

## **Tea to ‘Chai’: The Making of Tea as a Global Beverage**

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**Abstract:** *This paper would tend to highlight the adverse effect of emergence of tea as the most lucrative form of global economy. My primary interest would be to focus on the growth of tea as a form of plantation system in the regions of North Bengal and Assam during the mid- nineteenth century. This paper would like to focus on the introduction of “tea” as a form of common beverage for the entire society during mid nineteenth century in England.*

**Keywords:** *British, Colonial Authorities, Economy, East India Company, Tea plantation etc.*

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### **Introduction**

Tea plantation was being considered by the colonial authorities as the best mode of production to extract maximum profit. The introduction of the tea gardens could be traced by the eighth century in Korea during the dynasty of Lyang.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese however flourished themselves in the cultivation of tea; they used to extract the juice from the herb and used it as drink extensively instead of wine.<sup>2</sup> The drink of tea further helped them to get rid of all the evil and preserved their

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health. In the preceding years after gaining widespread popularity in utilising tea as a beverage drink China exported tea to Japan. In due course, tea became the drink of ceremony not only in China and Japan but also gained its widespread popularity in India and Persia. The introduction of tea into England is presumed to date from the year 1652. Japan during fifteenth century invoked into a religion of aestheticism i.e Teism, inculcated purity and harmony, the mystery of mutual charity, the romanticism of the social order (Okakura,1906). In Japan, tea was generally being drunk at meals and during the royal invitations in the private families. They further believed the best tea are ought to be gathered by virgins, they are destined for this work. However eventually the export of tea gradually expanded to France, Italy, Holland and other parts of Christendom. In England the leaf was being sold at six pounds while in certain cases it was being sold at ten pound for the one pound weight.<sup>3</sup>

In the West, initially plantation of tea was unknown amongst the other entire plantation, it was being considered as cultivation of dried leaves. Captain Golf, director of the East India Company owned the first living tea plant in his orangery.<sup>4</sup> Though the plant was unable to survive and the species lost its significance temporarily in the west. The history of tea trade could be traced back to 1615; the British East India Company introduced tea trade to England. Commercialisation of tea trade gained its significance initially between 1615 and 1657 small lots of tea was imported from Holland to England which was sold between 5 to 10 per pound.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, from 1660 to 1689, the beverage of Tea was taxed at the rate of 8 pence per gallon. In 1675, the importation of this commodity rose to 4,713 lbs. The importation of tea further rose to 12,000 lbs by 1685. By the decade of 1760-67, the Tea trade further gained momentum amounting to 4,333,267 lbs. The tax rate was also increased gradually; in 1770 they totalled 119% of the total value.<sup>6</sup> During the concluding years of 1780 – 90, the importation of Tea further augmented to 21,706,718 lbs, the 91,183 lbs of 1700 a century later rose to twenty five million pounds.<sup>7</sup> In 1784, the legislature passed the Commutation Act, compelled the East India Company to make quarterly sales of Tea to sell even as low as one penny a pound above prime cost while preserving a substantial amount as storage for one year consumption. During the decades of 1760 and 1770 significant development took place in the expansion of tea plantation in England and Georgia. Carl Gustavus Eke berg in 1763, the captain of a Swedish East

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Indiaman presented Linnaeus with seedlings of tea which he had germinated and grown on a return voyage from China. By 1770 living plants were introduced in England and Georgia. In 1800, younger Michaux planted tea in the gardens of the Middleton Barony, on the Ashley River about 15 miles from Charleston. In 1810, Tea was introduced in Brazil as a mark of commercial production by the Chinese colony in southern Brazil.<sup>8</sup> By the decades of 1860s, migration of Chinese labourers was restricted in Brazil which further led to the failure of the Chinese colony to impose its control over tea plantation in Brazil. By the decades of 1850s and 1860s tea plantation economy in Brazil gained widespread popularity.

During the end of the nineteenth century, it was observed in England the entire community ranging from statesman, the preacher from the pulpit, the toiling mechanic, wearied labourer, poor governess, cottage housewife acknowledged and expressed their gratitude to the Queen for the grateful and invigorating infusion of tea as a social drink. The colonial authority therefore succeeded in replacing alcoholic drink by invoking the spirit of drinking intoxicating and non-narcotic beverage in general use among tribe of every colour, the custom of ‘drinking tea’ became the universal want of their common nature. The European successive financiers and the enterprise of merchants took initiative to reduce the cost of tea to mark this beverage as the only common real luxury for the rich and poor alike.<sup>9</sup> However, the colonial authorities succeeded largely in eradicating the discrimination between the rich and the poor in England by framing *Tea* as the common drink. Thus, increase in the tea trade significantly marked the expansion of the plantation of tea in other countries which led to the establishment of a global impetus of the British imperialism in other parts of the world.

## II

Commercialization of tea took place in Indonesia by Dutch in 1835. Simultaneously in India also by 1834 the East India Company established tea plantation economy. The Charter Act of 1833 paved the way for the introduction of plantation economy in India since it marked the beginning of the invasion of British industrial interest over mercantile interest which had its impact upon the settlement of Assam. Secondly, the Europeans were able to hold land with long term lease outside the presidency towns which led to the growth of the tea plantation economy in

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Assam.<sup>10</sup>The cultivation of tea in India was undertaken by the East India Company on 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1834 on consequence of a minute recorded by Lord William Bentinck<sup>11</sup>.From commercial point of view, the officials of East India Company believed that introduction of tea plantation in India would be of huge success, further led England to gain independent position economically in respect to China.

The existence of tea plant in Assam could be traced prior to the decades of 1830s. Mr. C.A. Bruce was appointed in 1824 to command a division of gun boats in Upper Assam during the progress of hostilities with Burma. In 1826 he brought down certain plants and seed which were identified as belonging to the tea of commerce.<sup>12</sup>In 1834, Captain Jenkins identified the indigenous tea plantation belt extending from Suddyah in Assam to the Chinese frontier of Yunnan. In 1837, tea makers and artisans were introduced from China since the failure of its initial experiment for conversion of the tea to its normal use.<sup>13</sup> Effect of capitalism was evident in the initial years of 1838 – 39 after the arrival of excellent quality of tea which further attracted the attention of the European mercantile world. This further led to the establishment of Assam Tea Company.<sup>14</sup> The Assam tea company initially gained its growth in the domain of capitalism during the initial years. The success was unable to sustain for a prolonged period of time owing to the depreciation of the shares. Secondly, it was gradually becoming difficult to access regularly such unhealthy terrains and expensive to maintain the establishments on a large scale. Until April 1849, the Government retained one third of its experimental tea estate.<sup>15</sup> In the preceding years the tea estates were sold at the sum of Rs 900. The government have achieved the maximum profit from the tea plantation in the past fifteen years.

The first private garden was established near Debrooghur in 1850-51 by Colonel Hamway.<sup>16</sup> Private enterprise thus began to expand in the following years in the neighbouring districts of Sebsaugor in 1853. In the Luckimpore district near Sebsaugor the no. of private gardens rose to six. Neither of the other districts in the province had seen the emergence of private tea plantation earlier. To enhance the area of tea plantation economy under the government experimental garden on attractive terms Waste Land Rules were introduced initially on 6 March 1838. The chief features of these rules were forty-five-year lease on a condition that the area must be cleared within five years, failing which the land was liable to resumption. No

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grant for agricultural purpose could be made for less than 100 acres at a time and to one who did not possess capital or stock worth at least Rs.3 per acre.<sup>17</sup> However these conditions were only favourable for the Europeans. While the opportunities was difficult for the indigenous planters, they were unable to avail the external grants under the framework of the rules. Furthermore, one-fourth of a grant remained revenue free for the initial five to twenty years. Though the revised rules of 1854 which stated all leases of waste land were extended to a period of ninety-nine years. They further provided one eighth of the total area was to be cleared and rendered fit for cultivation in five years, one-fourth in ten years, one-half in twenty years, and three- fourths in thirty years in default of compliance with these clearance conditions the grant was to be resumed.<sup>18</sup> By the end of 1859 there were 51 private tea gardens, out of these 10 were situated in Luckimpore, 15 in Sebsaugor, 3 in Durrung and the remainder in Kamroop and Nowgong.<sup>19</sup> The waste land rules of 1854 enabled the successful working of private companies from 1859 to 1863 in a healthy state.

The tea plantation in Darjeeling initially was introduced by Dr. Archibald Campbell in 1841 who believed that the Chinese bushes could be extensively cultivated in Darjeeling with great valour. In the backyard of the garden Dr Campbell initially experimented with the Chinese shrubs which indeed turned out to be not successful. In the later years Dr Withcombe and Major Crommelin experimented the tea plantation in the lower valley called as Lebong which turned to be of huge success since the quality of the production from the lower valleys were far more superior than the output from Assam. The blossom of the leaves and the seeds were healthy; the reddish clay on the sides of the hill made Lebong the perfect side for the plantation of tea than the black loam of Darjeeling. Since Darjeeling was situated at a height of 7,000 feet the moisture content was being considered as an obstacle for the growth of tea plantation. While the tract between Morung and Darjeeling was equally suitable for both the coffee and tea plantation. During 1866 there was a huge growth on the tea plantation with annual production amounting to 433,000 pounds of tea covering nine gardens with an extensive area of ten thousand acres.<sup>20</sup> The tea plantation in Darjeeling faced a rapid growth in the production amounting to 39,27,911 lb and extension of the cultivation area up to 18,888 acres by 1874. By the year 1891, the total no. of tea estates rose to 177, in the following years though there was a steady decline in the no. of

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tea estates in Darjeeling due to the tea estates were being organized under big limited concerns which led to the increase in the total area of tea plantation but the number of separate gardens gradually declined. The tea plantation gradually expanded to the plains of Terai. In Terai the first tea garden was established in 1862, near Khaprail by James White, he also laid the foundation of the largest tea estates in Singell near Kurseong.<sup>21</sup> Tea plantation further extended in the lower plains of the Jalpaiguri district comprising of the amalgamation of Western Duars District and the Jalpaiguri sub division of Rangpur District. Initially tea plantation was established in Jalpaiguri by R.Haughton in Gazilduba area by 1874.<sup>22</sup> In the preceding years by 1876, the growth of the tea plantation industry was in a large scale comprising of 13 gardens with an area of 818 acres and a yield of 29,520 lb of tea. High growth rate of profit from the tea industry encouraged the capitalist to establish more tea gardens in the Duars region. Within the span of twelve years ranging from 1881 to 1892 the no. of tea gardens rose to 182 covering 38,583 acres providing a turnover of 18 million pounds.<sup>23</sup> During the first decade of twentieth century plantation of tea expanded beyond the boundaries of the district Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling. The tea plantation economy extended to Coochbehar (i.e. eastern side of Duars) namely, the Coochbehar Tea Estate and to Dinajpur (i.e. southern part of Terai) namely, Debijhora tea estate. The tea plantation economy gained impetus successfully by the English East India Company in the South and South East Asian countries, Latin American countries, and East Asian countries during the mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth century. In 1880 the United States Commissioner Hon. W.G. Le Duc appointed Mr. J. Jackson, a British national to establish commercial production in Georgia.<sup>24</sup> Initially in 1852 Dr William Jones, in Riceboro, Liberty country, Georgia appointed Robert Fortune to import tea seeds from Brazil and established tea plantation.<sup>25</sup> Nearly 5,000 to 20,000 plants were distributed annually from 1868 to 1876. In 1880 the property initially owned by Dr William Jones was purchased by the United States Commissioner W.G.Le Duc, the plantings of Mr. Jackson was used as the source of samples to expand the tea plantation in spring. Eventually in the United States plantation of tea was encouraged by the government for the upcoming thirty years. The effect of British imperialist economy was thus highly reflected in the tea plantation economy since maximum profit was extracted from the tea plantation. In the early phase of mid nineteenth century it was formally

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difficult to extract labour from the neighbouring areas. Hence, the tea cultivation was being carried out by the local indigenous labourer's with considerable amount of low wage and by imposing harsh treaties upon them.

## Conclusions

Many scholars have failed to analyse the tea plantation economy had certain social impact too upon the life of the indigenous societies. Though there were several capitalist forces in India during the colonial period but tea plantation was the best reflection of the colonial exploitation on labour since it was argued that recruitment process, wage and work time equation in plantation are next to slavery. In this paper, focus has been made to understand on the emergence of “tea” as the global drink leading to the formation of a new social world. This paper is therefore an attempt to understand how the introduction of tea as a common drink played a key role in improving the social and the cultural life of all sections of the society in mid nineteenth century England.

## Notes and References

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