

The Tea Saga Of The Colonial Assam And The Empire's Distressing Control Of The Wild

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Abstract:

The article centres on the rich history of indigenous *Camelia sinensis*, the wild tea which was found in the distant hills of the Singphos, Khampteas and the Noctes. The idea that tea should be grown in India with a foundation of commercial viability established the framework for the tea trade outside of China in Assam. This led to numerous expeditions and investigations, such as the shipment in large quantities of Bohea tea seeds and the establishment of nurseries. This article presents a comprehensive analysis of various issues, including the rise in tea acreage and the natives' miseries, waste land grant regulations, and the effects of tea on the Assam's natives' lands. This article has attempted to delve into the depths of Assam's tea plantations, with the help of relevant literature and archival materials.

Key Words: Tea, Agriculture, Immigrant Labourers, Maladies

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I. Introduction

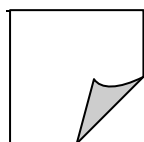
A stimulating beverage that is usually well-known to every person, tea has grown into an appealing option of everyday drink for the majority of people. Almost everyone has been accustomed to the habit of drinking tea. In all of India's agro-based sectors, tea is the most lucrative plantation crop by far. Many historians of China believed British to be the cause for extensive opium addiction in China, since they drove almost all of the populace into addiction. Opium was forbidden and outlawed by the Chinese Qing dynasty's ruler, who was totally opposed to the British. In order to get around the prohibition, the East India Company began auctioning off opium in 1839 to small commercial dealers so they could smuggle it into China. The dealers of the East India Company were entirely abandoned when over twenty thousand boxes of opium were confiscated (Hazarika, 2020, p.1704). Consequently, the British market's supply of tea began to decline. The loss of the tea trade monopoly with China in 1833 inflicted a serious blow to the East India Company. It was not until 1776 that British botanist Joseph Banks suggested India, start growing tea on a commercial scale. It is recognized that he laid the theoretical foundation for the tea business in the remote northeastern region of India. Colonel Kyd started experimenting after a few years by sending Chinese seeds to India to be cultivated. In 1787, he went on to create the Botanical Garden. Joseph Banks assisted Kyd in creating the botanical garden and worked closely with him (Baldwin, 1993, pp.813-817).

II. Research Methodology

Historical method is applied in the composition of the present article. The foundation for this paper's empirical review was built utilizing both primary and secondary sources. The National Archives, New Delhi, and the Assam State Archives provided the reports on tea expeditions, Labour enquiry reports, Epidemic reports, Proceedings, Sanitary reports, etc., these major primary sources were consulted. Books and periodicals are where the secondary sources are compiled. To provide a fair assessment, the government gazetteers and census reports are reviewed as well.

III. Discussions

The indigenous term for tea, Phalap or Khelap, as identified by the tribes of Tai-Khampti, Singpho and the Noctes of Arunachal Pradesh from the age-old period but it was not familiar to them as a commercially viable commodity until the advent of British (Wangtum, 2022, p.2). The EIC handed Purandar Singha, the Ahom prince the control of Upper Assam in 1834 in an effort to calm down the royal clan and tried to put an end to any possible uprising. He was forced by treaty to pay Rs. 50,000 annually. However, Jenkins quickly discovered that most Charles Bruce discovered tea tracts were within Purandar's domain. Purandar was soon



approached by the East India Company with a plea to grant a number of plots of land for tea plantation on Gabharu Parbat. Purandar Singh agreed to it and felt enthusiastic about the potential advantages the natives will get from it. Maniram Dutta Baruah, Purandar Singh's Finance Minister or dewan was one of the most determined natives of Assam, he recommended the king to adopt all the liberal ideals of the British in order to extract some profits for his people. Therefore, the forward-thinking monarch gave the British all of the hill lands, keeping just ½ for himself so that his subjects could cultivate tea there as well. He also requested the British to impart the knowledge of cultivating and producing tea to his people (Baruah, 1990, pp.535-539; Hazarika, 2020, p.1706). But he was removed from the throne very treacherously under the guise of bad governance and his entire kingdom was subjugated under the British as his kingdom was found highly preferable for the cultivation of tea (Baruah, 1990, pp.537-539).

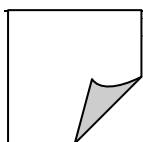
Vast regions of upper Assam have been reported to be covered under dense tropical jungles, its intensity was so heavy and dense that there are very less reports of the supervision of the forest departments in the parts of Lakhimpur forests. The planters were mostly threatened by the dense forest of Assam which became a major obstacle in their route to revenue generation and making it difficult for them in getting rid of these dense forests. The British officers despised the forests because they believed that it hindered their progress. This led to the categorization of forests as wastelands, or areas which were devoid of income (Hazarika, 2020, p.1709).

C.A Bruce and his Contributions to Tea

C.A Bruce, a trustworthy, enthusiastic long time acclimated resident of the Assam province was strongly recommended by Capt. Jenkins and Lieutenant Charlton for as being exceptionally competent for the immediate direction of the nurseries. The committee also instructed Wallich to approach the Governor General of India in council for approval of C.A. Bruce's appointment as superintendent, to be paid Rs. 150 a month, and to proceed right away with the necessary arrangements for the Bohea tea seeds, working with Lt. Charlton to approve and bear the costs associated with establishing and maintaining the nurseries (Experimental Cultivation of Tea, 1835). In his discovery, C.A. Bruce discovered numbers of additional wild tea patches, bringing a total of twenty-nine tea patches. Manufacturers of China with the necessary qualifications for producing green tea and tea chests were imported into the province. When it came to manufacturing tea and making the tea chests that would be well-seasoned to crust the sheet that would later be lined, the earlier they were manufactured, the better. The chests are made before the appropriate tea manufacturing season to use them (Revenue Report 1836). C.A. Bruce's foremost objective was to assess the state of the tea plants in the newly uncovered tea plots and what happened when the villagers cut them down and took away the shade of the large forest areas to create space to grow rice. C.A. Bruce had never witnessed a longer extent of land which was six hundred meters without a break. Bruce had never seen tea plants growing in the sun; instead, he had only ever seen them grown in the shadows of thick forests. The tea committee, to further authenticate the tea quality and thinking it was part of the forest, collected tea seeds from the muttock nation to evaluate the state of the tea plant that had been chopped down by the villagers the previous year in an effort to look into the experiment in more depth. The committee collected tea seeds from the muttock country to further authenticate and look into the experiment into more depth of the tea plant that the villagers had chopped down the previous year, not knowing it was tea, considering it a part of the forest. It was chopped off to the same level as every other remnant of the forest. The tea leaves were growing three to ten feet high, and the villagers had chopped them down from six feet above the ground. An abundance of young leaves with a slightly yellowish appearance was seen to be sprouting in March. Bruce was told by the villagers that they thought the tea plant was a wild tree. As a result, they nearly breached it down close to the ground, set the whole thing on fire, and replaced it with ahu rice. Bruce and his mates saw that, only an inch or two below the spot where the ahu rice crop had been cut, numerous thick tea shoots and leaves had emerged from the roots (Revenue Report 1836). All these shootings were outside and exposed to the daylight, with the exception of the evening time when the tall trees that surrounded the jungle and blocked the sun-light. The long-desired experiment to see whether tea trees could grow in the sun or not had demonstrated that they could flourish in both environments. The new and old teas were clearly different from one another. The former had big old leaves that were slender and long. The later had lush, green bushes with delicate green leaves. This gave additional evidence that they will under the sun-light as well. There were little hillocks or mounds with tea trees on them that ranged in length from eight to twenty feet (Revenue Report 1836).

The Natives distress and the Empire's control

The planters gradually seized all the lands owned by the native inhabitants. The planters started annexing more land than what was required or within their purview. Only 56,000 acres of the almost 0.7 million acres of waste land that planters inhabited were used for tea planting (Legislative Proceedings -A, 1870). The 1853 Land Settlement was introduced specifically to take land away from the aboriginal people and



give it to the colonial planters. Numerous wastelands grant regulations previously existed, such as the 1838 Ninety-nine-year lease rules, the 1826 fee simple rules, the 1874 revised fee simple rules, and the 1876 new lease rules, etc. Planters brought huge extensions of land who did not intend to cultivate the entire area were the ones who frequently applied for one-thousand to fifteen-hundred acres or more, which they never intended to cultivate the whole area. However, these overbearing actions were taken in light of the fact that the jungles had hundreds of priceless trees from which charcoal, the main fuel used to manufacture tea, could be harvested (Barpujari, 1992, p.44). The tea garden workers were made to settle in the remaining forest areas to ease the continuous supply of workforce. The forests provided the plentiful supply of the wood for the manufacture of tea boxes which were needed for effectively shipping the tea via water channels. The planters were allotted a total of 1,47,071 acres of land in sivsagar, of which only 34,194 acres were planted and the remaining 1,12,877 acres remained unplanted, based on the Annual Tea Report 1878. 1,17,308 acres in total were allotted in Lakhimpur as well; of them, 23,781 acres were planted and 93,527 acres were left barren. In Upper Assam, the tea planters went on to become the biggest owners of private forests and land (Hazarika, 2020, p.1710).

British authorities increased the rate of land revenue payable by the peasant. The native population was compelled to labor in the tea gardens in order to meet income demands due to the huge increase in land revenue (Guha, 1977, p.9-10). Work in a tea garden as paid labor was not considered significant by the natives, they were found to be more inclined towards their agricultural fields. Increased land revenue was a tactic used to force the natives to work. The planters gradually took possession of almost all the land owned by the native inhabitants. When it came to their own land holdings, the local peasants were obliged to pay land revenue ranging from Rs 3 to Rs 1-8 annas per acre, while the planters paid nothing for the majority of their holdings in 1870. The grazing pastures were taken over by the planters, infringing upon the Jhum rights of the local farmers. To restrict people's rights and even destroy the roads leading to their homes, the planters even went so far as to block public lanes, which harmed communication between the villages. In certain cases, the tea companies purchased the natives land as wastelands (Guha, 1977, pp. 14-15). Until the British invasion, the natives of Assam had the access to grazing lands. The rights of the common people on the waste land were abolished as soon as the new British government took control of Assam and started to exercise its authority over the region. The rights of the common people to let their animals graze on the wasteland was disbanded by the new regime. The government began setting aside forests, which it referred to as reserved forests. With the aim to further tighten the laws, the government-imposed restrictions on cattle grazing practices too (Assam Forest Manual, 1898)

The government used various restrictions on the natives to use the forests products from the reserved forests areas. Introducing any new changes in the reserved areas was prohibited by the Assam forests regulation act VII of 1891. Cutting down trees or gathering forests produce, clearing any reserved forests area for mining, fishing, hunting, or farming was made strictly forbidden. The only land made available for grazing was the area which had a little ability to produce any profitable crop (Bryant, 1912).

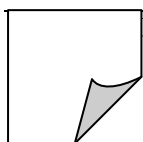
The locals were allowed to graze their livestock in the unreserved woodlands in exchange for taxes, caused hardship for the underprivileged. They also had to pay a fee double the amount of the damage if their cattle did to any of the forest produce. Furthermore, anyone who disobeyed the regulation faced imprisonment, a fine, or perhaps both (Home, 1898). The native inhabitants of Assam suffered greatly because of the reduction in grazing. The indigenous people were having difficulty finding fodder for their cattle and other herbivorous livestock as the government levied taxes on cattle grazing in the pasture areas, and with this the pasture land was continuously disappearing. The indigenous had severe fodder shortages during the flood, which resulted in starvation and even the death of their livestock as there was not enough food for their animals.

IV. Conclusion

With the tea discovery by the colonial regime in the hillocks of the Singphos, Khampteas and the Noctes which was indigenous to them led to the capturing of native lands which had adverse effects on the common people when the government had restricted all the rights of the common people related to lands. The forests areas were made reserved restricting the movements of the common people and using the forest produce or grazing their cattle's. The British regime seized the grazing rights, their liberty to move in their own forests, did not spare the routes of their villages making their lives measurable, the common people slowly lost their existence and freedom, which only came back to them after India gained independence.

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