding 2,400-2,600 kg per hectare. He is also credited with introducing a two-year pruning cycle, an innovation that challenges the industry norm of three- to four-year cycles, along with numerous other advancements in both field and factory operations.



Despite his decades of experience, Berry remains relentless in his pursuit of innovation, consistently outworking even the youngest executives in the company. MK Shah Exports: Leading India's Orthodox Tea Sector MK Shah Exports Limited is India's largest orthodox tea producer, with an annual production of nearly 21 million kilos across its estates in Assam. The company manages over 14,400 hectares of tea plantations in Assam and an additional 1,500 hectares in Africa (DR Congo).
News Source: East Majo

Our member, Priya Mehra Dewan's husband, Nakul Dewan, who is Senior advocate at the Supreme Court, has been designated as "King's Council" at Westminster Abbey in London on the 24th March this year.

Our heartiest congratulations to both Nakul and Priya for this prestigious achievement and recognition.(Priya is our Vice President, Capt. Vijay Mehra's daughter)

An English Wedding in the Plantations

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/zainmozumder_allynugger-manuabrclub-dauracherra-activity-7258425239431184384-c6lk?utm_source=social_share_wa&utm_medium=ios_app&utm_campaign=whatsapp

An English Wedding in the Plantations, offers a nostalgic, personal account of Buddy's journey from England to a life in a tea plantation in Bengal following her marriage to Stewart in 1957. Buddy's voyage aboard the Circassia from Liverpool, through Karachi to Calcutta, reflects the excitement and anticipation of starting a new life. Upon reaching Calcutta, Buddy deals with the unfamiliarity of colonial-era hotels and is chaperoned by colleagues, adding to her sense of adventure and foreignness.

The wedding takes place at [#Allynugger](#) Burra Bungalow with a unique blend of local culture and English traditions. Amidst the sweltering heat, Buddy, dressed in a high-necked cotton lace gown, marries Stewart in a setting filled with friends, laborers, and curious onlookers from the tea estate community. The celebration transitions into a lively reception at [#Manu Club](#), highlighting the cross-cultural blend and curiosity that Buddy and Stewart's wedding brings to the plantation community.

As Buddy settles into plantation life at [#Dauracherra](#), she navigates the challenges of being a planter's wife in an isolated, exotic environment. The estate becomes both a home and a landscape of surprises, with tropical heat, mosquitoes, unfamiliar servants, and encounters with wild animals. Life revolves around the club, social gatherings, and tennis, along with quiet evenings on the verandah.

Buddy's adjustment includes learning Hindi phrases and embracing the routines of plantation life, from managing the bungalow's servant staff to becoming accustomed to the constant heat and local fauna. She recounts humorous moments, like her bearer monitoring her dinner portions, and struggles, such as dealing with persistent mosquito bites.

A break from the plantation life arrives when the couple takes a holiday to Shillong, a hill station with a cool climate and English countryside-like scenery. Here, Buddy finds a reprieve from the sweltering plains and dives into a landscape that feels reminiscent of home. The trip offers a glimpse into Khasi culture and community, providing Buddy with a taste of traditional dances, local markets, and an experience of indigenous customs that deepen her connection to her new life.





Through Buddy's memories, the narrative encapsulates the complex blend of isolation, cultural integration, and charm inherent in plantation life during the mid-20th century. The story serves as both a personal reflection and a cultural portrait of British expatriates living and working in colonial-era tea estates.

THE ELEPHANT BOY OF TEA

Many will remember Sabu, the first Indian actor who made it to Hollywood and became the legendary Elephant Boy. This is the story of The Elephant Boy of Tea, son of an ex-patriate planter. Arthur Mansfield Nuttal was born in 1906, at Digulturrang TE, which was planted out by his father. His great grandfather was Maj General Sir Arthur Nuttal of the Gurkha Brigade. Arthur's parents became estranged when he was very young and his mother returned to England leaving the toddler behind. His father died soon afterwards. The Miri bungalow servants adopted the abandoned child and raised the white baba in their village. Soon the young lad, brought up in the Miri traditions, became an expert at kheda operations, training of elephants and a talented shikari. Assam in those days was prone to malaria and kala-ajar, which periodically surfaced in epidemic form. The youngster fell violently ill and was brought to Digulturrang in a critical condition. The Bara Sahib seeing a white boy and learning of his antecedent had the patient admitted in the estate hospital. Planters on hearing of the English boy, gone native, decided to get him back to their civilization. Colleagues of the boy's father helped to send Arthur to St. Paul's School, in Darjeeling. However, the lad so much at home with the local tribesman and the wild animals of Assam, especially the elephants, was a total misfit "among" his own. The English language and the western culture he was being educated in was totally alien to him. Not being able to express his inner feelings he developed a violent temper and was quick with his fists, traits that made teachers and students leave Arthur alone. The loner not academically inclined, but excelling in sports and games, left school before completing his final studies and returned back to Assam. With the tea industries expanding rapidly contractors were engaged to clear the jungle for plantations. A renowned contractor was Walter Smiles, later knighted to become Sir Walter. The gentleman, who engaged elephants for jungle clearance, employed young Nuttal and put him in charge of the herd, a job he loved. But the fiery temper, which develops when one is brought up in a disturbed environment, surfaced and Nuttal fell

out with his employer. It was with a heavy heart that he said goodbye to his beloved elephants. He joined the Railways as a temporary ticket collector at Makum Junction. Those days the Railways had a three-tier salary system, for Europeans, Anglo Indians and Indians. Arthur was paid the middle wages. Finding out that he was entitled to the European scale Nuttal applied but got no justice. The refusal of the higher scale was on the grounds that although he was a white man he lived like a native. In frustration he resigned. A planter seeing Arthur in Makum offered him an apprentice's post in Moran T.E. By dint of hard work Arthur Nuttal was promoted to the covenanted ranks and proved to be a diligent planter. He was very energetic and able to realize good work from the labourers without friction. He was adept at all garden work. Could do a full nirrick in pruning and pluck as well as the best plucker. His weakness was friction with fellow planters, especially seniors, poor administration and hostility to paper work. He was nicknamed Nutty Nuttal by his colleagues for his eccentricities. He went to England on leave, his first trip overseas. While in UK he met and married an English lady. It was only after marriage that he was taught to live like a foreigner. The English mem that turned Nuttal into a "British sahib" was, however, unable to curb the fiery temper, even when he became the Acting Superintendent of Moran Tea Company. In the 40's Assam came into the orbit of World War II. The Japanese Air Force bombed many areas and their land forces moved rapidly through Manipur into the Naga Hills, then a district of Assam Province. Planters evacuated their families out of the war zone. The tide turned only after the Battle of Kohima when the Japanese were defeated and started retreating. When the Superintendent of Moran Tea Company went to leave his family in Darjeeling, Nuttal, the Acting Superintendent spread the rumour that his senior had run away. The rumour cost Nuttal his job. With a family to support, the couple had two kids; Arthur Nuttal accepted work as a temporary garden assistant with the Makum (Assam) Tea Co in '44. In 1947 he was promoted as Senior Assistant and put in charge of Top Side division of Margherita TE. In 1951 he was transferred to Namdang Tea Co where he received his billet in Bogapani. Bogapani, in the 50's, was in the midst of a thick jungle infested with wild animals. News of a rogue tusker, creating havoc at the Bogapani railway station, was reported with Government orders to destroy the pachyderm. Nuttal went to inspect it. He looked at the rogue and declared that it was not wild. He slowly approached the animal, talking in mahout's language. Soon he had the animal following him and led the tusker away from the railway tracks, where a train was held up. When forest personnel queried as to how the sahib knew that the elephant was not wild he pointed to the faint chain marks on the animal's feet. Nuttal was Manager of Bogapani from 1951 to 1959. During his term he cleared the estate of encroachers and started the out garden Nazirating, then infested with tigers. For killing a man-eater, he was given a small plot of land by the forest authorities for a shikar camp. The story goes that every time Nuttal went for a shoot he moved the Nazirating boundary pillars thus acquiring 100 hectares of prime forestland for the company. To clear the jungle two retired sirdars were given the timber as bakshis. Once the trees were removed, he distributed the land to the workers and allowed them to cultivate ahu paddy for two years. With the land levelled Nuttal started planting. Today, even after half a century, Nazirating has some of the finest teas. The fiery tempers never abated and lead to Nuttal's final downfall. He quarrelled with the Superintendent and was dismissed. In 1959, aged 53, he left India for England with his family for good. Arthur Mansfield Nuttal passed away in the 80's. The story does not end here. During his bachelor days Nuttal frequented Shillong where a Khasi lady befriended him. Out of that friendship a male child was born. When the boy was of school going age Nuttal had him admitted to Dr. Graham's Home, Kalimpong, with the instructions that the boy must never be told of his father. The youngster grew up and went off to England where he married and settled down. Just a few years

back he, with his wife, came looking for his roots. In Shillong he met Mr Peter Furst, an ex-patriate and the last European Superintendent of the erstwhile Makum Namdang Company. Peter, who had worked under A.M.Nuttal as an assistant, on retirement settled in Shillong, where he still resides. The visitor from England asked Peter to narrate about his father. It was with rapt attention that the couple listened to what Peter had to say. When he finished the lady quietly remarked that her husband was just like Arthur Mansfield Nuttal, a father the son never knew. ALI. N. ZAMAN Ex Manager Bogapani (1988 – 1997).

Regen Agri - a boon for the Tea Industry by Uddhab Sarmah

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/uddhab-sarmah-8a606a37_reproducing-my-article-published-in-the-most-activity-7274781952266690560-1ySq?utm_medium=ios_app&utm_source=social_share_sheet&utm_campaign=share_via

The Assam Tribune

Date 16 Dec 2024

‘RegenAgri’ – a boon for tea industry

UDDHAB CHANDRA SARMAH

The RegenAgri certification represents a transformative opportunity for the age-old tea industry, offering a pathway to revitalization and long-term sustainability. Given the industry’s challenges, including environmental degradation, fluctuating markets, and labour-related issues, adopting regenerative agricultural practices could emerge as a ‘survival strategy’ for the 200-year-old sector. This requires a holistic approach to convince all stakeholders of the tea industry to come together on a common platform.

Now, to answer why RegenAgri matters for tea and how it works, the following objectives, which contribute to the benefits of RegenAgri, can be narrated as follows:

Sustainability and soil health: RegenAgri focuses on practices that restore soil

health, conserve water, and enhance biodiversity – critical needs for tea plantations that have long relied on intensive monoculture farming.

Economic viability: By improving ecosystem services (such as pollination and nutrient cycling), these methods can reduce dependency on chemical inputs and lower production costs while potentially commanding higher prices for sustainably produced tea.

Climate resilience: Tea plantations are highly vulnerable to climate change. RegenAgri-certified practices can help build resilience by improving soil carbon sequestration and reducing emissions.

Global market alignment: As consumers and retailers increasingly prioritize sustainable and ethically sourced products, RegenAgri certification aligns the industry with evolving market expectations. ‘RegenAgri’ is a global initiative that supports

regenerative agricultural practices, which aim to enhance soil health, biodiversity, and ecosystem services. One of its key contributions is carbon sequestration, where carbon is captured and stored in the soil and vegetation. This translates to benefits for tea farmers in terms of carbon credits:

1. Promoting Regenerative Practices for Carbon Sequestration

RegenAgri works with tea farmers to adopt sustainable practices that increase organic matter in the soil, enhancing its capacity to store carbon. These practices include:

Cover cropping: Growing cover crops reduces soil erosion, enhances soil structure, and increases organic matter, capturing atmospheric CO₂.

No-till or reduced tillage: Reduces soil disturbance, preventing carbon release and promoting carbon retention.

Crop rotation and diversification: Boosts biodiver-



sity and soil health, improving long-term carbon sequestration.

Agroforestry and perennial crops: Incorporates trees and long-term vegetation, which are effective carbon sinks.

Integrated livestock management: Proper grazing techniques improve pasture health and carbon storage in grasslands.

2. Measurement and monitoring of carbon sequestration

RegenAgri employs technologies such as:

Soil testing: Regular test-

Earn carbon credits: Farmers can monetize the sequestered carbon by selling carbon credits in global carbon markets. These credits are purchased by industries and companies aiming to offset their emissions.

Participate in sustainable supply chains: RegenAgri connects farmers with corporations that value sustainable practices, offering incentives beyond carbon credits.

4. Economic and environmental benefits

Farmers’ revenue: Carbon credits provide an additional income stream, encouraging the adoption of sustainable practices.

Improved soil health: Enhanced productivity and reduced dependence on synthetic inputs.

Climate resilience: Healthier soils lead to better water retention, reducing vulnerability to droughts and floods. By helping farmers

improve soil health and access carbon markets, RegenAgri not only supports climate change mitigation but also ensures sustainable livelihoods for tea farmers.

Need for a holistic approach

To ensure widespread adoption of RegenAgri principles, the following steps are critical:

Stakeholder engagement: Tea growers, manufacturers, traders, policymakers, and certifying bodies must collaborate on a shared platform to align goals and standards.

Education and capacity building: Many stakeholders in the tea sector may need training to adopt and maintain regenerative practices.

Incentives and support: Governments, NGOs, and private entities should offer financial incentives or subsidies to offset the transition costs for smallholder tea farmers.

Transparent communication: A clear understanding of the benefits (both ecological and economic) is essential to garner industry-wide support.

Monitoring and reporting: Reliable systems for tracking the impacts of regenerative practices will boost credibility and stakeholder trust.

Francis Constantini, CEO of RegenAgri, in an interview during the Asia Alliance held recently in Kolkata, said: “The Indian Tea Industry is at a critical juncture due to climate change, soil degradation, and regulatory demands. RegenAgri promotes regenerative agriculture practices that restore ecosystems. For tea producers, this means improving soil health, increasing biodiversity, and enhancing water retention.”

(The writer is retired Executive Director, Warren Tea Limited, and senior tea specialist, Solidaridad Asia.)

Darjeeling tea production down below 6 mkg in 2024



BREWING WOES. The fall in production is due to adverse weather conditions, climate change and lack of tea pluckers

Mithun Dasgupta
Kolkata

Production of the world-famous aromatic Darjeeling tea, which has got protected Geographical Indication, fell below 6 million kg in 2024. The output is feared to be the lowest on record.

The production was hit hard by adverse weather conditions and falling demand.

Darjeeling tea production stood at 6.01 million kg in 2024 compared to 6.93 million kg in 2023, according to Tea Board of India data.

HISTORICAL LOW

"Production fell below 6 million kg in 2024 due to adverse weather conditions, climate change and lack of tea pluckers and absenteeism of workers in gardens. This would be the lowest production almost ever in recent history," Indian Tea Exporters Association (ITEA) Chairman Anshuman Kanoria told *businessline*.

Premium tea depends on rain and favourable weather for both quantity and quality of the brew, which is special and fetches the highest price in the market.

Darjeeling's tea industry has been witnessing a gradual fall in production over the last decade and more.

In 2011, production of the aromatic tea was 9.14 million kg, while it was 8.13 million kg in 2016.

"Up to November last

year, the production was 5.59 million kg. And, there was no production in December. Every year, the production has been dropping. Apart from climatic change, factors such as less domestic demand is also leading to the fall in production," Calcutta Tea Traders Association Secretary Kalyan Sundaram said.

According to industry insiders, competition from Nepal tea has lowered demand for Darjeeling tea in the domestic market. Traders are selling the cheap variety of tea grown in Nepal, which is up to 50 per cent less costly compared to the Darjeeling variety.

"Prices were suppressed for the Darjeeling tea as both domestic and international demand were poor. Export for 2024 would remain the same as compared to 2023," Kanoria added.

In the overseas markets, shipments of Darjeeling tea generally stand around 3-3.25 million kg annually. Europe and Japan are the two large overseas markets for this premium tea, the first product to get a geographical identification (GI) tag in India.

India's total tea export, however, was up around 245-260 million kg in 2024 compared with 231.69 million kg in 2023. Mainly due to an increase in shipments to Iran and Iraq, the tea industry witnessed higher exports despite geopolitical tensions.

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/kanan-devan-hills-plantations-company-pvt-ltd-kdhp-_2025-what-strategies-can-sustain-growth-activity-7281886299827945472-vifS?utm_medium=ios_app&utm_source=social_share_sheet&utm_campaign=mail



We are pleased to share the podcast for businessline by our CEO and Managing Director, Mr. K Mathew Abraham , who currently serves as the President of the United Planters' Association of Southern India (UPASI). With his vast expertise and experience in the plantation industry, Mr. Abraham shares his valuable insights into the current state of the economy and its impact on the plantation sector.

<https://lnkd.in/giHhaHvd>

State of the Economy podcast. 2025: What strategies can sustain growth in India's plantation sector?

"Price increase was largely a supply side phenomenon rather than a demand side factor, as there has been a decline in production due to the adverse impact of climate change, which is indeed not a very encouraging scenario." says K Mathew Abraham, President, United Planters Association of Southern India (UPASI).

By Vishwanath Kulkarni Rowan Barnett Siddharth Mathew Cherian

Updated - January 05, 2025 at 07:14 PM.

In this episode of businessline's State of the Economy podcast, Vishwanath Kulkarni speak to K. Mathew Abraham, President of the United Planters Association of Southern India, and Managing Director & CEO of Kanan Devan Hills Plantations Company (P) Ltd, on the current state of India's plantation sector in 2024, discussing its challenges, opportunities, and what the future holds for this vital industry.

The year 2024 proved to be a mixed bag for the plantation sector. While commodities like tea, coffee, cardamom, and rubber saw bullish price trends, several external factors created hurdles. Erratic climate patterns, geopolitical tensions, and rising costs deeply affected production and profitability.

Abraham highlights how global conflicts, including those in Ukraine, Russia, and West Asia, disrupted maritime trade routes like the Suez Canal, compounding logistical costs. He remarks, "Price increase was largely a supply side phenomenon rather than a demand side factor, as there has been a decline in production due to the adverse impact of climate change, which is indeed not a very encouraging scenario."

The discussion also underscored that higher commodity prices did not translate to higher profits due to escalating input costs. Wages, fertilizers, fuel, and pesticides have seen significant price hikes, further straining margins. Abraham explains, "The present price rise therefore mostly gets nullified and as a matter of fact, in real terms, the commodity prices are still on a decline."

Looking ahead, Abraham acknowledges a mixed short-term forecast. While coffee and spices show positive price trends in the short term, commodities like tea are expected to face more challenges. He stresses the need for structural changes to overcome hurdles and sustain growth.

"Importantly, what needs to be done is to have a holistic approach for all plantation commodities to enable the sector to be cost competitive in the marketplace by optimizing mechanisation while simultaneously also investing in long-term field developmental programs," Abraham notes. He emphasises the importance of government subsidies, R&D investments for climate-resilient clones, and marketing efforts to boost global demand for Indian plantation products.

Listen in!

(Host: Vishwanath Kulkarni; Producer: Rowan Barnett, Siddharth Mathew Cherian)

About the State of the Economy podcast

India's economy has been hailed as a bright spot amid the general gloom that seems to have enveloped the rest of the world. But several sectors continue to stutter even as others seem set to fire on all cylinders.

Stagnation of Tea prices considered as Major Challenge for Tea Industry – By Uddhab Sarmah

*click on link: [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/uddhab-sarmah-8a606a37_stagnation-of-tea-prices-challenge-for-activity-7282685137098526720-85XR?](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/uddhab-sarmah-8a606a37_stagnation-of-tea-prices-challenge-for-activity-7282685137098526720-85XR?utm_medium=ios_app&utm_source=social_share_sheet&utm_campaign=mail)
[utm_medium=ios_app&utm_source=social_share_sheet&utm_campaign=mail](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/uddhab-sarmah-8a606a37_stagnation-of-tea-prices-challenge-for-activity-7282685137098526720-85XR?utm_medium=ios_app&utm_source=social_share_sheet&utm_campaign=mail)
or copy and paste in your browser to read*

Looking back by By Devender Bhalla (Ex Andrew Yule)

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1EJeSVrHw2/?mibextid=wwXlfr>

A trip back in time. Despite the paucity of time and a tiring 3 1/2 hour drive down from Darjeeling to Siliguri decided to fulfil one of my 'bucket list' desires of revisiting the Dooars Tea Estates of Banarhat and Choonabhutti (approx. 3 hours each way) where I started my career almost 57 years earlier on 1st Oct 1968. It was truly nostalgic. They still had the same solid wooden bed I used in my bedroom (on the right) ! However, not surprisingly, the hand cranked 'magneto' telephone in the garage to contact the Office and Factory was no longer there.

Mr Bidhan Sangha the present occupant told me that wild elephants still visited the bungalow despite the huge bamboo grove (whose tender shoots the elephants love) having been replaced by tea sections some time ago. The worst incident i experienced was when on one Wed Club Night around 12:30 am, Birsa, the night Chowkidar standing on the plinth of the Bungalow refused to



open the gates for me on my motorcycle (with silencers removed) as there were 5 'Badkas' ie Ganesh ie wild elephants. Elephants are reputedly angered when there is loud noise, abusive language and the smell of alcohol. I was guilty on all 3 counts. So after several 'Ma Behan' galis and the threat of termination, Birsa relented and opened the gates allowing me to park my motorbike (in the 3 car garage) and run up to the plinth on the bungalow to observe the elephants 'in action'. Wednesday Club nights at Binaguri were very important (including watching the movie, playing billiards, getting drunk, singing and dancing on the bar before driving to Niamat's Dhaba for Chicken Curry, Dal and Tandoori Rotis and then around 1am or later driving back to start our respective factories with a strong sobering glass of coffee). Sports played an important role too. I was the 'B Meet' Dooars Tennis champion in 1970-71 (as the name suggests it was the lesser of the two annual Dooars Tennis tournaments) Anyway, while i had to return the Cup I still treasure my prize of two silver napkin holders. I was also the Goalkeeper for the Central Dooars Club as well as the Dooars Football Team (we played Dr Grahams Homes in Kalimpong and St Pauls in Darjeeling -



where we were soundly thrashed on both occasions). Memories also flooded back of initially having to cycle at around 2am or 3am (depending on the quantum of leaf plucked) to start the factory (some 2 1/2 kms away ... which seemed like over 10 kms then) with a torch in my left hand and an umbrella in my right... praying that I was not attacked by a wild elephant or a leopard or bitten by a snake. Fortunately, my beloved father despatched a Jawa 250cc motorcycle to me within a week. I did lose my pet Bhutia puppy to a leopard who left it in a tree in the compound (since uprooted) and I had umpteen visits by

wild elephants, who thoroughly appreciated the bananas on the trees planted by my front garden 'mali' along the flimsy boundary fencing of the bungalow. I understand that the retinue of staff that we had is still being maintained ie Cook (Bawarchi), Masalchi (or upper help), Paniwala (the one who serves water and food and makes the beds etc), front gardener, rear vegetable garden Mali, day time and night time Chowkidars and of course the 'patti walis' female staff deputed to pick up fallen leaves and keep the compounds clean! I also spent some time looking across at the Army Camp, a short distance away on the right, remembering the legendary Lt. Gen. Walter Anthony Gustavo "WAG" Pinto (then a Brigadier) of the 66 Mountain Brigade (who at that time lived there) and his motto "Bash on Regardless" proudly emblazoned on his Willys Jeep (and on all his Battle Tanks as well, I reckon). Gen Pinto was the hero of the Battle of Basantar fought in the Western Theatre in Dec 1971. It might seem to many that the life of a Tea Planter was laid back luxury. But it was tough. There were usually only 3 Managerial Staff (the Manager, Senior Assistant and a Junior Assistant) to handle around / over 2,000 workers and oversee around 2,000 hectares of property. Even as a 20 year old Assistant Manager one was a 'Mai Baap' to whom the workers looked up to and expected to know everything - from cultivation practices, to manufacturing and machinery to handling an aggrieved worker whose wife had run off with someone else !

The Dooars Tea Estates were connected to Calcutta by Jamair which landed in the Football fields of various Tea Estates (our nearest one was Telipara). I recall an incident on one of my earliest flights, where the Co Pilot turned out to be my Sherwood College, Nanintal classmate Alan Gill who invited me into the cockpit after take-off where I found the Pilot and Navigator drinking Rum and playing cards on an Army disposal blanket on the aeroplane floor, while Alan Gill was reading a Max Brand novel while the plane was on auto pilot. Anyway, I had a chilled beer (thanks to Alan opening the side window and sticking the beer bottle outside for a couple of minutes) and smoked a cigarette seated in the Pilot's seat while Alan Gill (subsequently Chief Flying Instructor of Air India) skimmed over the Shade Trees of the Tea Gardens below. BTW I was the only passenger on board. The rest of the plane was occupied by Tea Chests and Goats (for the mutton hungry in Calcutta). Intrepid pilots those Jamair guys and their trustworthy all weather all terrain Douglas DC-3 "Dakota" aeroplanes. Chapeau!

By Devender Bhalla (Ex Andrew Yule)

Bygone Plantation Days : A Legacy of Stories - Reju George

(*) <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/161APg4EHD/?mibextid=wwXlfr>

A typical Sunday afternoon scenario of a Plantation Club in the bygone days irrespective of the location. Pure Nostalgia

MEMORIES OF THE LATE FORTIES:
Club Life By Tea Planter Bill Charlier
The photo shows a collection of erstwhile planters having a cold weather Sunday lunch-time session on the veranda of the old Sonari Club.



In those days there was an ample supply of imported AMSTELL BEER. From left to right, the photo shows Mac (?), Margaret Lobbin, Geordie Reed, Dr. Muir and Mrs. Muir. The vacant chair was mine.

During this period in the cold weather, polo was played at the club twice a week, Monday and Thursdays. There were some very good players - Ginger Morris, Brough, Worman. We could muster three teams.

The club was rather formal. Two very senior Memsahibs of Sonari, who had been in tea since the early twenties, sat on the veranda to receive felicitations from assistants of a junior status. There was however a problem. One was more senior than the other by a mere few months. To pass your greetings, in error, to the junior one first was to incur the displeasure from the husband of the senior one later, in the Mens' Bar, in such a way that everybody would know about it. Treading very carefully was the order of the day. These were Burra Sahibs of thirty years or more and were men to be aware of by Junior Assistants.

After three and a half years in Towkok, I was posted to Moran District.

A Journey into the Unknown: Bill started his planting career from Royal Airforce after the end of World War II

When the war ended in 1945, everybody was trying to find a job as most of us were going to be demobbed. Fortunately, through family connections, I heard of some jobs, which might be available. Whilst still in the RAF, I went to London to meet the Chairman of the Assam Company. He said that there was the possibility of a job in Tea in India. Other choices included openings in Africa and in America. I chose Tea.

Credit courtesy: koi hai com

Uploading my article published today in 'The Sentinel' (23rd January) for kind attention of all Small Tea Growers and concerned authorities to initiate a process of 'Green Revolution' for Organic Teas (safe , sustainable and healthy production of teas) like in Sikkim.

Assam STGs need guidance for organic tea cultivations like Sikkim

Uddhab Chandra Sarmah

(uddhab@solidaridadnetwork.org)

Within the tea supply chain, the Small Tea Growers (STGs) have grown exponentially over the last 40 years. The Tea Board of India defines a Small Tea Grower as a person who has a tea cultivation of up to 25 acres. But in the current scenario, most growers own less than 2 acres of land. A sizable number of small farmers, especially in upper Assam, have taken up tea cultivation during the last 30-35 years. In 2018, Assam produced around 691.91 million kg out of which 304.49 million kg (44.01%) were from the Small Tea Grower segments. The trend is increasing, and the production may exceed 500 million kg in the coming years. Further, from the total tea production of India in 2018 which was 1338.63 million kg almost 52% of tea was from the Small Tea Growers segments thereby showcasing as one of the most enterprising revolutionary segments of India.

As per Tea Board of India data, as of May 2024, there are a total of 1,25,484 small tea growers in the state, who have 1,17,304 hectares of land under cultivation and contribute nearly 48 percent of the total tea produced annually in the state.

Let us explore the scope of how best the areas under tea cultivation of small tea growers who have been holding areas ranging from half a bigha to about 5-6 bighas per family of 80-85% of the total population of STGs, can be converted to sustainable organic tea cultivations like in Sikkim which is declared as the or-

ganic state of India. This will help the farmers to grow teas to produce 100% organic teas from the food safety point of view.

Transitioning the tea cultivation areas of small tea growers (STGs) into sustainable organic farming can provide numerous benefits, including improved soil health, better market prices, environmental safety, and enhanced tea quality. Drawing lessons from Sikkim, India's first organic state, a structured approach is required to achieve this transformation. Here's a roadmap to explore the scope and implement this change effectively:

1. Policy and Institutional Support

- **Incentives and Subsidies:** Governments and local authorities should provide financial support for organic inputs (compost, bio-pesticides, etc.) and certification costs.

- **Formation of Farmer Collectives:** Cooperatives or Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) can help small growers pool resources, share knowledge, and access markets.

- **Research and Development:** Collaboration with institutions like Tea Research Associations and agricultural universities can provide localized solutions for organic tea cultivation.

2. Capacity Building and Training

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Educate STGs about the benefits of organic farming for health, environment, and marketability.

- **Training Programmes:** Conduct workshops on organic farming prac-

tices like composting, vermiculture, intercropping, and natural pest management.

- **Skill Development:** Offer practical sessions for managing organic tea gardens and using bio-fertilizers effectively.

3. Soil Health Management

- **Soil Testing:** Assess the soil health of STG holdings to determine specific requirements for organic conversion.

- **Composting and Vermiculture:** Encourage the production of organic manure using locally available biomass and farm waste.

- **Mulching and Cover Crops:** Promote practices to maintain soil moisture and fertility.

4. Adoption of Organic Practices

- **Prohibition of Chemical Inputs:** Gradual phase-out of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides with natural alternatives.

- **Intercropping and Biodiversity:** Introduce companion crops and native plants to enhance biodiversity and reduce pest issues.

- **Integrated Pest Management (IPM):** Use natural predators, neem-based sprays, and other bio-pesticides.

5. Certification and Market Linkages

- **Simplified Certification Process:** Streamline organic certification for small growers through group certifications or government schemes.

- **Market Access:** Develop partnerships with organic tea buyers, both domestic and international, ensuring premium pricing.

- **Brand Development:** Promote organic tea as a unique, high-quality product to enhance market visibility.

6. Financial Assistance and Insurance

- **Subsidized Loans:** Offer low-

interest loans to STGs for organic conversion.

- **Crop Insurance:** Provide coverage for risks during the transition period to organic cultivation.

7. Learning from Sikkim's Success

- **Government Commitment:** Replicate Sikkim's policy model, where the government played a critical role in banning chemical inputs and promoting organics.

- **Community Involvement:** Foster community-led initiatives for organic certification and market access.

8. Environmental and Health Benefits

- **Sustainability:** Organic farming practices reduce carbon footprints and improve ecological balance.

- **Safe Produce:** Organic tea is free from harmful residues, ensuring consumer safety.

9. Monitoring and Feedback

- **Regular Assessments:** Monitor the progress of organic conversions through farmer feedback and field inspections.

- **Adaptive Practices:** Modify practices based on climatic conditions and local challenges.

Conclusion: With proper planning, financial assistance, and technical support, small tea growers can emulate Sikkim's organic success. This will not only improve the livelihoods of STGs but also contribute to environmental conservation and public health.

However, all said and done, the untiring support and commitment from the government must be exhibited to ensure that Assam STGs can also convert 'Assam Teas' into full organic produce that is not only tasty with flavour but also safe and healthy from all impurities.

Mastering others is strength. Mastering yourself is true power.

— Lao Tzu



Guwahati: Assam's tea industry is undergoing a transformation thanks to the Small Tea Growers Sustainability Program (STGSP). Since its launch in 2023 by IDH, a Netherlands-headquartered global development organization, and Unilever, the program has made significant progress in promoting sustainable agriculture among small tea growers (STGs). Assam's small tea growers adopt sustainable practices with STGSP

by NE NOW NEWS

(*) <https://m.nenow.in/article/assam/assams-small-tea-growers-adopt-sustainable-practices-with-stgsp/409537>

February 10, 2025 3: 32 pm

Since its launch in 2023, the program has made significant progress in promoting sustainable agriculture among small tea growers.

Guwahati: Assam's tea industry is undergoing a transformation thanks to the Small Tea Growers Sustainability Program (STGSP).

Since its launch in 2023 by IDH, a Netherlands-headquartered global development organization, and Unilever, the program has made significant progress in promoting sustainable agriculture among small tea growers (STGs).



As of January 2025, pruning operations, crucial for high-quality green leaf production, have been completed on over 60% of participating farms.

Further, soil tests have been conducted for more than 600 STGs, enabling the development of targeted manuring plans to address nutrient deficiencies and boost productivity.

STGSP aims to improve the livelihoods of 1,500 STGs associated with four Bought Leaf Factories (BLFs) in the Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts.

The programme supports sustainable farming methods, enhances market access, and facilitates alternative income sources, empowering growers to strengthen their agricultural practices and economic resilience.

“STGSP is committed to ongoing engagement, training, and capacity-building,” said Jatin Bavishi, Program Manager of STGSP.

He highlighted the program's impact by mentioning the recent Farmers' Meet – Krishak Sammilan held in Dibrugarh on February 5, where over 150 growers discussed progress and explored opportunities for sustainable tea cultivation.

Bavishi added, "Our teams have provided direct support to improve plucking standards and raise awareness about the optimal use of fertilizers and chemicals. While quality improvements take 3–4 years to fully materialize, we are encouraged by the increasing adoption of good agricultural practices. Over 70% of STGs have also diversified into alternative livelihood options to supplement their incomes."

IDH works to transform markets through collaborative innovation, convening and investing in inclusive and sustainable solutions.

For 16 years, IDH has mobilized private sector investment and support to develop new business models that create better jobs, incomes, environments, and gender equity.

The organization brings together stakeholders from across global value chains to achieve joint visions and program agendas for sustainable trade in key agricultural, manufacturing, apparel, and commodity value chains.

Bygone Plantation Days : A Legacy of Stories - Reju George

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1X1hVCNqn1/?mibextid=wwXlfr>

The Disastrous Dinner Party & Firpos Calcutta

Have you been in a situation in your plantation in the bygone days, a dinner party where guests have arrived but not the food???? Read on....

Memories of Bill Charlier , a Tea Planter in Assam Tea Estates in the years 1945 to 1960sThe photographs show some of the guests at that party.

In the cold weather of the early sixties, I decided to have a large dinner party at DoomurDullong burra bungalow for most of Moran District.

I decided to ask the help of Pops of Sky Players who ran the Dakota service twice weekly into the DD strip. A meal for about forty people was to be flown up from Firpos Restaurant in Calcutta. This was to arrive on the afternoon of the day of the party. The day came, all arrangements made, but as the afternoon progressed, no plane arrived. In some desperation I tried to find out where my dinner had got to. By six o'clock, no word. But, the only two places it could have possibly been was Mackeypore in Nazira or in Gologhat airstrips. In desperation I located Vibu Raj, the factory assistant, gave him the jeep and dispatched him to find my dinner.

The guests started to arrive, still no Vibu with our dinner. Disaster!!!! I had to announce calmly to our guests that there was no dinner. It had not arrived from Calcutta. There was an abject silence.

Then suddenly the memsahibs sprang to action. "We shall find some food! 'Some of them went off to their bungalows on nearby estates. Within a couple of hours, they had produced a splendid spread. The day was saved.

In the early hours of the morning, a bedraggled Vibu turned up with three tea chests packed with the Firpos' dinner. He had found it in a Sky Players store in Golghat.

Now, what to do with the food? We unpacked it and made it up into lots according to the number of guests and in the morning my jeep made a round of the district, dropping off the Firpos' dinner!



The photographs show some of the guests at that party.

Have you been in a situation in your plantation, a dinner party where guests have arrived but not the food????.

In Assamese, Dommur Dullung means "the fisherman's bridge". This estate is one of the plantations of the Assam Company, established in 1839 by a royal deed of the British Parliament. One of the earliest and largest estates of the Assam Company, planted in the 1840's Dommur Dullung extends over 1,000 hectares. In the local language, Dommur Dullung means "the fisherman's bridge".

It's famous for producing one of India's rarest teas: the white tea. These well-aged Silver Needle Tips & leaves are carefully picked a few days in the year, then slightly fired, steamed and dried in the open air to give this tea its exquisite dark-sweet taste. It won the Silver Medal in the World Food Expo in Paris, way back in 1862.

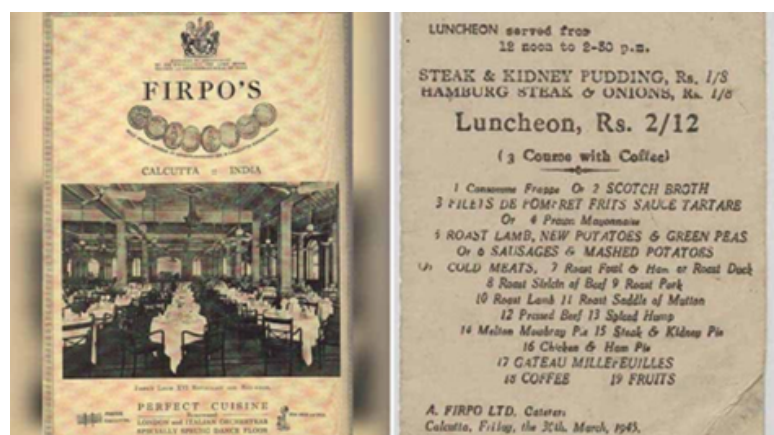


Firpos, the iconic restaurant in Calcutta was opened in 1917 during World War I by an Italian named Angelo Firpo. It started as a tea room selling cakes, pastries and other confectionery items and soon turned into a full-fledged family dining hall. Such was the reputation of its authentic Continental fare and extraordinary ambience, that the Governor of Bengal made it his choice of venue for Sunday lunches.

It was famous for its five course meals and a legendary night club.

#rejuceorge #assam #tea

Credit courtesy: Story shared from Koi Hai Com, google, telegraph India



Bygone Plantation Days : A Legacy of Stories - Reju George

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1X1hVCNqn1/?mibextid=wwXlfr>

Ging Tea House: The Tale of the Hills & The Gurungs & David Fountainlittle - the last British General Manager

Ging Tea Estate is one of the oldest tea plantations in and around the hills of Darjeeling. It is an uninterrupted stretch of 600 hectares at 3000 feet above sea level.

Ging Tea Estate was one of the first four tea gardens started by the Darjeeling Tea Company in 1860s.

Ging Tea Estate is also known for its estate bungalow in the bygone days called "Barra Bungalow", which is one of the first tea plantation bungalow built by the British. The most beautiful part of this story is that the generations of the Gurung community is part of this heritage plantation, carrying forward the legacy & the tale of the hills to present and future generations. Here is one such story of a loyal and faithful retainer.

Built in 1864, legend has it that The Tea House was one of the first colonial tea planter's bungalows made in the Darjeeling region against the backdrop of the majestic Kanchenjunga Range. The house which has been tastefully restored keeping its colonial heritage intact, is admirably classic in style was then called " Barra Bungalow". This historic house is surrounded by beautiful well maintained private gardens with a stunning serene vista of the Himalayas. Gurung community is very part of the Ging Tea Estate. The Gurung are a Tibetan ethnic group who live in Nepal, Bhutan, and India. They are known for their culture, music, and history as soldiers in the British and Indian armies.

This historic tea bungalow has been over generations looked after by this particular Gurung family.

Bidwan the English-speaking driver at Ging Tea Estates has driven the car for the Burra Sahib since 1975 and now drives the guests to the estates around telling them the tales of the hills. He is a treasure trove of stories of the bygone era collected while hovering around the Burra Bungalow as a child while his father Mr Kumar Gurung was the chauffeur to Mr David Fountainlittle - General Manager of the Ging Tea Estates under the British Tea Company in the 1960s.

The Gurung Family has served since and now with the newest generation of Rajat and Anju taking care of the guests. Bidwan's nephew Rajat joined as a baker and now a sous chef and Bidwan daughter Anju joined as a fresher and takes care of Tea Tours in the plantation.

Ging Tea House is a home to one of the most beautiful sunsets of the Himalayas with the experience of serenity and peace.

Inside, the tranquility and atmosphere of a family home are all still intact in Ging Tea House. The rooms with ancient stone fireplaces, with old wooden flooring and exposed rafters on the high ceiling, complete with period furniture and drapes and an antique piano reminiscent from the pioneering days of the Tea Bungalow.

The Ging Tea House is an study of the Period Furniture with its wide array of style like the antique Calcutta Bed, Bengal Bed made from Burma Teak, Country Spool Poster Bed, classic colonial bed, Empress cupboards and so on. indeed, a stunning collection of antique furniture - cane chair, antique British cupboard, antique rosewood dressing table, study, antique king bed etc

As one of the largest producers of Darjeeling tea, Ging Tea Estate, alongside its other sister gardens have been pioneers in introducing organic practices to the tea industry. This Tea Estate is now part of the Chamong group.

The organic tea from Ging is sold mainly to traders in Germany and Japan, who then package it under different labels and send it across the world.

Preserving the eco system is one of the gardens foremost drives and the locals of the estate have shown them the beauty of coexisting with the wild flora and fauna. With more than 60% of the estate left uncultivated, the mountain wildlife has not been disturbed.

[#rejuceorge](#) [#tea](#) [#darjeeling](#) [#darjeelingtea](#)

Credit courtesy : google, Ging Tea House



An Expedition to SPR (Selected Place of Residence)

I read an interesting narrative of one of my friends Ravi Nair, my name sake about the good old times of his father, a VCO coming on leave from NWFA where the latter was posted. It read like an expedition to his selected place of residence, South of Vindhya Ranges!!!

Reading this, I too was reminded of my travails to reach home from the borders, half a century ago. I venture to jot down my memories for posterity. I vividly remember coming on my first Annual leave from the Mizo Hills, *Vaphai Post*, bordering Burma (today's Myanmar) along the *Tio River*. — On foot for *four days* to reach the road head at *Tuirial- Aizawl*, that too at the convenience of 'Link Patrols', which ensured the protection to the foot columns. Then to *Masimpur* via *Warangte*, *Laylapur Rear*, in a Convoy of minimum 70-80 vehicles, with a vanguard and rear guard of Armoured Cars. Crouched in the body of a Shaktiman or a Tata Mercedes Benz 3 Ton truck, winding down, forcing one to throw up till nothing is left in one's aching bowels. And to *Silchar* to catch a meter gauge locomotive steaming out towards *Halflong*. From Halflong to *Guwahati* on a broad-gauge rail chugging sedately in no hurry, and we were disgorged at Gauhati in the dead of the night! From Gauhati to *New Bongaigaon* on a meter gauge.

At New Bongaigaon, walk across the sand banks to the waterlines of Brahmaputra with the coolie following, lugging one's steel trunk on the latter's head. By the way, the trunk had more of bottles than of any clothes, the latter acting only as paddings between bottles so that they do not break. Walk towards the River ends where the Steamer waited, to ferry one across the Ganges to *Farakka*. Few hours in the steamer which brought images of the huge paddle boats of the Amazon! Being a First-Class passenger, the steamer provided steaming rice with watery daal and pickles as dinner, then in utter contrast coffee served with decoction, cream and sugar in separate ceramic pots (chinked and dirty) - in true occidental style!! On reaching the other bank, long walk on river sand towards *New Jalpai Guri* railway station, where the rail-rake awaited with similar seat/ berth reservation arrangements.

The steam engine laboured the rake to *Sealdah Station* and from there to *Howrah* in a local train. Depositing one's luggage in the cloak room. A quick shower and shampoo at First Class Waiting Room, and 'non-itinerary visits' to Calcutta City just to have a feel of the metro life, and returning for the night train - *Coromandel Express* to *Madras*. After two nights reaching Madras early morning. Once again, put the luggage in the cloak room. Taxi ride to relative's house unannounced, and to the 24 x 7 movie halls - *Diamond, Emerald* and *Sapphire*, all housed in same building on Mount Road. Normally went off to sleep in the AC comfort of the movie hall, while intermittently watching *Taras Bulba*, which had no END, and kept repeating. Move next to *Madras Central* by evening, to catch the night's Cochin Express.

The 'Canadian Bullet Engine' took on the initial traction, and then the local snub-nosed ones which sneezed burning coal and dust throughout, brought one finally to *Cochin Harbour Terminus* by the next noon. _'Runglee Rungliot'_ meaning 'thus far and no further'. That was the termination of journey on rails, and thence forth in a 'yellow and black' Hindustan taxi for the move to Alleppey 65 kms away.

And, alas by evening, after a fortnight of having set forth from *Vaphai*, one entered one's 'selected place of residence' and to one's Sweet Home, waking up and surprising my mother and siblings - as the FL (Forces Letter) -FOAS (Free on Active Service) one had posted a month earlier from one's Picquet of announcing the sanctioning of my leave and tentative Travel Plan, had not reached my mother, after the customary censoring at 99 APO, _till then_. Hence, surprised indeed - they were! The matted hair filled with few pounds of coal dust and the telltale 'railway acquired syndromes' for over a week, like bugs and lice, had to be scrubbed off.

Answer mother knew, bar soap (used for washing clothes) and 'besan flour' with abrasive _'incha_ scrub', 'Amma's special concoction coconut oil massaged lavishly, and washed down with scores of buckets of water from the well, drawn and water cannoned by our 'Man Friday' Bhaskara Pillai, who showed many signs of kindness on the promise of two pegs in the evening!!!!

By now the meagre amount of ₹200/- discounted through a *Canara Bank, Boat Jetty Road Branch, Alleppey, cheque* from the Unit Baniya (Wet Canteen Contractor), for the journey had dried out. First thing in the morning was to visit one's bankers to whom all the salary - a princely sum of ₹ 345/- was remitted after the TDS of ₹5/- every month, irrespective of where one was posted!!! It was a big sum indeed, as a Sovereign ("Kuthira Pavan" of 8 gms of 22 k gold) costed only *₹ 90/-* then!!! Surprised to find nearly 2K in the bank to blow off!!!! Serving in 'Field', the entire salary got accumulated in the bank as there was no scope to spend in a Picquet, where 'roti, kapada, aur makkan' were free.!!!

With 'kuppies' (bottles) full in crates, crisp notes in the pocket, and cartons of 555 and Kent in lieu of a few pegs to right friends with US connections; And one's First Love - the original British Royal Enfield KLT 7724, always fully filled - life was worth living - Till the 'kuppi (booz)' and 'panam (money)' lasted!!! Then people start asking, "When are you returning?" Finally, one returns to Mother for a 'non-refundable loan', for financing the 'expedition back'.

Totally demoralised and 'home-sick' return, which would take a couple of Long Range Patrols to heal!!! The present generation soldier cannot imagine such a situation. Airforce Courier service, concessional air travels, authorised LTCs by Air, fast electric trains and the Farakka barrage over Ganges, beautiful roads wider than NHs crisscrossing and 'spiralling' the Mizo Hill heights - where we once heaved and perambulated, and above all the mobile phones which announced and videoed live, minute to minute progress of one's move etc - were non existent and couldn't even be thought of.

To achieve surprise nowadays is difficult!!! -- Ravi Nair - (Sikh LI)

Bygone Plantation Days : A Legacy of Stories - Reju George

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1Drc17H4x2/?mibextid=wwXlfr>

A tale of two tea planters: Claud Bald and F G Marsh

As a child, I knew that my maternal grandfather, F G 'Fred' Marsh, had been a tea planter in Darjeeling. My mother was born at Phoobsering Tea Estate in 1921 and considered herself to be 'Indian', her sister was born at Ging in 1919 but saw herself as 'English'. I also knew more vaguely that my maternal grandmother had also been born there and her father, Claud Bald, had 'written the book on tea'.

Much later in life I wanted to know more about my ancestors. Below is a summary of what I know with some pictures which revealed what Claud Bald and some other relative looked like together with a host of as yet unknown people. Perhaps you'll know some of them.

Claud Bald a tea pioneer

Claud Bald was born in Glasgow in 1853, to John Bald, a coffee merchant, and his wife Marjorie Wylie. As a youth, he trained as an engineer.

Claud began planting on the Lohargur Tea Estate in the Terai in 1877 at the age of 24, and he was also on Adulpore in the Terai at this early period but details are not known. In about 1881, he joined the Lebong Company in the Darjeeling district where he served successively as manager at Barnesberg, Badamtam and Tukvar over the next 26 years.

David Bald, a younger brother of Claud's, is the first of the family to appear in Indian records. He died of cholera in Calcutta in 3 April 1883 at the age of 24. He had been assistant foreman at 'Sindaria' in Darjeeling though I cannot find what or where Sindaria was. Perhaps David had gone to India in the care of his older brother or perhaps he joined him there later.

Sometime in 1883 Claud was presented with a small traveling clock awarded by Lieutenant A B L Webb of the Northern Bengal Volunteer Rifles, which implies that he was a member already. If the NBVR conducted their exercises and games in February, as was the case much later, he was probably a member well before then.

Perhaps his brother's death also underlined his mortality. In October 1883 at the age of 32 he married Glaswegian lass Margaret Ker, 8 years his junior, the eldest daughter of William and Margaret Ker. Mrs Ker was also a woman of strong religious faith. It is not clear where the marriage took place.





Why did he go to Darjeeling? Was it his engineering skills? He had arrived in the region at a time of rapid growth for the tea industry. In 1859 Dr Brougham started the Dhutaria garden and between 1860 and 1864 the Darjeeling Tea Company established four gardens at Ging, Ambutia, Tukdah and Phoobsering and the Lebong Tea Company established tea gardens at Tukvar and Badamtam. Tea production from 1866 to 1874 had increased by 89%, from 1874-1885 to 56.8%, from 1885 to 1895 by 22.4% and from 1895-1905, there was an increase of 5.9%. The increase was possible as the area of tea cultivation doubled from 1866 to 1874 in a period of two decades and increased by 34.8 % from 1874 to 1895.

In 1907, he became manager of the Tukvar Company's estates, holding this position until his retirement in 1918 at the age of 65. Claud was a supporter of missionaries and was also treasurer of the Union Church in Darjeeling. A poem in the Darjeeling Advertiser described him as a 'planter in the Master's field'.

Fred Marsh arrives

Fred Marsh was born to English immigrants Henry and Mary Marsh in Adelaide, South Australia, in 1891. He arrived in India sometime in 1912. Why did Fred move from South Australia to India? His eldest sister Edith was already there with her husband, Percy Clark. Clarke was a Baptist missionary in the part of Bengal which is now Bangladesh. She was often unwell and went to Darjeeling from time to time to recuperate. Fred had also gone there to learn the local languages ahead of becoming a missionary himself. Fred's objective changed when his younger brother Frank felt called to missionary work a few years later.

'Marsh', as Claud called the young Australian Fred, was his assistant manager from January 1913 effectively managing Singla TE. While he was there, he married Claud's eldest daughter Margaret in December 1917.

Claud was impressed with Fred as a son-in-law and also with his work ethic and horsemanship. He supported Fred's successful bid to become manager at Phoobsering in April 1919. Later that year, Claud left Darjeeling to spend his retirement in Worthing. Tea had been Claud's life and his book *Indian tea: its culture and manufacture*, Thacker & Spink, 1903, was revised in 1908, 1917 and in 1922 as a retirement project. Bald also wrote the cultivation of *Ficus elastic* published in 1906 and in 1919 published *Drainage for plantations: a practical hand-book*, which in part explains the operation of his invention of the sighting clinometer used to measure land flow. He died in 1924.

Claud's son – named after him and known by his middle name Wylie - did not take up plantation management, although he worked for tea agents Mango & Co in Calcutta and eventually moved to England changing direction completely.

Fred, along with most tea plantation managers from the area joined the Northern Bengal Mounted Rifles (NBMR). In his case, he joined shortly after the declaration of World War I, some two and a half years after his arrival. Claud had retired from the NBMR by that time. Fred's time at Phoobsering Every February, the Marsh family travelled to Julpaighuri where the NBMR had what Mum called their 'war-games'. After the adults had dined in the eating tent, called the 'mess', the children would dine with their Ayahs. As Mum's birthday was 14 February, she enjoyed tinned birthday cake on these occasions and thought this was all very 'boat rumrah cha' – highbrow.

On 15 January 1934, a severe earthquake opened up the ground under the Phoobsering house, probably some 70 years old. The house was rendered unliveable. Given the likelihood of more earthquakes, Fred decided to design a new 'earthquake proof' house. Fred and Margaret lived in half of the old house while the new one was being built. Arthur Ansell, an engineer who worked with Darjeeling Tea Company and family friend, designed the new house based on a concept of Fred's. Under the house were six concrete rollers and the house itself was essentially a pre-stressed concrete block. The theory being that in an earthquake, the whole block would move but not break. The house has since survived a number of strong earthquakes.

Times were bad in India in late 1939 early 1940, as they remembered it. The war was already having a 'terrible effect' though was not clear on what this actually was so early in the war. Japan did not seek to invade British India via Thailand until late in 1941 and the Bengal famine did not come to prominence until 1943. Perhaps some foodstuffs were being redirected at this early stage but the impact of this was probably not apparent in 1939. Most likely what stressed Fred was something happening on the estate which he felt powerless to deal with. Labour may well have been requisitioned by the Government which would have affected the availability and cost of labour on the estates and so had a negative impact on tea production. In any event, he had a nervous breakdown, and was ordered several months leave. Initially he spent about three weeks in Calcutta Hospital.

With her father's leave, the decision was made to travel to Victoria, Australia, where Fred's brother Frank lived. Fred left his two daughters in Australia and returned to the tea plantation. Australia was a much safer place than 'home'.

Fred and Margaret returned to India to 'do their bit' for the war effort and tea production continued to increase strongly. Fred and other NBMR members were involved in moving food supplies between Burma and India and facilitating logistics for some British and Australian troops though the details are not known. Tea planters in Assam are well known for facilitating the evacuation of refugees from Burma but there is no known account of what the Darjeeling planters did though it is acknowledged that they did something. It seems that the NBMR were not formally 'embodied' for World War II.

In about April 1947, Fred decided that he was coming back to Australia. The 'communists' as Fred called them, had stormed many of the factories including the tea factories. Every window in the Phoobsering house was broken. Fred felt they had no choice but to leave the country though their original plan was to remain there even past retirement. This was the time of India's independence being established, and many locals were eager to sever ties with Britain. Between October 1945–4 July 1946 Fred was subjected to what he called the Communist Party's 'war of nerves' which intensified from February 1946. This was followed by what may have been a nervous breakdown and an extended period of sick leave to recuperate which he spent in Puri in Odisha to the south-west of Calcutta. The NBMR had apparently been used to control unruly union activities during WWII and probably during this period which, if correct, may have been a factor.

Fred and Margaret Marsh arrived in Melbourne from India in July 1947 where they remained for the remainder of their lives. As a widower, Fred visited Darjeeling and Bhutan in about 1967 after working for 10 years with an insurance company. He died in 1979 at the age of 88. Some pictures of Claud and Fred and others are the featured photographs.

The story is shared by Leon Lyell, February 3, 2017

#reugeorge #tea #darjeeling

Credit courtesy : Koi hai com



Bygone Plantation Days : A Legacy of Stories - Reju George

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/169yZtMwpV/?mibextid=wwXIfr>

Fading memories of the Raj in the tea gardens of Assam....

An article from year 2008 by Journalist Richard Orange....

Richard Orange says the Indian tea industry is enjoying a revival – but that the traditional tea-planters' way of life, established by the British, is passing into history. There is not much to distinguish Dhanesheva Kurmi from the rest of the crowd at the Hautely Tea Estate, a remote garden an hour and a half's bumpy drive from the Assamese town of Jorhat.



Dressed in ill-fitting Western trousers and grubby shirt, he looks as though he has just finished a heavy day pruning bushes. But for three years since the estate's owner Lalit Borah ran out of money, and the management packed up and left, Kurmi has been running the show.

Every morning, the estate's 11,000 sari-clad tea-pickers, shielded from sun and rain by their conical japi hats, have trudged as usual along muddy red-earth paths to pick the next set of bushes. 'We knew how to do it by ourselves,' says Kurmi matter-of-factly. 'We have the experience – when the plants become ready to pick, you have to pluck them within six to seven days.'

As president of the workers' union, Kurmi collected and weighed the leaves, then sold them to the next-door tea estate, depositing the proceeds every fortnight in a bank in nearby Golaghat, which paid the workers' wages. At first it went well – everyone turned up for work, money came in, salaries went out, and after the first year Kurmi had banked £17,000 profit.

Hautely is one of nearly 140 tea gardens in India that were abandoned during a five-year slump in the tea market from 1999 to 2004. Overproduction at home and competition from new tea-producing regions such as Vietnam and the Philippines kept prices depressed. It wasn't until this year that they rose back above 1999 levels. This June's harvest – which produces the best and most fragrant teas of the year – is selling at well over 100 rupees per kg, compared to around 60 rupees in the dark days of 2003.

This return to profitability has brought the industry back to life. All but 22 of the closed gardens have reopened. The Indian government has pledged 40 billion rupees (nearly £500 million) to subsidise a huge replanting programme. But the tea industry has come back changed, purged of many of the vestiges of its old paternalistic culture.

An hour after we arrive, a four-wheel-drive trundles up. Girish Sarder, a tea-trader from Jaipur in Rajasthan, emerges. Flanked by two advisers and sporting mirrored aviator sunglasses, Sarder signifies a new order for Assam. He had arrived that week to take the estate off Kurmi's hands, after striking a 14-year management contract with the estate's receivers under which he escapes the estate's past liabilities and, so long as he pays the workers and provides benefits on agreed terms, he keeps any profits. With liabilities of five times the estate's asset value, this may be the best Hautely could hope for. 'It's in bad shape,' Sarder says. 'If somebody makes a change, it can be rescued. But any change can only happen when labour co-operates.'

On a healthy tea estate, the bushes are tightly packed, forming a green carpet of foliage three feet above the soil. Even a novice can see something is wrong at Hautely: here the bushes are old and many have died, so in parts of the estate they only sparsely dot the ground. The annual crop has fallen by two fifths since the workers took over, and the price they receive for their leaf has fallen from 9.6 rupees per kg to 8.25 rupees. After his three-year struggle to hold things together, Kurmi recognises the need for proper ownership. 'We welcome the new management. We are workers and we should concentrate on working only.'

Kurmi could not afford to provide his co-workers with free medical treatment, he says, which meant several of them died. Last year, when a plague of insects devastated the crop, forcing him to mortgage part of this year's harvest to the next-door estate, the bank began to look for a new owner. But Sarder — a member of India's hard-headed Marwari business community — is not here for humanitarian reasons. 'If I have captive production, I can get tea at a minimum price, and I can sell it at a maximum price,' he explains. 'We are not affected by the ups and downs in the market because we are traders.'

Half an hour's drive from Hautely at the Bukhial estate, the old-world charm of the tea-planter's life is very much in evidence. A red setter puppy bounds across a neatly trimmed lawn to meet us at Sandeep and Shalini Nagalia's sprawling 1930s bungalow. Nagalia, educated at the Doon School — known as the Eton of the East — exemplifies the old-style gentleman tea-planter. Impeccably maintained, Bukhial is regarded as one of Assam's finest estates. Once or twice a week, Nagalia jumps in his four-wheel-drive Tata Sumo and drives the 45 minutes to the Ganshree Club, which serves 16 surrounding estates. 'In the olden times, it was a very different world,' he says. 'In those days they only had the club, now we've got DVDs and the internet. But more or less the same traditions continue today, although people aren't as keen on the club as they were earlier.'

The British didn't bring tea to Assam. The Singpho tribe were drinking it for centuries before we showed up (their tea, smoked inside bamboo tubes, is now sold around the world as a gourmet brew). But we did build the industry. Within a decade of the first London sale of Assam tea in 1839, the riverboats on Assam's Brahmaputra River had filled up with young Brits looking to make their fortune. With them, they brought the planters' lifestyle of clubs, golf courses and pedigree dogs.

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That life lingered on in Assam long after India's independence in 1947. Bukhial's last British owners, the Guthrie family, only sold out in 1987, and when Sandeep started his career as a tea-planter in the 1980s, his visiting agent was a Mr C.D. Smith. John Mackenzie, the last British tea-planter working for Goodricke — which is India's last significant British-owned tea-growing company — retired in the mid-1980s. At the Jorhat Club the Union flag still hangs forlornly behind the bar and the visitors' book is crammed with the memories of Englishmen who spent their childhoods on the nearby gardens. One recalls a Christmas Day in the late 1960s when his father, dressed as Santa, landed a small plane on the club's polo ground to hand out presents.



Arun Singh, Goodricke's chief executive, argues that the British also established a sense of obligation among planters towards their tea-pickers. 'Running a tea garden is like running a mini-city,' he says. 'You're responsible for the peoples' welfare, their births, their deaths.'

British planters uprooted the forefathers of Assam's 600,000 tea-pickers from their villages far away in Orissa and Bihar, making the workers uniquely reliant on their employers for welfare. 'That culture hasn't changed,' Singh says. 'The manager is still looked at like a father figure.'

But in others ways the culture is changing, complains Amrit Singh, a Sikh who owns two small estates. 'Since these Marwaris captured 60 to 70 per cent of the industry, they just started producing as much as they can, and they don't care about the bushes.'

This is a little unfair: at Hautely, Sarder has big plans to invest. He wants to spend about £30,000 a month over ten years to bring the garden up to scratch, replanting 100 hectares with the highest quality tea bushes. 'You come back after two years,' he says. 'You'll see the difference.'

But at the Tocklai Tea Research Centre in Jorhat, Dr B.K. Goswami agrees that in the last 20 years there has been little replanting. For a tea bush, production peaks at between 15 and 40 years: many bushes in Assam today are more than 100 years old and more than a third date from British rule. 'At present, the replantation rate of the tea industry is very poor,' Goswami says. 'Less than 1 per cent a year. We want to get it to 5 per cent a year, and that will require a lot of government financial assistance.' Now that state subsidies are available, Goswami thinks Assam is entering a new era. 'The first generation of plantation started from 1823, the second generation was around 1950. This is the third generation.'

And with it is coming a new generation of planters. Sarder is convinced that the commercially switched-on owners like himself hold the keys to the industry's future. 'Tea is like a black diamond,' he says. 'Only a diamond-dealer can see what the true value of a diamond is, and only a tea-trader can see the true value of tea.'

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WRITTEN BY

Richard Orange

[#rejugeorge](#) [#tea](#)

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Photos : google



Richard Orange

JOURNALIST

Impact of climate Changes on the sustainability of Tea Plantations

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/uddhab-sarmah-8a606a37_uploading-my-article-published-in-the-sentinel-activity-7306182017954516992-oxq6?utm_medium=ios_app&rcm=ACoAAA_3yFkBTpFa5TTNv9k9R92wB_zBjKfw8U&utm_source=social_share_send&utm_campaign=mail

Uploading my article published in ‘The Sentinel Assam ‘today written about the impact of climate Changes on the sustainability of Tea Industry .

Impact of climate changes on the sustainability of tea plantations

Adrone effects of climate change are noticeable during the last few years in the growing pattern of bushes of tea bushes of the tea industry. Earlier, the upper Assam areas of tea gardens were used irrigation systems due to natural scarcity of rainfall well distributed over the season. Now, a different scenario is being experienced, either with too much rainfall causing floods in odd times of the season or too dry to sustain the growth of tea bushes for continued drought, resulting in a lack of moisture for the growth of tea bushes for flowering bushes as estimated with expectations.

The tea industry has to face this major onslaught of challenges and how best the sustainability can be ensured.

The problems with the young planted areas where maximum clones are preferred to seed stock or jays are noticed to suffer mostly because of the shallow root systems, unlike the seed stock, which can sustain better because of the tap root system, the length of which has been noticed to be more than one or two meters and more at some places, drawing moisture and nutrients from the subsoil or down below.

The longevity of the seed planted tea bushes can thrive for more than a hundred years if properly maintained, but clonal propagations are noticed to have a very short longevity period. The tea planters are using clonal plants for quantity as well as quality but on a short-term basis of calculations.

Under the circumstances, it needs to be a big concern for all the stakeholders of the tea industry how best the sustainability of the industry can be suggested to follow up a concrete strategy to ensure both crop and quality and to realize the 200-year-old tea industry!

The tea industry in Upper Assam, particularly, is facing significant sustainability challenges due to climate change, particularly irregular rainfall, droughts, and increased dependence on clonal plants with shallow root systems.

1. Climate-Resilient Cultivation Practices:

- **Reintroducing Seed Stocks:** While clones offer better quality and yield in the short term, a hybrid approach incorporating resilient seed stocks with deep taproots can improve longevity and drought resistance.
- **Soil Moisture Conservation:** Mulching, cover cropping, and organic matter incorporation can help retain soil moisture and reduce dependence on irrigation.
- **Agroforestry Integration:** Planting shade trees, windbreaks, and companion crops can help moderate temperature fluctuations, reduce soil erosion, and enhance biodiversity.
- **Water Management Innovations:**
 - **Micro-Irrigation Systems:** Drip and sprinkler irrigation can optimize water use during drought conditions.
 - **Rainwater Harvesting:** Capturing and storing excess monsoon rainwater during heavy monsoons can mitigate water shortages during dry spells.

2. Soil Drainage Improvements: Installing proper drainage systems in flood-prone areas can prevent waterlogging and root damage.

3. Climate-Adapted Tea Breeding & Biotechnology:

- **Developing Climate-Resilient Clones:** Research should focus on clones with deeper root systems and higher drought tolerance.
- **Improving Soil Microbiome:** Encouraging beneficial microbes can enhance nutrient absorption and improve plant health.
- **Carbon Sequestration Practices:** Organic farming and sustainable land management can enhance soil carbon levels, improving resilience against climate change.

4. Diversification & Value Addition:

- **Product Diversification:** Expanding into specialty teas, organic teas, herbal infusions, and tea tourism can enhance economic stability.
- **Processing & Storage Innovations:**

5. Policy & Community Engagement:

- **Government Support & Research:** Advocacy for policy incentives, subsidies for climate adaptation measures, and investment in tea research institutes.
- **Farmer Education & Training:** Workshops on sustainable practices, climate forecasting, and post-harvest management to improve farm or preparation.
- **Cooperative & Collaborative Models:** Encouraging collective farming initiatives for better resource management and financial sustainability.

As mentioned above, it is high time for all to engage themselves in implementing all these required strategies so that the tea industry can sustain both crop yield and quality while meeting long-term sustainability despite the challenges posed by climate change.

6. Climate-Resilient Tea Cultivation:

- **Hybrid Approach for Bush Longevity:** Combining traditional seed-grown bushes with selective drought-resistant clones to balance yield, quality, and pest resilience.
- **Flood-Resilient Infrastructure:** Elevated drainage systems and embankments in flood-prone areas.
- **Agroforestry with Native Trees:** Introducing indigenous shade trees like Albizia and Acacia to regulate temperature and moisture levels.
- **Deeprooting:**
 - **Stake Stabilization & Erosion Control:** Using contour planting, terracing, and vetiver grass to prevent soil erosion in hilly terrain.
 - **Biochar & Organic Methods:** Expanding composting, natural pest control, and soil enrichment to maintain the distinctive flavor of Doojaping tea.
- **Water & Soil Management:**
 - **Rainwater Harvesting:** Creating reservoirs and water storage pits to collect monsoon rainfall for irrigation in drier months.
 - **Drip Irrigation in Dry Periods:** Reducing water wastage and ensuring soil moisture retention.
 - **Microbial Soil Enhancements:**

Using bio-fertilizers and mycorrhizal fungi to improve nutrient absorption and root strength.

7. Climate-Resilient Tea Breeding:

- **Developing Drought & Pest & Disease-Resistant Cultivars:** Encouraging research institutions like Indian Tea Research Institute to focus on adaptive clones that do not compromise flavor.
- **Traditional Seed Propagation for High-Quality Tea:** Since Doojaping's unique muscatel flavor is linked to seed-grown plants, clones should prioritize maintaining these bushes while supplementing with selective clones for productivity.

8. Sustainable Processing & Market Diversification:

- **Carbon-Neutral Tea Factories:** Transitioning to renewable energy (solar/hydro) for tea processing to meet global sustainability standards.
- **Value-Added Products:** Expanding into green, white, and artisanal teas to cater to premium markets.
- **Direct-to-Consumer & Specialty Markets:** Strengthening GI (Geographical Indications) protection for Doojaping and Assam teas, enhancing global marketing through digital platforms.

9. Policy Support & Community Involvement:

- **Government & Private Sector Collaboration:** Advocating for subsidies, research grants, and expert incentives for sustainable tea cultivation.
- **Tea Grower Cooperatives:** Encouraging small tea growers to form cooperatives for better access to resources and fair trade opportunities.
- **Climate Awareness & Training:** Educating workers and estate managers about changing weather patterns and adaptive farming techniques.
- **Tourism & Tea-Breeding:**
 - **Tea Tourism Expansion:** Promoting estate visits, tea-tasting experiences, and eco-stays to generate additional revenue.
 - **Sustainability Certification:** (Rainforest Alliance, Fair Trade, Organic) Enhancing global marketability by aligning with premium tea sustainability standards.

It is high time for the tea industry to consider integrating these strategies so that the Northeast Assam and Doojaping tea industries can maintain their global reputation for high-quality tea while ensuring long-term resilience.

Bygone Plantation Days : A Legacy of Stories - Reju George ·

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James Finlay Tea Veterans & Assam Tea Party ...

One of a very successful Tea man was Saroj K Mehera. He started in the early 1950's as an Assistant Manager, then moved to Manager and thence to Kolkuta. Ultimately, he was overall boss of Tata Tea, concluding a career spanning 30 years plus. His story provides an interesting perspective on the Tea Industry in India.

I started life in Tea in February 1949, in the employment of James Finlay & Co., Limited, as an Assistant on Powai Tea Estate in Upper Assam, armed with a B.Sc (Hons.) degree in Chemistry from Calcutta University, acquired in 1948. Within days of my arrival, The Assam Tribune carried a Letter to The Editor, signed by "One Who Knows" complaining that a non-Assamese had been engaged as Assistant Manager on a large British-owned tea estate in the Dibrugarh district. I eventually discovered that the author was the schoolmaster on the estate who was rabidly parochial.

The Manager, Graham Thomson, was a Scotsman from Edinburgh, a married man, aged 53, who had served in the Royal Flying Corps (the RAF's predecessor) in World War I, earning a DFC, proudly displayed in a case in his bungalow drawing-room. There were two other Assistants, both World War II veterans aged 30 and 29 respectively. The older was an Irishman from Ulster, "Paddy" McLoughlin, who had been a rear-gunner in the RAF, the younger a Scot from Glasgow, with an engineering background, Jack Buchanan, who had served in Burma in the ranks of the British army. His broad Glasgow accent totally foxed me initially and his wife, Laura, also Glaswegian, but less broad, would translate for me! Paddy and his wife, Winnie, a Scot from Aberdeen, took me under their wing, for which I was most grateful, even though on the very first evening at their bungalow, some days after arrival, I got horribly drunk on brandy & soda! Being unable to pronounce my first name, they decided to call me James!

I learnt that Thomson was called "Burra Sahib" while McLoughlin and I were each called "Kamjari Sahib" and Buchanan, "Mistry Sahib", since he was posted in the factory because of his engineering experience. The labour would also refer to me as "Kala Sahib" and I never really knew whether this was simply to differentiate me from my white colleagues or was tinged with sarcasm inspired by the schoolmaster. I was the sixth Indian to be taken on as a "covenanted" tea garden assistant by my employers. My five predecessors, whom, strangely, I did not meet until several years later, had all served as officers in the Indian armed forces in World War II and, thus, were older men than I.

I had a "chung" bungalow to myself and having brought an old family servant with me. I settled down fairly easily. The bathroom in the bungalow had a washbasin and flush toilet but no shower or proper bathtub; in lieu, Thomson had installed, for my use, a huge wooden coffin-like contraption into which hot water, boiled in and ferried from the outside kitchen, was filled by a minion called a "paniwalla". I could have a long soak in it but occasionally had to remove wooden splinters from my bottom!

Powai is 4 miles from Digboi on one side and 6 miles from Margherita on the other. Thomson and Buchanan had their own cars but until I had a car brought up by river steamer from Calcutta, McLoughlin and I would use one of the estate lorries to go to the Digboi Club, whose members were mainly from The Assam Oil Company, with a sprinkling of tea planters. My sporting activities at the club consisted of swimming, at which I was rather good and squash at which I wasn't. Annual "Meets" of various clubs in Upper Assam were great occasions for sporting and social activities. Tea Taster & Buyer. James Finlay & Co., Limited, was a Sterling Company, with its headquarters and board in Glasgow. All its overseas offices, like Calcutta, were branches, the head of each being called The Senior.

I was put in the Tea Purchase Department, whose primary functions were (a) to buy tea at the Calcutta and Cochin auctions for export and (b) to export market those of the Finlay Group's own estate teas not earmarked for the Calcutta, Cochin or London auctions; its secondary function was to report on the estate teas. My boss was B.C. (Bert) Parker and among fellow Assistants was Dev Mukerji, a very old friend and schoolmate.

Featured Photo 1 James Finlay Company managers at Tocklai

A 1950 photograph of James Finlay Managers at Tocklai, the tea experimental station, Cinnamara, Jorhat.

Standing (L to R): - B.C. Hill (Hathikuli), J. MacGillivray (Lattakoojan), G.N. Thomson (Powai), T.F.T.M. Williams (Visiting Agent), Walter Leitch (Kakajan), A.M. Allison (Teok), J.J. Ruddiman (Sagmootea), A. Johnston (Majuli), J.A.G. Campbell (Nahortoli).
Seated (L to R): - J.M. Tullie (Kolony), A. Rougerelle (Diffloo), J. Clarke (Namroop), Arnold Bryning (Lamabari), K.B. Starnes (Tea Purchase Dept., James Finlay, Calcutta), P.M. Glover (Tocklai Experimental Station)

Photo 2 Party at Anwar Minallah's bungalow Balijan North T E 1951

Standing: Rajat Roy Choudhury, (AOC), D C Borkatoky (Eastern Assam), SKM (Powai), Victor Casabon (Samdang) "Phero" Aagrawal (Tinsukia), Sharma (Tinsukia)
"Senny" Sengupta (Powai), XYZ, R.K.Barua (kanjikhoh), Stan Allan (Samdang)
Seated: Bansi Lal Dhar, (Burma-Shell) Manas Kumar ("Jhintoo") Chaudhuri (Nalani), Asad Ahmed (Aquil's son) Aquil Ahmed (Monkhooshi)
Seated Sofa: XYZ, Anwar Minallah (Balijan North) Veena Dhar, "Thunu" Baruah, XYZ
Note XYZ = not Known

Photo 3 Saroj Mehra At Singpho House.

The Singpho tribe, on the India /Burma border introduced local tea to the Brits
#rejuergeorge #tea #assam
Credit courtesy : Koi Hai com





The Assam Tribune : March 17, 2025.

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1NcMsTneX7/?mibextid=wwXlfr>

Author of this article, Dr Devajit Borthakur worked in Tocklai Tea Research Institute. Also did research work on tea in China and US and therefore has an international exposure.

Cardiovascular health benefits of tea

DEVAJIT BORTHAKUR

Tea improves heart health by reducing oxidative stress and regulating lipid levels, making it a potent brew for cardiovascular disease prevention.

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) remains the leading cause of premature death worldwide. According to the World Health Organization, in 2019, CVDs accounted for 30% of all premature deaths. These diseases include coronary heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, and peripheral artery disease, among others. While some CVDs stem from congenital heart defects, many result from lifestyle factors such as smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, stress, and exposure to pollution. These factors contribute to oxidative stress, which is caused by an imbalance of reactive oxygen species (ROS), one of the major contributors to cardiovascular issues.

In recent years, compelling scientific research has highlighted the health benefits of tea, particularly its role in improving cardiovascular health. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (USA) recently included flavan-3-ols, a compound abundant in tea, in its dietary guidelines due to its cardioprotective effects. Additionally, a study published in the *European Journal of Preventive Cardiology* (January 9, 2020) found that habitual tea drinkers had a 20% lower risk of heart disease and stroke, along with a 22% lower risk of fatal cardiovascular events.

Tea, one of the world's most widely consumed beverages, holds immense cultural and economic significance. Recognising its importance, the United Nations designated May 21 as International Tea Day to celebrate

the global tea industry. The tea plant (*Camellia sinensis*) has two major varieties:

(i) *Camellia sinensis var. sinensis* (CSS) – small-leaved, bush-like plants used primarily for non-fermented teas such as green and white tea. These teas have a delicate floral and a lower polyphenol content; and

(ii) *Camellia sinensis var. assamica* (CSA) – large-leaved trees with higher polyphenol content, commonly used to produce fermented teas such as black, oolong, pu-erh, and brick tea.

Tea is a rich source of polyphenols, ranging from 14–16% in CSS to 25–27% in CSA. The form of polyphenol in tea depends on the processing method: whether fermented or non-fermented. Green tea, a non-fermented tea, contains monomeric polyphenols such as epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG), while black tea, a fermented tea, contains polymeric forms like theaflavins and thearubigins. These compounds promote cardiovascular health through several mechanisms:

(i) **Prevention of atherosclerosis:** Tea polyphenols help prevent the narrowing of arteries caused by fatty plaque buildup, a major cause of heart disease.

(ii) **Reduction of oxidative stress:** Tea inhibits ROS-generating enzymes, reducing oxidative stress – a key driver of CVD.

(iii) **Enhancement of endothelial function:** Tea stimulates the production of nitric oxide, a potent vasodilator that keeps arteries flexible and clear of deposits. This discovery earned nitric oxide recognition as the Molecule of the Year in 1992.

(iv) **Improved lipid profile:** Tea consumption helps prevent high triglyceride and cholesterol levels resulting from high-fat and high sugar diets.

(v) **Anti-inflammatory effects:** Tea inhibits the production of inflammatory markers such as cyclooxygenase, lipoxigenase, and adhesion molecules, reducing vascular inflammation.

Research also shows that tea polyphenols regulate key genes involved in cardiovascular health, offering new possibilities for disease prediction, prevention, and treatment. A landmark example of genetic breakthroughs in cardiovascular medicine is the Nobel Prize-winning discovery of the role of LDL receptors in cholesterol metabolism, which led to the development of life-saving cholesterol-lowering therapies.

Tea lovers often debate whether green, black, or oolong tea is the healthiest. Recent studies suggest that black tea polyphenols (such as theaflavin-3) may be more effective than green tea's EGCG in preventing heart disease while also being safer for long-term consumption. However, non-fermented teas like green and white tea contain additional bioactive compounds such as gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) and theanine, which reduce oxidative stress, enhance heart function, and improve post-stroke recovery.

To maximize tea's health benefits, one can adopt a balanced tea-drinking routine. In the morning, a cup of black tea (without sugar or milk) can boost metabolism and

alertness. In the afternoon, a cup of green tea can enhance antioxidant intake, and a cup of white tea in the evening can help with relaxation and stress reduction.

The way tea is consumed significantly influences its health benefits. Once ingested, tea polyphenols undergo enzymatic transformation in the gastrointestinal tract, beginning in the mouth. This process occurs regardless of whether the tea is green, black, white, or oolong. Research suggests that consuming EGCG in an encapsulated form on an empty stomach – after fasting for about eight hours – leads to the highest plasma concentration. Developing an encapsulated formulation of tea polyphenols could greatly enhance their absorption efficiency. Free catechins are absorbed in the small intestine, while conjugated catechins undergo metabolism in the liver before being reabsorbed into the colon. Gut microbiota also plays a key role in metabolising tea polyphenols. Studies indicate that black tea extract has a more pronounced effect on gut microbiota, stimulating starch metabolism and improving overall gut health.

The use of tea components in treating CVDs is well established. EGCG has been recognised as a potential supplement to commonly used CVD drugs. Its mode of action differs from that of statins – the most common drug to treat CVDs. Therefore, EGCG holds significant potential as a supplement to statin therapy, especially for treating atherosclerosis in statin-intolerant patients.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bygone Plantation Days : A Legacy of Stories - Reju George

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1C2udh1pJs/?mibextid=wwXlfr>

Rampur : The Tale of a Tea Bungalow that has withstood time seeing across an era of three centuries...

Featured is the Rampur Tea Bungalow in Silchar, Assam then in Year 1860 and now in Year 2008 with the story of Lynda Tedesco trail to Rampur where her Great Grandfather lived and home where her grandfather was born.

August 11 2008

ON GRANDFATHER'S TRAIL

by Lynda Tedesco



I guess one could say that my wish to see the Tea Estates where my great grandparents lived in the late 1800's started when I was a pre-schooler. My grandfather's sister (Great Auntie Bunnie) lived with us when I was small, and she told me stories of Rampore - of tiger eyes shining in the night beyond the front compound, of a python circled around the water cistern in the "cold house", of the burra bungalow so gracious and airy, with fans being turned by the Punkah Wallahs.

She spoke of the jungle, the monsoons, trips to Darjeeling to escape the hot season, and of the Himalayan Mountains one could see there. My grandfather, Arthur Littlepage Ross-Jones, who also lived with us, made me giggle with descriptions of the antics of the children on board the ships taking them to school in England, and of "hiding" the bland food of boarding school as he much preferred the spicy foods of India!

These stories stayed with me and finally, retired, children all grown and with my dad's increasing interest in his father's birthplace, I decided to help him out by using the internet to find as much information as I could about the Tea Estates, and specifically Rampore T.E. where my grampa was born.

The more I searched, the more snippets of information I discovered, the more "hooked" I became on the research and so the idea of actually going to India and Bangladesh took hold. The upshot was that I was actually able to plan a trip to Asia to fulfil my dream (and vicariously the dream of my father, Keith Ross-Jones). I left for Kolkata two years after the start of my searches and on the centenary of my great-grandfather's death.

I arrived in Kolkata at 10:30 pm., 19 long hours after leaving Vancouver, BC, Canada. The Tea Garden trail started from Fairlawn Hotel on Sudder Street, Calcutta

My very last leg of the Tea Garden journey was to visit Rampore. TE where my grandfather was born.



Then on to Rampore, over the Barak River and up the other side. There I was welcomed warmly by manager Mr. Sandip Nagpal and his beautiful wife, Dishta Begum Khan cemetery Bangladesh Wahidul Haque, manager of Deundi Tea Estate knew the location of the cemetery where my great-grandfather and his second wife were buried. Great-Grampa had managed both Amo and Teliapara TE's, dying at Amo in 1908 from a ruptured appendix. He was predeceased by his first wife, Maria McInnes Littlepage in 1893 and by his second wife, Hortense Sands, in 1899. Wahid so kindly organized my visit to the Begum Khan Cemetery and to the TE's, which were quite close to Deundi.

There was Begum Khan and right in the middle of this small, neatly kept and peaceful cemetery were the graves of Great Grampa and his second wife. I had such a shiver of excitement, a frisson of connecting with the past as I read the engravings on their headstones And let the sounds and colours of the Bangladesh countryside seep in.

It was such a special moment, to think that I was the first Ross-Jones offspring to visit this site in 100 years! While there, I was able to collect pictures for James McNie, too, of past friends too...

08.03. 20.. grave of g'grampa. "In the Memory of Frederick Ross Jones who died on the 27th July 1908 at Amo Tea Estate. Aged 58 yrs.

"A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise".

Teliapara and Amo TE's. Teliapara was built in 1895 and, amazingly, was still the original bungalow where my Great-Grampa had lived. Yes, there had been a few changes - a larger deck and sheltered entrance way, but essentially the same building. There is also a Military Memorial to the 1971 War of Independence that was very moving. After a fine tea with Mr. Chowdhury and wife Sultana and daughter Taspiya, we motored on to Amo TE for lunch. This is a very new bungalow, and the thatched roof was just being re-installed. Unfortunately, all that is left of the original Amo TE where my G Grampa died, is a tall and lonely chimney. It seems the original Amo was a fire victim in the Independence War. The tea trees (I didn't think tea could grow any higher than a bush) grown for seed and imagine my surprise to find that Tea Plot #1, planted in the 1800's, still contained a few elderly tea bushes which would have been planted in my G Grampa's day!

[#rejugeorge](#) [#tea](#)
[#assam](#)

Credit courtesy:
Koi Hai com



Assam

Crisis in a cup: State's tea economy feels the heat as climate change & pests threaten production

Experts call for research-driven strategies like drought-resistant tea, sustainable farming, and climate-resilient infrastructure

By The Assam Tribune - 25 March 2025 3:30 PM

[https://assamtribune.com/assam/crisis-in-a-cup-states-tea-economy-feels-the-heat-as-climate-change-pests-threaten-production-1572246?](https://assamtribune.com/assam/crisis-in-a-cup-states-tea-economy-feels-the-heat-as-climate-change-pests-threaten-production-1572246?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZWQCMTEAARQ5HOGwG5t8_WIBR9c4aGVvV65JtzdKbyWz2P5MhCfMBqaSAJRhJNIS4A_aem_yZQetDT5K_f8-VgJ9TnrqA)

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Guwahati, March 25: Assam, which produces around 650 million kilograms of tea annually and exports 120 to 130 million kilograms worldwide, is now grappling with a steady decline in both production and quality—primarily due to climate change and pest infestations.

Experts fear that the state may never surpass its record tea output of 2019, raising concerns about the future of state's iconic tea industry.

Prabhat Bezbaruah, former Chairman of the Indian Tea Board and the Toklai Tea Research Center, stressed on the gravity of the situation, stating, "The quality of Assam tea has always been distinct and unmatched, but climate change and pest infestations have significantly affected the yield. Rising temperatures and unpredictable weather patterns are a reality, and their impact on the state's tea plantations is severe."

Secretary, Tea Association of India, Dipanjol Deka explained the critical impact of rising temperatures on tea production.

"The ideal temperature for tea cultivation is around 27 degrees Celsius. Earlier, Assam maintained a favourable climate of 26-27 degrees, but now temperatures often soar to 36 degrees in Guwahati and reach 40-41 degrees in Jorhat and Dibrugarh—regions with extensive tea plantations. This is perilous for tea production. Unlike Kenya, Assam's tea plants are not drought-resistant. When exposed to high temperatures, the plants shed their leaves to survive, compromising their economic viability."

Deka further noted that increasing temperatures also lead to a surge in bacterial growth and pest infestations, forcing planters to rely heavily on pesticides. The overuse of pesticides has severe implications for the environment and public health, impacting the delicate balance of Assam's ecosystem.

The rise in harmful insect infestations has exacerbated the crisis.

Pests attack the tea leaves, draining their juice and affecting the quality of the produce. Farmers have resorted to increased pesticide use, which not only threatens ecological health but also raises concerns about the safety of the tea produced.

Bezbaruah warned, "The frequent pest attacks and excessive pesticide use compromise the quality of Assam's tea. The government must act promptly to develop sustainable solutions that safeguard both the industry and the livelihoods of those dependent on it."

With the state government yet to announce specific measures to address these growing challenges, the future of Assam's tea industry remains uncertain. Experts stress on the need for research-driven strategies, including drought-resistant tea varieties, sustainable agricultural practices, and climate-resilient infrastructure, to mitigate the crisis.

The Assam Tribune



Tea garden workers | Representational image

Chabua Airfield and Fishing in Assam

Author: Roy Church

<https://www.indiaofthepast.org/roy-church/life-back-then/chabua-airfield-and-fishing-assam>



Roy Church worked in Assam tea estates over 1959-67, after three years in the British Army. He is married and his eldest son was born at Panitola Central Hospital, Dibrugarh in 1965. For the last 20 years he has travelled extensively in the Central Himalaya leading groups of friends.

Editor's note: This story initially appeared on www.koi-hai.com. It has been edited for this website.

Chabua

I was garden assistant at Dikom Tea Estate in Dibrugarh district when Indian Air Force (IAF) Squadron Leader John O'quino arrived in the 1960s to reopen the Chabua airfield.

This airstrip had been unused since it had been abandoned by the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) at the end of WWII. During the War, USAAF had used it to undertake what was called 'flying the hump' – a high altitude military aerial supply route from Assam, across northern Burma, to Yunnan province in southwestern China. The airfield had no buildings, and the jungle had grown prolifically through cracks in the concrete runway. Readers who have spent time in Assam will recall that the Americans not only built a concrete runway but also concreted the main Dibrugarh-Tinsukia highway 37. It was the only place for miles around where you could 'put your foot down'.

The officers and airmen of the IAF vanguard who moved into Chabua had to initially endure a Spartan lifestyle, living under canvas tents in rudimentary conditions. When I invited John round to my bungalow for a drink, he was keen to accept but made it plain that what he would really most appreciate would be a hot bath. One of the few commodities which found its way through the tragically mismanaged supply system of the Indian military was rum. My bungalow quickly became an annex to the non-existent Chabua Officer's Mess, which produced a massive cache of rum in exchange for hot baths!

Once the Chabua base had been made operational, the IAF's fixed wing aircraft began to arrive. Fighters included Gloster Meteors, De' Havilland Vampires, and Hawker Hunters. Most of the transports were DC-3 (passenger version) or C-47 (freight version) Dakotas.

Building the base of the runway extension

The Dakotas had no problem landing on the existing, overgrown strip but several of the fighters finished up damaged on the side of the runway. One unfortunate Hunter pilot went straight off the end of the runway, the plane finishing up on its nose in the middle of the Dikom rice fields.

The monsoon would soon be approaching, and the rice paddies surrounding the airfield soon began filling up with water. There was no heavy machinery such as earth scrapers or bulldozers available.

It was decided in consultation with the Indian Tea Association that, in view of the seriousness of the emergency, local tea garden labour would be employed to extend the runway. Since Dikom was the nearest estate, I was 'volunteered' to supervise the necessary work.

The Garrison Engineer took me out to the Wilton end of the runway, which ended abruptly before dropping about 15 feet down into the water filled rice fields. We marked out a 150-yard extension to the runway with bamboo posts. These posts marked both the edge of the proposed runway as well as the required height of the embankment. The Engineer suggested that I use my labour force to take the soil out of the waterlogged paddy land to make the new embankment. I pointed out to him the impracticality of his proposal, not to mention the aggravation that would be caused by digging up the rice crop of Dikom labourers. In the end, we decided to use the soil from an area of higher ground just to the side of the end of the existing runway.

I arranged to temporally employ just over 600 workers from the labour lines at Dikom, Chabua and Nahortoli estates. To supervise my labour force, I re-employed a retired Jemadar (junior military officer) supervisor from Nahortoli Tea Estate as my 'right hand man'. He appointed some half dozen Sirdars (bosses), who spent several days recruiting unemployed men and women in the local labour lines. We formed six gangs of workers\; each gang was about 100 labourers. They were told they would have to work (and be paid) in pairs.

The Jemadar and I arranged a starting date with the Engineer, and the word was sent to the lines.

It was one of those tasks that seemed in theory to be simple\; but putting the theory into practice required much effort.

The area from which the soil to make the runway extension was to be taken was slightly larger than a football pitch. The whole area was marked with chalk dust into 12 feet x 12 feet squares, which, using the draughtboard system, were denoted as 'black' or 'white'. On day 1, the labour force would dig out the black squares, day 2 the white squares, day 3 the black squares, and so on.

For a day's pay, two labourers would dig a square 2 feet deep, and carry the soil to a point indicated on the runway extension. Those labourers digging squares furthest from the new bank would take considerably longer to complete their task than those whose square was near to the new bank. To compensate for this difference, the whole labour force was rotated round the site on a day-by-day basis.

Somehow, it all miraculously worked!

Each morning, my newly recruited labour force could be seen heading from all directions for the Chabua strip, carrying their baskets and digging tools. Some of the digging pairs were man and wife, some were two women, and some two men\; they all had the same task and pay. They were paid cash each day.

As the days of March passed, the new bank slowly extended across the paddy fields, and the hole from where the soil was being dug grew deeper and deeper. By then end of March, the hole had to be accessed via several earth ramps and steps cut up the sides of the excavation. When I approached the site, I could not help sometimes mentally comparing the project to some Hollywood biblical film set.

Eventually, the Garrison Engineer announced that we had shifted enough soil, and that the new runway extension would be sufficient for the IAF's needs.

My 'private army' was stood down and paid a cash bonus.

In the middle of the subsequent rains, I learned from John that the Dikom Pukri (pond), as the hole had become known, filled up to the brim with water. A luckless trainee pilot had finished up veering off the runway into it with disastrous results. His plane had completely disappeared under nearly 30 feet of water, and the pilot had been very lucky to escape with his life.

Cheating in laying stones on the runway extension

After the new piece of runway had been laid, it was necessary to top the surface with broken stone to form a firm foundation for the tarmac surface. This stone was brought as large boulders from the banks of the Brahmaputra, some 15 miles distant from the airbase. The stone had been brought by country boat down from the higher boulder reaches of the Siang River, and was unloaded onto ageing ex-American Army 6 x 6 GMC lorries, which brought the stone to the site.

The whole complex operation involved a chain of contractors. The first contractor collected the boulders from the banks of the upper Siang, when the river dropped after the monsoon. Next, there were contractors who ran flotillas of country boats that brought the stone about 30 miles down the river to the point of the Brahmaputra closest to Chabua. The next link was a contractor who ran a fleet of lorries to bring the stone to the new runway. Finally, there was a contractor who employed hundreds of casual labourers to break the stone.

Many of the labourers used to break the stones were the same ones who had originally built the new bank. They would sit by a pile of boulders, breaking them with a homemade hammer. Big boulders about the size of rugby balls were first broken by men, who passed the smaller pieces to women, who hammered them down into aggregate of about 2 inches.

One early morning I noticed a smartly dressed Bihari in European clothes, who presented himself to my Manager, David Gibb. The visitor spent half an hour in David's office before departing in a chauffeur driven brand new Ambassador saloon.

David came into my office. "We've just had an unexpected windfall," he said. "The contractor delivering the stone to the new Chabua airfield extension is having trouble with the railway authorities to get permission to take the stone-hauling trucks over the railway level crossing." David continued, "He wants to use the track across the rice fields from Wilton. Not only is he able to make this road up so that it would take the trucks but he has agreed to donate a thousand Rupees to the Dikom labour social club."

"In addition, he gave me a bottle of Scotch," said David with a rare smile.

It sounded an excellent arrangement, and I gave the matter little further thought, other than to have some suspicion of contractors voluntarily making donations.

About a week later, one of the Sirdars whom I had employed to run a gang during the building of the runway came into my office. He had been hardworking and reliable, and was someone in whom I had total trust.

He explained that he was now in charge of a gang of labourers breaking stone, but they had had to be laid off because there was no stone to break. I was surprised because I had seen numerous lorries loaded with stone passing through the tea garden on a daily basis. The Sirdar asked me to look into the matter and make my own enquiries. Despite my further questions, he was no more forthcoming, and left my office.

Next time I visited the sections of tea nearest the airfield, I carried my bicycle over the intervening rice fields to the new runway to see what was going on. On the new extension, there were a few women breaking stone. As I walked up, they greeted me, and complained that they did not have enough work. Since they were paid on a piecework basis, they were not earning enough.

As I stood there chatting with them, a GMC lorry loaded with boulders approached from the far end of the runway.

One of the women said urgently, "Sahib, boyt ow! Dekayee!" (Come and sit down near me and watch.)

I sat among them on a pile of stones.

The lorry, heavily loaded with boulders, was approaching amid a huge cloud of dust from the far end of the airfield nearest Highway 37, and headed towards the new extension. But it did not stop. Instead, it continued past and down the newly made road to Wilton, the road that David had given permission to be used.

I cycled on to the Garrison Engineer's office, which was situated by the main gate. When I arrived, the Garrison Engineer was engaged, and so I sat in the shade of a golden mohur tree outside his tented office. After a short while, a loaded GMC arrived at the main gate. The driver collected a brass talla (counting disc) from the gatekeeper, and drove off down towards the runway extension. Only after it had passed did it strike me it was the same lorry that had driven by when I had been sitting with the women at the stone breaking site.

Eventually I got in to see the Garrison Engineer. He was very pleased with the progress being made with the runway, and most grateful for the work I had supervised. Everything, he said, was going according to schedule.

When I suggested to him that his stone delivery service included a lorry which was simply driving round in circles whilst logging up deliveries, he did not believe me. I was in the middle of explaining how the contractor had arranged a temporary right of way through Wilton when, through the tent window, I saw the same lorry re-appear once more at the main gate. The Engineer and I jumped into his jeep and followed the lorry down the runway. It did not stop and disappeared into the rice fields near the Sessa River. The lorry driver had an unexpected reception committee waiting when he next arrived at the main gate!

The last I saw of him was a dejected figure with a black eye being led away in handcuffs.

Fishing with John Q'quino

It turned out that John was a keen angler. One day, I offered to take him to the Dirok River. Here we had a wonderful day catching several chocolate mahseer, which John had never seen before as they are peculiar to Assam. He noted the height of the pristine jungle in the Dirok Reserve Forest, and said to me with some feeling that he hoped he would never be forced down in such countryside.

Driving back to Dikom, John thanked me for a great day and asked whether he could return the favour by taking me to a venue of my choice up the Lohit. He would arrange an Inner Line Pass for me. We fixed a Sunday when I would report to the airfield guardhouse at half past eight, where he would meet me.

On that Sunday, as I drove up to the tented guardhouse, John was talking to what appeared to be the pilot or crew of a Sikorsky 36 helicopter parked some 100 yards from the guardhouse. The plan was that we would be flown up to wherever we wished, so long as it was enroute for Walong, where the helicopter was on duty shifting stores and supplies. Having completed its duty, the helicopter would pick us up and fly back to the Chabua base.

I had never flown in a helicopter. This Sikorsky, which looked a reasonable size while flying, looked massive close-up on the ground. We scrambled up steps into the cavern-like hold, where an airman gave us each ear protectors and a sick bag, indicating that hand signals were the order of the day. The helicopter had only two windows into the hold and it was almost dark.

We noisily took off.

We had arranged to go to the upper mukh (mouth) on the Sibia. We landed amid a cloud of sand. Once we had unloaded the fishing kit and lunch, the helicopter made off to Walong. It was only just after 9 o'clock, and had taken us but 20 minutes to fly from Chabua. Normally to be up the river by 9 o'clock, I would have left my bungalow before 6 o'clock

We walked carefully up to the junction, where the water coming down the Sibia was gin clear. Conditions were ideal, and it was not long before we had both caught a fish. As I helped John unhook a fish of about 7 lbs., the distant drone of a speedboat came from the main Lohit, and it soon became clear that it was headed to where we were.

Eventually a boat hove into view, and seeing us at the junction, moored up about 200 yards downstream from us. In the stillness of the morning, we could catch snatches of conversation, and it soon became clear that it was Vic Swales and Peter James. From snatches of conversation, it became clear that they thought we were camping further up the river. About mid-day, we took a break for lunch. Peter and Vic came over to where John and I were sitting on the warm sand. I introduced Peter and Vic to John, and we talked mainly about the morning's fishing. Peter and Vic had caught several barsa.

Vic asked whether we were staying overnight, to which John replied that much as he would like to have camped, duty at Chabua called. Peter and Vic were puzzled - how could he return to Chabua in time?

However, precisely at 1500 hours, as arranged, the unmistakable sound of a helicopter approached from the upper Lohit and put down 50 yards from us.

Peter and Vic waved, no doubt wishing they could have been transported over the sandbars of the Sibia Mukh.