



# Planters Welfare Association

(AN ASSOCIATION OF MUTUAL BENEFITS)

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## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

**President:** V.Lall

**Vice - President:** Ashok Batra

**Ex- Officio:** Mrs. Dipika Nanjappa

**Secretary :** R.K.Patney

**Treasurer:** B.Chhabra

**Members :** Capt. V.K.Mehra and A.K.Saxena

**Members Meeting ( Socials):** Mrs. Nirmla Lall, Mrs. Rani Patney, Mrs. Sunanda Chhabra

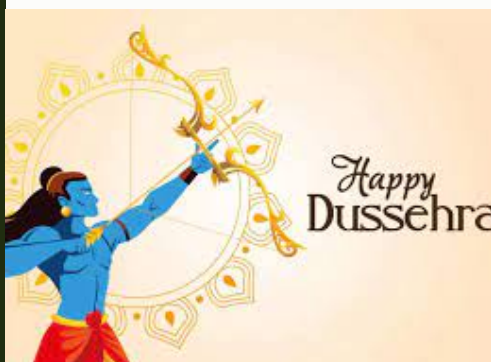
**Member Mailing:** Mrs. Rani Patney

**Editor:** Ashok Batra

**Period 2 - October 2022**

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# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

We are once again very pleased to revert to our regular Members Lunches this year and it is encouraging to see the increasing attendance commencing from our last AGM held in March, 2022.

Due to the high inflation post Covid, there has been a substantial all round escalation

in the cost of hosting our Lunches and hence we need to urgently increase our collections. This will be discussed in detail at the next AGM, which is being held on the 18th. December, 2022.



At the September Members Lunch, we incurred a huge loss, as 10 members who had confirmed their attendance did not turn up and the Association had to bear this loss of about Rs 20,000/-. I would suggest that we consider charging these defaulters and recover the dues from them at the next function.

Our Tea Planters Association has been well supported over the long years and we would like to continue our get togethers of retired & serving Planters.

I would be delighted to hear your comments.

With Best Wishes,

**- Vishnu Lal**  
**President**

From the Editor – Sincere apologies for the delay in this Issue



MOVE  
**OOLONG,**  
NOTHING TO  
**TEA**  
HERE

Making tea isn't  
hard, but waiting for  
the kettle to boil  
sure is tea-dious



# MEMBERS MEETING ( SOCIAL ) FOR THE YEAR 2022 – 2023

We are pleased to advise that the Activities of the Association have commenced after a break of two years, since the restrictions imposed due to Pandemic have been removed.

The Events held and the up – coming Activities for the year 2022 – 2023, are as under -

S. No.	Date	Venue	Venue booked by
1.	Sun 27th March 2022	Annual General Meeting - 2021 at Delhi Gymkhana Club, New Delhi Sponsored by Mr. Avijit Ganguly & Mr. Sanjay Choudhary ( Lunch)	Mr. V.Lall
2.	Sun 21st August, 2022	DSOI Dhaula kuan, New Delhi (Lunch)	Capt. V K Mehra
3.	Sun 25th Sept 2022	Delhi Gymkhana Club , New – Delhi 9 Jamun Tree) ( Lunch)	Mr. B.Chhabra
4.	Sun 06th November, 2022	Air Force Sport Complex , New – Delhi (Pool Side) , Lunch	W/Cdr. Gullu Kapur
5.	Sun 18th December, 2022	Annual General Meeting - 2022 at Golf Links Community Centre, New Delhi (Lunch)	Mr. V Lall
6.	Sunday 22nd January, 2023	Hosted at their Farm House by Mr. & Mrs Narotam Sayal	
7.	February, 2023	Residence of Mr. P.S Tibb , Gurgaon (Lunch)	Mr.& Mrs P.S Tibb
8.	March , 2023	To be intimated at a later date	

The three Socials held till date this Financial year, ( as indicated above ) in August, September and November, were a roaring success, and thoroughly enjoyed by us all. With an average of 60 + members and their spouses – great comraderies, super and delicious lunch menu's by the EC Ladies.

The last Social held recently at the Air Force Sports Complex, was graced by Mr. Sagar Mehta, President at Badulipar Ltd., Koomtai 'B' Tea Estate. At 92, we believe, he is the Eldest serving Tea Planter in the World. And he matched us Beer for Beer, standing tall.

A big thank you to Mr. T.P.S. Josen who invited Mr. Sagar Mehta to this Social, and presented a Memento for the occasion. Snaps of this occasion, as well as of these three Socials are entered to our website.

All information for the AGM and balance Social's planned for the rest of the above events, will be communicated to members by e – mail / WhatsApp closer to the dates.

# CHAMPAGNE & ROSES

**BIRTHS: Nothing to report**

**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 ( JOINING APRIL 2022 ONWARDS )

1. Dr. Ritu Arora, S – 13, Greater Kailash – 2, New – Delhi – 110048 , Mobile : 9582232332; e mail: arora2008@gmail.com
2. Mr. Subrata Shankar Medhi, S- 421 ( 2nd Floor), Greater Kailash – 2, New – Delhi – 110048 , Mobile : 9935119838 , e mail: subratamedhi@gmail.com
3. Mr. Manmohan Singh – Nirvana Country , Close North, Flat 1203, Tower 15, Gurgaon, Mobile : 9831213762, e mail : mmsingh.2101@gmail.com
4. Mr Narender Kumar Jain – D – 83, Defence Colony , New – Delhi – 110024, Mobile : 9811089707, e mail :- nkjain1008@yahoo.com
5. Mr. Biswajit Borkataky - Orchid Petals , Penthouse 1404/ tower 11, Sector 49, Gurgaon – 122018 , Mobile: 9560 489977 Land Line – 0124 4370190, e mail : biswajit@borkataky.com
6. Mr. Anshul Pal – Plot 73, Sector 47, Gurgaon – 122018 , Mobile : 8433204991, e mail: anshul.africa@gmail.com
7. Mr. Saumitro Sen – A – 97, Chittaranjan Park , New – Delhi – 110019, Mobile: 9811299386 , e mail: saumitrosen@gmail.com
8. Mrs. Varsha Wadhawan - 5/12 , DLF City Phase – 1, Qutab Enclave , Gurgaon – 122002, Mobile : 8860006939 , Land Line : 0124 4283863 , e mail: varshawadhawan@gmail.com
9. Mrs. Meena Berry,- 6, Dharam Marg, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi – 110021, Mobile – 9312399485, e-mail – manish.berry@gmail.com
10. Mr. Vidhur Saghal, B-3/70, Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi – 110029, Mobile – 9811188887, e-mail – vidur.vidurraj@gmail.com
11. Mr. Rohan Tandon, The Resort, F-604, Sector 75, Faridabad, Harayana – 121004, Mobile – 9811525304, e-mail – rohantandon99@yahoo.com
12. Mr Deepak Modi , 1102, Tower B –1, Parsavnath Exotica, Golf Course Road, Gurgaoan- 122002, Mobile – 9435137472 , e – mail – deepakmodi60@gmail.com
13. Mr. Kamaldeep Singh, A-066 DLF, Capital Greens, Kamarpura, N. Delhi 110015, Mobile – 9957566547, e-mail- Kamaldeep9891@gmail.com

We are pleased to inform that 17 new members so far, during the period January to November 2022, have been enrolled ( 13 above and 4 members in March 2022, as mentioned in our April 2022 Newsletter), which is one of the highest numbers in recent years.

## CHANGE OF ADDRESS / E MAIL/ MOBILE NO

All changes , if any , have been made in the Members directory , which is circulated to all members at regular intervals . The same is available for viewing at our website [www.pwa.in](http://www.pwa.in)



# COMMUNICATION

We are happy to report that we have 269 members which includes NCR / Out Station / Hony. Members.

**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** - As conveyed earlier, WhatsApp group ( PWA – NCR) has been introduced since the Bulk SMS facility has been withdrawn . Many members who do not have WhatsApp features, 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 no 9810020533. It will be prudent to mention that few members have exited the group , and they are requested to join the group to avail this facility.

## WEBSITE

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

## SUBSCRIPTION:

Annual subscription for the year 2022/23 is due now. There are few members who have not paid their subscription for the year 2020 - 2021 . They are requested to clear their dues ASAP. Kindly note that 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. This is as per the resolution passed at the AGM in the year 2018. 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

### **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 –**
  - i. **Name of Beneficiary – Planters Welfare Association**
  - ii. **Saving bank account - A/C no 004601050068**
  - iii. **IFSC Code - ICIC0000046**
  - iv. **Bank & Branch- ICICI Bank, New Friends Colony , New – Delhi – 110065**

# OBITUARY ( April 2022 – November 2022)

We regret to inform passing away of:

**Our Members:** Mr. Bijoy Talukder , Mr.N.G Jalnawala, Mr. Pavi Sarin, Mr. J.S. (Jags) Jamwall, Mr. J.M. (Jaggi) Lall -Ex. Goodricke's

**Near & Dear ones of our members:** Brother of Mr. H.S Chimni, Father in law of Mr. Avijit Ganguly, Mrs. Chander Malhotra, wife of Mr. Brij Malhotra, Father of Ranjit Kent, Mother in law of Harpreet Singh Grewal

**Our friends:** Mr. Ranvijay Singh (Ex. MRIL), Mr. Ashley Larkins (Ex Moran Tea), Mr Prabhat Ghosh (Ex Tata Finlay) Mr Harish Mukhia (Ex Duncan. Goodricke's) , Mr Roy Button (Ex Assam Frontier), Mr. Rajan Mehra , ( Ex Assam Company), Vicky Dhar s/o Mr Amarjit Dhar ( Tata Tea), Mr. Bhupinder Pal Singh,(Ex Jardine's), Mr Prabal Jyoti (PJ) Sharma, (Ex Tata Tea), Mr. John Willis, (Ex. VA, Jokai), Mr. Amarinder Singh ( Dimpay) Gill, ( GM Sonabheel, Ex Jorehaut Tea Co.), Mrs. Shukla Sen, Wife of Late Mr Gautam Sen ( Ex – Tata Tea)

**Condolence letters to the bereaved families have been sent out by the Hony. Secretary on behalf of the Executive Committee of the PWA.**

## ACHIEVEMENTS

**Ms. Anuradha Sawhney, daughter of Mrs. Dipika Nanjappa , was invited to speak at the Vegan International Catalunya, in Barcelona, on the 18th September 2022.**

**Our Heartiest congratulation .**

## DONATIONS

None during this period



## JOLLY JALOPY

**Memories of the early days in Assam, narrated by Mrs. Rita Singh, Wife of Late Bawa Kuldip Singh ( Ex Goodricke's ), to Mrs. Nandita Tewari, wife of Mr Akhil Tewari, ( Ex Goodricke's , now V.A with New Tea Co., Siliguri) Reproduced here with kind approval of Nandita and Reeta. Photos courtesy Reeta and Mr. Prem Singh ( ex Jardine's )**  
<https://nanditat6.wixsite.com/rosee-t/post/jolly-jalopy>

She was rudely awakened by the loud sound of what seemed to be a damaged silencer pipe of a vehicle. It was way past midnight and she could sense the vehicle going at top speed around their bungalow. She covered her ears and looked at her husband Kuldip, only to find him rejoicing gleefully. He exclaimed, "they have arrived! Come meet my buddies from Rydak – across the river."

"Who? At this unearthly hour?"

"Nothing unusual about it, they always enter through the botol khana," stated Kuldip.

It had been a little over a week when on a freezing night in the first week of February 1975, Rita, the new bride had alighted at the Alipurduar platform. The two-hour long, dusty and bumpy drive to the no. 16 bungalow was soon tucked away in the folds of her memory and she began settling down to the "candle-lit" lifestyle, as the chhotta bungalows would get electricity only when the factory was running; a far contrast from the bright and vibrant Delhi life that she was accustomed to.



**No. 16 bungalow - Sankos Tea Estate**

That particular night, she awoke to the whirr of the engine. Rita heard a voice blasting in with a thunderous "Koi hai?"

She now stood in the gol kamra, with a warm smile while her husband introduced the bachelors as his friends – Prem Singh and Rustomfram.

"Oh yes, haven't we met at the Jainti Sankos club?" she asked.

"Of course Rita," said Prem in his deep drawl, "and now you will see us more often."

"That's great," replied Rita asking if they would like to have something. "A cup of tea perhaps?"

"Oh! We have already done justice to a brimful dekchi of milk from your fridge today," they replied as laughter echoed in the drawing room of the Sankos bungalow.

"There's plenty more to have," said Rita mentally rummaging through the contents of the Electrolux kerosene fridge. "We're good to go," the friends replied and made themselves comfortable on the sofa. Rita's eyes met two shy but well-behaved youngsters dressed in shorts and hunter boots. They stood up to greet her and Rustomfram introduced them as new recruits who had just been inducted at Rydak Tea Estate.

The jokes, banter and the inane but hilarious repartee carried on into the night. Then, as abruptly as they had arrived, Prem clapped his hands and said, "Okay boys, time to go." Obediently, they stood up and made their way out. Prem and Rustomfram said their back-slapping goodbyes as the couple stood in the verandah to see them off.





**Mrs Rita Singh and Late Mr Bawa Kuldip Singh**

In front of the bungalow, an old retired Army jeep, which was not familiar with a coat of paint for decades, was parked. The jeep had no hood and only two seats in the front. So starry nights, torrential rains and winter chills had equal charm. Prem beckoned the chowkidaar and it seemed that it was another familiar drill as the chowkidaar came with the jerry cans. Using a half-broken bottle as a funnel, the jeep was made to drink up half a can of petrol.

Rita was bewildered as a ludicrous scene unfolded before her eyes. The boys stood behind the jeep jogging on the spot. Prem started the ignition as Rustomfram sat next to him. "Prem's khatara has its own rules for starting up," said Rustomfram in friendly banter.

On Prem's cue, the new recruits began shuffling and pushing the jeep forward. Soon, it coughed and gurgled and with a jerk, it came to life. As it inched forward, the two new boys ran and jumped in the back, into the comfort of cotton quilts.





Rita looked at her husband, feeling somewhat sorry at the silent discomfort of the boys. But Kuldip stated as a matter-of-fact, “inki training ho rahi hai.” (They are being trained.) Soon, into the darkness, they sped away on the narrow desolate roads. The only sound that pierced the silence of the estates was that of the jalopy. They felt the cool breeze on their faces as well as the warmth of the spirits radiating from within them.

The jeep made its way on the dry shore amongst the boulders and crossed the fair-weather bamboo bridge spanning across the larger stream of Rydak river. They had barely covered a mile when the engine began to sputter and gradually died. It seemed that the landscape had acquired a hyper-realism lit by the moon and the twinkling stars. The fields stretched endlessly, broader and flatter than during the daylight hours. The sky looked inkier and the river glassier. The night was edging towards dawn, though still devoid of birdsongs. They heard a growl.

“The leopards are on the prowl,” warned the seniors.

The boys looked at each other, taking a moment to soak in the vastness of their surroundings a wee bit nervous and then repeated the routine of push, shove and jump as they drove on. Prem proudly beamed and stated, “in spite of many odds, this Jalopy has a ‘carry-home-instinct’ and we have lived many adventures, always managing to find our way back home.”



**L - R - Bawa Kuldip Singh, Sarosh Rustomfram | Prem Singh, Vijay Singh Mann, Bawa Kuldip Singh, B Narayan**

#### **Glossary:**

**Botol khana: Pantry**

**Chhotta bungalow: Assistant manager's bungalow**

**Gol kamra: Drawing room**

**Dekchi: Metal pot used for heating**

**Chowkidaar: Night sentinel**

**Khatara: Jalopy (an old car in a dilapidated condition)**

# **THEY ALSO SERVED**

**by Rajesh Thomas**

*Dear friends,*

*I'm so happy that the 'drought' is over and we have new stories coming in. This wonderful thirst-quencher from Rajesh Thomas is about the bars in tea clubs and the good men who preside over them. Cheers, all of you!*

To take the tale back to 1928: A boisterous farewell party is in progress at the High Range Club for a colleague departing in retirement to the isles. Probably ridden with emotion at the departure of a friend and senior whom they adored and respected, the partygoers hoist the planter in question, W.O.Milne, on their shoulders and on to the bar to a merry chorus of "for he's a jolly good fellow", and prevail him to hang his bowler hat over the bar.

Beginning thus a unique tradition of having planters with an uninterrupted tenure of thirty years in the district hang their hat at the men's bar in recognition of their service. Over time, the hats symbolise the legacy of the men who shaped the destiny of these magnificent hills, the High Ranges, the jewel amongst all planting districts in South India.

Fast forward to the present and as one enters the men's bar of The High Range club, Munnar, it feels as if one has stepped into a distant world of planting history where time stands still. Wood-panelled walls, photographs of yesteryear, curios and artefacts donated by planters retiring to distant shores, animal trophies that stare at you from walls and glass cabinets of sporting trophies which tell tales of valour on the sporting field. But the thing that catches one's eye is the magnificent arch over which is a collection of old planting hats and sola topees with names / initials and dates. W.O.Milne was the first, and now 52 hats adorn this arch. Curiously, two of Milne's sons, also High Range planters, hung their headgear over the bar and this was called Milne's hat trick.

When one closely observes the other side of the bar, there are also three turbans that adorn the walls of this bar, belonging to retired head bearers and barmen of this club, keeping in tune with tradition, as they also had the distinction of marking thirty years of continuous service with the club. A sign of respect the planters of yore had for the staff, who served them and the pride of place the bartenders had in the clubs.

As the joke goes, the master of ceremonies at a wedding reception announced for everyone to stand next to the most important person in their life, and the barman nearly got stampeded in the resulting melee. Likewise, for planters, the barman was their go-to therapist, who administered them the weekly elixir of life.



The gentleman bar man who had the privilege of hanging up his turban along with the doyens of planting in Munnar was Yohaán. Yohaán retired long before I joined planting and was revered by the seniors. Many a senior recounted stories of being helped on to their motorcycles after a booze up and he would steadfastly refuse to serve if he felt the gentleman could not handle any more alcohol. His successor at the High Range club and the present incumbent Thangiah is no slouch with handling inebriated Assistant Managers, and Thangiah can whip up a mean Bloody Mary.

Yohan's contemporary at the Annamallai Club was Murugaya. Murgaya probably wielded more influence than anyone else in Valparai town did. A jack of all trades, Murugaya seamlessly slipped into administration and looked after the club accounts too later on.

Annamallai club had a second bar for the kids, the barrel bar. As the name suggests in the shape of a barrel, where all the cool older kids hung around sipping coca cola and fanta and eating finger chips. A characteristic of these legendary bartenders was they knew the choice of all the regulars, and one just had to walk into the bar and instinctively they handed you the right drink.

In the smaller planting clubs, these wonderful men showed they are multi-talented and in a lot of clubs they doubled up as the billiards marker or could hold their own in a tennis foursome when short of a fourth player. A skill they achieved with no formal training.

Balan the barman at the Meppadi Club, Wayanad and Kunhu Mohamed at the nearby Devarshola club across the Tamilnadu border, were some who pulled up double duty on the court and off the bar. A unique feature about the tennis courts at the Meppadi club was the court surface was of bitumen or tar.

The Bartender in the remote Highwayys club Manikam was a one man institution. It was he who dispensed the booze, made up a foursome on the tennis court, played billiards and snooker and if one felt peckish, rustled up a sandwich and generally kept everyone in a good mood. Manikam joined the club as a ball boy on the tennis court in the 1920s and gradually graduated to the green baize and then the bar. He continued to work well into his eighties and even then was reputed to dispense liquor accurately without the aid of a peg measure.

The Vandiperiyar and Peermade clubs of Central Travancore were two of the most lively planting clubs in South India. The old timers who dished out the moonshine were Dasaiah at Vandiperiyar Club and James at the Peermade Club. Besides keeping the spirits high, they were also adept at wielding the cue. Many Assistant Managers learnt the nuances of the green baize from these two. The Vandiperiyar and Peermade planting districts of Central Travancore were next to each other and were reputed to have tough labour and even tougher management. The Managers and Assistant Managers caught between the two carried a reputation of being a hard bunch that worked hard and partied harder. At a luncheon party over a monsoon Sunday, an argument broke out between two planters as to who was the better snooker player, Dasaiah or James. Soon others joined in with each faction vociferously, claiming their choice was the better player. To settle this, the famous battle of the barmen was scheduled over a Sunday in a fortnight's time, giving enough time for the contestants to sharpen their skills. I cannot recall who won the match, but a significant amount of money was reputed to have changed hands.

When one talks about barmen, mention should also be made of a unique club bar, the Kundale Club located in a small patch of heaven in the High Ranges, Munnar. A bar without a barman. The club has a unique system where the members pour their own drinks, write out their own chits and drop them in a box. The manager of one of the nearby estates, normally Chitavurrai or Yellapatty come periodically to tally and top up the stocks. Ironically, seldom is a shortage found and more often there is a small excess, like the factory tea stocks.





**The Coonoor Club bar**

Nathan the gent who doled out the hooch at the Coonoor Club in the seventies had a brood of leghorn chickens and he sold their eggs to the members to supplement his income. Once an English lady who wanted to buy eggs kept asking if they were “fresh and English” and Nathan kept assuring her they were. Unwittingly, she was delaying the next round of drinks to a bunch of impatient men. A voice from the end of the bar called out, "If you want any fresher or more English, you will have to lay them yourselves."

These fine men were not without their faults. During the days when getting imported booze was difficult, one planter had managed to get his hands on a bottle of imported vodka. He organised a golf foursome for the Sunday morning, with expectations of some good quality Vitamin V after eighteen holes. When they reached the nineteenth hole, the parched golfers found out the potato juice from Moscow had lost its potency. Apparently it had been watered down and Vodka had become Wadka, As the furious foursome turned to confront the suspect across the counter, our friendly neighborhood bar-man looked at the bottle and the owner and quizzically asked “was it raining in your estate?”



**The Gun Bar at the Wellington Gymkhana, The Nilgiris**



But these lovable rascals had a way of worming their way back into your heart. Thumba the veteran gin slinger who presided over the magnificent Gun Bar at the Wellington Gymkhana in the Nilgiris was one. A tale often related by my father's colleague and friend Babu Jayaram. Babu Jayaram's father Mr.K.K.R.Menon was the first Indian planter in South India and the Wellington Gymkhana was one of his familiar haunts. Hence Thumba knew Babu from his growing up days. As newlyweds, they were passing through the Nilgiris and were taken to Wellington Gymkhana for dinner by their friends. He introduced Thumba to his bride at the bar and later proceeded to their dinner. When they asked for the chit to sign, the bearer replied there was no chit for the drinks and dinner as Thumba had already paid for it. When Thumba was confronted on the way out, he just shrugged and said, "After all the years I have known you, the least I could do is buy you dinner when you get married."

**Meet the writer:**



**Rajesh Thomas introduces himself:**

**"A second generation planter. Born and grew up in the planting districts of Southern India. Started my career in the High Ranges and Annamallais Planting Districts for twelve years. Had a stint in Africa for two years. Since 2009 been planting in the Nilgiris.**

**Read all of Rajesh's stories at this link:**

**<https://teastorytellers.blogspot.com/search/label/J.Rajesh%20Thomas>**

# THE HUMP ON THE ROAD

*Hello again, dear readers! I'm most happy to bring you another lovely story from Indi Khanna. Get ready to travel through time to the High Ranges in Kerala, 1978. I'm going to get myself a good cup of tea before I settle down to read this; why don't you? Cheers! Gowri*

*by Indi Khanna*

I'm terrible with dates. While I need to shovel loads of fish down my gullet to simply remember even my own date of birth date, the one date which is firmly etched in my memory is the 1st of January 1978. I was a young pudian (green horn) SD (Sina Dorai = Assistant Superintendent) on Panniar Estate in the High Ranges in Kerala. The estate was teeming with elephants so much so that Panniar had one Division going by the name of Anairankal (literally translating into 'the road by which the elephant goes down').



The upshot was that not a day went by when one, while going around the estate, didn't bump into at least a couple of the pachyderms. The SOP was straightforward, you see a fellow, you simply swivel your bike 180 deg and head post-haste in the opposite direction. Workers, since they were always on foot, whenever they saw an elephant (which was a regular feature) either turned on their heels or should the fellow be too close and have been encountered while coming around a corner on the road, would simply duck under the nearest tea bush and stay put till the gentle giant(s) had ambled across. Perfect harmony and cohabitation. The man/animal conflict tale was, in those days, unknown and waiting in the wings to be played out many decades later.

Back in the day the High Range Club was always buzzing and VERY active. With the district encompassing 26 estates, 23 Tata Finlay (now KDHP) properties and 3 belonging to Malayalam Plantations (of which company, I as an Assistant Superintendent, was a teeny-weeny cog in the machinery) the strength of covenanted staff in the district was enough to ensure that the club was always alive and kicking. Never more so than on New Year's eve. Which 'evening' traditionally ended the next morning with an early 0500 Hrs breakfast of dosas, leaving one just about enough time to hop on to one's bike and make the one hour plus ride back to the estate in time for muster.



The High Range Club on new year's eve (besides other big bashes and inter-district meets through the year) was very pucca. Ladies resplendent in their best saris and all the men in formal attire – dinner jackets or 'bandh gala coats'. The accepted form back in the day was that, following the New Years dance and somewhat extended dinner, on the 1st of January one attended muster (always sacrosanct and de rigueur) allocated the day's work and could then take it somewhat easy through the day. I digress, so back to 1978 and the first day of the new year.



Leaving the club post a hearty dosa breakfast, still in my formal dinner attire, I rode into Panniar just in time for my morning muster at 7 a.m. As the workers trickled in, they were assigned their work for the day and headed off to the allocated fields. Around 0800 Hrs, by which time normally all the workers should have reported for work, my conductor Mr Balia (Incidentally NEVER Balia – always Mr Balia) remarked that he found it rather strange that not a single worker from the No.5 line had come in for work. Odd indeed. So I got on to my bike and heading off towards the lines. Nearing the line houses I saw that a whole lot of workers and kids were sitting on the roofs of their houses. Seeing me they started shouting that I shouldn't come any further since there was an elephant sitting in the middle of road.





Did a quick about turn and drove up instead to the main office which was on the hillock opposite the No.5 lines, from where I could also sight the road leading up to the lines. Sure enough, there it was – this huge pachyderm sprawled across the road with his massive head slightly raised off the ground, resting on his tusks. On the question being shouted out, the workers hollered back that the fellow had been there since midnight in exactly the same position. As to why everyone was perched on their rooftops, was told that they were scared to come down. By which time Mr Balia having also arrived on the scene, explained to me that the elephant on the road was the same one which had been visiting the lines regularly to raid their kitchen garden plots for banana and sugar cane which the workers had planted. To fend the fellow off, whenever the workers would hear or see him heading their way they would scramble up on to the roof and would start banging on the CI sheets to drive the fellow away from their homes.

This particular time, probably fed up of being chased off all the time and being robbed off the juicy cane, it appeared that the tusker after trumpeting and raising his trunk to its full height, had charged towards the lines and had probably tripped and fallen over and was most likely injured. Which would explain him sitting on the road in the position he was in. In all the continuing pandemonium and egged on by Mr Balia, one of the workers finally picked up courage, clambered down from his rooftop perch and approached the elephant with a large rock in his hand, got close enough and threw the rock which simply bounced off the elephants back with not so much as a twitch from the mastodon. That gave all the others, including me, the courage to approach the fellow. Which is when we saw the high tension cable firmly lodged, running across through his mouth above his lower lip. And him obviously dead!





By this time Rajah Pooviah (red arrow) who, since Abid was away on a longish leave, was the acting Superintendent had also arrived on the scene. After much discussion the only conclusion we could arrive at was that when the big fellow charged the lines, his trunk being very high up in the air, had probably hit the electric cable dragging it into his mouth. And there it stayed with the electric poles on either side of the sagging cable bent inwards and leaning at an acute angle towards our poor dead pachyderm.

The matter being reported to the Divisional Forest Officer resulted in almost all the government functionaries in the district descending upon Panniar. Which lead to two days of a merry-go-round with Rajah being threatened with arrest for having willfully electrocuted the elephant. Two days of tension and with all sorts of pressure being applied before the DFO finally arrived at the obvious conclusion that the death was the result of an accident. Which then culminated in a formal permission from the district authorities to the estate management to dispose of the carcass



Ever tried to dispose off a 4 ton carcass? Easier said than done I assure you. The first option being cremation, 600 litres of diesel was brought in from the factory and poured over that massive body and from a very safe distance, a burning rag was tossed on. Whoosh! A cloud of dense black smoke and a massive flame which died away as quickly as it had erupted. The smoke having cleared we saw that, barring only the hair on the elephants hide which had disappeared and some singeing of the hide, the carcass itself was totally unaffected. After much deliberation and logistical planning a massive pit was dug across the road just behind the carcass. The estate tractor fitted with a winch cable and our two lorries were pressed into service to pull the elephant, dragging it into the pit. Following which the workers paid their respects to the tusker by conducting a Swami Kumbra (a prayer ritual) before the grave was covered over, leaving a massive hump in the middle of the road. Fast forward to 2018. I had to visit Munnar for some work with KDHP and decided to pay a visit to my first estate. Walked up to the office and looked down into the valley. Yup! Not high or as prominent when we'd buried the hapless soul, but there it was immediately discernable – the hump in the middle of the road!

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## Meet the writer:



With an industry experience and a tea knowledge base of four and a half decades and counting, I literally live and breathe tea. Starting my career in 1975 as an Assistant Superintendent with Malayalam Plantations Ltd, rolling up my sleeves by 'dirtying' my hands at the grassroots level and having literally 'grown' in the business, my experiences have matured me into a 'one of a kind' unique entity in the industry.

My journey which literally starts from the tea nursery and stretches all the way up to the consumer shelf, is in many ways unique. Regularly roaming the tea world, delving into the most remote areas wherever tea is grown or consumed, constantly interacting with Tea folk, I have always been learning and innovating. The invaluable experiences along this very interesting route have culminated into a unique new venture, a one-of-a-kind specialty tea manufacturing facility unit in the Nilgiris - [www.teastudio.info](http://www.teastudio.info). My life has been and continues to be blessed.

Thankfully this very interesting Tea journey continues as an ongoing learning experience. Read more by Indi Khanna here: <https://teastorytellers.blogspot.com/search/label/Indi%20Khanna>

# TEA'S ALMOST READY - BY JOHN MORGAN, AUSTRALIA

1968

Contributed by Mr. Ranjit (Roni) Das

## TEA'S ALMOST READY

by JOHN MORGAN

*(An article from WALKABOUT Australia's Way of Life Magazine February 1968)*

To the people of the north Queensland town of Innisfail Dr. Allan P. Maruff is a respected medical man who, with his doctor son, runs an obviously successful practice there. Only one thing though, he's a little nuts about tea.

Within the next 10 years Innisfail and the rest of Australia will come to regard Dr. Maruff as the founder of the Australian tea industry. By then an industry worth millions of dollars will probably have grown from his pioneering.

Already Dr. Maruff has more than 100 acres of neatly clipped rows of tea hedges, his tea factory will be up and in operation by the end of the year, and his tea will be on the market. Other interests are beginning to develop two other tea plantations in the Tully-Innisfail area, one group is bringing out five English planters from India to establish 700 acres of plantation, and another group is working on 2000 acres.

"This is only a beginning" says Dr. Maruff. "We can grow tea as good as any in the world. All the major problems are solved, we don't need cheap labour. The tractor, mechanical clipping, chemical weedicides are what we use. Soon we hope to consign the chipping hoe to the museum".

It was Saturday afternoon, the one time of the week that Dr. Maruff (pronounced Maroaf) manages to sneak away from his patients for a while. He was relaxing in his armchair, on call for a couple of maternity cases, a suspected appendicitis, and anything else that might turn up.

"Will you have a cigar? A Black Label? A Bacardi?" he asked.

"Isn't it a little traitorous to drink Brazilian rum in Queensland?"

"I drink Bacardi because it's the best in the world. When Queensland produces a better one, then I will drink that. Until then . . ."

"But you expect people to drink your tea".

"Of course, because it will be the best in the world. It's not quite right yet, we are only processing it in the kitchen, but when the factory goes up we will get it just right, by jove".

For Dr. Maruff everything must be "just right, by jove". The husbandry of the tea must be "meticulous", none of his men must work over the 40 hour week ("they are Australians, not slaves"), every safety precaution must be taken in the land-clearing operations ("I don't want any funerals here"), the factory site must be just so ("We need that breeze running through, both for the people in the factory and for the tea"), the equipment must be the best ("they'll never sell me another little tractor like that, it has every fault known to engineering").

Is he in it for money? "What do I need the money for?" As he asked the question he waved his arm in a sweep that showed something of his Welsh mother and his Indian background. "I'm not interested in money. I eat the best food, I smoke the best cigars, I drink the best drinks."

"I'm doing it for two reasons. The first is more important to the individual than most people realise. I am 56 now, and I'm planning for my eventual retirement. When I go out of practice I must have something to keep me interested and active."

"The second reason is much more important in a general way. These people around here have given me a lot, and so has Australia. You can't just take, you must give it back. I am giving it back to the people from whom it came. That may be a rather old-fashioned Christian attitude, but, then, I'm a staunch Catholic."

"In any case, I like good tea. Have a cup? But remember this is not the real thing, the factory tea will be much better".

The tea was tea all right, a little different from normal, but very much tea. The colour of the unmade tea was lighter than usual, but Mrs. Dorothea Maruff—her husband calls her by the Latin endearment "Caro"—used only half the normal quantity to make the pot. It tasted



like a mixture of Indian and Chinese tea, with a "green" back-tang which, according to Dr. Maruff, will disappear with factory production.

"Perhaps you can get rid of that 'green' taste by blending it with imported tea". It was the wrong thing to say.

"My tea will be Nerada tea. I will blend it with nothing. It will be straight from the factory and plantation at Nerada, and that's that", said Dr. Maruff.

Dr. Maruff was born in India, his family traces its origins to the Caucasus via Persia. His great-grandfather, his grandfather, his father were doctors, and now one son is a doctor and a daughter is studying to be one. After service with the Indian army during the war, he left India in 1946 to go to Britain, and in 1949 came to Australia. At first he practiced in New Guinea and then in Western Queensland.

In the West he got to know Australia and Australians. "I was there a year", he said. "I was doctor, locum dentist, and locum vet. This gave me a picture of Australia, the ruggedness, the self-reliance, the toughness, the potential."

A year at Tully introduced Dr. Maruff to Northern Queensland, then it was a question of Brisbane or Innisfail. His wife liked Innisfail so Innisfail it was in 1954.

"Now you're bound to ask how did I get interested in tea. The story goes that I was driving around and saw that the foothills of the Atherton Tablelands looked just right for tea. It's not true, it was my wife. Until I started to grow tea I had never even seen the stuff growing, I've never been in Assam or Ceylon."

"No, it was my wife. She said 'This is just like Assam. Someone should grow tea here'. Her remarks, for some reason, stuck in my mind. I found out that the C.S.I.R.O. Bureau of Tropical Agriculture at South Johnstone, just a few miles outside Innisfail, had been experimenting with tea for about 25 years. They, like everybody else, including the banks, warned me against trying to grow it commercially.

"Tea was first grown around here in the 1870's by two ex-Indian army officers, who were regarded as eccentric, at Bingil Bay, the Harold Holt territory. They also experimented with cardamon, vanilla, rubber and mangoes. Their tea plants are still there, hidden in the bush near Bingil Bay".

From 1954 to 1958 Dr. Maruff studied tea. He collected a library of books and literature, he studied soil chemistry and physics, he read up on pests and diseases. In 1959, after checking on soils in his own laboratory and on the rainfall records, he picked a site at Nerada, 21 miles from Innisfail on the Palmerston Highway, which leads up to the tablelands.

"I set up the plantation in 1960 with 15,000 seedlings I had raised in the garden of my home and around the clinic from seeds provided by the Bureau of Tropical Agriculture. We planted the first row of seedlings on Australia Day, January 26. There was no sentimentality about this, it just happened to be my day off."

"In 1961-62 the big drought hit us, but we gained two things. The following year we put in the irrigation system, and although half the plants died in that drought, 2000 survived in an area I call Heartache Ridge. I studied the survivors, and from them we propagated new plants, a drought-resistant strain, from slips. Now we have 50,000 of this drought-resistant strain, and we have been trying to purify it ever since."

"We need irrigation because tea requires over 100 inches of rain evenly distributed over the year. At Nerada we have 140 to 150 inches a year, but 100 inches of it comes in the first six months."

"The established bush is quite hardy, but young tea is sensitive up to about three years. Anyway, it isn't a bush, it's just a member of the camellia family with a small camellia-like flower. It would grow into a 30 or 40 foot tree if you let it, but it must be pruned into a bush. Once set, tea can be cropped for 80 to 100 years, there are even bushes 350 years old in Japan. All that's needed is meticulous husbandry."

In 1963 the Nerada plantation began to look something like it does today, with row upon row of tea hedges eight feet apart stretching over the rolling ground at a height of 30 inches. Between the rows are strips of neatly cut grass that hold the land together and help to preserve the moisture.

"That year we made the major breakthrough", said Dr. Maruff as he walked through the rows of tea. "I knew from the start that we could not afford in Australia the methods used in India, the laborious business of raising the seedlings in a nursery and then transplanting



them into the field. We cleared the land from the virgin jungle and worked it into a fine tilth, then we laid down long strips of polythene and planted the seed through slits."

"Not seedlings, seeds. And we had to be careful, the slits have to be in the right direction or the prevailing wind will lift the polythene, and the seeds should be the right way up for better germination."

"We planted 50,000 seeds and the results were amazing. We had a hedge right away. Indian planters came to see this tea about a year ago, and they thought it was seven years old, instead of just short of four. It's ready for cropping right now."

By the end of 1964 Nerada had 750,000 tea plants, and now there are about 2½ million, mostly raised from seed. More than 100 acres are covered by the ordered rows, strips of silver polythene run along more acres, and the balance of Dr. Maruff's 350 acres is being gradually cleared. All that's needed is the factory now being designed in Britain. The site is already being bulldozed on a small rise overlooking the plantation. The plans for two buildings, each about 70 ft. by 140 ft., and the machinery they will house have been checked over by Dr. Maruff and sent back to Britain for modification.

At present four men work full-time on the plantation, but when 250 acres of hedge tea are in production there will be six men in the factory and six in the field.

While Dr. Maruff waits he is still pouring money into the project—about \$300,000 up to now—and continually experimenting. The problem of weeding has been his most expensive in time and money, but now, he says he has it beaten through mechanisation and chemicalisation. Using a \$15,000 tractor imported from France—the high-body type designed for vineyards—and special sprays and nozzles developed in years of research, the weeds below the young tea are now kept under control.

Dr. Maruff explained "After germination and getting rid of the polythene, the important thing is to keep the weeds clear. In the early years we have to spray weedicide two or three times a year, then comes the hoeing to clear out the dead weeds below the bushes. That's one thing I've got to mechanise yet. But after the bushes are well established the spraying drops to once a year, as the shade of the leaves keep the weeds down."

"There is no cultivation of the ground after first breaking it up into a fine soil. Any cultivation would merely bring up the weed seeds . . . one year's seeding, seven years' weeding. Fertilisation will be necessary when we start production, but so far we have given only one dose of fertiliser in six years. And, don't forget, we are running 10,000 to 15,000 plants to the acre compared with the Indian 3,500 to 5,000. That's due to first-class soil, it's worth 10 cents an ounce".

Dr. Maruff is equally as enthusiastic about the mechanical plucking of his tea. "After pruning the tea plants into a bush we 'skiff' the bushes into as level a hedge and at as constant a height from the ground as we can. This forms a 'table' through which the young leaves come to the top. Five or six days later we come along with the French tractor and the British mechanical plucker on the back and work down the hedges, taking off the top two leaves and the bud."

"The machine has a built-in 'feeler' tray that senses the height of the table and adjusts the cutting bar by a servo-system. That way we don't get any of the old leaves, just the top two and the bud. Five or six days later we come back again and take off more tea, and so on and so on. There is no dormant period here as there is in Assam. Even in the wet we will be able to crop, we have done it immediately after 20-inch rainfall."

It is at this stage that the factory is needed. The fresh leaves are "withered", in which they lose between 50 and 60 per cent of their moisture content, then they are crushed into a green pulp. The pulp is spread out and allowed to oxidise—"They call it fermentation, but it isn't—for around two hours. Then the tea is "fired" at about 200 degrees Fahrenheit to destroy the enzymes causing the oxidation and to dry the tea. The exact stage at which the tea should be "fired" is the art of tea production.

What happens to all the tea now growing, without a factory to process it? It is not, the hedges are pruned to maintain the bush shape rather like clipping back a couple of months' growth from a private hedge.

To get his cup of tea today Dr. Maruff does all the factory processes with his wife's kitchen stove and a mincing machine. When his factory is built it will be an automated process.

Australian consumption of tea is now running at 71 million lb. a year. From 250 acres of bushes Dr. Maruff expects to get 750,000 to one million pounds of tea a year. That last million pounds of tea we're drinking, he hopes, will come from Nerada.