



Planters Welfare Association

(AN ASSOCIATION OF MUTUAL BENEFITS)

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Thirty - Seven AGM held at The Delhi Gymkhana Club Ltd.

IN THIS ISSUE:

- MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT
- MEMBERS MEETING
- CHAMPAGNE & ROSES / BIRTHS & WEDDINGS
- NEW MEMBERS
- CHANGE OF ADDRESS
- WEBSITE
- SUBSCRIPTION
- OBITUARY
- ACHIEVEMENTS
- ARTICLES & ANECDOTES

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President: Capt. V. K. Mehra

Vice - President: A.K. Saxena

Ex- Officio: A. Batra

Secretary : R.K. Patney

Treasurer: B. Chhabra

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

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

Editor: A. Batra

Period 1- May 2026



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

One of the real highlights of our Association has been the series of lunches we hold. It is heartening to see that the positivity with which members are now taking part specially in the past few lunches, with very low last minutes cancellations is very encouraging.

Meeting each other in a relaxed setting, sharing experiences, sharing ideas and of course enjoying good food has reminded us that beyond our work ,day to day routine, it is this sense of community that truly strengthen our organisation. I would like to thank all those who helped organise and host these gatherings so warmly. It is a daunting task to send reminders to our members for these lunches to get to know the exact numbers attending, to facilitate bookings at the venues. Hats off to Mr. Patney, Mr. Chhabra and Mr. Wazir Chand to undertake this task so admirably.

As we look ahead to the coming months, let us stay connected keep sharing our life's experiences and continue to support each other. I would also encourage more of you to contribute your thoughts ,stories and suggestions for our newsletter.

I look forward to meeting many of you at our upcoming events.

With Warm regards,

Capt. V..K Mehra



MEMBERS MEETING (SOCIAL) FOR THE YEAR 2025 – 2026

The Events held and the up – coming Activities for the year 2025 – 2026, are as under:

S. No.	Date	Venue	Venue booked by
1	Sun 10th August, 2025	DSOI, Dhaula Kuan, New Delhi (Lunch)	Capt. V K Mehra
2	Sun 22nd Sept 2025	Cancelled due to inadequate Numbers of Attendees	
3	Sun 2nd November, 2025	Indian Airforce Aakash Mess, India Gate , New – Delhi (Neelamber) (Lunch)	Mr.R.Wazirchand
4	Sat 13th December, 2025	Delhi Gymkhana Club , New Delhi Party Cottage) , (Lunch) (Sponsored by Tea Co's / Member)	Mr. A.Batra
5	Sunday 18th January, 2026	Delhi Gymkhana Club, New Delhi (Lunch)	Mr. B .Chhabra
6	Sun 18th February 2026	Fraternity Club, Free Masons Hall , New Delhi (Lunch)	Mr. Sunil Khanna
7	Sunday 12th April , 2026	Delhi Gymkhana Club (Jamun Tree) New Delhi (Lunch)	Mr. B .Chhabra

All the events held during the Financial year 2025 - 2026, were a roaring success, and thoroughly enjoyed by all. The events were well attended , great comraderies and bonhomie, super and delicious lunch menu's by the Committee .

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

We are very grateful to our members for forwarding their Confirmation prior to the closing date.

Members are reminded that all those members who confirm and do not attend the event , shall be billed for payment.

Thirty Seventh AGM – 2025

The above was held at the Delhi Gymkhana Club, New Delhi (Party Cottage) on Sat. 13th December 2025 . The event was sponsored by Tea Company's, as well as a Member ; Brig. M.J.S Bains (AVSM) – A most generous sponsorship for the 2nd Consecutive Year.

Tea Company's - Messrs J.Thomas & Co. Pvt. Ltd., Goodricke Group Ltd., Jorehaut Tea Pvt. Ltd., Badulipar Ltd. (Koomtai "B " Estate) , Contemporary Brokers Pvt. Ltd., Rossell India Ltd. , Mokalbari Kanoi Tea Estate Pvt. Ltd.

Our 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 runaway success . We are thankful to Mr. Ashok Batra for booking the event . Our thanks to Mrs V.Lall , & Mrs. S.Chhabra for the menu and their assistance along with Mr. & Mrs R.Wazirchand for all the arrangements made by them for the event. Mrs A.Ganguly did a great job of registering the members who attended the AGM.

The Executive Committee of the Association is indebted to the efforts of Past President ,Ashok Batra , who arranged the donations for the AGM – 2022 / 2023 / 2024 / 2025 that have been received with sincere appreciation from the Tea Companies.

CHAMPAGNE & ROSES / BIRTHS & WEDDINGS

We are pleased to inform that Mr. Atul Nanda was recently married to Ms. Radhika. Our Heartiest congratulations and best wishes to the newly married couple.

NEW MEMBERS

We are pleased to inform that 5 new members joined the Association during the year 2026 .

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Mr. Rajeev Mehrotra | 4. Mr Ranjit Sabhaney |
| 2. Mr Sunil Malik | 5. Mr Ajay Pal Singh |

3. Mr Dileep Kumar Gupta

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

CHANGE OF ADDRESS/ E – MAIL/ MOBILE NO

All changes , if any , have been updated in the members directory , which is circulated in the Members at regular intervals for their perusal & records. The same is available on our website- <https://www.pwa.in>

OBITUARY – (DECEMBER 2024 – APRIL 2025)

With great sorrow we inform our members of the sad demises of the following -

Our Member :

- Mrs. Chandra Lekha Mathur
- Mr. Philip Yadava
- AVM. K. K. Khanna (Retd.)

Friends:

- Mr Harish Parekh (Ex-Chairman M/s J. Thomas & Co Pvt Ltd)
- Mrs. Kusum Mehra w/o Late Mr. Jaggi Mehra

Near & dear ones :

- R.R. (Brownie) Malhotra

LETTERS EXPRESSING OUR CONDOLENCES WERE SENT TO THE BEREAVED

WEBSITE – www.pwa.in

The above is updated at regular intervals . You are requested to view and give your valuable comments to enable us to improve further. A fervent appeal to our esteemed members – Please view this regularly for latest updates , forthcoming events and Archives – this is being done with painstaking hard work, time , besides finances – the number of hits is disappointingly low, which really doesn't warrant the work and finances, so do browse ,and encourage family and friends, as well.

SUBSCRIPTION:

1. Kindly note that our annual Subscription for NCR members is Rs 500/- per annum and Rs 200/- for out station members.
2. Annual subscription is payable by all members.
3. The rules under 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 good intention to pay their Annual subscription is stipulated period. However due to oversight such payments are not received from few members & the list of defaulting members does increase to an unacceptable level when follow ups with the concerned members are necessary . In this context we wish to thanks Mr. R.Wazirchand , our Executive Committee Member, who took the onus of following up with members who needed to remit their Annual subscriptions. He has been relentlessly been doing the exercise for the last two calendar years which has yielded desired results, whereby 97% percent of members are up to date and in fact many have already paid for future years. 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 - ICIC00000046
- 4 – Bank & Branch- ICICI Bank, New Friends Colony , New – Delhi 110025

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

ACHIEVEMENTS

BREAKING THE AGE BARRIER – CAPT. V.K. MEHRA AND CUCKOO MEHRA

From a small garage setup to one of Noida's most loved tea spots - they have built more than just a tea shop, they've built a legacy.

Serving chai, stories, and smiles for years, they remind us that passion doesn't retire - it evolves.

This is what Breaking the Age Barrier truly looks like.

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DXl5mMRkiye/?igsh=Z3F5dXZmZ245cnl0>

THIRTY SEVENTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING. – AGM -2025

HELD AT DELHI GYMKHANA CLUB , (PARTY COTTAGE) NEW DELHI
ON SATURDAY, 13TH DECEMBER 2025

A. LIST OF ATTENDEES

B. MINUTES OF THE THIRTY SEVENTH ANNUAL GENARAL MEETING

C. ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT MR. A. BATRA

(A)

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. MR. R.K PATNEY | 35. MRS. RITA SINGH |
| 2. MR.A.K.SAXENA | 36. MR.K.HAZURIA |
| 3. MR. G.GADI | 37. MRS. ANJU MAINI |
| 4. MR A. BATRA | 38. MR. K.K.MEHRA |
| 5. MR. R.WAZIRCHAND | 39. MR. ARUN KHANNA |
| 6. MR. B.CHHABRA | 40. MR. AMARPAL SINGH SHAW |
| 7. CAPT. V.K.MEHRA | 41. MRS. VARSHA WADHAWAN |
| 8. MRS D. NANJAPPA | 42. MRS. REKHA LALL |
| 9. MR. A.GANGULY | 43. MRS RAJ GREWAL |
| 10. MR. D.V JAMWAL | 44. MR. P.S TIBB |
| 11. MR. SURESH MEHTA | 45. MR. B.B.MEDHI |
| 12. MR. D.P.L NANDA | 46. MR. A.SHAUNIK |
| 13. MR. DINESH PRAKASH | 47. MRS.SHALINI TANDON |
| 14. MR. AJAY JAIN | 48. MR. K.KAMPANI |
| 15. MR. R.K.DAS | 49. MR T.P.S JOSEN |
| 16. MRS. PAM KAPUR | 50. MR ATUL NANDA |
| 17. W/C T.K.MITRA | 51. MR. ASHISH BALI |
| 18. MR. Y.N CHATURVEDI | 52. MR SUNIL KHANNA |
| 19. MR. A.K.BHARGAVA | 53. MR KAMAL DEEP SINGH |
| 20. MR. SARABJIT SINGH | 54. MR. RAVINDER SINGH MANHAS |
| 21. MRS.URMILA LANBA | 55. BRIG M.J.S.BAINS |
| 22. MR. ATUL NANDA | 56. MR ARVIND AWASTHI |
| 23. MR. A.BISWAS | 57. MR SUNIL KHANNA |
| 24. MR RAJEEV SURI | 58. MR.R.P. SINGH |
| 25. MR. R.MEHROTRA | 59. MR A.K.BALI |
| 26. MR. ANUP CHOPRA | 60. MRS PADMA VOHRA |
| 27. MR. SANJAY BATRA | 61. MR V.K.TYAGI |
| 28. MR. NIRAJ NAYAR | 62. MR T.SABARWAL |
| 29. MR. K.R BHAGAT | 63. MISS DEEPA KANT |
| 30. MR. ASHOK KRISHNA | 64. MR. ARVIND MALHOTRA |
| 31. MRS. MANJU SINGH | 65. MR. DEEPAK MODI |
| 32. MR NAVEEN MEHTA | 66. MR. HARPREET SINGH |
| 33. MRS S. MADHOK | 67. MRS GEETA BHASIN |
| 34. MRS SUNITA SINGH | 68. MR. SUNIL VOHRA |

(B)

The President, Mr. Ashok Batra called the meeting to order and welcomed the members.

On behalf of the Executive Committee the Secretary welcomed the members to the AGM and appreciated the large numbers attending the AGM. He thanked all members for timely confirmations received for the AGM and all the other events held during the year, which have been very helpful to facilitate arrangements. He also appreciated the gesture of few members who paid the nominal charges for an event since they did not attend the event after forwarding their confirmation. However, penal charges were imposed and received from few members for no show at the event since confirmation was received from them.

The Secretary thanked Mr. Ashok Batra for arranging the venue. He also thanked Mr. & Mrs.V. Lall , Mr. & Mrs. B. Chhabra and Mr. & Mrs. Ashok Batra for making all the arrangements for conducting the AGM. The Secretary thanked Mr. Ashok Batra and Mr. Rajiv Wazirchand for all the effort made by them to receive sponsorships from various Tea Companies.

The A.G.M 2025 was sponsored by the following Tea Companies / Member.

- Messer's Brig M.J.S Bains (AVSM)
- J.Thomas & Co Pvt Ltd
- Goodricke Group Ltd
- The Jorehaut Group Ltd, Badulipar Ltd (Koomtai " B " Estate)
- Contemporary Brokers Pvt. Ltd
- Rossell India Ltd
- Mokalbari Tea Estates Pvt. Ltd

We are thankful to all the sponsors for their continuous support.

The Secretary thanked Mr V.Lall , who has resigned from the Executive Committee on health issues. He further stated that Mr. Lall has been the only President who has had three very successful Tenures in the Association . He has handled many portfolios during his tenure such as heading the Events Committee whereby all the aspects of all events, held over the years gone by, has been handled by him. Handling of Website , News Letters as Editor Member, has been the other aspects so ably handled by him . He has been a great help to the Mr B. Chhabra , our Hon. Treasurer, to resolve a very grave issue of Issuance of New Pan card, Cancellation of old Pan Card, and up loading the same on the Income tax portal . The entire process was concluded after two years of rigorous follow up by Mr. Chhabra and Mr. Lall for which the Executive committee remains indebted to them.

The Secretary extended his thanks and gratitude to the Out Going President Mr. Ashok Batra . We place on record our sincere appreciation for the Presidents, exemplary leadership , unwavering commitment and selfless service to the Association. His guidance, balanced judgement and dedication have greatly strengthened the functioning of the Association and inspired confidence among members . We are grateful for the time , effort and vision contributed during his tenure. He has been solely responsible for approaching the Tea companies for their contribution for the last four years. He also took the additional task of being our editor member for the past years and gave a new look to the News Letters which are circulated twice a year and with his hard work put in, it made News Letters most interesting and the stories added gave a different flavour.

The Secretary thanked Mr. B.Chhabra for handling the most important job of the Treasurer for past few years. He has handled all aspects of accounts of the Association in a most professional manner. He is a true asset for us all.

The Secretary extended his thanks to Capt. V.K.Mehra , Mr. A.K.Saxena , Mr. R.Wazirchand Mr. A.Ganguly and Mr. S.Choudhary for their unstinted support during their tenure as members of the Executive Committee for the year 2024 – 2025.

The Secretary welcomed the Incoming President Capt. V.K.Mehra, and was confident that under his able leadership the Association will attain new heights .

Thereafter the items on Agenda were taken up :-

- 1.The President welcomed the members and addressed the meeting. (President's address is enclosed). Two minutes silence in the memory of our members, Near and dear ones , our friends who passed on since the last A.G.M was observed
- 2.Activity Report for the year 2024 - 2025 by the Hon. Secretary was received and adopted. Passed - By Voice vote
- 3.The Audited Accounts for the year ended 31.03.2025 by the Hon. Treasurer were received and adopted. Passed – By Voice Vote
- 4.The proposal to appoint M/s Prannav Khanna & Company, Auditors for year 2026 was carried unanimously
- 5.Five Nomination were received for the post of Vice – President and of 4 for Members, hence no voting was required to be held ,hence following were elected unopposed:

Nomination :

- 1.Vice President: Mr. A.K.Saxena
- 2.Member: Mr. B.Chhabra
- 3.Member: Mr. R.K.Patney
- 4.Member: Mr. R.Wazirchand
- 5.Member: Mr. Abhijit Ganguly.

The incoming President shall exercise his privilege and allocate portfolios to the elected members in the next Executive Committee Meeting. The President is empowered to 6 nos. additional members to the Executive Committee as required in consultation with the elected members. The Executive Committee thus can be of 7 and maximum of 13 members.

6.AOB : No Discussion.

The Meeting ended with a vote of thanks by Mr. R.K.Das to the Chair.

Ladies and Gentlemen, A very good afternoon.

Welcome to the 37 th Annual General Meeting of the Planters Welfare Association. And a special welcome to our Ex- President Mrs. Dipika Nangappa, who has come specially to attend our AGM like last year, from Pune. My sad duty is to first mention the names of our Members, Near and Dear ones, as well as Friends and well-wishers who have left us since our last AGM.

May I request, those who are able, to stand with me, for a minute in silence, to pay our respects to the departed souls, while I read out their names. With great sorrow we inform our members of the sad demises of the following since our last A.G.M.:

Our Member - Mrs. Asha Sehgal, Mr. Sudhir Prakash, Mrs. N. Jalnawala, Mrs. V. Rautela, Mr. Arun Tandon, Mr. H.N.Chopra Mr. B.B.Malhotra , Mr. Harjit Singh (Bunny) Mehta

Near & Dear ones – Sister of Mrs. Buntty Uppal, Miss Bhamini Pahwa d/o Mr. Atul Pahwa, Sister of Mrs. Dipika Nanjappa, Father of Mr. Rohit Malhotra, Mother of Mrs Renu Mehra, Mother of Mrs. Ritu Wazirchand , Son in law of Mr. Y.N . Chaturvedi.

Friends - Mrs. Manju Srinagesh, Mrs. Nazma Chatterjee, Mr. Ajay Atal, Mrs. Ibala Syiem Pariot,Mrs. Sreelata Dhir , Mrs. Gurtu , Mr. Phillip Rajit Ninan , Mr. P.K.Banerjee , Mr. Jimmy Nichlos , Mr. Shalendra Prakash , Mr. N.K.Jain, Mr. Prodosh K Sen.

Letters expressing our condolences were sent to the bereaved families. Thank you – You may be seated

This would be my last address to you as President, as my tenure comes to an end, signalling a new setup in the Executive Committee, with fresh horizons to look forward to for the next two years.

The past two years has been an eye opener for me, forging great friendships with many of you, reigniting with old contacts and acquaintances, building new ones, and learning so much from many of your experiences. I really can say, that I have never met so many, than you gentlemen and ladies, who still have the dedication and professionalism after retirement, and continue to live life to the fullest, with such joie de vivre.

My sincere and grateful thanks to each and every one of you, for the kind support and encouragement that I have received in carrying this mantle; it has made me a wiser and more enlightened person, and I have enjoyed every moment.

While thinking about the future of our PWA, I cannot help thinking about a couple of things; one is raising finances for sponsoring of the future AGM's, which comes to between 2.75 to 3 lacs.

Each of us need to use our contacts to raise even small amounts which add up, so as not to burden our usual well-wishers, due to the trying times that our Industry is going through for the last few years. We can see what climate change is doing to our lives, as well as to the Industry we love. Again, a poor season in terms of crop, prices and huge rising input costs, interrupted by massive pest attacks and climate vagaries.

Thank you to our sponsors for today's AGM- Our sincere gratitude.

- BRIGADIER M.J.S. BAINS (AVSM) A most generous
- Sponsorship for the 2 nd consecutive year
- M/S J. THOMAS & CO. PVT. LTD.
- M/S GOODRICKE GROUP LTD.
- M/S THE JOREHAUT GROUP LTD.
- M/S BADULIPAR LTD. (KOOMTAI 'B' ESTATE)
- M/S CONTEMPORARY BROKERS PVT. LTD.
- M/S ROSSELL INDIA LTD.
- M/S MOKALBARI KANOI TEA ESTATES PVT. LTD.

Another is the age of our present E.C. My appeal to you all, especially our younger members, we need your experience and fresh ideas, to rise even higher. Believe me, it's a great way to occupy a bit of your time.

We are grateful to Mr. & Mrs. P.S Tibb, who have provided their premises for our events for the last 16 Years. We are also most grateful to Mr. & Mrs N.Sayal for Sponsoring and hosting the event at their premises for the last three years, but due to unavoidable circumstances , both these popular events will be off in 2026

We are most concerned that the numbers of attendees for our events are falling. Events, are our major activities and the EC works overtime arranging these.

The Event to be held in the month of September at DSOI, Gurgaon, arranged by Mr. A.K.Saxena , had to be cancelled, as we could not receive adequate confirmations . On the other hand the Event held at DSOI, Dhaula Kuan , arranged by Capt V.K.Mehra, we had 72 Confirmations but only 59 attended, resulting in a loss for the PWA. What are we doing wrong? Is it the timings of these events, or the venues which are being overlooked? We need your inputs desperately to revive the enthusiasm.

You would have noticed that a very prominent EC Member, our past President, and that too for a record Third term, and his spouse have been missing from the AGM, even last year, as well as from the Events over the year. Mr Vishnu Lall and Mrs Nirmla Lall, have been tripped up with ill-health, especially Mr Lall, and sadly we perforce have accepted his resignation, after decades of sterling work for the PWA. Though they both still give us their advice and assistance whenever required, behind the scenes – so our grateful thanks to both for a super Innings at the PWA. Needless to add, they continue to be our member, and we pray for a complete recovery health wise, so that we can continue to meet at our forthcoming events.

Our thanks to The Sub Committee-Social consisting of, Mrs. N.Lall, Mrs S.Chhabra , Mrs.R Patney, Mrs. R. Wazirchand who have worked very hard. Our thanks to Mr. R.Wazirchand, Mr. A.Ganguly and Mr. Sanjay Chaudhary for their support.

My grateful thanks to the entire Executive Committee for their unstinting support during the past two years, with special mention to Mr. Bhushan Chhabra and Mr. Roopy Patney, who have carried out the tedious and thankless work of Honorary Treasurer and Honorary Secretary with distinction, dedication and professionalism, and most of all, at lightning speed. And to add, for over one and three decades respectively.

We need to put the PWA out , much more, and the easiest way to do this, is to get as many as we individually can, to read our Newsletters. We really need your inputs and suggestions to make it enjoyable. This also applies to our website which has been redesigned and makes most interesting reading, but it saddens us that the hits each month can be counted on your fingers; despite the immense time spent in keeping it up to date; besides the expenses incurred to keep this going.

My sincere thanks to Mr & Mrs Lall, and Mr. & Mrs Chhabra, for helping me in the logistics, to put up today's event and for coordinating and designing the menu for the Lunch that follows. And not to forget Mr Roopy Patney and Mr Chhabra for the finance and legal work, as well as documentation for the AGM.

On behalf of the E.C and all members and spouses, our grateful thanks to the Management and staff of the Delhi Gymkhana Club for the use of the Party Cottage and all the excellent arrangements made for today.

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

Wishing you and your dear family all the very best for the forthcoming festive Seasons; Take good care with the Winter approaching, as the weatherman predicts a further severity.

Warm wishes from Radhika and me. Thank you for your patient hearing.



The President and Hon. Secretary, with Brigadier M.J.S. Bains

Incoming And Outgoing President's With Brig. M.J.S. Bains



Naginijan Tea estate

Brushed Away by an Elephant

Located in Jorhat Mariani, Na-Kachari Naginijan Tea estate was established in the early 20th century (tentative year 1901) by British tea Planters. Most intriguingly, I came to know about the history of this tea estate and the tea bungalow owned by the colonial British manager through the book "Tiger Trails in Assam" written by British explorer, hunter, and orchidist Maurice P. Hanley. This book was published in the year 1961 by Robert Hale publication in London. In Naginijan Tea estate of Jorhat district, Assam, the author was appointed as assistant tea garden manager. He served in the British Indian army prior to World War II and later began his career as an assistant tea manager. He wrote three books based on his experiences in Assam after living there for fifteen years: "Tiger Trails in Assam", "The Songs of Assam Tea Garden", and "The Land We Loved and Served." He later returned to England. He is comparable to renowned British hunter Jim Corbett in India based on his hunting narrative. Through his book "The Tiger Trails in Assam", we learn about the richly detailed descriptions of the stunning natural settings of the Naga hills, the daily lives of tea workers, the local climate, and the variety of animals that could be found in the jungles of Assam. There are still two British bungalow in Naginijan Tea estate. One is still standing intact and the other is abandoned.

Embarking on his career as a forest officer in British-occupied Assam in 1929, John Rowntree became the last British forest administrator in the region, serving until 1947. During his tenure, he was appointed to various forest areas by the British authorities to help preserve the rich wildlife across Northeast India. He also served in several districts of Assam, including Jorhat, Nagaon, and Kamrup. Through his vivid personal account, *Chota Sahib: Memories of a Forest Officer*, we gain insight into the socio-economic landscape of Assam, including the impact of World War II. When reflecting on the colonial history of Northeast India, his memoir stands out as one of the most valuable primary sources. For anyone interested in the colonial history of wildlife conservation and the personal lives of Europeans during the colonial period, this book serves as a significant document. There are only a few personal accounts by Europeans that genuinely praise India's rich culture and acknowledge it as one of the most sophisticated and ancient cultures in the world without hesitation & John Rowntree was undoubtedly one of them. His personal residence (Bungalow) still stands intact in Kulasi (North Kamrup) & witnesses the legacy of his benevolence, love towards the countrymen & the wildlife of Assam.



The serenity of Munnar and a beautiful initiative called Srishti Trust by Mrs Ratna Krishnakumar & Tata Tea

‘Creation’ | ‘Nature’ | ‘Universe’ | ‘Handiwork’

— all synonyms of “Srishti” and the foundations of their existence —

A Charitable Trust dedicated to the rehabilitation & generation of sustainable livelihoods for the differently-abled children & young adults of the rural plantation community of Munnar, Kerala. Their Welfare Institutes impart skills that will support and generate sustainable livelihoods for a better & more empowered future. The mission, in 1991, with the foundation of the DARE School Project, was to educate, rehabilitate & generate sustainable livelihood possibilities for the specially-abled young adults who graduated from the School. The graduating youth are further given the opportunity to interact & be nurtured into artists by experts in their respective craft domains from across the globe, developing unique traditional craft techniques from a world community of artists.

The DARE School enrolls children with severe mental health conditions, dwarfism, the infliction of polio in childhood, hearing and speech disabilities, heart conditions among others. The children are imparted education in functional academics & trained in social & self-help skills along with vocational skills through their formative years.

The managing trustee of Srishti Mrs Ratna Krishnakumar has enriched the lives of plantation workers with her love for textiles. When her husband Mr Krishna Kumar was leading the transformation of an India-focused Tata Group into a \$100-billion global conglomerate, Ratna was discovering her love for textile and colours.

In 1991, she joined DARE (Developmental Activities in Rehabilitative Education) School in Munnar which was already engaged in rehabilitating the specially abled children of plantation workers.

She, along with Dolly Lai, wife of a then Tata Tea manager, took a keen interest in bringing a holistic approach to the lives of these children. DARE, which started in a small room with only five children, has so far touched the lives of more than 205 children of plantation workers.

Did you know Che Guevara was presented with Indian Coffee & Tea during his visit to India in July 1959??

The Motorcycle Diaries , a movie I watched twenty years ago introduced me to Che Guevara and his engrossing travelogue of year 1952. The Epic Motorcycle Trip That Turned Che Guevara Into a Revolutionary

A coming-of-age adventure through five South American countries set Che Guevara on the path to becoming a Marxist revolutionary.

During his 1959 visit to India, Che Guevara was formally presented with Indian tea and coffee by commerce ministry officials. He also met with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and visited several agricultural and planning sites, all part of his mission to build diplomatic and economic ties between Cuba and India.

Tea and coffee presentation: At the Planning Commission of India, Che and his delegation were presented with Indian tea, coffee, and cigars by officials from the commerce ministry. As an emissary from Cuba, Che's two-week visit was intended to establish diplomatic and economic ties and foster closer relations with India.

Did India started exporting coffee and tea to Cuba after his visit , would be an interesting story to follow



**Commerce ministry officials
presenting Che Indian tea, coffee
and cigars.**



Coffee & Single Malts : A Paul John Story

A realm where history intertwines with flavor, unlocking a symphony of taste that captivates discerning palates. Yes for many a planter nothing like a scotch to end a tiring day & relax."

The story of scotch and coffee goes beyond coincidence with similar time frame of pioneering global presence ; it's a story that goes beyond borders; it's the story of craftsmanship and heritage passed down through generations. Scotch, made with care in Scotland's highlands and lowlands, carries the heritage of Scotland. At the same time, coffee from the plantations steeped in history, Geography, climate and production methods all play a role here, its aroma woven into people's daily routines worldwide. The story of Single malt and coffee tells a story where Scotch and coffee's unique stories dance together in a cultural tapestry, they function as complementary ritualistic elements, where coffee can serve as a palate cleanser between sips of whisky or a digestive aid after a heavy meal.

Coffee and single malt connect is a deep synergy of craftsmanship, shared flavor profiles, and sensory experience. Both beverages are rooted in hundreds of years of tradition and require specific expertise to achieve their characteristic complexity and depth of flavor. Their Paring is based on finding balance and harmony between the roast of the coffee and the regional characteristics of the scotch.

Coffee for Shonali Paul is much more than a daily ritual , its a passion deeply rooted in India's coffee heritage. Her love for coffee began in her childhood nurtured during her visits to her grandfather's estate in Coorg. She experienced the ritual and richness of Indian coffee estates as a child – and the stark absence of that cultural meaning in her adult life. "I spent some of my childhood in India, and the coffee experience and emotions behind it sparked my interest in coffee," Shonali shares. "Paired with my grandfather's estates and his own work ethic around it, it was highlighted when I grew up and left home to study. I would take that Indian coffee I knew and lived with me wherever I went, because I never found quality Indian coffee around me."

The disconnect between what she knew and what was available led to a bigger realisation – one that turned into a mission. “When I graduated from my MBA, I thought about starting an Indian coffee company to bring Indian coffee to the world,” she says. Paul John Caffeine was founded upon the goal to popularise Indian specialty coffee with global consumers. It had its beginning in Florida in 2023.

For Shonali and the team at Paul John Caffeine, the quality of Indian coffee is paramount. This means shifting away from the coffee exports the country has long been associated with, and showcasing the nuance of its lesser-known coffees, with its blends spanning a range of roast profiles and flavour notes, overall ensuring that Paul John’s coffee accurately reflects Shonali’s childhood memories

For Paul John Caffeine, sustainability means spotlighting the traditions already in place on India’s smallholder estates – the environments and practices Shonali grew up experiencing. “Indian estates are predominantly small estate holdings,” she says. “I have been a big advocate for them promoting their own sustainable practices that have been passed down from generations,” Shonali says.

“When I started creating the brand, I wanted to reflect my background in a way,” she says. “Being born American but of Indian origin, growing up in both countries, I wanted to blend the cultures and to bring the experience of Indian coffee to the world.” Paul John Caffeine prioritises storytelling in its coffee.

Her Grandfather whose estate her passion for coffee was ignited, was T John (1931 - 2023), a prominent businessman and planter. He was from Vaikom Taluk Kerala who moved to Coorg and established his base in Plantation activities. Coorg also became the platform for introduction to Politics and was a prominent leader in the Indian National Congress party. He served as the Minister for Infrastructure and Civil Aviation in former Chief Minister S.M. Krishna’s Cabinet in Karnataka. T. John passed away in February 2023 at the age of 92. From Coffee to Biscuits to Barrels is a story of how T John’s son, Paul John helped put India on the global whisky map, challenging traditional Scotch dominance with unique tropical-aged expressions. Paul P. John’s first business venture crumbled, quite literally, like a cookie.

“There was a biscuit factory,” he recalls, “owned by a friend’s father that had shut down. I had just finished college, and was looking for something to do. I thought, ‘Why not biscuits? Everybody eats biscuits!’ So I took over and tried to run the factory, but it was a disaster. After two years, I had to close it down.”

That is how John, now a whisky pioneer known for his eponymous single-malt labels, entered the alcohol industry.

John’s father, T. John had interests in plantations and liquor. With his family’s support, John converted the defunct biscuit factory into a distillery, launching the Original Choice whisky in 1996. It became a bestseller, with millions of cases sold.

“In Florida,” says John, “I started tasting high-quality whiskies, including single malts. I thought, ‘This is something we don’t have back home.’ And that is how I decided to create single malts in India.”

In India, John selected Goa as the site for his distillery with Michael D’Souza, his master distiller. The first Paul John single malt was launched in the UK in 2012.

Most awards at international whisky fairs are now won by non-Scottish brands. Japan has some fantastic single malts, and India is high on that ladder as well. - Paul John, chairman, John Distilleries

“For the first four to five years, I focused on building the brand in Europe,” says John. “After winning several awards and gaining recognition there, I launched it in India.” The rest is history.

Credit courtesy : Paul John website, article inputs on whisky shared from The Week magazine story.

CHRONICLES OF TEA, COFFEE, RUBBER & SPICE PLANTATIONS IN SOUTH INDIA, ASSAM & BENGAL (1800–2025)

By. S. Suresh Kumar

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Dedication.

To Late Shri. R. Sadasivan Mechanical Head of works, Went Worth Estate,

Whose hands sustained the silent machinery of plantations, whose skill bridged colonial systems and Indian mastery, and whose life reminds us that history is not only written by owners and empires, but by those who kept the estates alive—day after day, season after season.

This book was not conceived in libraries alone. It was shaped by factory sirens, estate roads, monsoon anxieties, workshop smells of oil and metal, and the quiet discipline of plantation life.

For over two centuries, tea, coffee, rubber, and spice plantations transformed vast landscapes of South India, Assam, and Bengal. Forests became estates, villages became labour lines, and agriculture became industry. These plantations fed empires, financed companies, and shaped global taste.

Yet much of this history has been written from above. This manuscript is written from within. My father, Late Shri R. Sadasivan, served as Mechanical Head of works at Went Worth Estate, and through his working life I witnessed the real anatomy of plantations—not as abstractions, but as living, engineered systems. Factories did not function by policy alone. They functioned because machines were understood, repaired, adapted, and kept running under difficult conditions by Indian professionals whose names rarely appear in official histories.

This book therefore attempts something different: a complete chronicle that unites empire and estate, science and labour, ownership and skill, global trade and personal memory.

The Long Genesis (Before 1800)

Before plantations, India already knew tea, coffee, rubber analogues and spices—not as monocultures, but as forest and homestead crops. Pepper vines climbed trees in Malabar. Coffee grew in shaded hills of Baba Budangiri. Spices flowed through ports like Calicut and Cochin long before Europeans arrived. What the British introduced was not crops—but scale, discipline, and permanence.

The Nineteenth Century: Empire Takes Root

The 1830s marked a turning point. The British Empire, anxious to break China's monopoly on tea, turned to Assam. The discovery of indigenous tea plants and the systematic work of figures like Robert Bruce and Charles Alexander Bruce transformed Assam into a vast experimental zone.

Simultaneously, the Nilgiris, Anamalai, and High Ranges of South India were opened through forest clearances. Coffee spread rapidly—until leaf rust devastated Arabica plantations in the 1870s, forcing a scientific reckoning.

Rubber entered India through imperial botanical networks after 1876. Pepper and cardamom, though indigenous, were reorganised into estate systems.

By the late 1800s, plantations had become industrial landscapes.

European Planters, Science & Estate Society

European planters brought capital and control, but it was science that stabilised plantations. Research stations—Tocklai, Coonoor, Balehonnur, Kottayam—converted trial-and-error agriculture into regulated production.

Factories emerged as the heart of estates. Withering troughs, rollers, dryers, curing yards, tapping systems—all demanded technical understanding.

Alongside science emerged estate society: labour lines, supervision, hierarchy, discipline. Plantations became self-contained worlds.

Cochin (Kochi): The Maritime Artery

Cochin evolved into the logistical soul of plantation India. Tea, coffee, rubber, and spices converged here before sailing to London, New York, and Europe. Warehouses, brokers, exporters, and shipping agents connected remote estates to global markets.

Cochin was not merely a port—it was a commercial nerve centre.

The Malayalam Plantation Identity

In Travancore and Malabar, plantations acquired a distinct cultural identity. Malayalam-speaking managers, supervisors, engineers, and clerks gradually replaced Europeans.

Companies like Harrisons & Crossfield played a decisive role, later giving rise to Harrisons Malayalam, shaping Kerala's plantation economy across tea, rubber, coffee, and spices.

This was not just economic Indianisation—it was cultural.

Engineering the Estate: The Invisible Backbone

By the mid-20th century, estates depended more on engineering reliability than on planter authority. It is here that men like Late Shri .R. Sadasivan, Mechanical Head of works at Went Worth Estate, become historically central.

Imported machinery had to survive tropical humidity, monsoon power disruptions, spare-part shortages, and continuous operation. Manuals were insufficient. Experience mattered more.

Indian mechanics became:

- 1.Diagnosticians
- 2.Fabricators
- 3.Teachers
- 4.Custodians of continuity

They were the living memory of estates.

Independence & Indianisation (1947–1970)

After Independence, ownership changed hands. British companies exited. Indian corporates, trusts, and families took over.

The Plantation Labour Act formalised welfare but increased costs. Estates survived through discipline and technical competence rather than expansion.

This was the era when Indian professionals fully assumed control—quietly, effectively.

Stagnation, Then Shock (1970–1991)

Regulation, price controls, and labour pressures slowed reinvestment. Many estates aged. Bushes grew old. Machinery survived through ingenuity rather than replacement.

Then came 1991.

Liberalisation exposed plantations to global volatility. Some collapsed. Some consolidated. A few adapted brilliantly.

The Modern Turn: Branding, Sustainability & Climate

From 2000 onward, plantations rediscovered identity. Darjeeling protected terroir. Nilgiris repositioned quality. Coffee turned to micro-lots. Rubber modernised clones. Spices regained global prestige.

Climate change now poses the greatest challenge:

1. Erratic monsoons
2. Rising temperatures
3. Labour shortages

The plantation of the future is no longer colonial nor paternalistic. It is adaptive, data-driven, environmentally accountable.

Went Worth Estate: A Microhistory

Went Worth Estate stands as a representative truth of Indian plantations—not famous, but real. It functioned because engineering worked, because labour showed up, because responsibility was upheld. By naming Late Shri .R. Sadasivan, this book restores individuality to plantation history. It acknowledges that continuity was built not only by policy and capital, but by skill and duty.

Conclusion: What Endures

Two centuries have passed. Empires fell. Companies changed. Markets shifted. What endures is the plantation landscape's capacity to adapt.

This is therefore not a nostalgic account, nor a colonial ledger. It is a witness chronicle.

It stands for:

1. The land
2. The science
3. The labour
4. The mechanics

The families who lived inside the estates

And it affirms one simple truth:

History does not run on ideas alone. It runs on people who make systems work.

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Chapter 1

Coffee, Rubber & Spice Plantations in South India, Assam & Bengal (1800–2025)

Before the Plantations: Forests, Indigenous Crops & Trade

The verdant landscapes of South India, Assam, and Bengal before the advent of large-scale plantations were a symphony of natural abundance and human ingenuity, where dense forests intertwined with indigenous agricultural practices that had evolved over millennia. This era, spanning from ancient times up to the early 1800s, set the stage for the colonial transformations that would follow. The forests were not mere wildernesses but living repositories of biodiversity, sustaining communities through shifting cultivation, foraging, and trade. In Assam's Brahmaputra Valley, wild tea plants (*Camellia assamica*) grew untamed amid bamboo groves and rhododendrons, their leaves brewed by indigenous tribes like the Singphos for medicinal purposes. Bengal's Sunderbans mangroves harbored spices such as wild pepper and cardamom, while South India's Western Ghats were a cradle for coffee's wild ancestors and rubber-yielding trees.

Indigenous crops formed the backbone of local economies. In South India, the Tamil and Malayali peoples cultivated rice paddies, coconut groves, and sandalwood forests, with pepper vines climbing betel nut trees in Kerala's humid hills. Assam's Ahom kingdom thrived on wet rice farming and mulberry for sericulture, producing silk that rivaled China's. Bengal's fertile delta supported jute, indigo, and betel leaf, with communities practicing sustainable jhum (slash-and-burn) agriculture that rotated fields to preserve soil fertility. Trade routes pulsed with life: Kerala's ports like Kochi exported black pepper—known as "black gold"—to Roman traders as early as the 1st century CE, fetching prices worth their weight in silver. Assam's timber and resins flowed down the Brahmaputra to Bengal's markets, linking to the Silk Road.

Enter the early botanists and researchers who began documenting and exploiting this bounty from the late 1700s. William Roxburgh, the "Father of Indian Botany" (active 1776–1813), arrived in Madras in 1776 and cataloged South India's flora in his *Plants of the Coast of Coromandel* (1795–1819). As superintendent of the Calcutta Botanic Garden from 1793, he studied Bengal's mangroves and Assam's wild plants, laying groundwork for plantation economies by identifying commercial potential in spices and timber. His work influenced colonial policies, viewing forests as "wastelands" for conversion.

Robert Kyd, a British army officer and botanist (active 1780s), founded the Calcutta Botanic Garden in 1787, experimenting with spice crops from Bengal and introducing nutmeg and cloves. Kyd's vision was economic: he proposed acclimatizing foreign plants to Indian soils, foreshadowing tea trials. In South India, Johann Gerhard Koenig (active 1768–1785), a Danish botanist, explored the Nilgiris, documenting coffee-like shrubs and rubber sources, sending specimens to Europe.

By the early 1800s, Nathaniel Wallich, a Danish surgeon-Botanist (active 1807–1854), took over the Calcutta Garden, distributing spice seedlings to Assam and Bengal planters. His *Plantae Asiaticae Rariores* (1830–1832) detailed indigenous crops, aiding trade. In Assam, Robert Bruce (active 1820s) "discovered" wild tea in 1823 through Singpho knowledge, though indigenous use predated him. His brother Charles Alexander Bruce experimented with cultivation, blending local and Chinese varieties.

These scientists bridged indigenous knowledge and colonial ambition, but at a cost: forest clearance displaced tribes like the Paniyas in South India and Bodos in Assam. Trade boomed—pepper exports from Travancore reached 5,000 tons annually by 1800—but environmental strains emerged, with soil erosion from over harvesting.

As the 19th century dawned, this pre-plantation world teetered on transformation. Indigenous practices of sustainability—rotational farming, sacred groves—clashed with emerging scientific imperialism. Researchers like Hugh Cleghorn (active 1840s–1860s), Scotland's first Indian Forest Conservator, began advocating conservation amid rampant logging in South India's teak forests. Yet, their work often served empire, mapping resources for exploitation.

In retrospect, this chapter reveals a paradise disrupted: forests as communal lifelines, crops as cultural heritage, trade as global connectors. Scientists like Roxburgh and Wallich immortalized this biodiversity, but their legacies paved the way for plantations that would redefine the landscape. By 2025, echoes of this era persist in sustainable agroforestry initiatives, where modern researchers like those at the Indian Institute of Spices Research revive indigenous varieties amid climate challenges.

Wicker Chairs & Nazira Club

The wicker chairs are so nostalgic about the bygone club days with turbaned bearers serving you. The slow life that is disappearing from the landscape. Seeing these photographs brings to life the memories of those good old club days.

The plantation clubs were the social hub of plantation activity going full stream on the weekends when it was a very close fraternity and slow life where friendships and community mattered.

The photographs of Nazira club from year 1958 time frame mainly taken by late Pat Martin, who was the Burra Sahib of Bam on Pookrie Tea Plantation at Nazira, Assam.

Nazira is a small historical town. A beautiful town situated on the banks of River Dikhow, in Sivasagar district of Assam. It has so much history from medieval times, equally running parallel with the pioneering tea industry in India.

Tea plantations were started in and around Nazira like the other parts of upper Assam. The present day officer's club of Oil and Natural Gas Corporation limited (ONGC (L) was in fact a tea planter's club established in 1939. Nazira was the headquarters of famous Assam Tea Company.

John White Masters, as Superintendent of the Assam Company went to Assam in June 1839 and took up residence at Nazira. He made it the company's headquarters. An old British graveyard lies inside ONGC Colony in Nazira town. Here there are about 62 graves that can be traced according to the list given by H. A. Antrobus. The buried include the historian William Robinson, the author of A Grammar of Assamese Language (1839) and A Descriptive Account Of Assam: With a Sketch of the Local Geography, and a Concise History of the Tea-Plant of Assam. (1841).

Nazira was an important place during the regime of Ahom Kingdom. Nearby Gargaon was the capital of Ahom Kingdom over a long period. According to legends Nazira got its name from 'Now-Jeera', which Means "resting place of boats". But to some historians, "Nazira" is a Tai (Ahom) word, where "Na" means Land, "Zi" means Inclined and "Ra" means Much. Accordingly, Nazira means a much inclined land.

Being in the vicinity of the Dikhow River and the capital of Ahom kingdom Gargaon, it is said that boats used to rest in this place after their long journey through the river. The Kareng Ghar a palace from the medieval period build by King Rajeshwar Singha, a ruler of the Ahom kingdom stands as a testimony of the bygone era.

The photographs were shared by Annie Fello, daughter of Leslie and Kay Woolley of Bamon Pokie, as part of family history.

Credit courtesy : google, Koi hai com

A tribute to my Great Great Great Grandfather — Maniram Dewan

220 years. And the world still drinks his legacy.

On the occasion of his 220th birth anniversary, a tribute to my Great Great Great Grandfather — Maniram Dewan. The Assamese nobleman who gave tea to the world and gave his life fighting defiantly against those who sought to take everything from him.

This rare photograph shows Maniram Dewan seated in a black coat — the first tea planter in Assam and in pre-independence India. It was he who discovered that the Singpho people of Assam had been cultivating tea for centuries, a truth unknown to the rest of the world. Between 1833 and 1840, he became the first Indian to commercially cultivate tea, establishing The Cinnamora Tea Garden near Jorhat, followed by several other significant estates across the region.

On February 26, 1858, the British colonialists hanged him for his role in the Mutiny of 1857. After his death, they illegally seized his tea estates and sold them to George Williamson. Out of that act of dispossession, the world-famous Assam tea industry was born — built on the vision and sacrifice of the man they had silenced. In 2013, when India officially designated tea as its national drink, the announcement was timed to fall on his birthday — April 17th. Today.

Every time I hold a cup of Assam tea, I think of him with gratitude — for this precious, healing potion that traveled from the forests of Assam to every corner of the world, because one man had the courage to see what others had overlooked, and the conviction to fight for what was rightfully his.

Maniram Dewan. Born April 17, 1806, Jorhat, Assam. Never forgotten.

Cheers!

Dipshikha Chaliha



My view is better than yours

A beautiful story by Shriti Das of an Heritage Tea Plantation from bygone era.

A quiet, sensory retreat unfolds at The Postcard in the Durrung Tea Estate, Assam

Think: endless tea gardens, a train occasionally slicing through the landscape, birds making the verandah their playground every morning. I'm not a morning person either — and yet this trip has flipped the script. I've somehow enjoyed waking up early. I've found joy in the pauses, the waiting, the watching. I'm at The Postcard in the Durrung Tea Estate in Assam. In case the photos haven't made that obvious already.

It's 8.30 PM on a pleasant Wednesday in March and I've just realised this is a slightly unhinged hour to be replying to work emails. Especially on a trip where I consciously decided I wouldn't work. So naturally, I switch tabs. And what do I escape to? Writing this story. Which, let's be honest, is just another kind of work. But it feels like the fun kind — the kind where I can pretend I'm off-duty while still typing furiously with a deadline whispering in my ear. Let's go backwards because that's how memory works. It's almost dinnertime on my last night at The Postcard in the Durrung Tea Estate. Over the past couple of days Ishita Sitwala and I have been shooting the property. While it was a part of work (and the reason why we are here) it was also grounding, and at times exhilarating.

Yesterday was our most productive day. We shot most of the property, ate all our meals on time and like model citizens went to bed early. The lovely Postcard staff had planned a tea trail and tasting for today. After lunch we sat in our second favourite spot — the verandah dining area of a restored 1950s bungalow, a two-storey colonial relic once owned by a tea planter and now transformed into the hotel's dining and reception space.

The lower floor houses the entrance and verandah while rooms occupy the upper floor. I'm obsessed with the light teal railing that wraps around the spiral staircase. It reappears as a balcony detail and once again on the lobby stairs. That shade of teal feels deliberate — like an ode to colonial colour palettes softened by time and light. As put into words by Kapil Chopra, Founder and Chief Executive Officer at The Postcard Hotel, "Our vision was to craft the finest tea experience in the world and there was no better place to begin than the magnificent 1,400 acre Durrung Tea Estate in Assam. Here we invite our guests to journey through the complete story of tea — from the first leaf on the bush to the final perfect sip." This is probably a good time to mention that The Postcard in the Durrung Tea Estate occupies 5 acres within a 1,400 acre tea estate with 12 chalets, rooms and suites. Eight are new constructions. We stayed in the newer chalets that are built in the traditional Chang style — a colonial-era stilted construction. Conventionally, they were designed to protect against wild animals and flooding. My bathtub was strategically placed in the centre, overlooking a tall window where a single beam of sunlight poured in every morning, illuminating it.

That's when I first spotted Ishita in the distance, beaming behind her lens. I joined her. "I now know why the tea-pluckers wear such thick clothes," she said. "My legs are scratched to bits. But look at these shots, aren't they amazing?"

Unlike us, who chose to wander off into the 19th-century tea estate unhinged, unsupervised and unchaperoned, the property organises tea trails and tastings taking great pride in producing some of the finest teas in the world. Ishita kept shooting. We were late for breakfast. I ordered eggs. She got the pancakes, again. Wholewheat with jaggery syrup on the side. "I ordered the most unhealthy thing and they've made it all virtuous and delicious," she laughed.

We also tried the Assamese rice crepe filled with coconut and sweetened with date jaggery. Light, soft, sweet and yes that sealed our late lunch. Today's lunch was an elaborate Assamese thali (my second in two days). I had joha saul (local aromatic short grain rice), labra (mixed vegetables), aloo pitika (mashed potatoes with chickpeas and coriander), maati mahor daali (slow cooked black lentils), mustard greens in khar, fried and curried fish, bitter gourd, chickpea chutney and pickles. Lunch was late because breakfast was late.

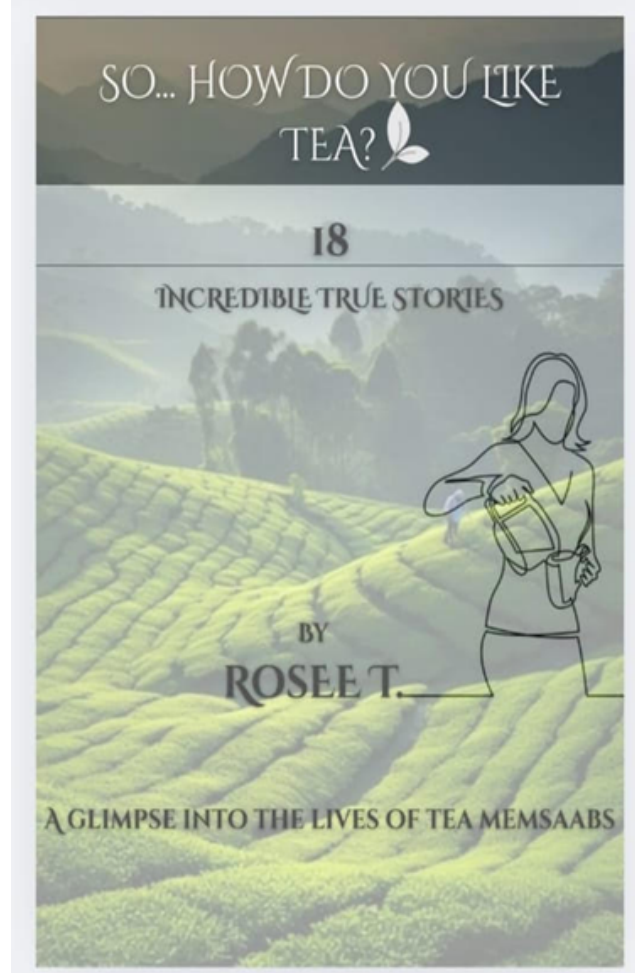
Its 9 PM now and I'm contemplating soup. Every meal here has been impeccable. Maybe I'll skip breakfast tomorrow if I have soup tonight. Some time later Ishita headed back to her room. I decided to catch up on work. Soon it would be 8.30 PM and we are right back at the beginning (end) of the story. Later that night at 9 PM I ordered chicken and barley soup. At 10.30 PM I returned to my room. However at 12.30 AM I called the restaurant back and requested the shrimp tagliatelle. Handmade pasta, perfectly al dente, tossed in tangy ou tenga (elephant apple) reduction and crowned with succulent Brahmaputra river prawns. More shrimp than pasta — which is how I like it. Protein matters. "I'm definitely not having any breakfast," I told myself, drifting to sleep. The next morning I sat in my favourite chair waiting for coffee. Ishita arrived, hair damp, eyes gleaming. "I don't know what this place has done to me," she said. "I went for a swim. And all my gear is all over in my room. I'm totally unbothered." And honestly, so was I. Maybe that's the real mark of a place well done. Not the long list of activities or themed evenings but the rare and quiet magic of not needing any of it.

P.S: I ate a good big breakfast that morning.

Credit courtesy : Article shared from Elle Decor by Shriti Das Jul 2025

Photography by Ishita Sitwala

A Collection to add for the Tea Mem Saab's



How a 4th-Generation Planter in Coonoor Is Preserving Nilgiri Tea & Giving It Global Identity

In the misty hills of Coonoor, fourth-generation tea planter Sandeep Subramani is giving Nilgiri tea a global identity. Through his estate Tranquillitea, he's turning every cup into an experience — blending heritage, sustainability, and community to revive the region's century-old tea legacy.

By [Misha Paul](#)

Edited By [Pranita Bhat](#)

19 Oct 2025

Brewing heritage, Sandeep Subramani is putting Nilgiris tea on the global map.

The lives we lead today are a blur of deadlines, meetings, and endless notifications — all set against the drone of traffic and construction. Yet somewhere beyond the noise, a different rhythm plays. It winds through quiet forests and mist-wrapped hills, where the air smells faintly of rain and tea leaves whisper in the breeze.

For many in the Nilgiris, that pause arrives each afternoon — at 4 o'clock — when time itself seems to steep and settle. In homes and gardens, hands reach for kettles, and calm begins to pour, one cup at a time.

"Tea is a very special beverage for us here in the Nilgiris," says Sandeep Subramani, a fourth-generation tea planter carrying forward his family's century-old legacy. "People across the district stop for at least half an hour, typically around 4 pm, and gather to have a cup. The process of tea brewing can be meditative and calming when you take your time through the process of weighing the tea and getting the water to the right temperature before brewing it."

For Sandeep, tea is more than a drink — it's a way of life he's determined to share with the world.

Coonoor: A childhood steeped in tea and community

Sandeep was born, brought up, and educated in the Nilgiris district, which houses a small municipal town of Coonoor, with a population of less than 50,000. The Nilgiris region is at an elevation of 900 to 2,600 metres above sea level, and Coonoor is a charming town that feels like it never left the slow lane.



*The Nilgiri tea estate in Coonoor.
Photograph: (Sandeep Subramani)*

Apart from a short time away to do his degree in hospitality management in Switzerland, the rest of his education was also completely there. "The fact that I graduated in hospitality meant that I could use what I had learnt to develop another vertical in our family business, here in the Nilgiris, the place I love," he says.

His business is his way of giving back to the land where he grew up — by putting Nilgiri tea on the global stage. "My wife recently read a quote that said we need to give our children wings to fly wherever they want to and roots strong enough to come back to. I think this quote is true for me."

How is Nilgiri tea different from Darjeeling or Assam tea?

While Darjeeling and Assam teas are globally celebrated, Nilgiri tea — though prized by connoisseurs for its rich flavour — has yet to reach the masses.

“Darjeeling was positioned as a premium beverage early on by the British, while Assam’s sheer production scale made it a household name. In contrast, the Nilgiris relied for the longest time on the erstwhile USSR market, with most of our teas exported there. But when the USSR collapsed, we suddenly found ourselves without a market,” adds Sandeep.

Nilgiri tea has a century-old legacy

But the Nilgiris is home to some of the highest tea estates in the world, giving its teas a naturally complex profile. Elevation plays a vital role — the higher the estate, the richer the taste.

“Add to that the dramatic climate shifts — a swing from -8°C at night to 21°C by morning — and you get flavour notes that are truly unmatched,” Sandeep beams.

“While that’s an extreme example from one particular year, most other tea-growing regions don’t experience such drastic temperature variations between day and night. It’s this unique climate that gives Nilgiri tea its truly magical flavour, unlike any other in the world.”

A legacy rooted in the Nilgiris — A heritage brewed by generation

But the story of Sandeep’s estate and Nilgiri Tea doesn’t start with him. It begins with his grandfather, Rajubettan — known lovingly as the father figure of the small tea growers of the Nilgiris — who pioneered the region’s first “bought leaf” factory; one that didn’t depend on its own estate but supported the community around it.

Sandeep speaks fondly of his grandfather, who started with just a grocery store but slowly ventured into tea by converting a part of his farmland.

“Each day, he would harvest leaves and carry them to a nearby factory, only to be turned away when they were already full. After one too many wasted trips, he had a simple but transformative idea: What if there was a factory that didn’t necessarily buy leaves from his own estate but from estates that surrounded his factory?”

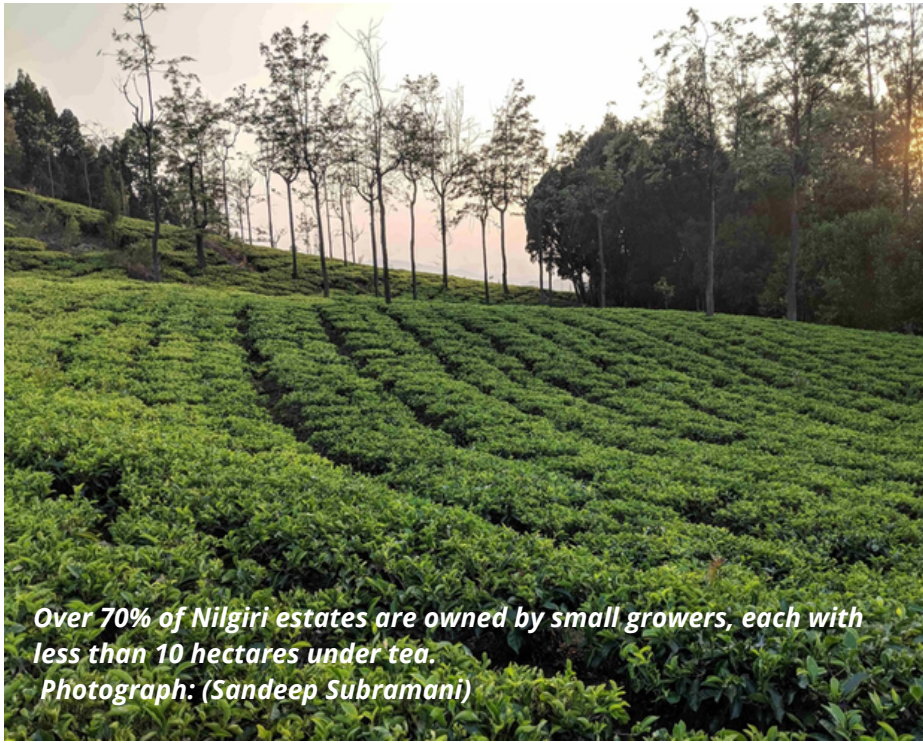
That idea opened the doors of tea cultivation to anyone with a small patch of land and a big dream. Even today, over 70% of estates in the Nilgiris are owned by small growers, each with less than 10 hectares under tea.

“In most other tea-growing districts, it tends to be only large estate owners who hold hundreds and thousands of acres. Today, there are over 150 bought leaf factories in the Nilgiris,” Sandeep adds with pride.

Small farms shaping a global brew

There are three models in the Nilgiris for small farmers.

Sandeep explains, “The most popular of these is called the ‘bought leaf’ model that my grandfather pioneered. This model ensures that anyone interested in growing tea can do so without worrying about the huge costs involved in setting up a production facility. This truly enabled the proliferation of the small tea grower moment in the Nilgiris,” he shares



*Over 70% of Nilgiri estates are owned by small growers, each with less than 10 hectares under tea.
Photograph: (Sandeep Subramani)*

There is also a cooperative model where the growers are also stakeholders in the factory that produces the tea. He adds, “The most popular of these is the Government-supported ‘INDCOSERVE’. In recent years, some small farmers have started their own micro-factories that produce tea from their own estates, which may be just a few acres in size.”

Tranquillitea — Gourmet Nilgiri teas and boutique experiential hotels

After completing his hospitality degree, when Sandeep returned home, he founded Tranquillitea — Gourmet Nilgiri Teas & Boutique Experiential Hotels.

Realising most visitors only knew milk-and-sugar chai, he designed a gourmet experience to showcase the nuanced world of single-origin, high-elevation teas. Their boutique experiential stays are repurposed bungalows where guests can experience the plantation life in person, thus avoiding building new structures and putting any additional strain on the ecosystem.

What began as a hobby has since grown into a daily ritual for travellers from across the globe. Over the last 20 years, Tranquillitea has hosted everyone from heads of state to business tycoons, from celebrities and movie stars to global sports stars and icons.

“We have even had guests who visited the Nilgiris only to do the tea tasting with us. Conde Nast Traveller called us one of the seven best places in the world for tea, and we even found a place in The Lonely Planet Guide to India,” shares Sandeep.

While India remains Tranquillitea’s primary market, its teas have travelled far — to Japan, Germany, Singapore, the UK, the USA, the UAE, France, and beyond.

Planet-positive: Tea, tradition, and the timeless hills of the Nilgiris

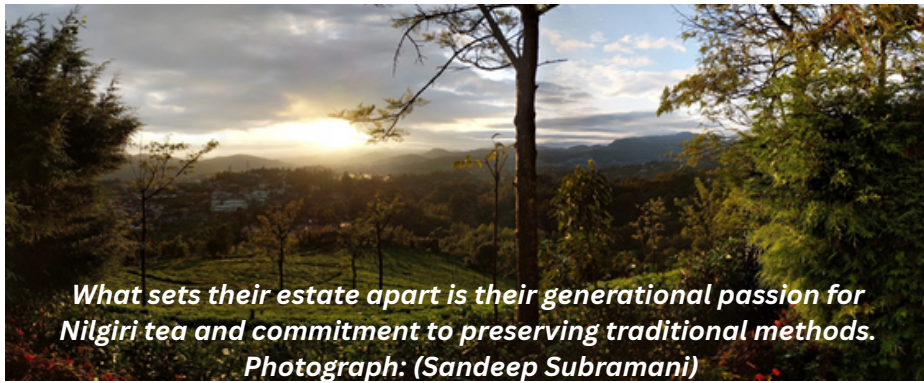
The more you speak with Sandeep, you realise that his relationship with tea runs deeper than business — it’s cultural, emotional, and ecological.

Along with their generational passion for Nilgiri tea, what sets their estate apart is their commitment to preserving traditional methods and knowledge.

“We consciously avoid chemical fertilisers and pesticides, and grow tea using organic principles,” he shares. The estate prunes bushes every few years, leaving the branches to compost naturally, enriching the soil.

Sandeep has also planted hundreds of shola trees across his estates — efforts that will not only raise groundwater levels but also add shade, enriching the flavour profile of Nilgiri teas.

Sholas are rare ecosystems of grasses, shrubs, and clustered trees that thrive only above 6,000 feet in the Western Ghats. This means there are only certain pockets where this ecosystem can thrive.



He works closely with Godwin Vasanth Bosco, ecologist and founder of Upstream Ecology, to restore these fragile shola patches. “At Upstream Ecology, one of our goals is to work towards recreating entire shola forest communities, and recreating these rare ‘cloud forests’. Although they are making a slow comeback over their traditional

regenerating shola forests is still extremely beneficial to the biosphere,” Bosco explains.

“We are looking to transform about 25% of our estates with shola trees and grasses and other indigenous plants,” adds Sandeep.

In Sandeep’s own words, they are a small operation that currently employs around 50 employees in total. They are ‘community-first’ because workdays are capped at six hours, giving staff time for family and personal pursuits.

Tea pluckers Chandra (47), Asuntha (55), and Mary (59), who’ve worked here for over 25 years, agree that a lot has changed since Tranquilitea started — from eliminating pesticides to producing hand-rolled teas to planting shola trees.

“Our salaries have also increased, and now we regularly see wildlife — Indian gaurs and birds we never saw 25 years ago. That’s probably because we stopped using chemicals. It’s better working outdoors in nature than inside four walls,” they smile and add.

From setbacks to growth

Just like most businesses, the early years were tough. “Very few guests came to our tea house, and we could barely make ends meet or pay salaries from the income we generated,” recalls Sandeep. “But I believed that if you have the right product and stick with it, things change. Today, we have bookings made a year or more in advance.”

Another challenge came when the colonial bungalow they had rented was reclaimed by its owners. Forced to shift into their own, more remote estate, Sandeep had to rethink the model.

“Earlier, people could just drop in for tea and snacks. Now, being more interior, we moved towards curated gourmet tea tastings and afternoon tea experiences that required prior reservations.”

What seemed like a setback became an advantage — today, guests often call the tasting the highlight of their Nilgiris visit.

Louise H, who visited the estate with his family, says it’s “definitely something to do if you’re staying in the Nilgiris.” For him, the afternoon was both informative and relaxing — beginning with a gentle walk among the tea bushes, followed by an engaging indoor session on all things tea and a tasting of six different varieties. “It was fascinating and delicious,” he recalls, adding that Sandeep is “a lovely and extremely knowledgeable host and farmer.”

Tej, another traveller who spent an afternoon at the estate, calls it “a memorable, cosy experience” — complete with tea tasting and a walk through the Coonoor estate. Describing Sandeep as “a passionate tea connoisseur and a great host,” Tej says it’s an offbeat experience the whole family can enjoy.

Nilgiri Tea — A legacy brewed in stories, soil and time

In Sandeep Subramani's welcoming world, tea isn't just a drink. It's a legacy, a livelihood, and a living ecosystem. What he is building in the Nilgiris is a blueprint — a regenerative, rooted, and replicable way of bringing together tradition, ecology, and economy. It's not just "business".

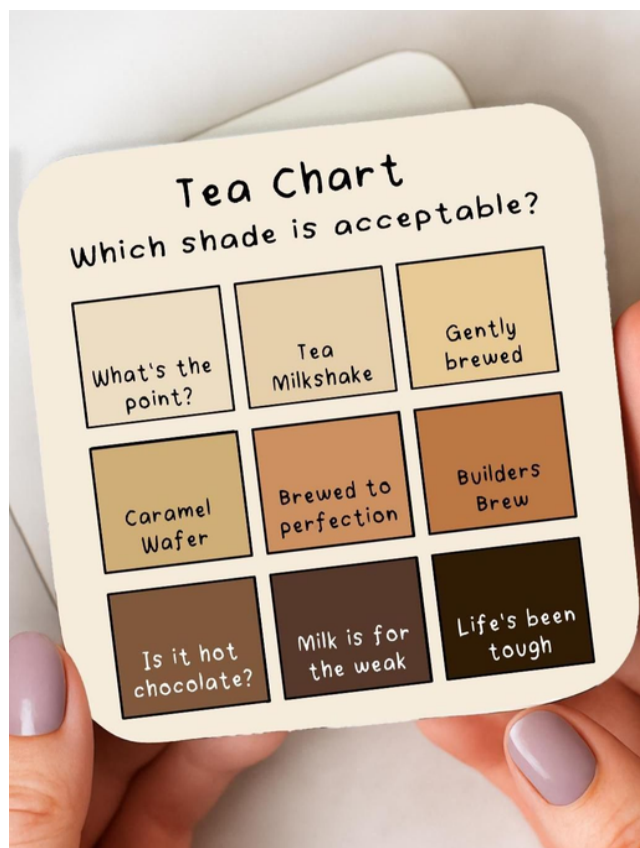
If you ask him how many tonnes of tea they produce annually, he says in his usual calm manner, "We are into small batch production where each tea is meticulously crafted, often by hand. We focus on quality, and we are not into the volumes game."

At a time when conversations around sustainability are often driven by scale and technology, Tranquillitea reminds us that sometimes, the answers lie in looking back — at what the land once offered, what our grandparents once knew, and what our hands can still create.

Sandeep has big dreams. He is currently setting up a micro-factory to produce small-batch speciality orthodox teas and is collaborating with industry leaders and stakeholders in the Nilgiris to host a festival celebrating Nilgiri teas in September 2027.

Nilgiri tea may have taken the long road to the spotlight, but with people like Sandeep at the helm, it's finally claiming its place — tasting of misty mornings, mindful hands, and a future brewed slow, with heart, and brewed right.

To shop from their gourmet tea catalogue, book their gourmet tea-tasting experience or their experiential holidays, you can visit the [official website of Tranquillitea](#).



For Tea Planters

An idyllic life-style slowly fades away

A superintendent relaxes in the porch of his enormous residence

It was the ultimate relic of the Raj. Sprawling bungalows attended by an army of well-trained servants: vegetable gardens to supply the kitchen with an uninterrupted supply of fresh greens: the clubhouse a short drive away for the evening "snifter" at the bar - or a game of tennis or golf: weekends at the nearest hill station or out in the jungles for organised shikar-cum-fishing trips.

Governing this idyllic life-style were two leaves and a bud, the ubiquitous symbol of Indian tea. Whether in the rolling plains of Assam and the Dooars in West Bengal or in the mist-shrouded hills of Darjeeling and the Nilgiris, life on the tea gardens seemed suspended in time: an extended legacy of the hard-living, hard-drinking Scotsmen who first planted and cultivated the stunted green shrubs that made Indian tea literally a household name everywhere.

Up till the late '60s, life on the tea gardens remained rooted in the Raj. Tea garden labourers treated managers and assistant managers like minor gods whose every word was a divine command - labourers referred to managers as mai-bap. Salaries and perks for tea planters were far more attractive than comparative appointments in private sector companies. In the '60s, starting salaries were between Rs 1,200 and Rs 1,500 along with virtually everything else - fully furnished houses, servants, transport, petrol - paid for.

Though social life revolved around the clubs, there was something for everybody. Games included billiards, golf, tennis, squash, football and cricket. There were movie shows and regular dances with live bands organised by the wives. In most estates, regular weekly charter flights arrived from Calcutta loaded with foodstuffs and anything else planters wanted to order.

But it was an anachronism, an era that had to end. Even so, the change in the tea planter's life-style is so dramatic and all-embracing that even 1970 seems like a century ago. In Shillong, Thomas Richmond, 76, nostalgically remembers his 25 years as a tea planter: a life "as good as in rural England". He can talk for hours of the "splendid times" he had but dreads going back to the gardens now. "It will break my heart," he says.



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An assistant manager supervises the plucking of tea leaves: Fading aura

Before Independence, tea companies were almost wholly owned by the British and young men were brought in to look after the estates all the way from England. Remembers Anil Sokey, 64, who spent over four decades as a planter. "Hardly any planter would miss an evening at the club. Even Indian planters made it a point to participate because British bosses ensured that their assistants were active at work, on the playground and in the clubs." Dancing, drinking and generally living it up were images synonymous with planters.

Today, for an old planter, the sight at the Dibrugarh District Planters' Club on a Saturday evening would indeed be heartbreaking. There are normally hardly a dozen planters at the bar and even less playing any kind of game. But that is symbolic of the dramatic change that has overtaken tea garden life. By the early '70s, with even the most die-hard British planter having left, life on the tea gardens became, almost overnight, a case of paradise lost.

The change was hastened when British-owned companies sold out to Indian owners, mainly hard-headed, profit-oriented Marwari businessmen. With the change in management - and the sudden competition in international markets that Indian tea faced - the old life-style of the tea planter was doomed.

"There is little time for recreation now," says Rajiv Wazirchand, 40, an Assam planter: "There is too much paper work." In the mid-'40s, there were nine golf courses maintained by tea clubs in Cachar district alone. Now, tall grass and weeds have claimed them. Interestingly, even the traditional afternoon "lie back" has become a memory.

A job on the estates today is a high-pressure one. Points out Hemendra Prasad Barooah, owner of nine tea estates in Assam: "When the Britishers were in charge, working as a planter was a way of life. Now, it is just another job. Employers annually spend around Rs 2.50 lakh on a manager in a tea garden. Naturally, they want results."

"When the Britishers were in charge, working as a planter was a way of life. Now it is just another job." Hemendra Prasad Barooah tea estate owner

More important, they want quick results. Within the last decade, there have been sweeping changes in the gardens. Most of the new recruits are engineers, agriculture graduates and computer professionals. "Today, companies are only interested in the quantum of work completed, production figures, rising profit graphs and projections for the future," says a new recruit.

Arul Pahwa, 23, a planter in Dibrugarh points out that working hours have stretched to unimaginable levels. Apart from dealing with the labour and filing countless government returns, more time is taken up by the factories which work longer hours than before. Moreover, improved agricultural practices have helped stretch the plucking season to nearly 10 months a year.

The change in life-style has a lot to do with the pressures of the market-place. Today not only is international competition intense, even within the country, consumers have become quality conscious. "You can no longer flog any quality of tea. It has become a buyer's market," says Barooah.

Moreover, if sports and socialising - both synonymous with tea estates - have started fading out it is because of the kind of people who have started joining the gardens in recent years. Almost all the professionals who are now getting in belong to middle class backgrounds: to them the kind of life-style that existed 15 years ago on the estates is totally alien. Their wives would rather stay at home and watch video or television whereas in the old days, it was the women who played a major role in organising the social life.

It isn't as if there aren't profits in the tea business. But employers seem to feel that the tea planter now need not live the kind of life that his British predecessors used to. For a start, a newcomer in a fairly good company begins with a salary of between Rs 1,200 and Rs 1,500 - hardly impressive figures, compared to other private sector jobs.

Traditional perks too have been a major casualty. In numerous cases, owners have moved into the palatial houses that managers formerly lived in, compelling their own employees to shift to smaller accommodation. Assistants have been made to share bungalows.

Managements see the change as inevitable, even necessary. Says K. Datta, deputy general manager, Tata Tea: "British planters tried to create a little England around them. Today, if a young planter lived like that it would be totally incongruous." He says that if perks have been cut, it is a deliberate effort on the part of tea managements to see that planters live the way other Indians do. "We do not want maharajas on the gardens," he says.

The changes have started taking their toll. One example; the heavy turnover among new recruits. Most youngsters who join tea gardens leave even before their probation period is over. Says Anup Chopra, 48, a superintendent in a Jorhat tea garden; "In our time, it was the best paid job and we were well compensated for living in the wilds. Now youngsters would rather become executives in a city."

The aura of authority and power that surrounded the managers and assistant managers has also faded. The boot is now on the other foot. Secluded as their houses are, a sense of insecurity haunts managers, several of whom have become targets of dacoities. Says a Dibrugarh planter: "Our managements do not understand the adverse conditions we live in. Our pleas for more security have fallen on deaf ears."

The traditional system of having a 'garden banker' - usually a local money lender - to conduct transactions has been done away with by some managements to save on commission. They now expect their managers to withdraw huge amounts from the bank and carry the cash to the garden on salary day. The days are well known and managers are known to have been waylaid and looted.

But even more than criminals, it is problems of labour that plague managers. In Assam, until quite recently, the tea garden workers were a peaceful lot. True, they were unionised, but they were fairly well paid and most of them were controlled by the Congress(I)'s Indian National Trade Union Congress. But now the state's ruling Asom Gana Parishad is trying to carve out a base for itself in these areas. The consequence: inter-union rivalry, aggressive workers and, for the managers, a major headache.

In a tense situation, the manager is the only voice of the owners and predictably, the major target for physical attack. Last year, for instance, Manager Suresh Bhalla was ruthlessly hacked to death by workers. And last month, two assistant managers had to be hospitalised with serious injuries after they were attacked in the Behora Tea Estate near Jorhat.

Manager Wazir Khan, who tried to intervene, was also beaten up. The cause for the outrage was that some labourers who had been found asleep on duty had been suspended. "This is only going to get worse," says a planter's wife. "We have to somehow get managements to ensure that our husbands return safely."

Clearly, the glamour of the tea estates is gradually fading and, in another few years, there may be little to distinguish the tea manager's job from that of his counterparts in the city.

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