



Tea Industry of Assam

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Abstract

Assam Tea is celebrating 200 years of its establishment. The peculiarity of Assam Tea is its strong taste. Tea industry is Assam's one of its Primary Industry which is grown in Upper Assam Districts, North Bank of Brahmay river and in plains of Barak Valley of Assam. Tea industry although termed as large scale Tea Cultivation or large tea estates now a days many small tea growers are also playing an important role in this industry. As in case of other industrial activities, this industry also has its ups and downs which the paper aims to focus at.

Key words: Assam Tea; Large tea estate; Small Tea Growers; tea types; pesticides in tea;

The strong in taste and nice in colour – my cup of tea.. Assam Tea.

Second to water Tea is the most consumed drink. Annual tea consumption worldwide amounted to about 6.7 billion kilograms in the year 2022 which is expected to reach 7.4 billion kilograms by 2025 (source statista 2024)

As perit's preparation process and choice of taste, this drink is consumed both as a medicinal drink or as refreshment drink.

Native to China, it is known to be discovered more than 4000 years ago, around 2737 BC during the reign of Emperor Shen Nongor.

After the Chinese Japanese are the next to taste and drink tea Travelling monks from Japan experienced its taste while visiting China. Drinking tea, calms the mind which helps the monks in meditation. And in this way drinking of tea became a habit for the Japanese people.

The state of Assam, India that lies in other part of Himalayas across the China, the tea plants were naturally grown in the forest of Upper Assam areas. The indigenous tribes used to drink the liquor by preparing it in their own traditional ways from a long long time.

However unlike china tea was not grown in organized way and tea leaves are plucked from wild tea plants only.

Till the early part of the 19th century, tea was known to be only grown from the one plant species, Camellia Sinensis var. Sinensis, in mainland China, but only few knew that the northeast was home to a hidden gold mine. a different variety of tea plant was native to this land. Few people are aware that the Singpho tribe drank tea as an herbal beverage long before it was discovered. The Khamti tribe of Arunachal also used to drink some tea like beverage.

The traditional Singpho tea is the falap, made by frying, drying and stuffing the tea leaves (from unpruned bushes growing wild or even in the backyard) in bamboo and leaving it to smoke above the stove. The Singphos have been drinking phalap since time immemorial Their tea heritage, after all, is older and richer.

The British had been looking for a way to break China's monopoly on the tea trade and they tried some

In mid 19th century During British Rule Scottish adventurer Robert Bruce went on an expedition into Assam, in 1823. While in Assam, Robert met up with an Assamese nobleman Maniram Dutta Baruah alias Maniram Dewan, who later on took plantation of tea in commercial way.



The Singpho tribe Chief Bessa Gam, also known as Jaiprakash Veer Singh, showed Robert how unknown to the world, the Singpos brewed tea from the plant growing wild and the tea was good enough to compete with Chinese tea.

Bruce was convinced that he had found 'Camellia Sinensis' in Assam which was quite different from the Chinese variety. Robert however passed away a year later, in 1824. Before his death, Robert told his brother Charles Bruce of his discovery. In the Botanical Gardens in Calcutta, and tried to plant the sapling. In 1836, Charles Bruce, brother of Robert Bruce set up a tract of land in Sadiya, Assam, as a nursery and planted it with indigenous tea seed plants. The plants survived and, with the help of Chinese workers, Charles managed to quietly dispatch a small sample of manufactured tea to the Tea Committee the same year.

He also sent out some seed to the Botanical Gardens in Calcutta for botanical classification. The

Botanical Gardens in Calcutta completed its scientific assessment, and the plant was given its own identity and classified as *Camellia Sinensis* variety *Assamica*.

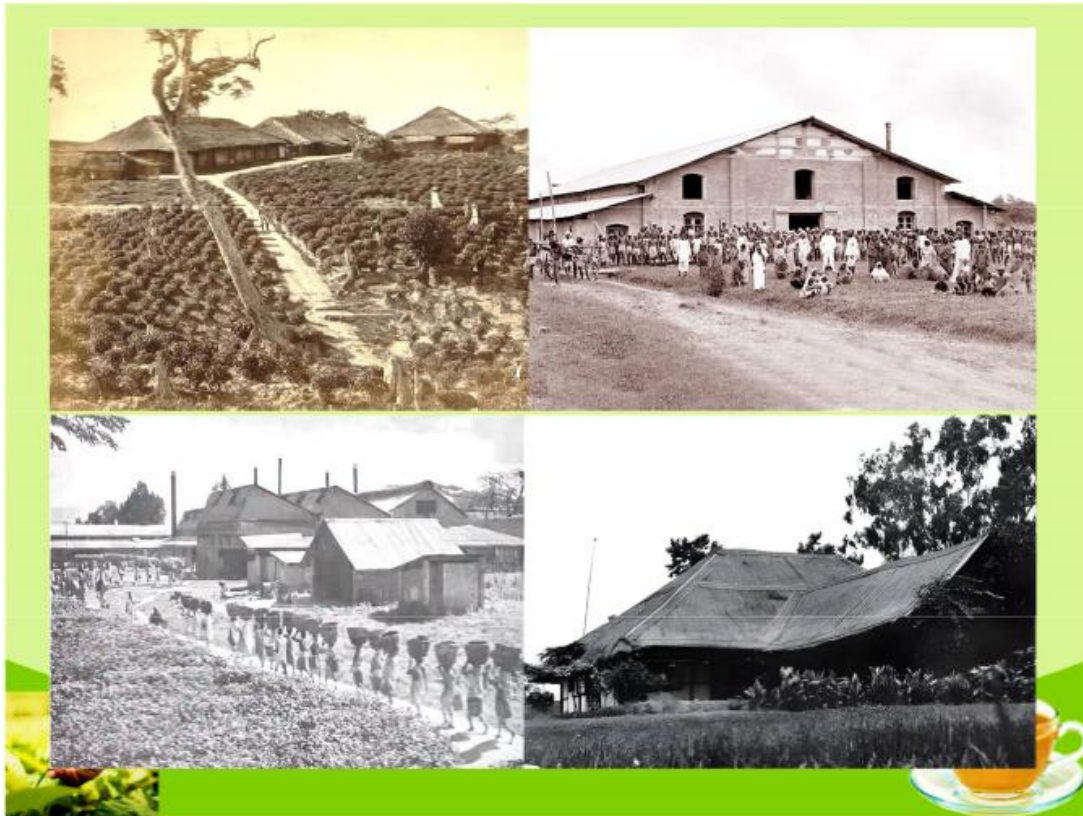
In 1837, Bruce dispatched another consignment of 46 chests of tea made entirely from the leaves of the Assamese bush. After removing a portion that had spoilt in transit, 350 pounds in eight chests were sent to London auctions in May 1838. This first consignment was auctioned in London on the 10th of January, in 1839.

A tea garden was started in 1833 in erstwhile Lakhimpur by the British. However "Chubwa Tea Estate", established in 1937 near Dibrugarh was the first well organized successful tea plantation of the British Government.

In 1839, British Government formed the "Assam Company"; the first tea company in the world to grow, manufacture and trade tea across the globe.

SOME OLD PHOTOGRAPHS OF TEA GARDEN ACTIVITIES OF 19TH CENTURY





In recognition of his contributions to Tea Industry of Assam Bessa Gam the village head of a remote Singpho village of Upper Assam was awarded with the Padmashri the fourth highest civilian award in the year 2009. He passed away in 2012 at the age of 91 leaving the Tea Industry to flourish.

The present Tea Industry in Assam operates as an organised Tea Industry run and managed by Big tea companies and unorganized Small Tea growers working at local level.

The Assam Company, set up in the year 1839, with rapidly expanded its business and established over 160 tea gardens by the 1860s.

Robert Bruce and Charles Alexander Bruce established Jorehaut Tea Company. The company had another garden namely Dickom Tea estate.

The Cinnamara Tea Company was established in 1863 led by Henry G. Morris. The company established several tea estates in the Dibrugarh

district of Assam, including the famous Cinnamara Tea Estate.

Moran Tea Company: This . It was known for its high-quality tea and for its innovative use of machinery in the production process.

McLeod Russel India Limited: It is one of the largest tea company in the world, with over 50 tea estates in Assam, West Bengal, and Vietnam. The company was founded by British tea planters in 1869.

Williamson Magor & Company Limited: This is another major tea company with several tea estates in Assam. The company was founded in 1869 and is headquartered in Kolkata.

Russell Tea Limited: This British Company formed in 1912 has several tea estates in Assam and produces high-quality, orthodox teas.

The Pesticide row of Assam Tea and the resultant downfall of tea auction and selling

Assamese Tea Industry celebrating 200 years of its inception. However, it is disheartening to see that



there is no Testing Lab to check the pesticide level of the Tea leaves in the State of Assam.

The story goes... ..

With every sip from the cup of tea, we welcome the health benefit of it. Apart from other health benefit of drinking tea, the common one is it reduces stress and anxiety, may improve blood pressure and reduces risk of cancer. But if contain any chemical content due to unscientific and over use of pesticides, it may cause health issues.

In this regard, India Tea Board is playing a proactive role and issues a notification which states that the Bought Tea leaf factory owners should auction sale 100 % of their dried tea leaf produce and at the same time they should certify that the leafs should be free from any chemical content. But this notification affects an estimated 1.5 lakh Small tea growers of Assam as;from 1st June 2024, the Bought leaf tea factory owners refused to buy bought tea leaves from small tea growers without proper testing. The main problem here is there is no Testing Lab in the State of Assam and it is not feasible to go to Kolkata for doing the testing the pesticide and other chemical content level. Moreover, it is also not possible for the Testing Lab at Kolkata to do regular testing of the tea leaf. However, at Tocklai Tea Research Centre, Jorhat District, Assam only 10 samples can be tested in a day. As a government entity, the testing lab is serving its role, but it is not enough. However, the Small Tea Growers Association is terming the whole issue as a propaganda by the outside forces of the state to underplay their part in Tea Industry of the State. At the same time, the Association is demanding the Government to take initiative to establish a Testing Lab in the State at the earliest and fulfilment of other demands like special training centre for small tea growers, granting myadi (permanent) land allotment to small tea growers, infrastructure development for the sector, creating a proper market on co-operative model for the small tea growers, 100% auction by the Government of the bought leaves and starting government tea leaf factory.

So, for greater interest of both the consumers and cultivators/tea traders timely action from the Government and other stake holders is prime most important.