



Planters Welfare Association

(AN ASSOCIATION OF MUTUAL BENEFITS)

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Text/Whatsapp – 09810020533)



EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President: A. Batra

Vice – President: Capt V.K.Mehra

Ex- Officio: V.Lall

Secretary : R.K.Patney

Treasurer: B.Chhabra

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

Members Meeting (Socials):

Mrs. Nirmla Lall, Mrs. Rani Patney, Mrs. Sunanda Chhabra, Mr. Rajiv Wazirchand

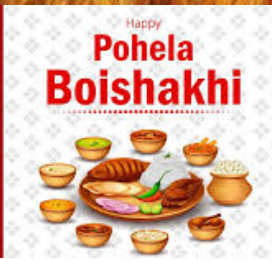
Member Mailing: Mrs. Rani Patney

Editor: Ashok Batra

Period 1 – May 2024

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

This is the first Newsletter after the 35th AGM held in December, and so, also my first message to our esteemed members. My gratitude to each of you, having accepted me as the President of the PWA for the next two years. Needless to add, on behalf of myself, and the entire Executive Committee, we shall continue to uphold the high standards that have been set by all previous Committee's and continue to work in the best interests of us all – we learn from our errors and with added inputs from many of you, will continue to try and keep raising the bar (pun intended!) Of course, more of your comments and suggestions are expected, and welcome. We are fortunate that over the last year, we have had a welcome inflow of new, and younger members, joining us, and we do expect new and fresher ideas to keep coming in – I can assure you, that the EC will give each one due consideration, with the aim of bringing our events to the highest level possible, in the limitations that we work under; perhaps even a change in scenario- as the one we have had last year, and this January, generously hosted by Makiko and Narotam Sayal at their farm, have been thunderous afternoons, greatly appreciated by us all.



It has been gratifying, as well, to see that our social event calendar, since the beginning of this Year have had virtually record turnouts and been greatly enjoyed, special thanks to the Socials Sub- Committee of Rajiv Wazirchand, Rani Patney, Nirmla Lall, Sunanda Chhabra, as well as many others, who unstintingly offer to assist at all events, guided by Vishnu Lall and Bhushan Chhabra, who continue as the Convenors of the Socials Committee.

Finances are in order, thanks to Bhushan, who has been doing a tremendous job, but here I would like to reach out to you all, your spouses, friends and well-wishers, to think and start working on new methods and avenues to raise donations/sponsorship for our next AGM at the end of the year, given that our Industry did not have a good 2023, and started 2024 on a very "iffy" note.

And of course, the running of the PWA would not have been so efficient without Roopy Patney's "eye to details", dedication and impressive work to keep everything ticking and in order, being meticulous in keeping us all in touch with the happenings.

We need more inputs from all, on Births, Weddings, Achievements, as well as Anecdotes, and Articles which you may want to share.

Wishing you all and your families, the very best and really looking forward to new suggestions.

Ashok Batra



MEMBERS MEETING (SOCIAL) FOR THE YEAR 2023 – 2024

Are indicated in the table given below:

| S. No. | Venue | Arranged by | Date | Status |
|--------|---|-------------------|------------------------|--------|
| 1. | DSOI , DhaulakuanNew – Delhi | Capt. V.K.Mehra | Sun 27th August 2023 | HELD |
| 2. | Delhi Gymkhana ClubNew – Delhi | Mr. V.Lall | Sun 24th Sept 2023 | HELD |
| 3. | Vasant Vihar ClubNew - Delhi | Mr. R.K.Das | Sun 26 th Nov 2023 | HELD |
| 4. | AGM 2023 , Vasant Vihar Club – New - Delhi | Mr. R.K.Das | Sun 17th December 2023 | HELD |
| 5. | At the Residence of Mr. N.Sayal (Sponsored Event) | | SUN 21st January 2024 | HELD |
| 6. | Mr. P.S Tibbs Residence | Mr.& Mrs P.S Tibb | Sun 25th February 2024 | HELD |
| 7. | Delhi Gymkhana Clun – JAMUN TREENew - Delhi | Mr B.Chhabra | Sun 07th April 2024 | HELD |

All the events held during the Financial year, (as indicated above) were a roaring success, and thoroughly enjoyed by us all. The events were well attended , great comraderies, super and delicious lunch menu's by the EC Ladies and Social Sub- Committee.

Thirty Fifth AGM – 2023 –

The 35th Annual General Meeting of the PWA was held at the Vasant Vihar Club , New – Delhi, on Sun 17th December 2023 . The event was sponsored by Tea Companies; namely Messer's -

- Mcleod Russel India Ltd., J.Thomas & Co Pvt Ltd, Goodricke Group Ltd, Badulipar Ltd, Laxmi Tea Co Ltd
- M.K.Shah Export Ltd, Contemporary Tea Ltd, Palashbari Tea Co Ltd , and Mr N.Salkan

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 the event was a runaway success . We are thankful to Rony Das for all the arrangements made for the event.

Executive Committee Meetings

In order to take decisions on suggestions received, keep a close check on Finances , Cost control, future events planning and more , your EC has been meeting regularly in rotation at each EC members residence which are being hosted by them personally. We propose to hold 9 such EC meetings during the Year 2024/25.

Already three have been held and the 4th will be happening as you are reading this Newsletter this month. Five more have been tentatively scheduled for the remaining period.

YOU ARE



BREW-TEA-FUL

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.

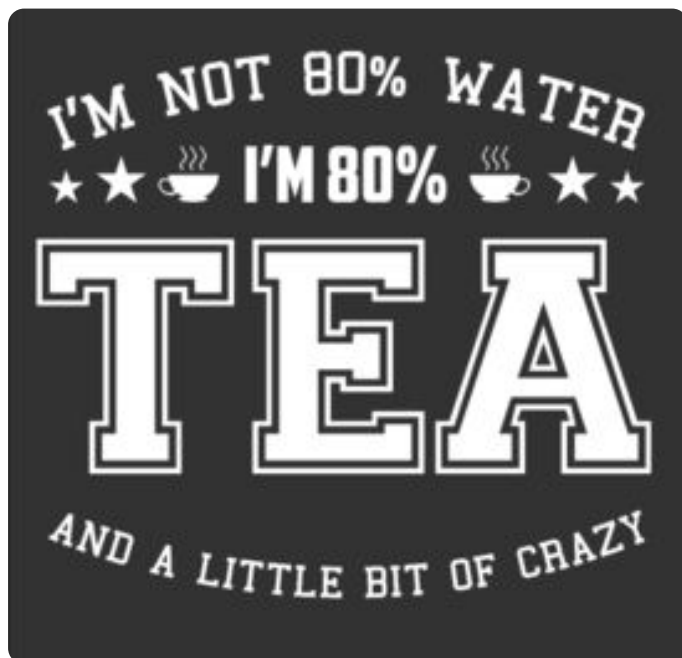
NEW MEMBERS

1. **Mr. Divya Puri** – W- 7/9 B (FF) , DLF Phase – 3, Gurgaon Mobile – 9899323869, E mail:- divspuri@gmail.com
2. **Mr. N.R Srinivasan** – LX2 0904, UTSA – The Condoville , New Town , Kolkata – 7000163, Mobile : - 983159258, E. mail :- nallepillysrinivasan@gmail.com
3. **Miss Puja Rautela** – Chautala Farm – 15 , Gadaipur, Delhi – 110030, Mobile :- 9810520621, E – mail - pujar@flatworldsourceinc.com
4. **Mr. Parakarm Singh Rautela** – Chautala Farm – 15 , Gadaipur , Delhi – 110030 , Mobile:- 9899073336, E mail:- parakram@flatworldsourceinc.com
5. **Mr. Rajeev Suri** – D – 68, Defence Colony , New – Delhi – 110024 , Mobile :- 9810304580 , E mail:- rajeevsuri.cbms@gmail.com

We are pleased to inform that 24 new members joined the Association during the year 2023 -24 ,which the highest numbers in recent years. We are happy to report that we have 262 members which includes NCR / Out Station / Hony. Members.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS / E MAIL/ MOBILE NO

All changes ,have been made in the Members Directory , which is regularly updated, and circulated to all members. The same is available for viewing at our website - www.pwa.in



COMMUNICATION

E-mail - As communicated earlier all our communications are forwarded by E mails . We earnestly request those members who have not yet forwarded their E- mail ID , to kindly forward the same , to the Secretary at rkpatney@gmail.com to enable us to update our records and forward all documents by E- mail. It is our fervent hope that more and more members will opt for communication vide this mode.

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 is to be mentioned, that a few members have exited the group , and they are requested to join the group to avail this facility. Noteworthy messages and those of importance or conveying information can only be sent by the administrator , Roopy Patney, so no additional messages are received by us. We members cannot post any message; basically no forwards and no spam /junk

Website - Has been up – dated at regular intervals . You are requested to view and give your comments to enable us to improve further. It saddens us to note that with the effort to update the website regularly, at both cost and time, we have only a limited number of hits, which makes us want to rethink if having this website is worth the cost and effort – we value inputs to make it more user friendly and your suggestions to improve and add contents is more than welcome .

SUBSCRIPTION:

Annual subscription for the year 2024 is due now. There are few members who have not paid their subscription for the year 2023 - 2024 and we request them to kindly clear their dues . It may please be noted that Subscription for NCR members is Rs 500/- per annum and only Rs 200/- for out station members.

Since these are relatively small amounts, we would request to forward additional amounts which will remain credited to your account for future years as well . This will relieve members to forward Subscriptions each year and also save time in doing so. The work of our Hony. Treasurer too, will be reduced.

And reminders and updates will be sent to you for record as well.

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

The rules under Societies Act are very stringent. 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** - (a bit cumbersome for all and not the best method, unless no alternative)- 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** – (definitely preferred as long as the payer's details are also included in the transaction). 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 – 110025**
- c. **Kindly note that Subscription will not be accepted in cash.**

OBITUARY (September 2023 – April 2024)

We regret to inform sad demise of:

Our Members:

- Mr. Harcharan Singh
- Mr G.S . Sodhi (Giri)
- Sardar Hardev Singh

Near & Dear Ones:

- Mrs Tikendra Kumari Singh (Teeka) w/o Mr Bhupendra (Bob) Singh (Ex Tata Tea)
- Mr. I.P.Khanna
- Mrs Manju Bhagat w/o Mr K. R. (KakaBhagat, (Ex Assam Co.)

Friends:

- Mr. Ram Singh Taragi, (Ex Duncan)
- Brother of Mr R.K.Das
- Mrs Krishna Jamwal w/o Late Mr J.S Jamwal
- Mr Kapil Kapoor (Ex Jokai)
- Mr Boni Gohain (Ex Tezpur Tea Company)
- Mr Sudip De (Ex Tata Tea)
- Mr Sanjiv Sharma (Ex Assam Co)
- Mr Austin Rufus (Ex Makum Namdang)
- Mr Ajit Nandkeolyar (ex Tata Tea)
- Mr Avinash Mathur, (Ex Mcleod Russel)

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

A poem for Tea

When the world is at odds
And the mind is at sea
Then cease the useless tedium
And brew a cup of tea

There is a magic in it's fragrance
There is solace in it's taste
And the laden moments vanish
Somehow into space.

The world becomes a lovely thing
There's beauty as you'll see
All because you briefly stopped
To brew a cup of tea

Friendship Tea Bag



*When you're feeling sad & blue
And have no clue what to do
Sit down and have a cup of tea
And a hug or two or maybe three
Feel those troubles melt away
And start you on a better day.*

OUR SALUTATIONS TO THE BACKBONE OF THE PWA

We are conscious of the fact, that endeavouring to mention names of stalwarts of the PWA could lead to misunderstandings and upset feelings, as there are too many to be named. In spite of this , we wish to try, as a token of our appreciation, to those that stand out.

I.P. Khanna- The contribution from IPK will always be written in Golden words in our history. He gave us his dedication, valuable advice and professional assistance with pro bono work over the last 34 years and for this, he will always be remembered, for our smooth sailing, even in the most difficult times. Our deep appreciation to him, as our returns were never scrutinised – Our association with him has been most fruitful, as he made sure he was always available to lend us his expertise. A great gentleman in the true sense of the word. After his loss, his nephew, Pranav Khanna, carries on his mantle, with pro bono work for the PWA.

A few other names to mention here who unstintingly assisted the PWA in tough times – Late Kuku Maini, Late Uppal Channi, Kailash Chaurasia, our Ex Hony. Treasurer for 14 years earlier, the ever glowing Rony Das, Roopy Patney, who has handled the not so glamorous and thankless job of Honorary Secretary, for the past 34 years, with finesse, Bhushan Chhabra, our Honorary Treasurer , who has put our finances and bank work in to the latest technology , Vishnu Lall , our past President for his dedication to our cause, and not to forget, all our past Presidents and Executive Committees , who have woven us in to this historic Association , with great memories, grand times and bonhomie, with more to come.

OUR FELICITATIONS

Sagar Mehta, the legendary grand young man of Tea , celebrated his 95th Birthday on the 4th May, at Koomtai(B), Badulipar Ltd - Roopy Patney , Our Honorary Secretary , called him to convey our congratulations and warm wishes on behalf of the PWA ! Needless to add, at that time he was out of the Factory at " Kamjari" as usual.

We send him our Blessings and best wishes with good health for the future



DONATIONS

Rs 10000/- was received from Mr. N.Salkan . We wish record our sincere thanks and appreciation.



ACHIEVEMENTS

Jaskirat Singh Grewal,(Jesse) had been selected to receive the 2023 Dronacharya Award (Lifetime Category) as Golf Coach.

The award was conferred at the National Sports Awards at Rashtrapathi Bhavan, by President Murmu on Tuesday, 09.01.2024, and was telecast 'Live' on Doordarshan

Jesse was with Tata Tea Limited and was posted on Nahorani T.E. and on Nonoi T.E. in Assam.

His late father, Shatru Daman Singh (S.D. Singh) was the first Indian Superintendent of Doom Dooma Tea Company in Assam. Jesse's younger brother, Jaideep Singh Grewal was with Tata Tea Ltd. in South India.



How to recognise an old Tea Planter:

- ☀ Always smartly dressed whatever the occasion.
- ☀ Though old will try and walk like a young person.
- ☀ Has a lot of stories to share.
- ☀ Has a lot of "gyan" to give.
- ☀ Considers himself a authority on all alcoholic beverages.
- ☀ He is a poor listener!
- ☀ Always leads by example & very caring.
- ☀ Stands to attention when the National Anthem is played!!
- ☀ Does not trust people who do not drink and are teetotallers.
- ☀ *IS SHIT SCARED OF HIS WIFE*

If you laughed at this you will be blessed with a great day and a great life.



- Anonymously donated

Article by Uddhab Sarma (Ex Warren's)

200-year-old Assam Tea and its impact on socio-economic growth

Uddhab Chandra Sarmah

(ucsarmah@gmail.com)

Writing about the growth of Assam, especially in the arena of socio-economic factors by the most prestigious and glorious age-old Tea Industry starting from 1823 to the present status of today's Assam, it's quite a difficult task to present the pictures in short how the 200-year-old journey of the most favourite household beverage tea, called 'the Elixir of life' started from the nascent stage in 1823 by Robert Bruce first then after his unfortunate death, his brother Charles Alexander Bruce who with the help of the Singfo king Beesa Gaum and his assistant Nirungla undertook the tea cultivations first at Sadia and then to other areas of upper Assam for business purposes to export hand-made teas to the UK under the banner of the East India Company. History says that the first consignment of night numbers of tea chests from the first garden called 'Chabua' was dispatched through shipment to the UK, and the teas were auctioned on January 10, 1839. The teas were found to be exceptionally nice, with quality and flavour much better than the Chinese teas, which were

dominating the European markets. Since then, there has been no comeback as far as the growth of the tea industry in Assam is concerned or in the subsequent socio-economic development of all the tea-grown localities. It's to be noted that there was a massive scale of growth in the plywood industry before the ban on plywood by the Central government, and at the same time, the coal and fertilizer industries were also developed simultaneously to



fulfil the requirements of tea production in Assam, and employment opportunities for both local people and experts from outside were opened up for absorption in these industries. Most of the plywood factories had been converted to bought-leaf factories later, when the ban on deforestation was promulgated strictly in Assam.

In brief, the contributions over the years of the past two centuries by the tea industry for the significant growth in socio-economic development, employment generations, and more particularly, in earning foreign exchanges due to exports, etc., can be highlighted as follows:

1. a) Economic Condition:

* A major contributor to the economy by generating substantial revenue through domestic consumption and exports. Assam's production of teas rose to 700 million kg in 2022, which is 52% of India's production.

Provide direct and indirect employment opportunities for the unemployed.

* Contributes to the state's tax revenue through various taxes and levels.

1. b) Employment generation:

* Provide a crucial source of livelihood for tea garden workers and their families. Almost 1/5th of the total population of Assam is employed in tea fields.

* Create employment in plucking, processing, packaging, transportation, and marketing.

* Support related industries like packaging materials and logistics.

* The tea industry is recognised as the topmost industry in the country in terms of the employment of women workers. Nearly 60% of women workers are engaged in plucking and other related operations.

1. c) Foreign Exchange Earnings:

* Assam teas are



highly regarded globally, contributing to export earnings. Strengthen the trade balance. The state generates around Rs 3000 crore through foreign exchange.

* Enhance international trade relations and the reputations of the tea-producing regions of Assam.

1. d) Social Impact:

plays a significant role in the social development of tea communities.

provides housing, health-care, education, and other welfare activities.

* Initiates CSR programmes in education, skill development, and healthcare.

1. e) The growth of small tea growers in the last 30-35

years revolutionised the tea industry in Assam and the socio-economic development of the state over the last 40 years of time. As per records, there has been a growth of over 1.5 lakh small tea growers in Assam, with a production of over 300 million kg of tea. It's worth mentioning that more than 50 lakh people are employed in the production of 47% of the total production of Assam. Since the ages of the tea bushes are young enough to sustain high productivity, it's expected that the productions from the segment of STGs will reach over 50-55% of the total productions of Assam in the next 10-15

years. 2. d) With the phenomenal growth of small tea growers and the productions generated to almost 50% of the total productions of Assam, there has been a tremendous growth of almost 300 plus numbers of 'bought leaf tea factories' in the entire Assam, which have created employment opportunities and contributed to the economic growth of Assam.

In conclusion, the tea plantations of Assam are a testament to the region's rich cultural and historical heritage. The industry has played a significant role in shaping the region's economy and global identity.

Ratna Devaya

SALAAM

I name this blog salaam, as only the tea fraternity of Assam and Bengal will connect to it. Such a respectful and gracious greeting given to us by our care takers and helpers, and they really looked after us with love, devotion and pride of work-- their Saab and memsaab--I spell it thus as it was their unique way of pronunciation addressing us, and we were very precious to them and their every step and gesture portrayed that love and feeling. I am so privileged to have enjoyed that rapport for 61 years of my life -- first as a chai ka baby, then as a Memsahib.

All of them seen every day in pristine clean uniforms-- the men in khaki for daily use and white when "cumpanee saabs" came. The women in crisply starched white sarees with green borders, never any other colour as the hospital nurses wore the blue borders and red borders were worn for the "Jhumur Naach". My eyes miss that freshness and cleanliness that greeted us every morning. The greatest accolade I give them all is that they swept and cleaned and polished and shone for us and the house, with diligent sincerity, but were immaculately attired and uncrushed at every stage. Nothing was ever out of line or out of time --+ very much like the army in many ways, never a stained cloth or glass or tray or plate ever visible.

They were personally proud of what they did. Smoking awful bidis and chewing on paan, tamul and zarda -- the aura was never diminished. Each bearer wore the insignia of his saabs name on his pagari or turban -- my parents bearers sported the old English "N" for Nanda and ours "D" for Devaya, so they were identifiable when on group duty -- lucky were the Singh's in plenty for theirs got away with the mistakes as it was difficult to identify which Singh's house he came from or B for Barooahs. The women worked unseen but diligently behind the scenes ironing our sarees and clothes keeping our rooms and cupboards in best order, laying out our clothes -- they knew better than us how to match things and always knew which shoe the Saab wore when-- there was never any mistake. We lived a colonial life style, but it was these hands that kept the style of life going for us. They were the actual foundations, pillars and roofs of the beautiful Bungalows we lived in.

To say we were looked after is an under statement -- we were spoilt rotten and indulged so lovingly that today in retirement I miss my dear bearers and my loving ayahs.

Their bright smiles with their light footsteps, their willing natures and most of all their element of reliability.

The style of life has dwindled, but if you visit the estates anywhere, some antique stalwarts still run forward with that big "SALAAM"

Tea garden life is diverse so the cooks and Pani wallahs n, Malis and Jharoo wallahs night chowkidars will be covered in other anecdotes.

Reju George **Tea Bungalow**

Tea Bungalow - what an unusual name for a 110 year old heritage bungalow in Fort Cochin, which was once upon a time known as Brooke Bond Bungalow.

Tea Bungalow occupies pride of place in the heart of the exclusive heritage area of Fort Cochin. The bungalow was built in 1912 primarily as a workshop and office of the UK based Company called United Carpets who was engaged in the manufacture and export of coir and spices.

Brooke Bond tea company bought the bungalow in 1956 and renamed it Brooke Bond bungalow which housed the top management of Brooke Bond & Company and also as a guest house for visiting managers. Reaching the hands of Dempos, the heritage of spice and tea brought about its.

This heritage home belongs to the Dempos. Traditionally in the exports of coconuts from Goa for three centuries, The Dempo family has also been into the hospitality industry primarily in Goa. Mr. Vivek Dempo, the grandson of Padmasri Mr. Vasant S. Dempo founded the Dempo Group of companies.

Under low red-tiled roofs there's a wide veranda, with original French doors opening onto a walled garden shaded with banana, avocado and jack-fruit trees. Inside, the décor nods towards colonial Fort Cochin with airy rooms

Credit courtesy : google , tea bungalow



Threat to sustainability: A serious concern for Assam's 200-year-old tea History

Sentinel Digital Desk

Published: 20th Apr, 2024 at 9:19 AM

Uddhab Sarmah

(ucsarmah@ gmail.com & uddhab@ solidaridadnetwork.org)

It's heartening to note with great pride that the people of Assam today have been able to witness the great eras of the tea industry steadily for the last 200 years of time since the discovery of tea plants in 1823 AD. With the bicentennial celebrations of the age-old tea industry held recently, it can be understood that the doyens of the industry have undoubtedly come up with a concrete plan and vision for upholding the image of the past glory, which has been passing through a very critical phase at present. There has been a serious concern for the producers of all companies at present about how to run the business when the prospects of profitability depend on all social costs, maintenance of over one million families to meet their needs, and other fixed costs, etc., which are to be counted for despite having to maintain the properties in a proper way to be on par in the competitive markets.

Going by the general scenario of the Indian tea industry at present, there are a few critical factors that have been noticed to be matters of concern for all producers.

1. Oversupply of production, i.e., increased growth of production of teas coming out mainly from the segment of STGs (52% of total productions), has a direct effect on the supply-demand ratio. The lower the supply (availability) is, the lower the demand for tea, resulting in a lower price than expected.
2. There has been a decreasing trend of productions with productivity almost in all estates of the agency houses and big producer companies owing to the increasing trend of unproductive areas due to the old ages of tea bushes and the direct effect of prevailing climate change succumbing to the pressure of adverse weather conditions and attacks of pests and diseases that affect the health of tea bushes to a large extent.
3. The escalating cost of production per kg of tea has been gradually found to be much higher than the selling price of tea per kg in the markets, rendering the tea business almost non-profitable as compared to other agricultural crops.
4. Stagnation of tea prices over the past two decades of time as compared to all other edible and non-edible commodities, thereby crippling the overall tea marketing scenario in the domestic markets.

SUPPLY vs. DEMAND RATIO: India stands next to China in terms of total tea production. It is a matter of great pride that total production has been showing an increasing graph in the last few years. It shows from the statistics that in 2009, the total production of India was 982 million kg, whereas in 2022 it was 1365 million kg. Which shows over 13.65% increase during the 14 years of time.

Although the production has reached a reasonably high level of expectations, the domestic consumption of teas in India by our populations has not grown to the extent expected, in spite of the fact that tea is considered the most common man's drink next to water. The average per capita consumption of tea in India is only 850 grams (hardly a cup of tea per head per day in a year), which is far too low if we compare it with other tea-drinking countries. This consumption rate has really set back despite various efforts of advertisements and propaganda about the 'health benefits' of tea consumption in the country.

Based on the consumption rate of 850 gm per head throughout the year, we find that the requirement of teas for domestic consumption in India is around 1040 million kg, which creates a surplus of over 300 million kg to be sold either by export or to carry over to the next season. It has been noticed that the quantity of exports from India to other countries has been showing a decline over the years because of mainly quality and MRL factors as compared to other competitive tea-growing countries in the world. However, the export quantity from India to other countries hovers around 220-230 million kg each year, and eventually it results in an oversupply of 80-100 million kg remaining to be sold in domestic markets in the next season. This carryover accumulation over a period of time is very high, and its effect is reflected in the lower price realisation at the domestic markets.

So when the supply is higher, the demand for some good teas also automatically comes down to a lower level, much like expectations. It is obvious that unless the per capita consumption of teas is increased to a reasonable level of around 1.5 kg per head per year, the economic theory of demand and supply will continue to dominate in the tea markets for a long period, ultimately making the industry sick. The government has to think seriously with a visionary look as to how to communicate to the masses, from the grassroots level to the elite class of people, about the benefits of tea drinking. The main challenges are with the youth generations, which encompass around 30% to 40% of the total population of India, just to create habits of tea drinking.

If we look at the total production of teas in India, amounting to 1359 million kg, 52% of teas come from the segments of 'SMALL TEA GROWERS' production, which emerged as one of the most enterprising revolutionary segments of the Indian tea industry. Nearly over 700 million kg are contributed each year, 90% of which are bracketed in the common tea quality category, the price of which hovers around an average of Rs 120–150 per kg in the auction market. The quality suffers for many reasons, among which concern for handling raw materials from field to factory, lack of scientific base knowledge in field practices, low holding areas not receiving due attention as required from the owners, MRL-level chemicals used not being understood properly, etc. are some of the basic areas. So, one can imagine the market conditions of having a huge quantity of over 700 million kg of common teas out of 1340 million kg in the total basket of Indian teas, which strongly affects the average price in totality at the close of the season.

ESCALATING COST OF PRODUCTION (COP) vs. SELLING PRICE: As mentioned above, the higher production of teas is mainly due to the contributions that have come from the bought-leaf segments in the country. The evolution of small tea growers emerging in the early 1980s, then coming into shape in the 1990s, and the gradual upsurge from 2000 to the present period have been recognised as the most revolutionary period for growers of over 1.5 lakh who have been self employed and taken the tea business as budding entrepreneurs.

According to the statistics for 2018, Assam produced around 690 million kg, out of which 320 million kg (47%) came from STG segments.

This bulk quantity of 320 million kg gets sold at an average price of Rs 120 to Rs 125 per kg, and the remaining 370 million kg produced by the organised sector gets sold at an average rate of Rs 175 to Rs 180 per kg, thus making an average auction price of Rs 150 to Rs 156 per kg of tea made, which has been found from the records of the auction average for the year.

The cost of production per kg of tea for an organized sector estate varies from minimum Rs 220 to Rs 260 plus per kg of made teas based on productivity and quality tea productions. In the same way, the cost of production of teas from a bought leaf factory varies from Rs 140 to Rs 150 per kg, approximately at present, with increased costs of gas and power.

With all the realities mentioned above, the whole picture of the present situation of the tea estates in Assam lies in the fact that unless the price of the teas is fetched over Rs 300 per kg as a minimum support price (MSP), all the regulated estates will not be able to run the tea properties meeting all the statutory requirements and other liabilities conforming to welfare activities, which include providing housing facilities, provisions for drinking water, health and hygiene works, etc.

In the case of BLF producers, the margin of profit has come down as compared to earlier years, and factories producing ordinary liquoring teas are certainly going to suffer a setback in their business profitability despite having fewer liabilities and fixed costs in comparison with organised properties. In the same way, the cost of production per kg of green leaf for small tea growers has gone up in recent years from Rs 12 to over Rs 22–24 per kg of leaf because of the high rate of inflation of all inputs of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, fuels, and predominantly wages to workers. As the average selling price of leaf is around Rs 15 per kg at the close of the year, the growers are finding it very difficult to run the properties, having to render losses for their productions yielding from the tea areas. The small tea growers are gradually highly demoralised because of the losses accrued from tea cultivation. Unless the prices of tea are improved like other commodities, there will be a huge setback to this growing industry.

Lately, it has been learned that the escalated high cost of production in all inputs, including worker's wages, and subsequently lower prices of tea realised in the markets have almost paralysed the functioning of the tea productions in Kenya, resulting in the unemployment of thousands of workers and joblessness to the extent of the closure of tea factories. The same situations are going to emerge in our country too unless immediate intervention into the gravity of this issue is understood and taken care of.

STAGNATION OF TEA PRICES: As mentioned earlier about the prevailing prices of teas of different classifications of teas, it is really ironic that the same scenario of the prices of teas have been witnessed over the last two decades of time, almost causing a 'STAGNATION' as compared to the escalated growth of prices for all other edible and non-edible commodities in the markets. This stagnation of prices can be reckoned as one of the draconian causes of the downfall of the industry in the last 10-15 years of time, compelling the proprietors of the big, reputed tea companies to dispose of their prized properties on a large scale.

STEPS FOR REMADIES TO OVERCOME THE CRISIS: Considering the latest ongoing crisis period of the industry, the tea producers of large and small companies need to carry out their own self-introspections as to how best the law of diminishing returns can be averted by way of executing both need-based short- and long-term planning for improvement of their products and properties. The incoming period is expected to be much tougher owing to the present wage increase and the rapid escalation of the of the costs of every input required for field and factory productions. Urgent attention from all is required for the following areas:

1. Since customer awareness of quality teas has been increasing and there is always a wide gap in price realisations between common, medium, and good/best brackets of teas, quality produce is a must for all producers to come out of the impending danger of natural death.
2. In view of the oversupply of productions coupled with the left-over bulk of huge quantities from each year's productions, which are having a direct effect on prevailing tea prices, the tea producers must concentrate on making quality teas for higher prices rather than the common medium standard of teas coming out of uncontrolled raw materials detrimental to quality products and health.

3. Since there has been a downward trending of productivity almost in all the estates of the all-organised sector for an increase of high percentages (35–40%) of uneconomic areas that are too high to be uprooted and replanted for a productive stage within a short period of time, the producers are therefore required to make a thorough study of each property in carrying out the exercise of revamping the existing areas in a systematic plan phase wise for completion within a time-bound period. All these development works are to be considered an investment cost for the future sustainability of the existing property.

4. Practices of 'regenerative agriculture' using 'biofertilisers' and minimising use of inorganic fertilisers and chemicals need to be adopted so as to cut down on the high cost of production. Consumers are becoming more concerned about food safety and health; therefore, 'quality 'products with food safety' needs to be the main priority for value-added teas.

5. The urgent need of the industry is to pay all attention to how to bring out a dramatic change for Bought Leaf Productions to a level of good standard of tea quality from the existing rank of "common teas," which are being used by the giant buyers for the purpose of packaging as fillers. The total production of teas coming out of the BLF segments is over 300 million kg in Assam and over 700 million kg in the country. These huge quantities have brought down the total average price realizations for all producers. The role played by the giant buyers in exercising their dominance over the price scenario for all grades of tea in the Indian auctioning system is also one of the most important areas of concern to all producers.

6. Attention to follow good standards of plucking and handling of leaves properly to maintain undamaged conditions right from field to factory continues to be a major problem, which produces poor and common teas responsible for affecting the image of Assam and Indian teas in both domestic and international markets. The government and the Tea Board authorities need to be more concerned about how best a system can be developed to connect BLF owners and the STGs at grassroots levels for the production of quality teas in the factories.

7. The main problem with the small tea growers is with their planting materials planted 20–30 years ago, when the quantity of production was the main area of attention by all for immediate short-term gain. All the planted materials come from quantity clones, which are fast-growing and high yielding. So farsightedness for the future of the industry was never a concern for all at the nascent stages.

8. Since the unorganized segment of the STGs is being considered the 'backbone' of the tea industry for the contributions of the productions, which are almost reaching over 52% now and are expected to achieve over 60% in another 10 years of time, the multiple challenges being faced by the industry in the process of restoring the past glory of Assam, Darjeeling, and all Indian teas must need to be diagnosed to meet the consumer's requirements for both domestic and international markets. There needs to be a strong, cohesive effort from all concerned in the tea industry to prepare a road map for the entire STGs of the country to produce the desired standard of quality of teas (both specialty and black teas) through the process of collectivization, good agricultural practices based on scientific norms, and the pathways to productivity, which can help the growers in their socio-economic developments and recognitions at the same time.

9. The markets for value added for specialty teas like hand-rolled green and oolong of both organic and black teas are very limited; the total consumption does not exceed even 1% of the total production in India. There needs to be an aggressive marketing policy for these teas to be exported and consumed in domestic markets. If due attention is given by the government to organised markets by encouraging small tea farmers in groups like FPO/FPC/SHG or in the form of cottage industries, there will be a tremendous achievement in promoting the small tea growers in their self-development process of enriching socio-economic conditions with the production of healthy and safe products.

10. Tea consumers in today's world are very concerned about 'food safety and health measures' for every edible product. Not much attention has been noticed to be paid by the Department of Food Safety and concerned authorities of the government, especially for teas. Owing to the adverse climate and change of weather globally, there has been a visible change in weather as compared to earlier years, two to three decades ago. At the same time, attacks of pests and diseases have been noticed to be a major challenge in protecting crops and tea bushes. All these have resulted in the indiscriminate use of chemicals and fertilisers for the production of teas by the majority of big and small tea growers, causing a major threat to all consumers as far as the MRL (maximum residue level) of chemicals is concerned. This has been reflected in our export of teas being restricted to almost the same quantities for the last two decades since compliances of food safety for MRL of use of chemicals mainly have been found to be lacking seriously. The need for serious attention from the government and Tea Board to curb this menace by establishing laboratories to check pesticide residue levels frequently throughout the year.

At present, from the perspective of 'Tea Producers', the 'Tea Business' has been reckoned as the most unremunerative because of the stagnation of low prices despite producing reasonably good teas and for being burdened with heavy liability to bear from all corners, eventually succumbing to heavy losses in running the properties. Because of continued losses, most of the owners of big companies sacrificed their sentiments for their own belongings and preferred shifting to other businesses in search of profitability and mental peace of mind. Lately in the last 4/5 years of time, there has been a sea-change of ownership shifting to the hands of 'traders' mainly by the big house of agency groups and companies rendering the 'glory of the 200-year-old tea industry' in shambles without paying a single moment of thought about the plight of lakhs of people who have sacrificed their lives in the upbringing of the properties in good, bad or the worst times of the yesteryears!!

Photos of " CURRENCY TOKENS " - Received from Ranga Bedi

IN DAYS GONE BY, PLANTATION COMPANIES MINTED THEIR OWN CURRENCY, WHICH WAS VALID ONLY IN THE PRECINCTS OF THEIR ESTATES .

THESE WERE ISSUED TO WORKERS IN LIEU OF THEIR WAGES .

We do hope that some of you , will be able to throw some light on these coins ?

The denomination of " 2 ANNAS 3 PIES " , " 3 Annas " , etc. seen on some coins , may seem small . However in 1872 , it could have been a WEEK'S. WAGE ?

Most of these were Tea Estates were in the Cachar, Sylhet, as well as in South India



