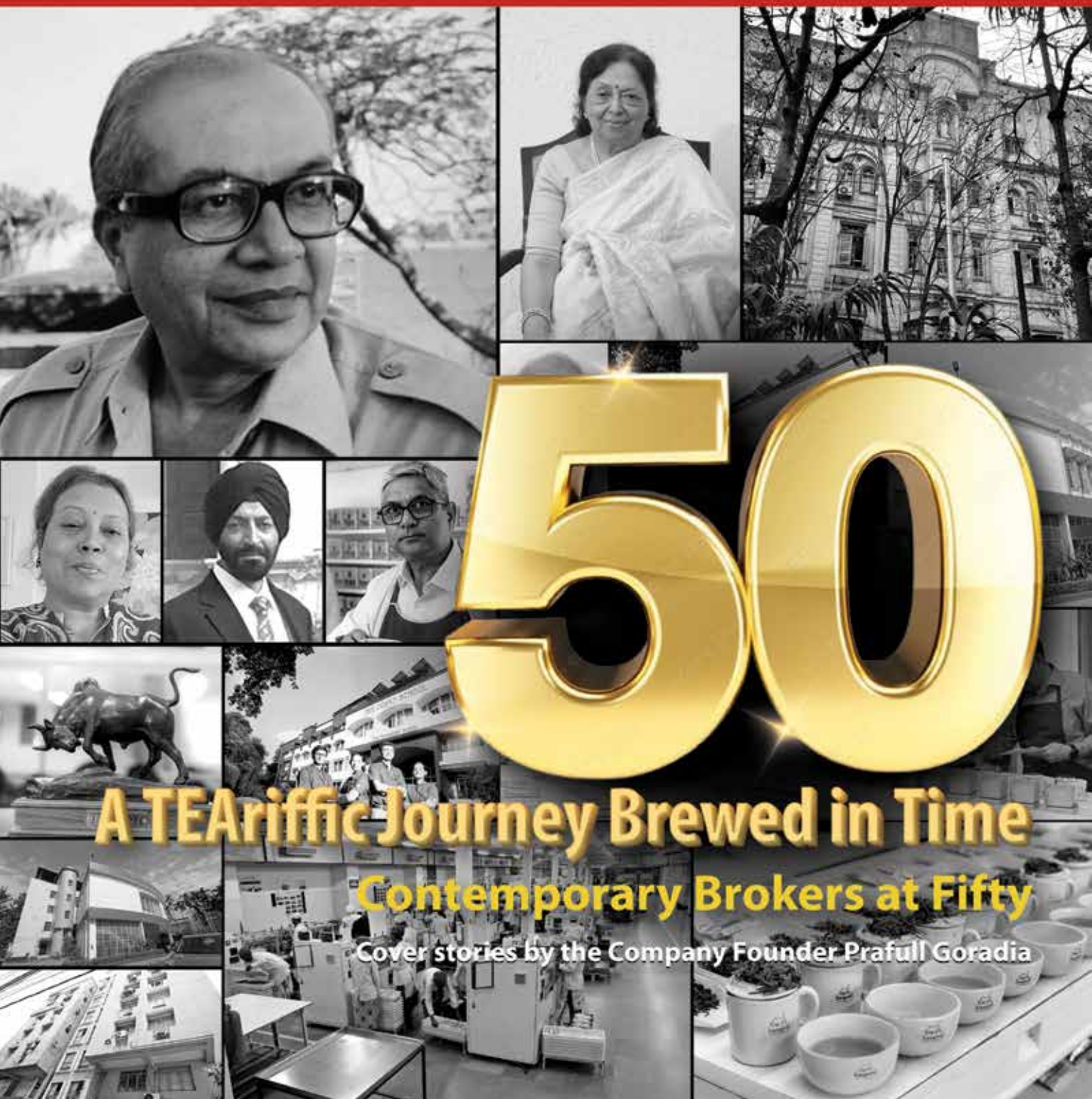


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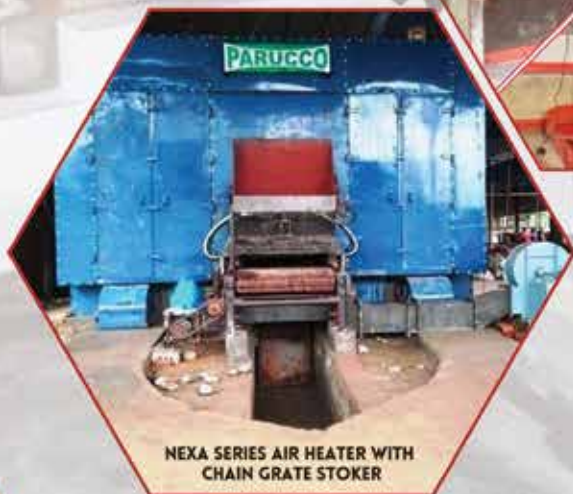
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Published by Iqbal Singh Sukarchakia, on behalf of Contemporary Brokers Pvt. Ltd. 1 Old Court House Corner, 2nd Floor, Kolkata 700001

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First Flush

GOLDEN LEGACIES AND SHIFTING GLOBAL WINDS

Fifty years is a remarkable milestone in any industry. In one as deeply rooted in history as tea, a golden jubilee stands as a tribute to resilience, foresight, and enterprise. In this issue of *Contemporary Tea Time*, we are delighted to mark the fiftieth anniversary of **Contemporary Brokers**. Our cover story celebrates the institution's founder, Mr. Prafull Goradia - an industry stalwart and a thoughtful man of letters. His reflections offer a vivid account of the firm's early years and the singular vision that shaped it. Complementing his narrative is a rich mosaic of memories from members of the Contemporary family - voices from colleagues past and present, who together capture the human story behind the broking's enduring journey.

Even as we celebrate these golden legacies, the industry must also confront a rapidly shifting global landscape. One of the most significant developments on the trade horizon is the India-EU Free Trade Agreement, concluded in January 2026. For a sector that has grappled with stagnant exports, the agreement opens new possibilities. Tariff barriers may ease, offering fresh momentum for Indian tea in European markets. Yet the optimism must be tempered with realism: the EU's rigorous regulatory framework remains unchanged. Meeting its demanding compliance and quality standards will be the real challenge if premium Indian teas are to gain stronger footholds on European shelves.

At the same time, geopolitical tensions are casting long shadows over global trade. Escalating conflicts in Western Asia have begun to disrupt shipping routes and push freight costs upward. For tea exporters, the consequences are immediate - longer transit times, higher logistics expenses, and the spectre of inflation. In such an uncertain climate, the industry must rethink and strengthen its supply chains with strategic clarity.

These evolving challenges also underline the need for a broader perspective. Tea is a truly global commodity, and the conversations shaping its future increasingly transcend national borders. Recognising this, *Contemporary Tea Time* endeavours to bring into its pages the views and insights of industry leaders from beyond India, offering perspectives on the developments, innovations, and diverse cultures of tea-producing regions around the world.

As we honour the pioneers who shaped our past, we also look ahead to a more interconnected future for the tea trade. The story of tea, like the leaf itself, continues to unfold across continents, markets, and generations.



Chitto Ghosh
Editor



MY CUP OF LIFE OVERFLOWS

It is often said that a sculptor speaks through silence, allowing stone and bronze to hold what words cannot. But in this edition's Guest Column, we are invited into something rarer - the inward voice behind the chisel, the philosophical murmur of a creative mind in repose.

Niranjan Pradhan stands among the distinguished figures of the Indian art world - a celebrated painter and master sculptor whose work bridges modernist inquiry with civilisational memory. His artistic presence - visible from the streets of Kolkata to the august precincts of Rashtrapati Bhavan and housed in leading museums, art galleries, and premier cultural institutions - has long transcended national boundaries. It finds one of its most memorable expressions in Bristol, England, where his majestic statue of Raja Ram Mohan Roy stands in serene dialogue with history. Yet long before the international acclaim, institutional recognition, and commanding commissions, there was a boy in the Sunderbans who had never seen a teacup.

In this deeply reflective and lyrical meditation, Pradhan moves beyond biography into revelation. From the clay of his childhood to the studios of Calcutta, from the shaping of matter to the shaping of moments, he discovers in tea not merely a beverage but a metaphysical companion. The rising steam becomes sculpture in air, the act of brewing an aesthetic discipline, and the sip an oceanic summons. Here, the artist who has given permanence to many mediums, turns to the ephemeral - and finds, in the curling vapour of a morning cup, a theatre of memory, devotion, and inner illumination.



Sculpting the Former President of India, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee at Rashtrapati Bhavan (as a Resident Sculptor)

As one journeys along the pathways of life, there come moments of effervescence laughter, song, sorrow, and pain weaving themselves into an unceasing tapestry of experience. And within this ceaseless weave, one sometimes encounters the Great Magnificent - whose radiance inscribes, for a lifetime, an intricate alpana of light and shadow upon the soul.

With a cup of tea in hand, memory and contemplation awaken an unparalleled realisation. It is a magician's play - an enchantment unfolding without pause.

In the hidden lanes of the mind there resounds a sweet flute-song; its spellbinding notes flood every corridor of consciousness. The heart fills, and an unbroken harmony continues to hum within.

Brewing itself is no mere routine - it varies from person to person, much like the touch of an artist. Give two sculptors the same lump of clay, the same tools, the same subject, and yet two astonishingly different forms will emerge. One may be smooth and classical, the other rugged and modernist. Each is brilliant. Each, distinct. The brewer, like the sculptor, leaves something of the self within the creation. The patience observed, the precise instant chosen to lift the kettle from its boil, the quiet grace with which the tea is poured - each gesture is an act of art. And perhaps that is why every cup carries a different destiny, a different whisper.

There, where the heart sways like the fragrant blossom of dolonchampa, begins the search for a wondrous, scent-laden dream. In that tremor of



The painter, inwardly, sketches image after image - an experience utterly singular - until the painter becomes a sculptor. The spiralling columns of steam gather like sculpted forms, illuminating the hidden byways of the mind. How is such a thing possible? Each curl of the mind. How is such a thing possible? Each curl of vapour reveals itself anew - almost as if singing, "Why did you not awaken me before the night slipped away?" What a tender arrival - a cup of warm tea.

With intimate affection comes once more that fragrant meditation, enriched by the smile upon waiting lips. Blessed are you, O Tea - how many fires of separation you have soothed. And again, like a radiant star, you appear - within a single sip, an ocean's summons. Blessed tea - your love flows on within this fragrance.

Niranjan Pradhan

Sculptor & painter

Ex-reader, Government College of Art & Craft



delight, the innermost chamber of the mind is filled to the brim. Immersed in that ecstasy, the heart receives tidings of a vast and exalted experience. On the morning table, the steam from a cup of tea rises slowly upward. The spirit grows luminous. It recalls the chariot of a great charioteer once glimpsed upon life's road; the inner sanctum of the mind fills again, and all ten directions seem perfumed. From the unknown, variegated images emerge, tracing circular lines of revelation. In the drifting vapour of the tea, one form after another appears in ineffable beauty.





TEA PLANTER

A man for all seasons

Few callings in India have blended romance and risk quite like that of the tea planter. In this classic piece first published in The Statesman in 1979, Mrs. Nayana Goradia - former editor of Contemporary Tea Time and now its advisor - captures two contrasting eras of plantation life in Assam and Darjeeling: an earlier world of sprawling bungalows, shikar lore, and polished social ritual, shadowed by isolation and deadly disease, and the present, where that grandeur has yielded to economic strain, regulatory complexity, and new social realities. Later included in her much-loved memoir "The Middle: A Story of Love, Life and Laughter", the article endures as a sensitive portrait of a vanishing ethos - and of the resilience shaped by land, leaf, and uncertainty.



Mrs. Nayana Goradia

MR. X WAS A PLANTER near Tinsukhia, Upper Assam. One January morning this year, he had an unusual visitor at the factory office.

"Very nice meeting you, Mr. X." said the courteous guest, a man sentenced to life for murder but who had escaped prison in a few months. He now collected 'subscriptions.' He said, "I have a small request. I shall be grateful if you will be good enough to keep Rs. 50,000 ready in cash this afternoon. I shall call again at 4 p.m. Do keep this transaction between ourselves. After all, you do have a wife and children you wish to protect." To emphasise his point the visitor made a sudden karate chop making the heavy table quake like jelly.

The moment passed. He was once again the affable urbane visitor. A smile and a nod and he sauntered out.

Few planters are called upon to face such a situation. Nevertheless, life in the wilds can hold many surprises and dangers. The planter learns to move with the confidence of a leader, proud of the long tradition he is upholding, retaining his calm amidst all recriminations and threats, sympathetic, and yet unemotional. He takes many things in his stride - demolishing a nest of cobras unexpectedly found outside the baby's nursery window, chasing up a man-eater, or serving as a father confessor to his brood. The planter is a tough man, endlessly resourceful, and also a master of the art of downing innumerable chota pegs!

To the outsider, the planter's world seems to be an exotic place familiar to us through the works of Somerset Maugham and Joseph Conrad; a legend kept alive by the tropical extravaganzas from Hollywood.

However evocative, these are illusions. Certainly, there was a time in the early part of the century when many of these fantasies bordered on fact. The whiskered, hunter-swishing planter in his solar toper and white ducks, autocratic perhaps, but accepted as omniscient, could well have been true. His abode was a veritable mansion, flanked by a tennis-court and smothered in a riot of bougainvillees, and filled with lofty high-ceilinged rooms and echoing Kafkaesque recesses, tended to by an endless army of servants. It was then the age of polo and shikar with His Excellency, of chota hazri under a striped canopy over a manicured lawn, of hostesses languishing over 'station gup'; of afternoon gin sessions at the club lengthening into a hazy, sullen night.

That was the time when, at a special coming-of-age party, the planters drove to their destination all formally attired, their ladies a vision in satin and lace. The band and the chef for the occasion were imported from Firpos of Calcutta and a small army of "jee-hazoor-ing house-boys assiduously polished the dance floor for 30 days to make the ball the talk of the district for years to come.

It was a life of prerogative and position, of benevolent despotism juxtaposed with immense toil and stamina to survive the malaria and black fever and the untold dangers of a merciless tropical jungle. That was a life when a 'polo pony allowance' was among the essential prerequisites granted to a young assistant manager and it was de rigeur for the superintendent of gardens to have a private staff of 20 domestics.

All this is now part of history. The old clubs, once subsisting solely on the fancies and the peccadillos of the planter, now look withdrawn and derelict; the paint peeling behind the bar and the waiters' uniforms stained with remnants of countless forgotten meals. A great backwash modernity has swept over the world and society has changed under the impact of liberal ideas; moved far from the stage when the manager was the monarch of all he surveyed and his worker a chattel; each taking the other's lot as destined and irrevocable. The pomp and the circumstance has gone but not, alas, the memories. The privileges, the prerogatives have departed, but the illusions of unalloyed prosperity and creature comforts remain, and these are what churn up resentment in the outside world.

To understand, one should look at the *raison d'être* of a planter's calling. Growing and manufacturing tea is only part of his job. His is a lonely existence. Sometimes his nearest neighbour is 30 miles away. The children

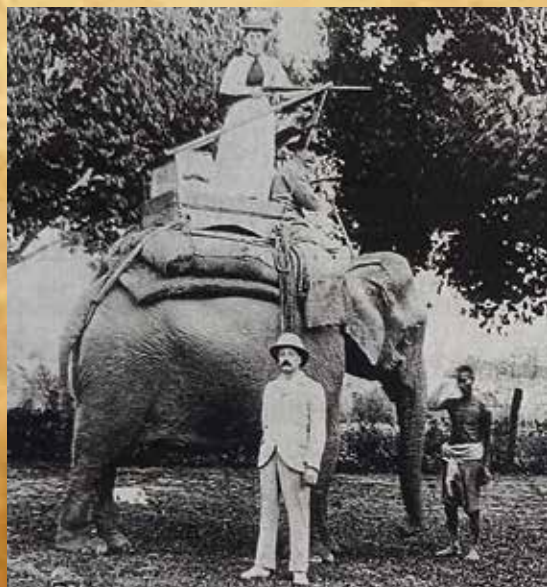
have to be sent to a boarding school and life away from near and dear ones is often chilly and forlorn. A planter could well ruminare, Alexander Selkirk-like. "Oh, Solitude, where are the charms that sages have seen in thy face?" The roads are not always pukka or traversable by car. In times of landslides or floods, all communications are snapped and he is metaphorically marooned on an island, isolated from the world.

The planter's spouse needs all her wits to run a fluid, accommodating home, capable of hosting half a dozen unexpected dinner guests before providing beds for them for the night! Also, the peace and serenity which seems such a balm to a casual city soul on a visit to the gardens can assume terrifying, brooding proportions in times of unrest. Each trembling shadow on the lawn could be that of a stalking assailant and dangerous.

It is scarcely surprising that the planter has been likened to a captain of a ship. He is his own legal advisor, labour officer and engineer. He is called upon to sit in judgment on his men's most intimate domestic problems: "My wife has run away with my neighbour. Kindly arrange to restore her to me. Sir." The boss's verdict is always accepted as final and sacrosanct. Should a rogue elephant stray into the garden the workers look their saheb to deal with the beast.

The planter can also be called upon to face the mob ignited by a handful of mischief-makers from outside. Many have displayed astonishing courage on occasion. A planter was once gheraoed by several hundred men. The men closed in to watch with bated breath as their leader threateningly pointed a kukri at the captive's throat. The manager's unflinching response was: "All right, kill me. Or else, get our." The man withdrew.

All this and much more makes the planter what he is - a man for all seasons. If he is sometimes accused of being a brown saheb - more pukka than the original product - so what? There is the odd planter who with his koi bais and fussy manners, his passion for his pipe, the Daily Telegraph and outdated slang continues to resurrect the Raj in his person. He belongs to a bygone age. Nevertheless, he holds out an affectionate appeal for things past. It is he who adds dimension of colour and nostalgia to what is now a sedate, pragmatic, down-to-earth community.



Nayana Goradia

Former Publisher of Tea Time, historian and author



Cover Story I

Celebrating

50

years of
Contemporary Brokers...

*The Kolkata office in the
iconic Tobacco House.
Where Contemporary's
journey teaed off.*



As Contemporary enters its fiftieth year in 2026, it is fitting that we pause, not merely to mark the passage of time, but to listen - attentively - to a voice that has both witnessed and shaped that passage. Shri Prafull Goradia, founder of Contemporary Brokers, belongs to a rare tradition of industry leaders for whom commerce is inseparable from conscience, memory, and reflection. Revered across the tea trade and beyond, he is as much a chronicler of institutions as he is a participant in their making.

Author of widely acclaimed works on tea, politics, history and Hindu thought, Shri Goradia writes with the authority of lived experience and the restraint of wisdom earned over decades. His prose carries neither nostalgia for its own sake nor the impatience of modern disruption. Instead, it offers something far more valuable: a reflective understanding of how systems evolve, how institutions endure, and how human relationships - between seller and buyer, broker and producer - remain central even as technologies and practices change.

This essay is not merely an account of auctions, buildings, or broking. It is a meditation on continuity and change: from hammer-and-knock auctions to electronic platforms, from colonial legacies to democratic marketplaces, from personal stamina to institutional resilience. In revisiting the physical and moral geography of the tea trade, Shri Goradia reminds us that industries are ultimately built not on transactions alone, but on trust, judgment, and responsibility - values that remain timeless, even as the world around them transforms.

Contemporary Brokers began knocking tea in the Calcutta Tea Auction Room in 1976. This was exactly fifteen years after Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru laid the foundation stone of the new current building. At that time, the auction was still conducted in the traditional hammer-and-knock style; the electronic system came much later.

Until it became electronic, the tea auction had remained virtually unchanged since its inception in London during the eighteenth century. In Calcutta, the auction began in 1861. It was housed within the compound of a building that had earlier served as the residence of John Clavering, a member of Warren Hastings' Council. Presumably, he sold the building after retiring to England. It was subsequently taken over by Robert Thomas in 1832, who ran a broking firm dealing in indigo - the natural blue dye used to whiten clothes during washing.

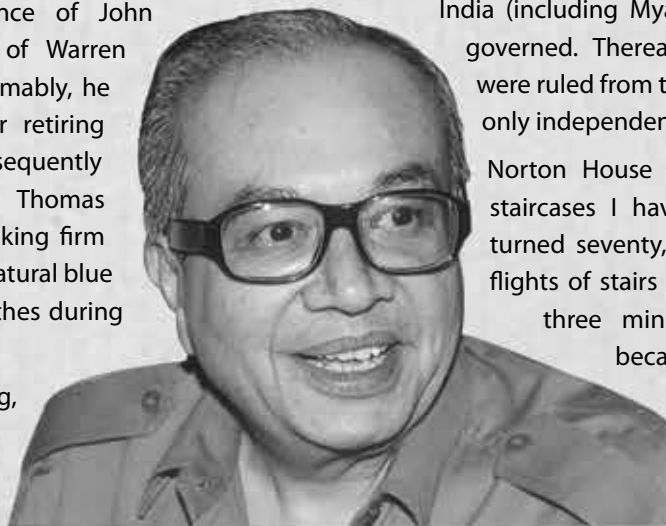
That is why the building, or its later replacement, is still known as Nilhat House (nil = blue, hat = market/house). It

now occupies only one-third of its original land area; the remaining two-thirds were purchased by Birla Brothers, whose massive new building stands

as Nilhat's neighbour. With the proceeds from the sale - and additional investment - the Nilhat group constructed a ten-storeyed elegant mansion, retaining the original name to preserve its historical legacy.

Despite being a much newer enterprise, Contemporary managed to establish itself in 1976 in a nearby mansion known as Norton House. Between Norton House and the colossus called the Writers' Building lie two medium-sized streets and an elegant church - nothing more. The Writers' Building served as the headquarters from where, until 1937, India (including Myanmar, then Burma) was governed. Thereafter, India and Pakistan were ruled from there. After 1947, it served only independent India, or Bharat.

Norton House has some of the finest staircases I have ever climbed. Until I turned seventy, I could run up the two flights of stairs to our office in less than three minutes. No longer - not because of the stairs, but because of my stamina. Behind Norton House lie Kolkata's Police Headquarters. In front of the Writers' Building is Lal Dighi, a name that later gave way to Dalhousie Square. The square is surrounded by monumental buildings. Evidently, in earlier times - beginning at



least in the eighteenth century - one could not establish a substantial business without a large office. Today, however, one can manage even from one's residence.

Until well after the Second World War, there were only four tea brokers in Kolkata, all founded in the 1860s. All had European names and ownership. In the 1950s, four more firms entered the field; all were Indian. Only one of these has survived to this day. Fortunately, two other Indian companies have since joined the ranks of tea brokers. In contrast, three of the four early European firms have gone out of business. The stories of Guwahati and Siliguri, we shall reserve for another occasion.

The patronage of brokers - and of many other intermediaries - is a legacy of British rule. The rationale behind this policy was, first, to cultivate friends and allies for adverse times; second, to patronise like-minded individuals who could be of assistance when needed; and, more broadly, to create a network of supporters - or, in today's language, employment. Now, however, the objective is to minimise dependency and keep overhead costs low. As matters stand, tea brokers remain more economical for sellers than sellers maintaining their own market representatives.

In the course of my experience, I have often heard the advice: sell as the seller wishes, but route a garden's name through only one source. If a seller owns a large garden, its produce should not be divided among two or three brokers. Instead, the garden's name itself may be divided into two or three variants, which are then printed or catalogued separately in different catalogues.

The tea auction is a vast weekly release of diverse teas in a particular city or centre, all ready to be accessed by any and all registered buyers. The process is open and transparent: every buyer can know what has been purchased and by whom, and every seller can

see which buyers are operating on which teas and at what prices. Privacy is not a priority; rather, the auction functions as a popular and efficient marketplace.

Selling through an auction deprives the producer of the personal satisfaction of handling the tea he has lovingly produced. To many sellers, it feels akin to handing over one's daughter in marriage - entrusting her to another agency rather than through one's own hands - sometimes accompanied by quiet sorrow at parting with a cherished legacy.

In a democratic society, everyone should have the right to buy and sell and to produce according to personal choice. However, a seller should insist on routing each brand through a single channel so that buyers do not gain undue advantage. Over the years, some gardens have sold teas under different names and through multiple channels - for example, some teas in packets, others through private sales in large bags, and still others under a third name through auction. Such a perfectly coordinated arrangement is rare, but it is possible. If pursued consistently and systematically, it can yield optimal returns and achieve near perfection.

At work, the broker can be quite a shock-absorber between the seller and the buyer - especially if and when disputes arise in a private sale deal. In 1968, when I was an active broker, we had an ex-factory deal between a Cachar garden and a buyer firm called Gordherdas Lalji. The Cachar district in those days was on metre-gauge trains; hence, each wagon load was 6,000 kg. The quality was spread across six grades: BPS, BOP, BP, PF, PD, and Dust. The understanding was that the percentage of the grades should be as they were produced.

The garden factory, however, loaded the correct total weight on the wagon but stuffed it with a disproportionate percentage of BPS, which at the time was among the cheapest grades. The price was, if I remember correctly, Rs. 6/- per kg F.O.R. Silchar. When the delivery reached Surendranagar in Gujarat,



Conference room, Contemporary Brokers, Kolkata

the ultimate buyer was hopping mad. How and why should he accept 28 per cent BPS when the natural proportion would have been about ten to twelve per cent?

The dispute went ding-dong for about twelve days. The buyer, in my opinion, was right, but the seller was stubborn. All my persuasions failed. The disputed amount was Rs. 326. I therefore sent, from my own pocket, the amount in cash to the buyer to finish the matter. When the seller came to know that I had paid the disputed amount from my small pocket, he felt embarrassed and promptly sent me the money.

Apart from testing, commenting on, and valuing the seller's teas, the broker can be very helpful in improving quality - especially by increasing the percentage of valuable grades. At times, the value profile of the total undergoes a revolution. This happened in 1967, when Mr. Dadhich was the manager of Towkok Estate. The challenge was to increase the percentage of whole-leaf grades (FOPs and OPs) in orthodox manufacture to over 50 per cent from 20 per cent. The visiting broker requested what was called a ghooghie, or a funnel. It had to be

six-sided, with the mouth, or biggest end, being the exit end.

The factory staff was very efficient and produce the new contraption within twelve hours. They hung it up correctly, which, at the right rotation speed, produced more than 50 per cent at the first attempt. The visit ended with the figure rising to 70 per cent.

The broker can often turn into a banker or financier and lend money to a seller - and even occasionally to a buyer - in need. I can go on. He can be the client's friend in all seasons. One could write nearly an encyclopaedia, if there were space here and if the reader had the leisure to read it.

Prafull Goradia

Company founder and author



Kolkata office foyer, where vintage grace meets modern comfort



Cover Story II

A GLIMPSE INTO THE COMPANY GENESIS

*In the restless commercial energy of 1970s Calcutta - then the undisputed epicentre of India's tea trade - Prafull Goradia made a decision that would redefine his professional destiny. Walking away from a coveted position at Duncans, he stepped into the uncertain yet exhilarating terrains of entrepreneurship, establishing his own tea broking firm at a time when the industry was both tradition-bound and fiercely competitive. In this excerpt from his autobiography, **Fly Me to the Moon**, Mr. Goradia revisits those formative years - marked by conviction, calculated risk, and intellectual clarity - when leadership in tea required not only commercial acumen but also courage of thought. His journey offers a rare glimpse into an era when the contours of modern Indian tea broking were quietly being redrawn by educated vision and principled resolve.*

Looking back to my professional career in Calcutta, I had been extremely well paid and had an unlimited authority over a then Rs 100-crore turnover company with 25,000 employees. With the setting up of my company, I had acquired an economic base of my own in Calcutta with branches in Guwahati, Siliguri and Cochin, which could develop into a full-grown business. I also had a beautiful home and enjoyed a reasonable status in society. In Delhi or Gujarat which I was now venturing, I had neither a political base nor a godfather who could steer me forward. I was forty-five years old. I had, besides my wife and two daughters, my parents to look after. When I look back I shudder to think about my headlong dive into Delhi. It was truly a leap in the dark!

Duncans, my employers had lived up to their promise and in 1976 I had been able to start my own tea-broking firm. This had been in exchange or 'insurance' for the risk involved in trying to revive the National Tobacco Company. My plan to join a family-run business group, offer to do something special, if not also to perform a mini-

miracle and acquire a business as a result utopian construct appeared to have succeeded. My new firm bore the self-explanatory name of Contemporary.

My real challenge had begun when I had first set out to implement my plan, especially because I could

not spend any substantial amount of time on the project. I already had the tea and the tobacco portfolios at Duncans to look after. In any case, a broker's work is time-consuming, much more so when one is starting an enterprise. For those not in the know, it is exceptionally difficult to set up a tea-broking house. There were four British houses set up in Calcutta between 1861 and 1870. They were still in the business in 1976 when I launched my enterprise.

After 1947, several companies started by Indians came on the scene, but went out of business before long. Just

about one was functioning by 1976. Two new ones had come up at Guwahati in 1970 when an auction was inaugurated there; but for the new opportunity, they would not have entered the market. There is a special reason for a tea-broker's business being



Contemporary Brokers, Kolkata Office

difficult to establish. The client or the garden-owner needs to repose blind trust in his broker. In those days, tea was allocated for auction four to eight weeks before it was sold; another two weeks could easily elapse before the sale proceeds were realised. All these weeks, the broker was the custodian of the quantity that would be worth several crores of rupees.

I had located a suitable candidate who seemed willing to head the new firm. He was the number two in one of the flourishing erstwhile English companies. When, however, the moment of decision came, he chickened out. The only other person I could think of was lower down in the hierarchy of the biggest of the British-origin companies. He agreed to take the plunge and I gave him all the infrastructural support: a commodious ground floor flat with a huge garden in the heart of Alipore and enough business to keep the company in comfort for quite some time to come. The individual in question was designated managing director. His name was Vijay Dudeja. He got down to the job in earnest and by April 1976, we began selling tea and earning brokerage.

My foray into business took me to the southern backwaters of Kerala the following year, where I had earlier cut my teeth in the rough-and-tumble of the tea world. I happened to visit Cochin. Duncans



With Calcutta's social elite

then had three gardens on the Peermade hills, not far from the famous Thekkady game sanctuary. They could be approached by driving up from Cochin.

Cochin, now Kochi, is called the 'Queen of the Arabian Sea', and with good reason. It is a fine, quaint city that even today bears the unmistakable stamp of its colonial legacy. The landscape of Fort Cochin is particularly striking, dotted by European-style buildings that were once the offices and garrisons of India's colonial rulers, Portuguese, Dutch and finally the British. The princely state of Cochin was an important spice trading centre on the west coast of

India from the 14th century onwards. It also became the first of the European colonies in India. Among European rulers, the Portuguese were the first to occupy it, in 1503. The city remained the main seat of Portuguese India until 1530, when Goa became the seat of their rule. It was later occupied by the Dutch and the British.

We arrived in Cochin in 1977 and I met up with my old J. Thomas colleague, Philip John. He proposed that Contemporary should come to the south. He was willing to lead the venture. My impression of him was that he was capable, ambitious and clever. I therefore decided, on my return to Calcutta, to promote a separate company wherein Contemporary would hold two-thirds of the shares and Philip the remaining one-third.

Business began in earnest by the Christmas of 1977. There was no crowning success, though; over the following five years, the southern company ran up a loss of 6 lakh rupees. The share capital was a lakh, and the Chartered Bank overdraft limit was five times that amount. But the bank had indicated that it would

help us tide over a crisis. In the middle of 1982, Philip however, informed Dudeja who headed the Calcutta company, that the bank had asked him to pay up the deficit and clear out. By then, I had shifted to Delhi and therefore, called them both to my

new location.

After an early dinner, I went to the Lodi Hotel where Philip had put up. Dudeja was with him. I ordered brandy and knocked back two pegs in a matter of half an hour. This gave Philip the impression that I must be inebriated. I declared that I did not want to hold on to his company. I could not carry on with such a bankrupt passenger and asked Dudeja to close it down. Philip was a shrewd man, but despite that he swallowed the bait.

The prospect of seriously shrinking our business was certainly not a pleasing one. Dudeja felt we must save



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HEAD OFFICE: DIBRUGARH, ASSAM

Cochin at all costs even if it meant pumping money from Calcutta. He hated having to accept a retreat. But I was adamant, insisting that I would like to have nothing to do with such a mismanaged company. My final verdict was to close it down. I soon said goodbye to both Philip and Dudeja and left for my house at Defence Colony, which was where I stayed in those days.

The following week I was in Calcutta, when mail arrived from Cochin. It was a lawyer's opinion of Philip's rights and powers as managing director. It talked about how he could veto a closure and file a suit if he were retrenched. The opinion was addressed to Philip but my suspicion was that the dispatch was meant to be a threat, although it was made to appear as though it had been mistakenly posted to Calcutta. The idea must have been to give Philip a chance to apologise, admit his mistake and back off.

Then, two days later, Philip's resignation letter reached us. Dudeja probably expected that I would react and say that Philip ought to clean up the mess he had created. Why should Calcutta have to be bothered with the painful process of closure? Let him take the company at the face value of the shares and disappear. He appeared to have assessed that I was anxious to wash our hands off his half-a-million rupee liability. The suspicion was that the deficit had been built up in order to frighten us into giving up the company. Prima facie, the accounts were near perfect, if one were to look at way they were maintained. They were punctual and audited. Dudeja's reflex reaction was to wring his hands; he was in a quandary as to who would manage the south now. But I was ready with my plan. I immediately told Dudeja to accept Philip's resignation and proceed thereafter as the chairman of this southern company for a few days. He would be accompanied by a Calcutta colleague called Menon, who would stay back there for some months.

This was the first business 'civil war' of my life. Unfortunately, however, it did not prove to be the last. More were to follow. I was learning the heavy price one has to pay for proxy management. These were illustrated for me the cost of not managing one's business hands-on. Ideally, a business, whether in India or abroad, is initiated by an entrepreneur who manages it himself, and then hands it over in due course to a successor, who is mostly his offspring. If

and when it expands and/or runs out of interested successors, it is turned over to professional managers. Small-to-medium enterprises can seldom afford enterprising managers. A capable manager generates a lurking fear that he could grab the company for himself. Otherwise, why should such a manager work for a medium-size company which gave him little scope to fulfil his own ambitions? Conversely, if he were a mediocre individual, he might not be able to deliver the goods. It was a Catch-22 situation.

To preserve and maintain a business is like playing the role of a mini-Vishnu. It might not be difficult. But to play the Brahma or the mini-creator by proxy is rare, if not also improbable. I had tried to overcome this dilemma because of my peculiar insistence on being free from the routine of earning a livelihood which, in many ways, is the theme of this volume. The price I paid for this priority is described in the course of the so-called civil wars. My gain was the leisure or time and energy to pursue politics. My loss was perpetual stress, obvious when tussles took place and implicit when there appeared to be peace. But stress has been there all the time.



Tea tasting room, Contemporary Brokers Kolkata - where every sip is judged



Contemporary annual meet



Contemporary Canvas
Thru the lense - candidly captured



Contemporary Brokers Private Limited



Mr. Prafull Goradia
Founder



Mrs. Nayana Goradia
Founder - Director

Board of Directors



Ms. Brinda Goradia Shroff



Mr. Iqbal S. Sukarchakia
Managing Director



Mr. Arjun Mitra



Mr. Lal Raisinghani



Mr. Somnath Palit

Branch Executive Teams



Kolkata Team



Siliguri Team



Guwahati Team



Ms. Brinda Goradia Shroff, Mr. Satyanjoy Hazarika, Mr. Arjun Mitra and Mr. Iqbal S. Sukarchakia in a meeting



A moment of discernment - Mr. Arjun Mitra and Md. Zubair Uddin at the tasting table.



Ms. Shreyoshi Palchoudhuri, Ms. Brinda Goradia Shroff, Mr. Aditya Palchoudhuri, Ms. Nayantara Palchoudhuri, Mr. Prafull Goradia, Ms. Nayana Goradia and Mr. Iqbal S. Sukarchakia in a Kolkata meet



Front row: Mr. Niladri Saha, Mr. Rajiv Roy, Mr. Iqbal S. Sukarchakia, Mr. Arjun Mitra and Mr. Somnath Palit.

Middle row: Mr. Sushanta Nandi, Mr. Indranil Bhattacharya, Ms. Tania Khan, Ms. Ranita Sengupta, Ms. Susmita Poddar, Ms. Moumita Roy, Ms. Madhuparna Chakraborty, Ms. Swarupa Das and Mr. Manoj Gayen.

Back row: Mr. Basudeb Chatterjee, Md. Zubair Uddin, Mr. Prasanta Kr Ghosh, Mr. Souvik Manna and Mr. Sudipta Halder.

Kolkata Office



Mr. Iqbal S. Sukarchakia, Mr. Niladri Saha and Ms. Susmita Poddar exploring flavour, one sip at a time



At the table, where strategies take shape



Mr. Rajiv Roy and Md. Zubair Uddin tasting tea



An impromptu exchange in the office foyer



Accounts dept. - Mr. Prasanta Kr Ghosh and Ms. Moumita Roy



Mr. Basudeb Chatterjee in a focused tea tasting session



Accounts dept. - Mr. Nirjan Chowdhury and Mr. Subhra Pratim Mukherjee



Siliguri office in STAC building



Asst. Managers - Ms. Ena Bandyopadhyay and Mr. Ankit Sha



Mr. Abhijit Sengupta, Ms. Ena Bandyopadhyay, Mr. Ankit Sha, Mr. Nimeshkar Bhujel, Mr. Harsh Kumar, Mr. Sujoy Mukherjee and Mr. Ansuman De



Tasting and Marketing Team



Siliguri Office

Front row: Mr. Anshuman De, Mr. Nirjan Chowdhury, Mr. Harsh Kumar, Mr. Nimeshkar Bhujel and Mr. Abhijit Sengupta

Middle row: Mr. Tapu Dey, Mr. Basudeb Roy, Ms. Subashana Sunam, Ms. Usri Banerjee, Ms. Shampu Thapa, Mr. Biplab Saha, Mr. Bijay De, Mr. Subhra Pratim Mukherjee, Mr. Prem Prakash Pandey, Ms. Ena Bandyopadhyay and Mr. Debraj Paswan.

Back row: Mr. Debabrata Saha, Mr. Ankit Sha, Mr. Sujoy Mukherjee, Mr. Avinash Kherwar and Mr. Suraj Sharma.



Tea tasting



Guwahati office



Front row: Ms. Uresha Saikia, Ms. Kabita Tamang, Ms. Momi Das and Ms. Sunita Marie Dutta.
Back row: Mr. Nayanjyoti Hazarika, Mr. Amarjit Sarmah, Mr. Satyanjoy Hazarika, Mr. Rajdeep Basumatari, Mr. Sukanta Roy, Mr. Anup Kumar Sarmah, Mr. Nilkamal Saha, Mr. Surendra Bhattacharyya, Mr. Dilip Borgohain and Mr. Sunil Kishore Tewari.

Guwahati Office



Guwahati team



Tea tasting session



Guwahati office



Mr. Anup Kumar Sarmah,
VA, Boiragimath, Dibrugarh



CTC roller sharpening workshop under Mr. Anup Kumar Sarmah

Dibrugarh Branch

THE INDIAN SCHOOL

Knowledge is power



Founded in 1996, The Indian School is located in the heart of New Delhi. It is a senior secondary school affiliated to the CBSE and has approximately 3,000 students on its rolls.

The School embodies the vision of the Chairman, Mr Prafull Goradia - "We build ocean liners with Indian anchors and ethical rudders" - and integrates holistic development through experiential learning and skill integration. The mission is to nurture global citizens using modern technology while remaining rooted in the timeless Indian sanskaaras.

Routinely, academic curriculum complements sports, music, dance, debate, drama, yoga, community service etc. Innovation is continually encouraged and a landmark moment came when Neoviz Technologies, founded by 3 students, was acquired by Ericson Technologies, Canada, for ₹42 crore! Their 2 projects, a device detecting heart disease, and an assistive device for the blind - were patented under Neoviz, proving how innovation nurtured at our School has reach global heights.

Self-discovery exercises prompt the children towards self exploration, while theme based spiral learning stretches the horizons of our young minds. There have been many themes in past years - The Silk Route, The European Masters, The Great Moghuls, Dilli Meri Jaan, 'I am the Change I Want to See' are some of the themes.

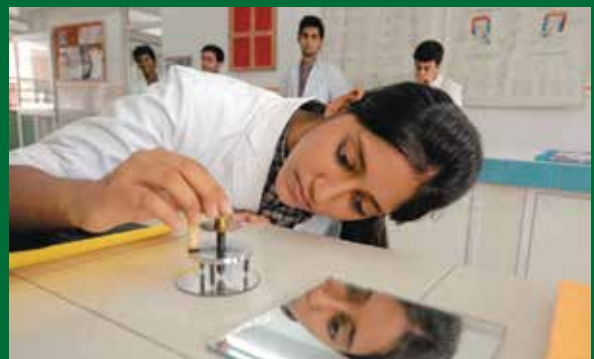
The School Eco Adventure Park offers a feel of the rural environment for our urban students and lessons in sustainability and conservation.

The School annually hosts multiple inter-school

competitions, namely, The Dr Amidas Goradia International Inter-school Debate, where leading Indian and overseas schools participate, Malhaar for music and dance, Innoation for STEM and AEON for AI and IT.



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TOOTHBRUSH DIVISION

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Contemporary began as a tea auctioning company in 1976. In 1986, our Founder, Mr Prafull Goradia decided to diversify and the group set up base in his home state, Gujarat, to manufacture toothbrushes, albeit as an independent company. Today at 40, the group has grown to be the largest manufacturer of toothbrushes in India, with a capacity of about 700 million toothbrushes annually and supplying to global leaders in oral care. The production capacity is versatile and cutting edge to meet global markets and tightly circuted by stringent quality systems.

The group pioneered the manufacture of premium toothbrushes in India in the late eighties, with the import of the latest German lines. This state of the art equipment ensures precision engineering, consistent quality, and efficient processes. The mission is to provide the best quality at the most economical cost to our customers.

Over four decades, the group has evolved through technological upgrades, quality focus, and strategic vision. Today, we deliver high-quality oral care products for domestic and international markets, supporting dental hygiene worldwide.



Contemporary Canvas

Flavour of fittea

In the haze of 1970s Kolkata, amid the scent of jute and fresh CTC, a quiet disruption took root. Founded in 1976 by Mr. Prafull Goradia, Contemporary Brokers entered a tea auction system weighed down by legacy inefficiencies - and began to reimagine it from within.

What followed was not merely growth but methodical transformation. By the early 1980s, with a presence in Siliguri and Guwahati, Contemporary brought clarity to a cluttered trade - redefining auction catalogues into distinct, intelligible categories that improved transparency and accelerated turnover. It was an early signal of a company that understood tea not just as a commodity but as a time-sensitive craft.

The company's leap into computerisation in the early 1990s further set Contemporary apart, quietly catalysing an industry-wide shift that would soon replace opaque, old-world bidding practices with speed, precision, and trust. Over time, the company expanded its footprint while deepening its social commitments - most notably in education. Beginning with the acquisition of The Indian School in Delhi, it was thoughtfully transformed into a model institution, blending innovative pedagogy with a pluralistic Indian ethos under the CBSE Board.

Simultaneously, Contemporary diversified into manufacturing, producing toothbrushes for the country's leading brands, as well as its own label, Merlin - extending its precision-driven approach beyond tea into new domains.

In the pages that follow, we tell the story of Contemporary Brokers - a dynamic, resilient enterprise - through the perspective of its Managing Director, Mr. Iqbal Singh Sukarchakia, and with a concise corporate profile that traces its enduring journey.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF TRUST IN TEA from auction rooms to an enduring legacy

Contemporary Brokers Pvt Ltd. stands today as one of the enduring pillars of the Indian tea trade - its journey spanning over five decades of steady innovation, disciplined growth, and an unwavering commitment to service and trust.

Founded in 1975 as Contemporary Tea Company Private Limited, the firm commenced operations in February 1976, assisting producers in bringing their teas to market. By April that year, it had conducted its first auction in Kolkata - marking the entry of a new and purposeful participant in a broking system, then in need of renewal.

From the outset, Contemporary was guided by a simple yet enduring philosophy: while marketing may be defined as the exchange of satisfaction for money, service is the exchange of dedication. This principle has remained central to our approach - shaping not



Mr. Iqbal S. Sukarchakia

only our business practices but also our relationship with the tea fraternity. Every engagement, whether or not it translates into immediate business, is regarded as a matter of service.

The early years saw calibrated expansion. A branch in Siliguri was established in 1978, followed by Guwahati in 1984, placing the company at the heart of key tea-growing and auctioning centres. Alongside this growth came a conscious emphasis on modernisation. Contemporary

was the first to introduce computerisation in tea broking and to reclassify auction catalogues - bringing clarity, efficiency, and transparency to a system long marked by complexity. These initiatives were not merely operational improvements; they were steps towards building a more credible and reliable marketplace.

At its core, the Company's work has always been driven by a commitment to excellence in tea tasting, evaluation, and marketing. Yet, beyond volume and scale, the emphasis has consistently been on credibility. Trust remains the cornerstone of our operations - ensuring that every transaction is conducted with fairness, consistency, and integrity.

Tea broking, by its very nature, operates within a framework of uncertainty. While costs are largely fixed, income is subject to fluctuations in prices, crop variations, and market dynamics. To put it in another way, a tea broker has no way of budgeting both sides of his book. He can estimate his expenditure but what he will earn, by way of income is uncertain. Recognising this, Contemporary adopted diversification as a means of strengthening its institutional stability - not as a departure from its core, but as a reinforcement of its ability to serve clients responsibly.

In 1986, the Company ventured into manufacturing, producing toothbrushes for leading global brands alongside its own label. This initiative reflected a pragmatic approach to building sustainable revenue streams while maintaining financial discipline - thereby safeguarding the long-term interests of clients and stakeholders.

Equally, the Company has remained deeply conscious of its broader social responsibilities. In 2001, Contemporary acquired a major school in South Delhi and has since developed it into a centre of modern and holistic education. This initiative reflects

a clear objective - to serve society by nurturing future generations grounded in strong human values and a deep sense of national commitment.

At its core, Contemporary's orientation remains firmly customer-centric, guided by a philosophy that places trust and people at the heart of its enterprise. It is this belief - that beyond volumes, it is trust that sustains relationships, and that industries ultimately thrive on people - that continues to shape the Company's approach across both business and social endeavours.

Today, with a strong presence across Kolkata, Siliguri, and Guwahati, Contemporary Brokers continues to play a vital role in the Indian tea market place. Its journey reflects a consistent effort to balance tradition with innovation, enterprise with ethics, and performance with responsibility.

For Contemporary, service has never been a function; it has been the foundation. In an era of fleeting trends, Contemporary proves legacy is brewed drop by drop: innovation tempered with integrity, one cup at a time.

Iqbal Singh Sukarchakia

Managing Director, Contemporary Brokers



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Golden brews of nostalgic tea tales

As Contemporary Brokers toasts its Golden Jubilee in 2026 - marking five decades of steeping the tea trade in Kolkata's auction legacy - Contemporary Tea Time proudly unveils a special section featuring articles by present and former executives and longtime associates. These prudent voices, who've fuelled the firm through booms and blends, share enduring tales from the floor and gardens beyond.

Golden jubilee of trust and excellence



Mr. Lal Raisinghani
Director, CBPL

This year marks a historic milestone for Contemporary Brokers Pvt Ltd as we proudly celebrate 50 years of excellence and resilience. What began as a bold vision five decades ago has stood the test of time and is today considered a trusted broking house committed to progress and providing quality service to clients - both sellers and buyers.

The formation of the Company was made possible on a commitment by a large agency house of an assured volume to be sold by the company through the auction system. Thus began the Company's journey from setting up offices in Calcutta, Siliguri and later at Guwahati after facing stiff resistance to getting a broking license. Sometime later offices were opened in South India at Cochin, Coimbatore and Coonoor under a separate Company, Contemporary Tea Services Pvt Ltd, thus marking the Company's presence at all the six auction centres.

Personally, I have been associated with the company from the beginning in two capacities - for 7 years, from 1976 to 1983, as a client representing the Duncans Group and later as an executive with Contemporary, whom I joined in 1983. I continue to be associated with the Company till date. A long career journey indeed but not without it's ups and downs. To mention two notable ones amongst many others:

In 1983, not much later on, after I joined the Company, a large producing company transferred a

bulk of its business to Contemporary.

In 2001, a corporate restructuring became necessary. The board of directors took a pragmatic look at the Company's South India operations which it finally decided to exit.

While we celebrate our past we remain firmly focused on the future. We are committed to provide our clients better and efficient service combined with new innovations and faster service. On this golden jubilee, I extend heartfelt gratitude to our clients and colleagues who have been part of this journey. This milestone belongs to all of us.

Four decades woven into one journey



Mr. Anirban Bose
Director, Merlin

It was, perhaps, the shortest possible walk for a job seeker to attend an interview - simply walking down from the 5th floor to the 2nd floor of Tobacco House, Calcutta, one afternoon in March 1986. Fortunately, I was selected, and my journey began on 1st April 1986.

The working atmosphere was truly encouraging. It was a period of transformation, when offices were moving from manual systems to computerised operations. What impressed me most was the constant encouragement to embrace technology and modernisation - a culture that continues even today.

Over the years, I have realised that one of the most important aspects of executive training and development in our organisation has been the leadership's emphasis on multitasking and versatility.

This approach enabled many of us, including myself, to broaden our experience, build confidence, and achieve meaningful career growth.

The journey progressed through many transitions. In 1995, I had the opportunity to join the toothbrush division - a significant turning point in my professional life. The scope of work expanded to include manufacturing, finance, client relations, HR, administration, and much more. It was truly a comprehensive and enriching experience. It is heartening to see that the toothbrush division, a major pillar of the organisation, continues to thrive in the business of contract manufacturing for the top two MNCs in the country, maintaining an uninterrupted relationship.

In 2001, business restructuring in South India presented another important assignment. I spent 14 memorable months in Coonoor, in the Nilgiri Hills, completing the project and gaining valuable insights along the way.

Another landmark initiative from our Chairman, Mr. Prafull Goradia, came in 2015. We launched a new toothbrush brand with a distinctive marketing strategy. As an operations executive involved from the very beginning, it has been immensely satisfying to witness the brand grow steadily despite challenging market conditions.

The organisation also created a great institution - a CBSE Higher Secondary School in the heart of South Delhi - as part of its CSR activities. Once again, I was fortunate to be associated with its functioning.

The journey continues. I have been extremely fortunate to work under the inspiring leadership of Mr. Goradia, and I am pleased to see this legacy being carried forward by his daughter, Ms. Brinda Goradia Shroff.

Forty years have passed, yet many moments remain as vivid as scenes from a movie. While reflecting on this journey, I realised that over these four decades, I have worked across all four regions of India and been stationed at or visited 28 offices, factories, properties, and establishments of the organisation, each forming a unique chapter of this remarkable experience.

As we celebrate 50 years of the organisation's journey, I extend my heartfelt best wishes for its continued success. I look forward to seeing it scale even greater heights in the years to come.

A life in tea a home in Contemporary



Mr. Arjun Mitra
Director, CBPL

It was in 1977, after I had completed my schooling in Darjeeling and returned to my parents' home in Nagrakata (TRA), that I first heard conversations among Doors planters about a new broking house - Contemporary Tea - founded the previous year in Kolkata by Mr. Prafull Goradia. In those early days, Contemporary was widely seen as a Duncans-aligned entity, handling the group's entire auction volumes.

My own association with the city began in 1980, when I arrived in Kolkata to pursue my graduation at St. Xavier's. By a fortunate coincidence, I shared hostel space in Middleton Row with the son of a tea planter. Our conversations often turned to the trade, and I found myself deeply influenced by his early experiences as a trainee at Contemporary.

My father was keen that I remain within the tea industry, though in the sphere of broking rather than plantation management. Contemporary, then a young and dynamic firm, stood out for its progressive outlook - it was among the first to introduce computerisation into its operations. Through the reference of a senior Duncans planter, I joined the company in June 1983 as a trainee, following an interview with three of its distinguished directors.

With the guidance of senior colleagues - and perhaps aided by an early familiarity with tea - I quickly learned the nuances of tea tasting and marketing. The organisation's energy and efficiency were palpable, drawing both new clients and promising young entrants.

A significant turning point came in December 1984, when I was transferred to the Siliguri branch. Operating with a small team and modest infrastructure, yet handling one of the company's largest volumes, it proved an invaluable training ground. By 1986, we had moved into the more modern STAC Building, marking a new phase of growth. A couple of years later, I had the privilege of conducting auctions - an experience both humbling and exhilarating, especially as one of the youngest to hold the hammer at the time. Soon after, I was

awarded a month-long visit to London, where I had the opportunity to witness the London Auctions and tasting at Thompson Lloyd & Ewart comprising teas from almost all tea producing countries.

The mid-1980s also marked a period of steady expansion for Contemporary, notably with the addition of a substantial portion of Tata Finlay's business. With operations extending across all six auction centres in India, the company's client base and volumes grew consistently. In a relatively short span, Contemporary earned a reputation for discipline, integrity, efficiency, and financial strength.

Equally notable was the work culture - defined by commitment, camaraderie, and a strong sense of collective purpose.

In 1989, during a challenging phase in South India, Mr. Goradia stepped in to ensure continuity and a smooth transition. I was asked to officiate at the Coonor branch during this period - an experience that proved invaluable when I later returned to head the branch in 1999.

After spending nearly eight years with other organisations, my return to Contemporary (Guwahati) in 2009 felt like a homecoming. In the years that followed, particularly after the closure of Carritt Moran, the company's volumes rose significantly.

Through industry fluctuations and internal challenges alike, Contemporary - guided by a capable management team and the enduring mentorship of Mr. Goradia - continued to stand resilient.

Looking back, it has been immensely fulfilling. My heartfelt congratulations and best wishes to Contemporary on completing 50 years of sustained success.

A shared journey of work, values and transformation



Mr. Somnath Palit
Director, CBPL

My association with Contemporary began three decades ago. Until then, I had neither worked in a tea auction company nor possessed any real understanding of how such an organisation functioned. What I brought with me was only a willingness to learn. With the

active cooperation of my colleagues and the patient guidance of my seniors, that initial unfamiliarity gradually gave way to involvement, and involvement to a sense of belonging. In many ways, my own growth and the growth of the Company became inseparable.

Over the years, I have seen Contemporary Brokers transform itself through phases of diversification, restructuring, and steady consolidation. What started for me as a workplace soon revealed itself as a dynamic institution that was constantly responding to the changing needs of the tea trade. The Company's evolution into a formidable and dependable interface between planters and buyers did not happen overnight; it was the result of foresight, discipline and an ability to adapt without losing its core values.

My tenure coincided with some of the most significant transitions in the history of tea auctions. I have witnessed the movement from manual auction systems to the era of e-auctions, a change that altered not only the pace of operations but also the very character of the marketplace. The restructuring of payment mechanisms, the introduction of service tax and later GST, and the unprecedented disruption caused by the Covid lockdown were not merely policy shifts or external events - they were moments that tested the resilience, professionalism and collective resolve of the organisation. Each phase demanded new learning, new systems and, above all, a spirit of teamwork.

Looking back, what remains with me most vividly is not only the chronology of change but the human dimension behind it. The encouragement and trust I received from my superiors, particularly during difficult periods both for the Company and for me personally, instilled a lasting confidence. Those moments taught me the value of remaining positive and composed in the face of uncertainty - an outlook that has shaped my professional as well as personal life.

Though Contemporary is a closely held group, its functioning has always been marked by a high degree of professionalism. The emphasis on financial discipline, transparency and orderly growth created a sense of stability that inspired confidence in everyone associated with it. Equally important has been the cordial and supportive work environment, which allowed individuals like me to learn, to contribute, and to evolve. It is this atmosphere that encouraged me to work with sincerity and to the best of my

ability, knowing that my efforts formed a small part of a much larger and meaningful enterprise.

As the Company completes fifty years of its eventful innings, I feel privileged to have been associated with it for a substantial part of that journey. To have witnessed from within its emergence as a trusted and effective bridge between the producer and the buyer is a matter of deep personal satisfaction. Contemporary's story is not only one of institutional success but also of the many individuals whose lives and careers have grown alongside it. I count myself fortunate to be one of them.

Echoes from the auction floor



Mr. Samar Sircar
Former MD, CBPL

Heartiest congratulations to Contemporary on completing 50 years, and best wishes for the next 50.

I had heard in the late 1970s that a new tea broking company called Contemporary would start operations in Kolkata. Little did I know I'd join the fray and steep there for 32 years.

Like any enduring firm, Contemporary weathered storms - a schism splitting executives, labour unrest, closure rumours, even a midnight blaze in the bank below our office. Yet resilience always prevailed, turning trials into triumphs. Not too many people know that Contemporary printed the largest catalogue ever recorded in tea, including more than 82,000 packages in one sale. It unfolded in 1984 when West Bengal's government decreed overnight that all state teas must be auctioned publicly. Duncans - Bengal's tea titan - had sold Dooars leaf via upcountry mini-auctions, often in bags. Now diverted to Siliguri, those bags clashed with the chest-only rule. The problem was that these teas were packed in bags, and at that time, auction teas had to be in chests.

Hectic meetings started with the authorities. Finally, after weeks of deliberations - during which time the warehouses were bursting at the seams - the Siliguri Tea Auctions Committee allowed teas in bags to be sold, with a proviso: teas in bags were to be sold last, after the Dust sale was over.

I started the sale on Friday at around 6:20 pm. Selling



faster than ever before, we finished after 11 pm. Then came the callover (tallying price and purchases with the buyers). Thereafter, we went to the office to finish the post-sale work, as some buyers had participated on condition they got the contracts and delivery orders the very next day. We worked till 5:30 in the morning, took a break, and were back in the office by 9:30 am. By the end of that day, we were totally exhausted but elated that the job was done.

Not all memories are about work. Assam garden treks guarantee wildlife drama. Mine was when my colleague and I were travelling along the backroads of Meleng forest in Jorhat district. Driving along, we saw a few cars and people standing on the side of the road watching something. As we drew near, we saw it was two bull elephants fighting in a clearing about 200 yards away - pushing, charging, head-butting, trumpeting. It was an awesome, once-in-a-lifetime sight. After about five minutes, the victor poised to trample, then swivelled - eyes locking ours. We fled en masse. Forest rangers later confirmed: the loser limped on. While there were signs of a fierce fight, no injured animal was found nearby.

Fast forward to 2010: tea broking and the tea auction system were in the throes of change. The old manual auction system was replaced with electronic auctions. All the advantages of long-standing buyer relationships and being a practiced auctioneer able to generate momentum selling to 100 buyers in the room - all that was over. A whole new skill set was required. Now it was one computer selling silently to another computer, with hardly 10 buyers in an enormous auction hall. Most buyers preferred to buy remotely from their office, or anywhere, in fact. It was a fundamentally different scenario with new rules and a new generation taking over. The old order was over, and it was time to go.

It was a tough call since Mr. and Mrs. Goradia had always treated us as extended family members. But inevitability beckoned, so in October 2011 I retired, marking the end of a memorable 32-year journey.

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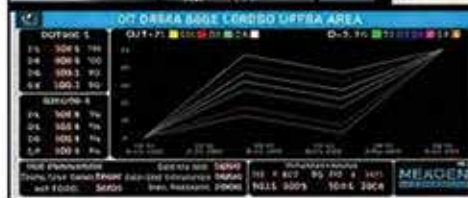
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An enduring bond



**Mr. Sourajit
Palchoudhuri**
Director, Washabarie Tea Co.

In the early 1970s, Gulma and Washabarie sold nearly all their tea privately through in-house auctions held every Thursday in our office - until 1984. That year, to prioritise domestic supply and ensure fair pricing, the Tea Marketing Control Order (TMCO) mandated that 75% of tea be sold via public auctions.

I vividly recall a day in 1978 when load shedding plunged our office into darkness. My cousins - Amitava Palchoudhuri (Senior), Anik Palchoudhuri (Junior), and I - sat in a large chamber, hand-fanning ourselves. Suddenly, Mr. S. Jabbar, Managing Director of M/s. W. S. Cresswell, walked in. He handed over cheques and delivery orders for Gulma and Washabarie teas, announcing that Cresswell was closing. He'd come personally to clear all our payments and return unsold stock via the delivery orders. Our gardens sold a small quantity through Cresswell at the Calcutta Auction. Mr. Samar Sircar (Sami), then with Cresswell, handled our group; I learned tea tasting from him in 1976.

Cresswell's closure left us brokerless, though most sales were private. Senior suggested finding an auction broker - ideally Sami, who had likely left by then. Without his landline number, I chanced upon him in 1979 outside Nilhat House on a Monday. He'd joined Contemporary Tea Co. Ltd., a dynamic new broking house. At my request, Sami visited our office, met Senior and Junior, and soon Gulma and Washabarie were allocated to Contemporary - alongside Zenith Tea Brokers and Tea Brokers Pvt. Ltd. Both gardens have since shared a close bond with Contemporary, which handles the lion's share of our tea.

The Siliguri Tea Auctions began in 1976 in a small hall at Hotel Sinclair's premises. Gulma and Washabarie joined when the 75% auction mandate kicked in.

If memory serves, Senior's ties with Mr. Prafull Goradia started when the Siliguri Tea Auction Committee (STAC) planned its own office and auction hall,

raising funds at 1 paise per kg from sellers, buyers, and brokers.

In 1985, as STAC Chairman, Senior offered Contemporary the top-floor space - half office, half terrace. They took a 99-year lease, built out the office, and moved in by 1986. A year later, they expanded onto the terrace.

One memorable incident: Two Contemporary representatives visited Washabarie during a cloudburst. The National Highway washed out just before the Leesh River bridge, and landslides blocked the Teesta hillside. The next day, we crossed the Sevok rail bridge south of Coronation Bridge to Sevok station - the Teesta raging just 10 feet below! The roar was terrifying. Finally, Gulma Tea Estate's vehicle picked us up for the airport.

It's been a long, wonderful association with Contemporary.

My best wishes for your 50th anniversary.





BREAKING CEILINGS, BUILDING FUTURES

Nayantara Palchoudhuri infuses a grand legacy of excellence as a lady entrepreneur in tea

Based on Srinjini Swar's interview with Ms. Nayantara Palchoudhuri - a fourth-generation tea planter with over 35 years of experience and truly a woman of many laurels - this first-person narrative captures the journey of a trailblazer who has redefined leadership in a world long dominated by men. She shattered over a century of precedent as the first woman to head the Indian Tea Association, the Tea Research Association, and the Asia Tea Alliance. A Gold Medalist from Jadavpur University, she pursued higher studies at SOAS and the London School of Economics as a Metcalfe Scholar. Beyond corporate boardrooms, she has been a pioneer in civic and social spheres - as the first woman member of the Calcutta Club, the first female District Governor of Rotary International in the region, and Honorary Consul for Norway. Her contributions have been recognised with honours including the King's Order of Merit, the Banga Samman, and the FICCI Woman Achiever Award, among many others.

I have been fortunate to receive several recognitions over the years, but each one holds meaning in its own way. Recently, I was deeply humbled to be honoured with the Times of India Trailblazer Women Icon Award and the Times Power Icon East 2026. For me, these recognitions are significant because they acknowledge my journey in an industry where I have had the opportunity to break a few long-standing glass ceilings.



Ms. Nayantara Palchoudhuri

One of my earliest such milestones came in 2005, when I became the first woman President of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce and Industry after 120 years. That role offered me invaluable exposure - not only to the tea sector but to a wide spectrum of industries - and the opportunity to represent Bengal in international delegations alongside senior government officials.

Tea, however, remains my core. As a fourth generation tea planter based in North Bengal, I have always felt a deep responsibility towards the people who sustain this industry - especially women, who constitute nearly 60% of the workforce. Understanding their

realities has been central to my approach.

Women's healthcare, in particular, has been a key area of focus - ranging from prenatal and postnatal care to nutrition, safe childbirth, and menstrual hygiene awareness among adolescent girls. Addressing issues like anaemia is not just a welfare concern; it is intrinsically linked to productivity and overall well-being. Alongside this, we have supported literacy initiatives, with schools in our gardens catering to both primary and secondary education.

In February 2022, I had the privilege of becoming the first woman Chairperson of the Indian Tea Association. There, I sought to reinforce the importance of sustainability - an umbrella that includes environmental responsibility as well as social priorities such as women's welfare. Strengthening women's clubs across tea estates and encouraging greater awareness and participation became part of that effort.

Later that year, I also assumed charge as the first woman Chairperson of the Tea Research Association

in Jorhat. This role was particularly enriching, as it allowed me to engage closely with scientific and research institutions on issues such as productivity, soil health, mechanisation, and climate resilience - critical areas for the future of our industry.

My journey has also extended to corporate boardrooms, where I have served as an independent director on several leading listed companies. These roles come with their own challenges, especially when one is the first woman in such a position. Expectations are naturally higher, and one is constantly under observation. Yet, I embraced these opportunities with a clear intent - to encourage more women to step forward and take on leadership roles with confidence.

Beyond industry, my association with Rotary International as the first woman District Governor in the region gave me deeper insight into grassroots social service. Similarly, my role as Honorary Consul for Norway has been both an honour and a learning experience, particularly given Norway's strong commitment to gender equality and social equity.

Leading the Asia Tea Alliance as its first woman Chairperson in 2022 was another enriching chapter

- bringing together tea-producing nations such as India, China, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Vietnam to address shared challenges, from climate change to labour dynamics.

Looking back, it has been a demanding yet deeply fulfilling journey. Managing multiple responsibilities has never been easy, but effective time management - and the ability to balance many fronts - has always been my strength. Above all, the unwavering support of my family, friends, and the tea fraternity has made it possible.

If my journey inspires more women to step forward and claim their space - within the tea industry and beyond - I would consider that my most meaningful achievement.

As told to



Srinjini Swar





RESETTING THE BOTTOM LINE **With a new pragmatism in** **Assam tea**

At a time when the Assam tea industry stands at a critical juncture - navigating rising input costs, climate volatility, and shifting consumer preferences - the role of next-generation leadership has never been more significant.

Mr. Aleen Baruah, Managing Director of Narayanpur Tea Company Pvt. Ltd., represents a new wave of industry custodians who combine academic grounding with inherited enterprise responsibility.

A graduate in agriculture from Assam Agricultural University, with a specialisation in tea sciences, and a master's degree in Agricultural Economics from National Taiwan University, Baruah brings both technical understanding and an economic perspective to plantation management. Rooted in a family legacy yet candid about present-day challenges, he speaks with clarity on operational efficiency, mechanisation, quality focus, and the need for realism in a saturated market.

In this conversation with Nayanjyoti Hazarika of Contemporary Brokers, Guwahati, he shares his views on the future of Assam tea, the structural threats facing the sector, and the opportunities emerging in exports and direct-to-consumer channels.



What drew you to the tea business? Was it solely family legacy?

Being a second-generation entrepreneur, entering the tea industry was both a responsibility and a natural progression. My father established the business, and it was essential for me to understand its fundamentals and contribute meaningfully to its continuity and growth. While family legacy played a defining role, my academic training in agriculture and tea sciences further strengthened my commitment to the sector.

Do you have a business role model?

I do not consciously follow a specific role model. Every entrepreneur's journey is shaped by unique circumstances. I believe in learning from experiences - both my own and those of others - rather than emulating any single individual.



Mr. Aleen Baruah

What are your aspirations for Narayanpur Tea Company?

Our primary goal is to unlock the company's true potential in terms of operational efficiency and profitability. Equally important is maintaining our estates and assets to high standards and ensuring the welfare of our workforce. Sustainable growth must rest on disciplined management and responsible stewardship.

What opportunities do you see for the Assam tea industry?

Assam tea is part of a mature and, in many respects, saturated market. To restore stronger profit margins, the industry must invest in mechanised solutions to reduce dependence on manual operations. Collaboration with institutions such as the Tocklai Tea Research Institute will be critical in this regard.

Policymakers must also prioritise quality

enhancement. A consistent focus on producing superior teas will help retain existing buyers and expand into higher-value markets.

What do you perceive as the major threats?

Rising costs combined with commoditisation due to oversupply represent significant challenges. Margin pressures are real and persistent. Additionally, increasing competition from other beverages, particularly coffee, is reshaping retail consumption patterns.

Climate change remains a structural threat. Erratic rainfall and rising temperatures are already affecting field conditions and productivity.

What opportunities exist specifically for your company?

We have strong confidence in the quality and cup character of our teas. The key lies in reaching the right customer base and building reputation through consistency. The export market, in particular, represents an important stepping stone for our growth strategy.

Do you see growing interest among young entrepreneurs in tea?

My interaction with young entrepreneurs in the sector has been limited. However, from what I observe, sentiment across the industry appears cautious, if not pessimistic. The challenges are real, and optimism must be backed by structural reforms and sound business fundamentals.

What are your interests outside tea?

I have recently developed an interest in motorcycling and enjoy exploring new places. Fitness is also important to me, and I spend time at the gym regularly. I remain keenly interested in technological advancements and follow developments across industries, as innovation increasingly intersects with agriculture and business management.

Who has been your greatest teacher?

Experience itself. The lessons drawn from past



decisions - successes and failures alike - have been my most valuable guide.

What new avenues have opened up for the younger generation in tea?

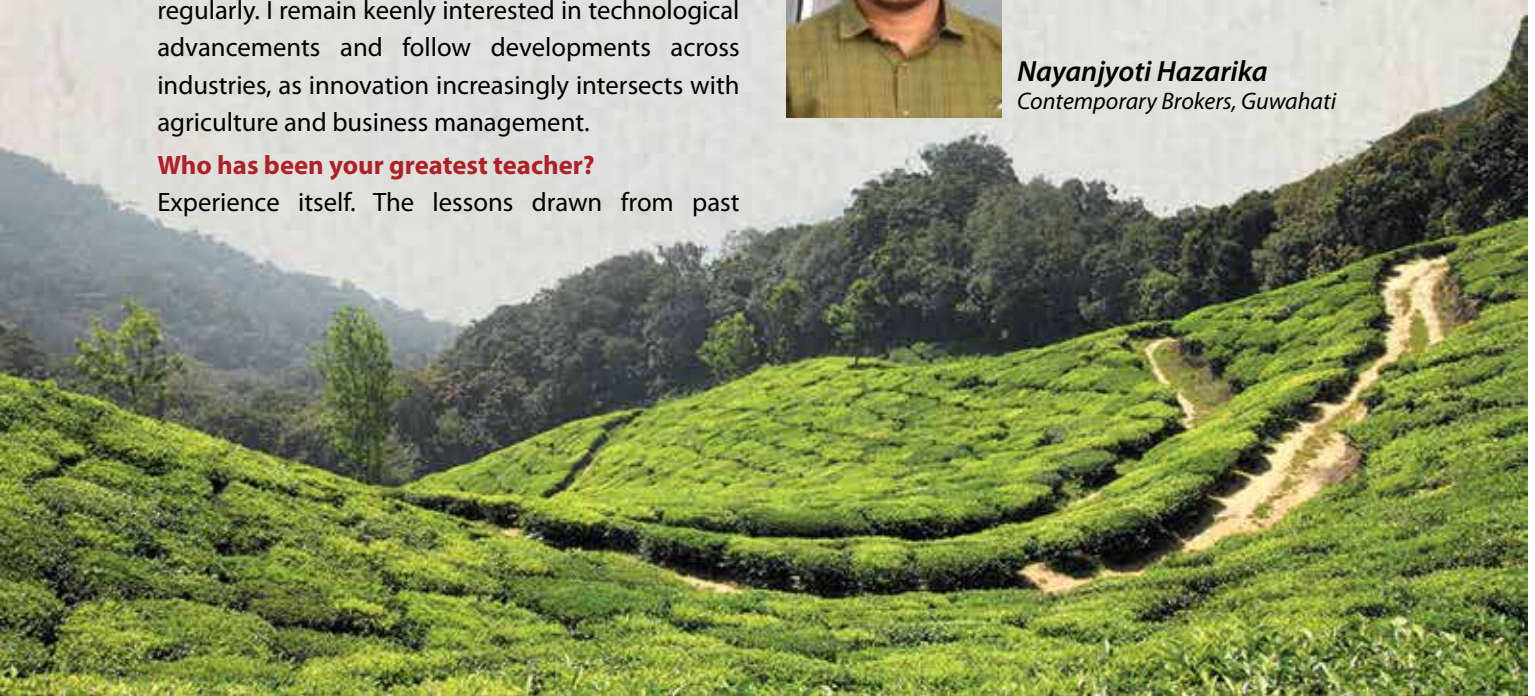
The direct-to-consumer (D2C) segment is expanding rapidly. Tea-based retail chains and specialty brands are gaining traction in urban markets. Start-ups such as Blue Tea and Woolah Tea have demonstrated how niche positioning can capture national attention, though the segment is still evolving toward mainstream acceptance.

How would you compare new leaders in tea with the previous generation?

While I cannot draw broad comparisons, I believe the new generation must approach tea with a sharper focus on operational efficiency and financial discipline. The industry no longer offers the margins it once did. Sustainability today depends on realism, cost control, and performance-driven management.



Nayanjyoti Hazarika
Contemporary Brokers, Guwahati





DECAF AWAKENING UNLEASHES \$650M GLOBAL TEA SURGE

In an era where wellness warriors shun the midnight jitters yet crave tea's timeless ritual, decaffeinated brews are stepping into a \$650 million global export powerhouse - up 5.5% annually amid a caffeine-conscious revolution.

Mr. Sachin Verma, Chief Business Strategy Advisor at Indoviking Beverages Worldwide and Board Director of overseas tea firms, unpacks this surging niche: from CO₂-extracted premiums guarding black tea's bold soul to fragmented Asia-Pacific producers eyeing wellness-driven dominance. Dive into the methods, markets, and movers reshaping your next jitter-free cup.

The global decaffeinated tea market represents a significant and rapidly growing segment within the broader tea industry. The decaf tea market continues growing at 5.5% CAGR, suggesting modest export increases. The total global tea exports reached USD 8 billion in 2025, with decaf representing a small niche. Global decaffeinated tea exports reached approximately 125,000 metric tons in 2025, valued at around USD 650 million, with major exporting countries collectively accounting for over 85% of global export volume.

Primary growth factors

Health consciousness Rising consumer awareness of caffeine's adverse effects on sleep quality and anxiety levels.

Lifestyle diseases Increasing prevalence of caffeine sensitive conditions driving demand for low caffeine alternatives.

Wellness trend Growing preference for functional beverages and health-oriented consumption patterns.

Demographic expansion Broad consumer base ranging from young adults to older populations seeking balanced lifestyles.

Product innovation Development of diverse tea flavours, blends, and convenient

formats (sachets, ready-to-drink).

Sustainable packaging Enhanced consumer appeal through eco-friendly and innovative packaging solutions.

Distribution network growth Expanding retail and e-commerce channels and improving market accessibility.

Caffeine removal methods

Decaffeination is a process that removes most of the caffeine content from tea leaves, allowing tea lovers to indulge in their favourite beverage without the jitters. There are several methods used to decaffeinate tea, and each method has its own unique characteristics and impacts the flavour profile of the tea. Decaffeinated tea comes in various forms, including black, green, white, and herbal blends. Each type of decaffeinated tea has its own distinct flavour profile and health benefits. Black decaffeinated tea, for example, offers a robust and full-bodied taste, while green decaffeinated tea boasts a delicate and vegetal flavour. White decaffeinated tea, on the other hand, is known for its subtle sweetness and floral notes. Herbal decaffeinated teas, such as chamomile or peppermint, provide a caffeine-free alternative with a range of aromatic flavours.



The industry employs three primary decaffeination techniques:

Ethyl Acetate Method natural compound extraction, commonly used for black teas

Methylene Chloride Method highly efficient, preferred for green teas

CO₂ Supercritical Extraction a premium method that maintains flavour profile integrity

Market characteristics

The decaffeinated tea market exhibits moderate concentration, characterised by:

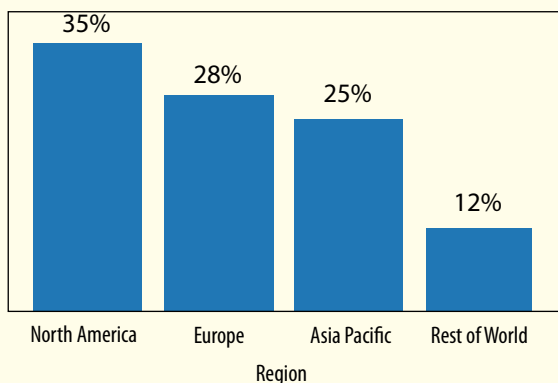
Large multinational corporations controlling significant market share

Numerous regional players and specialty brands contributing substantially

High market fragmentation in Asia-Pacific due to numerous smaller producers

Consolidated distribution in North America and Europe with robust logistics networks

De-caffeinated tea consumption market share - Region wise (2025)



North America

Characteristics Mature market, high per capita consumption, robust distribution networks

Key driver Health-conscious consumer base seeking caffeine reduction

Major importers USA, Canada

Europe

Key markets Germany, UK, France, Italy, Spain

Market characteristics Premium positioning, heritage tea consumption, strong retail presence

Growth drivers Wellness trend, specialty tea interest, sustainable packaging preference

Pricing Generally premium compared to other regions

Asia-Pacific

Market potential Highest growth potential despite current fragmentation

Key players China (consumption), India (production/export), Japan (specialty), South Korea (trend adoption)

Characteristics Fragmented landscape with numerous smaller producers

Growth trajectory Rising health consciousness driving expansion

MEA and other markets

Emerging growth potential in Middle East and Latin America

Increasing availability and consumer education driving adoption

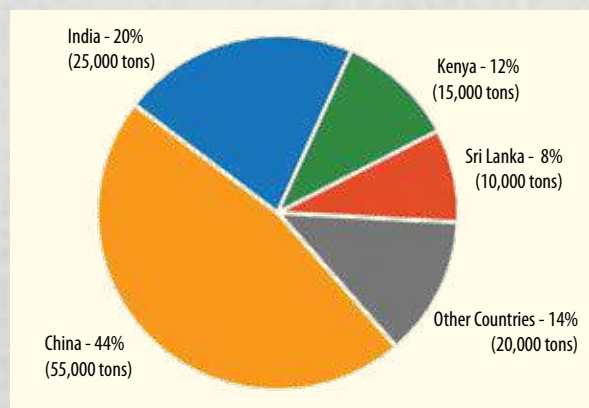
Expansion of modern retail channels improving accessibility

Decaffeinated tea – Global market share

Major Importing Countries and Markets

Region	Major Importers	Market Characteristics
North America	USA, Canada	High per capita consumption, mature distribution
Europe	Germany, UK, France, Poland	Premium segment, strong retail presence
Asia-Pacific	China, Japan, South Korea	Growing health consciousness segment
UK	Specialty tea retailers	Heritage market, premium positioning

Top Decaffeinated Tea Exporters - Global Market Share (2025)



Competitive landscape

The global market exhibits moderate concentration:

China Leading producer, accounting for roughly 44% of global decaffeinated tea output, with a focus on green and black decaffeinated teas.

India Significant contributor, especially in black decaffeinated teas, representing about 20% of global production.

Regional leaders in Sri Lanka Dilmah, Akbar Brothers Pvt. Ltd., Jafferjee Brothers, Regency Teas Pvt. Ltd., Ceylon Tea Marketing Pvt. Ltd.

Indian decaf tea exporters typically trade to markets in the Middle East, Europe, North America, and East Asia. Major exporters being - AVT Natural Products Limited (AVT Group), Jayanti Tea Trails, Indian Product Pvt Ltd, SPISYS Ltd, Goodricke Group Ltd.

Emerging players Specialised brands focusing on organic, premium, and functional segments

Distribution Mix of direct supply to retailers, online channels, and institutional sales.



Sachen Verma

*Chief Business Strategy Advisor
Indoviking Beverages Worldwide & on Board of Directors
of several overseas tea companies*

OBITUARY



Harish M Parekh

Mr. Harish M. Parekh, former Chairman of J. Thomas & Co. Pvt. Ltd., passed away in Delhi on 23 February 2026. He was a towering presence in the Indian tea industry and was widely admired for his exceptional knowledge, professional acumen, and statesmanlike leadership.

Mr. Parekh joined J. Thomas in 1964 and, over a distinguished career spanning more than three decades, rose to the position of Chairman in 1995. His tenure was marked by a deep understanding of the trade and an unwavering commitment to its orderly growth and credibility. Even after his retirement, his counsel continued to be sought, and he served with distinction on the boards of several tea companies, where his experience and balanced judgement proved invaluable.

Beyond the world of tea, Mr. Parekh was an enthusiastic golfer and remained active on the course until very recently.

With his passing, the industry loses one of its most respected elders.



A PLANTER'S JOURNEY From Tocklai to the new Dooars

In the tea industry, a planter's story is often written quietly - in the rhythm of the seasons, in the patience of the soil, and in the collective labour of hundreds of hands that nurture a garden. The following first-person account emerges from an extended conversation with Mr. Chinmoy Dhar, Senior Manager of the Majherdabri Tea Estate, shared with Abhijit Sengupta of Contemporary Tea Time, Siliguri. What unfolds is more than an interview; it is the reflective journey of a planter who has spent three decades in the field, from the training grounds of Tocklai to the low-lying yet remarkably productive estate of Majherdabri in the Dooars. Through his words, we glimpse the philosophy, challenges, and innovations that shape contemporary tea planting - where respect for soil, community, and experimentation continues to redefine what a tea garden can become.

I was born in 1970, and like many in the tea industry, my journey truly began at Tocklai. In 1994, at the age of twenty-five, I arrived at the Tocklai Tea Research Institute in Jorhat for my training. Tocklai is more than a research centre - it is a cradle for generations of Indian tea planters. Those months shaped my understanding of tea, not merely as a crop but as a living ecosystem where science, experience, and instinct must work together.

My first posting came soon after at Thanjora Tea Estate. From there, I moved through the tea landscapes of Cachar before joining Luxmi Tea's Fulbari garden, where I worked until 2001. The next chapter took me to Kohinoor Tea Estate, where I remained until 2004. Each estate, each region, taught me something new - about soil, climate, workers, and the delicate balance required to produce good tea. But the most defining decision of my career came on 2 July 2004, when I joined Majherdabri Tea Estate in the Dooars.

A garden's transformation

Majherdabri is part of the MLA Group and lies in the Dooars, a region with a proud tea heritage.

Interestingly, our garden sits at one of the lowest elevations in the Dooars. Traditionally, such terrain was not associated with very high yields. Yet today,

Majherdabri is among the highest-yielding gardens in the region.

When I first came here, production stood at about 3.5 lakh kilograms of tea annually. Today, we produce close to 13 lakh kilograms.

People often attribute this transformation to the manager, but I never see it that way. I like to compare it with football: a captain cannot win a match alone unless all eleven players perform together. In a tea garden, the

staff and workers are those eleven players. My role is to guide, support, and work with them.

The Dooars has a diverse community - tribal workers, Nepali families, and others who have lived with tea for generations. Over the years, I have realised that success in a plantation cannot come from instructions alone. It comes from relationships, from trust, and from working as a community rather than as a hierarchy.

Weather, pests, and the lesson of balance

Tea cultivation today faces challenges that were



Mr. Chinmoy Dhar

not so severe earlier. Over the last five to seven years, erratic weather patterns have made crop management more difficult. Pest attacks have also increased.

But I strongly believe that pests cannot be controlled by chemicals alone. Since 2015, I have consciously reduced the use of synthetic chemicals in the garden. When chemicals are used excessively, they destroy not only the pests but also the natural parasites and soil organisms that maintain ecological balance.

One of the simplest indicators of a healthy garden is the presence of birds. When we see many birds in the tea fields, it is actually a good sign. Birds naturally control about 30–40 percent of pests. Nature already has its own system of regulation - we only need to respect it.

Soil comes first

If there is one lesson I have learned in all my years at Majherdabri, it is this: soil must come first.

The soil in many parts of the Dooars has suffered because of decades of heavy chemical application. In my twenty-two years here, I realised that earlier very little attention had been paid to systematic soil treatment. We were so focused on pests that we often forgot soil-borne diseases.

Winter months offer an opportunity. When the factories slow down, we concentrate on soil health - cleaning drains, forking the soil, and carrying out essential maintenance.

I often give a simple example. When a baby is born, parents take great care of it. In time that child grows up and looks after the parents. The relationship between tea and soil is similar. If we nurture the soil

properly, the soil will take care of our tea plants.

Mechanisation and the future

Tea production in India remains largely manual. Today, nearly 70–75 percent of production cost goes towards labour. In my view, this must gradually come down to around 30–35 percent through thoughtful mechanisation.

Countries such as China and Kenya have adopted machine plucking on a large scale. India will also have to move in that direction if we wish to remain competitive.

At the same time, several structural changes are necessary. Tea must be clearly treated as an agricultural product. A minimum floor price for tea is essential to protect producers. The Tea Board should also strengthen awareness programmes for small tea growers and ensure uniform implementation of the Plant Protection Code.

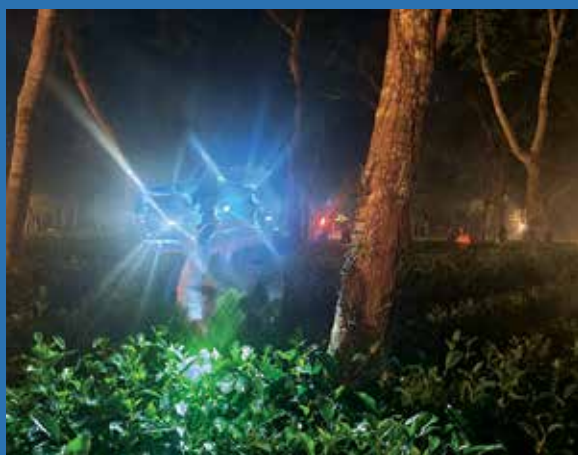
There is another reality we cannot ignore. Estate wages today are around ₹250 per day, which is hardly enough for a family to survive on. Without fair wages and dignity for workers, we cannot expect sustained productivity.

Three initiatives close to my heart

Over the years, a few initiatives at Majherdabri have given me particular satisfaction.

Digital wage payments

In 2017, during the period of demonetisation, we introduced direct bank transfers for workers' wages. More than 2,000 to 2,500 workers began receiving their payments directly in their bank accounts. For many, it was their first experience with formal banking.



The system brought transparency, security, and financial inclusion. Today it continues to function smoothly.

Moonlight plucking

Perhaps the most unusual experiment we undertook was Moonlight Plucking in 2020.

The idea came from a simple question. Darjeeling orthodox teas sometimes experiment with moonlight plucking. Why could CTC tea not explore something similar?

We began plucking between 5 pm and 9 pm on certain full-moon nights - Dol Purnima, Buddha Purnima, and Kojagori Lakshmi Purnima.

Research scholars from St. Xavier's College later visited the garden to observe the process. Their studies suggested that tea plucked in moonlight retained certain characteristics that tended to evaporate during daytime plucking.

Our first moonlight tea sold at ₹1,000 per kilogram. Since then, interest in the concept has continued to grow.

Of course, organising night-time plucking was not easy. Around 200–250 women workers participated. We had to install halogen lights, clean drains thoroughly for safe movement, and ensure complete security. Safety was my foremost concern.

Over time, the workers themselves began to treat moonlight plucking like a festival - something special that belonged to the garden.

Solar energy

Majherdabri also became the first tea garden in India to install solar panels.

Today, solar energy supports several of our operations, including electricity requirements and irrigation systems. It saves us nearly ₹2–3 lakh annually in power costs.

For me, cost efficiency and sustainability must go together. Green energy is not merely an option - it is the direction the future demands.

Experimenting with new teas

Innovation in tea is another area we have explored. At Majherdabri, we have developed forty-four different tea varieties.

Among them are specialty teas such as Gold Dust Tea,

infused with edible gold, and Rose Gold Tea, which is priced at nearly ₹1 lakh per kilogram and is planned for promotion in markets such as Dubai.

Such experiments help demonstrate that even in the CTC belt of the Dooars, there is room for creativity and premium products.

A garden as a community

A tea garden is never just an agricultural enterprise. It is also a social ecosystem.

With support from the Alipurduar Zila Police, Majherdabri has sponsored events such as the Dooars Marathon and local football tournaments. Activities like these strengthen community bonds and bring pride to the workers and their families.

A planter's philosophy

For me, tea is not just a profession - it is life itself. A tea plant is our bread and butter. Whatever I am today is because of my tea plant.

My priorities remain simple: maintain quality, protect the soil, empower workers, and innovate responsibly. From my training days at Tocklai in 1994 to leading Majherdabri today, the journey has been long and deeply rewarding. The Dooars is often spoken of as a region facing difficulties. But I believe that with care, innovation, and collective effort, our gardens can continue to flourish.

Tea has given me everything. The least I can do is give back to it - with respect, patience, and the willingness to keep learning.



Abhijit Sengupta
Contemporary Brokers, Siliguri



RETHINKING POWER, PEOPLE, AND PRODUCTIVITY IN PLANTATIONS

At a time when the future of the plantation sector is being debated across boardrooms and field offices alike, this reflective and experience-rich essay by a lifelong planter offers both diagnosis and direction. Writing from four decades of work that began in the mist-laden estates of Munnar and travelled through the Anamallais, the Nilgiris, the High Ranges of Kerala, the Nelliampathies, and even into Africa's agri-processing landscape, Mr. Sreekumar Nair brings the rare advantage of having lived through the industry's many transitions - from the era of the "gentleman planter" to the present age of globalisation and labour flux. What emerges is not merely a critique of a system rooted in colonial memory but a deeply practical blueprint for renewal. For an industry that stands today at a decisive threshold, his voice is both a reminder of where we came from and a call to where we must go.

In today's dynamic world, industries must constantly evolve to remain relevant and sustainable. The South Indian plantation sector, deeply rooted in its colonial legacy, has remained largely unchanged, struggling to break free from its traditional mould. As global economic currents shift and competition intensifies, the industry finds itself at a critical juncture. To understand the challenges it confronts today, one must first examine its historical evolution and management structure.

The evolution of plantation management

During the British Raj, young Britons - often from lower-middle-class backgrounds - came to India as soldiers or planters. These professions demanded physical endurance more than formal education. Their resilience and discipline laid the foundations of the plantation economy in tea, coffee, rubber, and spices.

After independence, as British planters returned home in the late 1950s and early 1960s, their managerial roles were assumed by Indians, many from privileged backgrounds, who carried forward the ethos of the "gentleman planter." Recruitment placed emphasis on pedigree, sporting ability, and public-school grooming. Aspirants were informally assessed through social interaction - often during

a stay at a manager's bungalow - before being considered suitable for the profession.

For decades, promotions were governed by seniority rather than performance. Key performance indicators were unknown, and annual appraisals were frequently subjective, shaped by personal rapport with superiors. This system began to weaken only in the mid-1980s, when India's economic opening created more lucrative urban career options. The resulting talent drain left plantations with a shrinking pool of young managers.

To fill the gap, companies promoted experienced field staff. While operationally sound, many lacked



exposure to strategic management. Lateral hiring became common, but the long-term talent pipeline continued to erode.

Challenges in the post-globalisation era

The 1990s marked a turning point. Globalisation brought intense competition, volatile prices, and stringent quality benchmarks. Simultaneously, labour rights, environmental sustainability, and climate change emerged as defining concerns.

As the service sector expanded, the plantation industry's contribution to GDP declined, reducing its political influence. Estate labor - once generational and rooted - began to disperse. Better-educated younger family members sought urban livelihoods rather than the physically demanding and socially isolated life of the estates.

Employment challenges in modern plantations

Rising labour costs remain one of the most pressing issues. Unlike manufacturing, productivity gains have not kept pace with wage escalation, while input costs continue to rise. Powerful buyer cartels exert sustained pressure on prices, narrowing margins.

Although institutions such as UPASI TRF and TRA Tocklai have made significant agronomic contributions, their impact on long-term economic viability has been limited.

The demographic profile of the workforce has also changed. South Indian estates now depend heavily on migrant labour from eastern India, recruited through contractors. Unlike traditional resident workers who developed estate-specific skills over generations, migrant labour tends to be transient. The result is a persistent skill deficit, affecting both

quality and cost efficiency.

Structural and administrative challenges

Plantations were historically run on a rigid, quasi-military hierarchy that valued discipline and continuity. Today's workforce, however, seeks flexibility, career progression, and work-life balance - expectations the traditional structure struggles to meet.

Multiple supervisory layers - field officers, assistant managers, and others - often duplicate functions, slow communication, and inflate costs. Modern tools such as mobile-based monitoring systems can streamline operations and enhance accountability.

Lessons from Unilever

Unilever's stewardship of Tea Estates India Ltd. demonstrated what modernisation can achieve. Among the notable innovations were

Leaf expansion time analysis to optimise plucking intervals

Block plucking systems for better supervision and accountability

Mechanized plucking to improve productivity

Field-level data collection for operational transparency

These measures significantly enhanced efficiency and remain a benchmark for the industry.

Restructuring for the future

A fundamental shift is essential. Key priorities include

Flattening hierarchies to improve communication and reduce inefficiency.



Leveraging technology - from drones for crop monitoring to automated factory processes

Inducting qualified professionals such as agronomists, food technologists, and financial specialists

Creating an aspirational work culture with competitive compensation and clear career pathways

Encouraging innovation by moving beyond inherited practices

A decisive moment

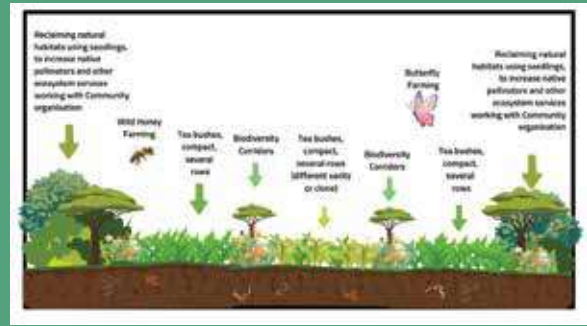
The future of South India's corporate plantation sector is precarious. A business model shaped in the colonial era can no longer sustain itself without structural reform. Industries across the world - from GE to Tata Motors to Apple - have survived by reinventing themselves. Plantations must do the same.

With more than half of India's population under 25, the potential workforce is immense. By aligning the sector with contemporary aspirations and integrating advanced technology, plantations can attract a new generation of professionals committed to agriculture.

The choice is stark: adapt with vision and courage, or decline through inertia. The path forward lies in shedding the weight of legacy while preserving the strength of experience - and in embracing innovation as the cornerstone of a sustainable future.



Sreekumar Nair
Consultant
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu





Flavour from Kenya

BREWING A NEW FUTURE FOR AFRICAN TEA

African tea has long been a cornerstone of the global tea industry - powering blends, stabilising supply, and influencing international prices. Yet, as consumer preferences shift toward quality, sustainability, and traceability, Africa's role is evolving from volume supplier to value-driven origin. In this feature, Mr. George Omuga, Managing Director of the East African Tea Trade Association (EATTA), examines the state of the East African tea sector, the structural challenges it faces, and the strategic transformations underway that could redefine Africa's place in the global tea market.

The state of tea trade and manufacturing in East Africa

The African tea sector remains a pivotal force in the global tea industry, exerting significant influence on international prices due to the continent's substantial share of global production. Kenya, in particular, continues to play a central role as the world's third-largest tea producer and the largest exporter of black tea.

East Africa's tea industry now stands at a critical inflection point. Historically shaped by bulk black CTC (crush-tear-curl) production destined for a small number of overseas buyers, the sector is confronting deep structural challenges while simultaneously encountering new opportunities driven by evolving global tastes, technological innovation, and expanding intra-African markets.

Firm auction prices and strong absorption rates since the beginning of the year signal improved demand and buyer confidence, even as Kenya's production declined by over 45 million kilograms in 2025. A major milestone in this transition is the planned launch of the orthodox tea auction in Mombasa in September 2025. This initiative represents a deliberate shift toward product diversification and higher-value orthodox and specialty teas.

The transition offers a pathway to reduce market concentration risks, enhance farmer incomes, and position East African teas as globally competitive products distinguished by low residue levels, unique flavour profiles, and sustainable production practices. However, persistent challenges - ranging from overproduction and quality inconsistencies to high input costs, governance gaps, and climate risks - must be



addressed if the sector is to fully realise its potential.

Market dynamics and the rationale for change

For decades, African tea production has been heavily skewed toward CTC teas, which are well suited to mass blending and strong liquor profiles demanded by a limited number of export markets. Historically, approximately 40 percent of African tea has been exported to Pakistan alone, while four markets - Pakistan, Egypt, the United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates - have collectively accounted for nearly 74 percent of total exports.

This high level of market concentration has created structural vulnerability. Shifts in demand, policy changes, or currency fluctuations in just a few importing countries can trigger sharp price swings and income volatility across the region.

The introduction of an orthodox auction in Mombasa is therefore a strategic corrective to the sector's overreliance on bulk CTC exports. Orthodox teas - often produced with minimal or no pesticide and herbicide use and characterised by very low maximum residue levels (MRLs) - are increasingly sought after by specialty and premium buyers.

As producers scale up quality orthodox production and artisanal tea lines, the Mombasa Tea Auction can evolve into a recognised global source of high-quality orthodox teas. Product differentiation, specialty branding, and provenance-based marketing offer improved margins and access to discerning markets that value sustainability, traceability, and distinctive flavour profiles.

Key challenges confronting producers and exporters

Despite these opportunities, the sector faces multiple, interlinked constraints that limit its ability to move up the value chain

Overproduction and depressed auction prices

Excess supply of bulk CTC tea leads to large stock carryovers and sustained downward pressure on prices.

High production costs: Rising costs of inputs, energy, and labour erode margins and constrain investment in quality and value addition.

Governance and regulatory weaknesses Fragmented governance structures, inconsistent legislation, and regulatory bottlenecks hinder efficiency and discourage investment.

Limited value addition: Inadequate in-country processing and branding capacity perpetuate reliance on low-value bulk exports.

Overdependence on traditional markets: Heavy reliance on a small number of importing countries heightens exposure to demand shocks, non-tariff barriers, and geopolitical risks - underscoring the importance of market diversification and AfCFTA opportunities.

Insufficient product diversification: A narrow focus on CTC limits responsiveness to evolving global demand for orthodox, green, flavoured, and specialty teas.

Multiple levies and non-tariff barriers: Accumulated taxes and regulatory charges raise transaction costs and undermine competitiveness.

Quality inconsistencies:

Variability in leaf quality and processing standards reduces appeal to premium buyers.

Global economic and geopolitical uncertainty

Recessions, currency volatility, trade disruptions, and rising logistics costs affect



demand.

Climate variability and climate change: Erratic weather patterns threaten yields, quality, and production stability.

Finance constraints: High borrowing costs and limited access to affordable capital restrict modernisation, especially among smallholders.

Logistics inefficiencies: Port congestion and overlapping regulatory oversight increase delays and export costs.

These challenges reinforce one another, creating a cycle of low prices, underinvestment,

quality constraints, and market vulnerability.

Transformations shaping the sector

Three interrelated forces - sustainability and premiumisation, technological modernisation, and market diversification - will shape the future of East African tea.

Sustainability and premiumisation Global consumers increasingly prioritise provenance, environmental stewardship, and food safety. Teas produced with low agrochemical inputs and sustainable practices can command price premiums. However, current global certification systems often impose high audit costs and administrative burdens on smallholders.

A more pragmatic approach lies in developing Africa-led sustainability and quality standards that are locally relevant, cost-effective, and internationally credible. Such frameworks would reduce recurring audit costs, reflect regional production realities, and allow African producers to tell their own sustainability stories - while ensuring that certification delivers tangible economic benefits through premiums, improved market access, and better livelihoods.

Technological modernisation and mechanisation

Mechanisation and automation are reshaping both field and factory operations. Selective mechanised plucking, sensor-based harvesting, and factory automation - from continuous withering and automated rolling to precision drying and sorting - improve efficiency, consistency, and quality control.

The transition from traditional withering troughs to continuous physical and chemical withering technologies (CPW and CCW) reflects the sector's growing openness to modern processing methods. These investments reduce unit costs and support the production of consistent CTC, orthodox, and specialty teas that meet stringent buyer specifications.

Access to such capital-intensive technologies, however, will require innovative financing models, including leasing arrangements, cooperative ownership, concessional loans, and pay-as-you-save schemes.

The Mombasa Tea Auction already the world's largest multi-origin auction - has itself undergone digital transformation. Since 2020, it has operated on a robust Multihall Smart Auction Trading Platform, capable of running multiple auctions simultaneously and supporting specialty and artisanal tea trading.



Market diversification and intra-African demand

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) offers a powerful opportunity to reduce dependence on overseas markets by cultivating domestic and regional demand. With a population of approximately 1.4 billion, even modest increases in per-capita tea consumption could absorb significant volumes of African tea.

Capturing this opportunity will require targeted strategies: regional branding, partnerships with local retailers and beverage companies, consumer-friendly packaging, and investment in distribution and retail infrastructure. Developing taste profiles and formats suited to African consumers can help reposition tea as a mainstream beverage across the continent's rapidly urbanising markets.

Practical steps to sustain and scale success

To translate opportunity into impact, coordinated action is required across the value chain:

Prioritise quality-first production through GAP, GMP, food safety systems, traceability, and continuous quality improvement.

Expand value addition via supportive policies, FDI, and public-private partnerships.

Make sustainability affordable through pan-African standards and pooled certification mechanisms.

Facilitate technology financing tailored to smallholders and medium-scale processors.

Develop markets strategically using AfCFTA

frameworks and consumer-focused campaigns.

Streamline logistics and rationalise taxes and levies to improve competitiveness.

Strengthen governance and regulatory coherence.

Build climate resilience through climate-smart agriculture, resilient cultivars, and risk mitigation tools.

Address finance constraints with affordable, tailored financial instruments.

Outlook and conclusion

East Africa's tea sector stands at a defining moment. Moving beyond dependence on bulk CTC toward quality-driven CTC, orthodox, and specialty teas can unlock higher margins, diversified markets, and improved livelihoods - provided this transition is supported by structural reforms, targeted investment, and coordinated market strategies.

Technology, sustainability, and intra-African trade can transform Africa's legacy of scale into a future of resilience and value. With the right policy environment and stakeholder collaboration, East African tea can strengthen rural economies, reduce poverty, and secure a more influential and profitable position within the global tea industry.



George Omuga
MD, EATTA
Mombasa, Kenya





THE GREAT CHAI CONFUSION

The American 'Chai Latte' vs Global chai traditions

Walk into an American café at 9:07 a.m. and you'll hear it. Half request, half incantation: "Can I get a chai tea latte?"

The barista nods, the espresso machine hisses approvingly (even though no espresso is involved), and a tan swirl of steamed milk and spice arrives like a cozy sweater with excellent PR.

If you grew up with chai as a daily fact of life, this moment can feel...complicated. Not because the drink is 'wrong,' exactly, but because the phrase itself is a tiny cultural glitch. 'Chai' means tea, so "chai tea" is tea tea, and 'chai tea latte' is, spiritually speaking, tea tea milk. The tautology is funny, but it also hints at a bigger story: how America takes a beloved ritual and turns it into a product you can customise into oblivion.

For many South Asians, chai is less 'beverage' and more 'emotional infrastructure.' In a beautifully personal essay for Sprudge's Special Projects Desk, journalist Navdeep Kaur describes chai as an "anchor" in her day, something that keeps her tethered to Delhi even as she builds a life in New York. Her mother insists she pack specific staples (tea, ghee) not because New York lacks tea, but because New York lacks her tea: the familiar brand, the smell, the shorthand for home.

That's the heart of the confusion: in the West, 'chai latte' often reads as a vibe: soft-focus spice, hygge

in a cup. In South Asian kitchens and roadside stalls, chai is a practice: boiling tea leaves with milk and sugar until it's thick, hot, and insistently alive.

Here's where the conversation gets sharp, and worth having. In a Guardian piece that captures the culture clash with surprising tenderness, NYU food scholar Krishnendu Ray argues that Western chai lattes can become a caricature of 'Indian-ness': aggressively spiced, overly sweet, engineered for maximum 'exotic.' He notes the irony that what is an everyday, often working-class street drink in parts of India becomes a cosmopolitan status marker in Western café culture. That critique lands because it's not really about cinnamon. It's about power: who gets to define the 'real' version, who profits, who becomes the backdrop to someone else's aesthetic.

And yet, chai is not an untouched relic. It's a remix with a complicated passport.

THE TWIST: Chai itself is a cultural evolution

Both Ray and Kaur point to a fact that rearranges the moral furniture: tea culture in India was deeply shaped by British colonial economics and marketing. Kaur notes tea was cultivated

in Assam long before British expansion, but the empire industrialised production for export, and later promoted tea consumption to create a domestic market, especially after economic shifts like the Great Depression. Indians then took those 'proper'



brewing instructions and cheerfully ignored them, adapting tea into what we now recognise as chai: milk-forward, sugar-forward, simmered, spiced, intimate. In other words, chai became quintessentially Indian through adaptation, and through people making it their own.

Which doesn't excuse lazy Western branding, but it does complicate the idea that there is a single, frozen 'authentic' chai that must never evolve.

How the latte happened

Kaur puts it plainly U.S. coffee shop culture 'latte-ized' chai. The café needs speed; the stovetop needs time. So, chai becomes concentrate, syrup, powder: something that can be steamed, iced, topped, and sent out the door in under two minutes.

Ray traces a parallel mainstreaming arc chai's Western popularity accelerates when big chains decide it can be made legible to coffee drinkers, hence 'latte.'

And because America adores a celebrity-collab moment, chai got one. Starbucks' 2014 partnership with Oprah Winfrey to create "Teavana Oprah Chai" is practically a case study in how ritual becomes retail, complete with a 'steep your soul' vibe and philanthropic positioning.

Fast-forward to right now big chains are still reworking chai for modern tastes, emphasising customisation (sweetness, spice) and "social-ready" visuals. The chai latte isn't fading, it's shape-shifting.

Why this is actually... kind of beautiful

Because beneath the branding wars, Americans really do drink tea, and not in a niche, 'special interest' way.

The Tea Association of the U.S.A. reports tea appears in 80%+ of U.S. households, and about 160 million Americans drink tea on any given day; most of it is iced.

A new generation is also rebuilding tea as a social ritual. Modern U.S. teahouses are drawing younger crowds with late hours, cozy interiors, and a 'sober-curious' appeal: tea as nightlife, but gentler.

So maybe the great chai confusion isn't a crisis. Maybe it's evidence of something more tender: that a drink born from history, migration, marketing, and memory can still keep traveling, picked up, argued over, improved, misunderstood, loved anyway.

Kaur ends with the kind of truth you can't fact-check: she'll drink a chai latte in New York, sure, but she still needs homemade chai to feel grounded, to feel whole, to feel at home in her own life.

And that - more than any menu label - is what chai has always been.



Suchetana Ghosh (Guha)
Cincinnati, USA





TO SHIP OR NOT TO SHIP The existential crisis looming over the Strait of Hormuz

As the drums of war beat louder across West Asia, the fragile architecture of global maritime trade is experiencing tremors not felt in decades. With geopolitical hostilities intensifying and recent naval blockades looming over the Persian Gulf, commercial shipping has been caught in the crossfire. Vital maritime chokepoints are increasingly being militarised, and the cascading effects are upending supply chains far beyond the energy and petroleum sectors. Rerouted vessels, paralysed ports, skyrocketing freight premiums, and stalled financial corridors are no longer anomalies, but the grim new standard for international commerce. Against this volatile backdrop of jeopardised global trade, the agricultural sector is bracing for severe disruptions - and India's previously flourishing tea export industry suddenly finds itself staring into the abyss.

For the Indian tea industry, 2025 was a year for the history books. Exporters celebrated an unprecedented milestone, shipping out a record 280.4 million kilograms of tea globally, surpassing previous peaks and cementing India's position as a dominant force in the international market. Generating an estimated Rs 8,500 crore in export value, the industry was riding a wave of post-pandemic recovery and strategic market expansion.

Yet, as we move through the second quarter of 2026, the euphoria of that record-breaking year has evaporated. It has been replaced by a pervasive anxiety as the escalating crisis in the Strait of Hormuz threatens to dismantle the very trade routes that made the 2025 boom possible.

To understand the gravity of the current threat, one must look at the geography of India's tea clientele. The West Asian market is not merely a trading partner; it is the lifeblood of Indian tea exports. In 2025, out of the total 280 million kg exported, approximately 121 million kg - representing roughly 41% to 45% of India's total tea export volume - was destined for the Middle East. The breakdown highlights deep regional dependencies: Iraq absorbed 52 million kg, the United Arab Emirates took 50.7 million kg (acting as a crucial re-export hub), and Iran imported a vital 10.6 million kg.

Almost the entirety of this massive volume passes through the Strait of Hormuz. With recent Iranian declarations restricting the passage of non-allied vessels, and the looming threat of retaliatory naval blockades, this strategic waterway has transformed from a bustling trade corridor into a high-risk conflict zone. Hundreds of commercial ships remain stranded or hesitant to navigate the strait. For the tea trade, any prolonged closure or restriction here doesn't

just mean a delay; it represents a structural collapse of their primary supply route.

The crisis is not impacting all tea segments equally. Ground zero for this disruption is the premium “orthodox” tea sector, primarily cultivated in the estates of Assam. Gulf consumers have a historical and deeply ingrained preference for the robust flavour profiles of Assam orthodox teas. The recent surge in India’s overall export figures was largely driven by an increased demand for these high-value, high-margin leaves in countries like Iran, Iraq, and the UAE. Recognising this potential, the Assam government recently increased the subsidy for orthodox tea production from Rs 10 per kg to Rs 15 per kg - a move explicitly designed to bolster export competitiveness. However, the conflict threatens to undermine these hard-won gains entirely. With over 50% of Assam’s orthodox tea destined for these volatile Gulf markets, industry bodies like the Tea Association of India (TAI) and the Guwahati Tea Auction Buyers’ Association are warning that a lack of new orders is threatening the fundamental viability of this premium segment.

Logistics in chaos: freight, insurance, and stalled payments

Beyond the physical blockade, the economic mechanics of shipping have become a nightmare for exporters. The immediate alternative to the Strait of Hormuz and the Suez/Red Sea routes is a massive diversion around the Cape of Good Hope. This rerouting is financially devastating for a commodity like tea. Industry estimates suggest that shipping expenses, factoring in the Cape diversion, could surge by as much as 400%.

Coupled with the transit times stretching by weeks, the shelf life and quality of the tea become a concern. Furthermore, war-risk insurance premiums for vessels daring to navigate anywhere near the Gulf have skyrocketed, eating into already thin margins. Even if a shipment successfully navigates the physical hazards, exporters face crippling financial risks. Reports are mounting of payments currently stuck in Iran due to banking sanctions and liquidity crunches induced by the war, leaving Indian exporters severely out of pocket and hesitant to honour existing contracts, let alone accept new ones.

The domestic domino effect

The peril of the Hormuz crisis extends far beyond the exporters themselves; it poses an existential threat to the domestic market. If the standoff persists, the industry anticipates that roughly 100 million kilograms of export-grade tea - largely from Assam - will remain stranded within India’s borders.

A localised glut of this magnitude would be disastrous. A sudden flooding of the domestic market with unexported supplies would inevitably trigger a sharp crash in local tea prices. The ultimate victims of such a price collapse will not just be the large corporate estates, but the millions of small tea growers (STGs) and plantation workers whose livelihoods are intricately tied to the crop’s market value.

Looking ahead

While the Indian government is actively pursuing free trade agreements and exporters are desperately eyeing alternative markets in North Africa and the CIS region to absorb the shock, replacing the sheer volume and value of the West Asian market is an impossibility in the short term. The Indian tea industry has historically demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of global turbulence. However, as the geopolitical chess game in the Strait of Hormuz continues, exporters find themselves navigating completely uncharted waters, hoping that international diplomacy can uncork the bottleneck before the 2026 export season is entirely lost at sea.



Indranath Ghosh
Former banker and trade commentator

Refs:

Industry data compiled by the Tea Board of India and recently highlighted in financial publications like Business Standard and The Statesman in early 2026.

Aggregated export statistics provided by the Tea Association of India (TAI)

Assam Tea Industries Special Incentives Scheme (ATISIS)

Recent public statements and press releases issued by The Tea Association of India (TAI) (specifically citing TAI President Shailja Mehta) and the North Eastern Tea Association (NETA)



REIMAGINING BLACK TEA MACERATION BEYOND THE DOMINANCE OF CTC

From the hegemony of the CTC to the promise of micronised maceration, the Indian tea industry stands at the cusp of a technological inflection point. What began as an accidental encounter with a food-processing machine has, through fifteen years of painstaking research at Tocklai and rigorous commercial trials in the Dooars, evolved into a serious contender for redefining black tea manufacture. Mr. Shiv K. Saria traces this remarkable journey of persistence, engineering improvisation, and industry collaboration - one that could reshape the economics and efficiency of tea processing in the years ahead.

For nearly five decades, black tea processing has been dominated by the highly successful, versatile machine patented and introduced in 1931 by Marshall, Sons & Co. Ltd. as McKercher's CTC. In the early years of the twenty-first century, however, the tea fraternity was unexpectedly introduced to the Septu Micronizer. Around 2007, a potentially promising - though initially unproven - alternative to conventional black tea maceration emerged from Gurugram, with preliminary trials conducted on leaf from Dehra Dun, initiated by the late Sudhir Prakash, former Chairman of TRA.

The Septu Micronizer is a compact granulation machine widely used in food processing and other industries for its efficiency in size reduction through mechanical forces such as shearing, impact, and attrition. Based on French technology and deployed globally, it offered an intriguing possibility for tea manufacture.

Early attempts to re-engineer the machine into an effective tea maceration unit at IIT Kharagpur did not yield the desired results. The machine was subsequently installed at the Model Tea Factory, Tocklai, in 2008, where systematic modification and refinement began in 2009 with support from the NTRF. In its original configuration, the machine had four rotors, each fitted with 32 teeth. The resulting tea grains were excessively dense and gritty, rendering them largely unsuitable for Assam teas.

A series of design interventions followed. The number of teeth per rotor was progressively reduced to eight; modifications to the liner design were made; the rotor-stator gap was recalibrated; and the lower fan system was altered. These changes produced brighter infusions and more satisfactory cuts, yet the overall make still fell short of expectations. Two attempts to scale up from the bench-scale experimental unit at Tocklai to commercial trials in nearby estates proved disappointing. With external funding drying up, TRA continued the R&D effort at Tocklai under severe constraints, and at one stage, the project was on the verge of being abandoned.

After fifteen years of intermittent progress, a decisive step was taken in 2022 to relocate the machine to



New Glencoe Tea Garden in the Dooars for a final phase of trials. A dedicated manufacturing line was installed, comprising a Rotorvane, the Septu Micronizer, two 36-inch CTC cuts, and a Googhy. Trials commenced in April 2023. Within ten days, key mechanical shortcomings were identified, and necessary modifications were carried out by Septu in November 2024. Commercial trials resumed from late November to 10 December 2024 and proved largely successful. Throughout the 2025 season, the machine operated continuously, producing grain formation, liquors, and infusions that matched and in some cases surpassed - those from the CTC (Figure 1).

Attention then turned to reducing the process from two CTC cuts to one. It was felt that this would require an increase in the number of teeth and/or rotors. Septu supplied a 16-tooth rotor, raising the total number of teeth across all cutters from 32 to 48. Grain formation improved without any deterioration in cup quality. A further modification - replacing another eight-tooth rotor with a 16-tooth unit - raised the total to 56 teeth. This resulted in a marked

improvement in grain formation and grade percentages. Manufacture continued until the close of the 2025 season, yielding better teas, though the final objective of reducing the CTC cuts from two to one remains to be achieved.

At present, the Septu Micronizer is in the final phase of its trials. The rotors have been returned to Septu, Gurugram, for augmentation and fine modification of the cutting blades.

Expected Advantages of the Septu Micronizer

- Compact** construction and operational simplicity
- Reduced** floor-space requirement
- Lower** power consumption (*Table 1*)
- Lower** leaf temperature rise compared to the CTC
- Absence** of metal-to-metal contact, resulting in minimal contamination and reduced wear
- Lower** roller-sharpening and segment costs
- Reduced** maintenance expenditure
- Easier**, more error-free operation than the CTC
- Uniform** grade distribution with over 80% BP/OF (*Table 2*)

Tea Tasting Report		Contemporary Brokers Private Limited		Contemporary Siliguri	
Date	08/12/2025	Report No. 10191			
Trade Mark	NEW GLENCOE				
Invoice No.	03/12/25 BULK A (CONTROLLED) 03/12/25 BULK B (MICRONISER)				
POINTS / 30					
LEAF	INFUSION	LIQUORS			
0	0	0	0		
Leaf: Blackish brown with fair grade mix					
Infusion: B is preferred being brighter					
Liquors: B is preferred being brighter and fuller. A is tending pale					
N.B: Overall combination of B is preferred					
Tasted by Nimeshkar Bhujel					

Table 1

Ampere readings of individual machines recorded during operation

CONTROL (Amps.)		SEPTU MICRONIZER (Amps)	
Rotorvane (RV)	8.0 Amp	Rotorvane (RV)	9 Amp
CTC 1st (20 HP)	16.5 Amp	Micronizer (60 HP)	27 Amp
CTC 2nd (20 HP)	16.5 Amp	CTC 1st (15 HP)	13 Amp
CTC 3rd (15 HP)	13.2 Amp	CTC 2nd (15 HP)	15 Amp
CTC 4th (15 HP)	13.0 Amp	Googhy	1.8 Amp
Googhy	2.3 Amp	-	-
Total load on machines	69.5 Amp	Total load on machines	65.8 Amp

Table 2

Grade distribution (%) of bulk tea

Grade(s)	SEPTU MICRONIZER (Grade %)
Ball/BOP	2.20
BOP Sm	7.30
BP	38.90
OF	40.20
PD	6.50
Dust/CD	4.90
TOTAL	100.00



Conclusion: Innovations in tea machinery targeted towards energy efficiency, ease of operation and maintenance of product quality at much lower costs is the need of the tea industry. With the adoption of the improved Septu Micronizer, patented by Mr. K. Kumar, C & MD of Septu India Pvt Ltd., some of the objectives of the industry can be achieved. The author is confident that the Septu Micronizer will be available for release to the industry by the middle of 2026.



Shiv K Saria

MD, New Glencoe Tea Co. Ltd and Soongachi Tea Industries (P) Ltd.



EXPORT OUTLOOK UNDER STRAIN AMID WEST ASIAN UNCERTAINTY



The 37th Biennial General Meeting of the TAI, Assam in Jorhat

India's tea export story, which scaled an impressive high in 2025, may be entering a phase of cautious watchfulness. According to Ms. Shailja Mehta, President-elect of the Tea Association of India, the continuing geopolitical tensions in West Asia could cast a shadow over the sector's 2026 outlook.

The concern is not without context. India recently achieved a landmark export performance - touching nearly 280 million kg and generating revenues close to ₹8,500 crore. Much of this growth was fuelled by strong demand from traditional markets such as Iran, Iraq and the UAE, alongside a steady push into China. Notably, orthodox teas from Assam have found renewed favour across the Middle East, reinforcing their premium positioning.

However, this growing dependence on a concentrated set of markets now presents a structural vulnerability. Any disruption in the region - particularly around critical trade routes like the Strait of Hormuz - could impact shipment timelines, payment cycles and ultimately price realisations.

Against this backdrop, industry voices are calling for a dual approach: sustained policy support at home and a sharper focus on market diversification abroad. Expanding into new geographies while strengthening the brand of India in existing ones will be crucial to maintaining export momentum.

At a broader level, the message is clear - India's tea sector must balance its recent export gains

with resilience planning. In an increasingly volatile global landscape, adaptability may well become the industry's most valuable asset.

TAI PRESIDENT URGES REFORMS AMID MOUNTING TEA INDUSTRY CHALLENGES



50th Biennial General Meeting, TAI

January 3, Kolkata: Highlighting mounting structural challenges facing the Indian tea industry, Mr. Sandeep Singhania, President of the Tea Association of India (TAI), on Friday called for urgent policy intervention, cost-price alignment, and coordinated action by stakeholders to ensure long-term sustainability of the sector. He was delivering his address at the 50th Biennial General Meeting of TAI, held at the Williamson Magor Hall of the BCCI in Kolkata.

Despite India retaining its position as the world's second-largest tea producer with nearly 19% share of global output, Mr. Singhania pointed to a paradox of rising production and falling prices. Tea prices

declined by nearly 6% nationally in 2025, even as wage costs - accounting for 60% of production expenses continued to rise sharply. He warned that this imbalance, coupled with climate change, cheap imports, stagnant domestic consumption, and a dual cost structure between estates and small growers, has rendered the industry increasingly unsustainable.

The TAI president advocated the introduction of a Minimum Sustainable Price for tea, linked to the cost of production plus a reasonable margin, to protect growers, workers, and quality alike. He also urged stricter regulation of tea imports, particularly duty-free inflows under Advance Authorisation and SEZ routes, to prevent market distortion and brand dilution - especially of Darjeeling tea.

Mr. Singhania underscored the need to boost domestic consumption through generic promotion, digital marketing, and value addition, noting that even a marginal increase in per capita consumption could restore the demand-supply balance. He further called for improved access to agricultural schemes, enhanced credit availability, faster clearance of pending subsidies, and reforms in auction and pesticide regulation mechanisms.

Concluding his address, Mr. Singhania stressed that quality and compliance must remain central to positioning tea as an aspirational national drink, while acknowledging the role of governments, workers, and industry bodies in safeguarding the future of India's tea sector.

Source: Tea Associations of India

CONVERSATIONS BEYOND THE PODIUM SIGNAL

A strategic shift in Indian tea



Siliguri: The 9th CII India Tea Forum proved that some of the most meaningful industry discussions happen beyond the podium. While formal sessions addressed immediate challenges, the real significance of the



Mr. Kurush Bharucha on the podium



The 9th CII India Tea Forum

two-day forum lay in the candid exchanges among stakeholders reflecting seriously on the sector's future.

A clear theme emerged: Indian tea's growth will depend not only on production but also on how effectively it communicates value. Sustainability, authenticity, traceability, and sharper storytelling were repeatedly identified as critical in engaging, evolving consumer expectations.

Growers, manufacturers, auction professionals, policymakers, and trade representatives collectively acknowledged that legacy alone cannot sustain relevance. Discussions moved toward long-term positioning - strengthening climate resilience, ensuring labour sustainability, aligning quality with market demand, reforming auction mechanisms, and improving value realisation across the supply chain.

Importantly, sustainability was framed as an operational necessity rather than a compliance formality. Environmental stewardship, ethical practices, and transparent communication were seen as central to competitiveness in both domestic and export markets.

The tone throughout was pragmatic and forward-looking. The forum reinforced a central insight: the future of Indian tea will be shaped not just by output, but by how effectively the industry collaborates, adapts, and communicates its value in a changing global landscape.

Ena Bandyopadhyay
Contemporary Brokers, Siliguri

INDIAN TEA IN FOCUS AT AGRO PACK IRAQ

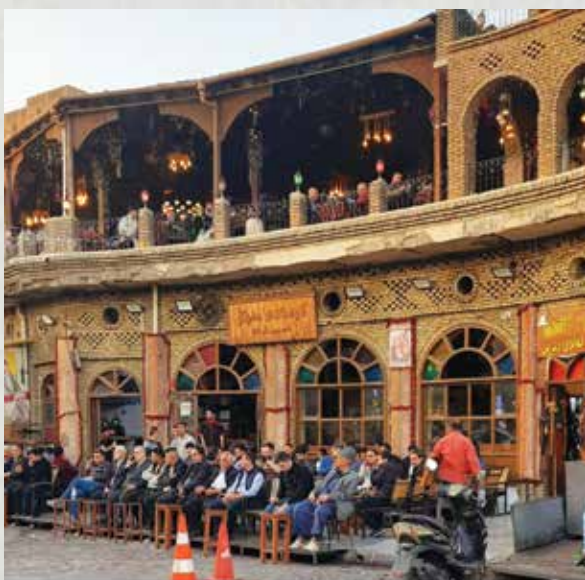
The 8th edition of Agro Pack Iraq 2025, the country's leading international trade fair for agriculture, food processing, and packaging, was held at the Erbil International Fairground, with over 340 exhibitors from 21 countries participating.

Given that black tea is the most popular beverage in Iraq, the exhibition focused on the tea industry, featuring dedicated international pavilions for Indian and Ceylon teas.

Several Indian exporters showcased their teas at the event, including Shah Brothers, Balaji Agro, Bhansali & Company, Inderchand Sitaram, Bhauram Jodhraj, Chaizup, Saman Tea, New Tea Exports, Gillanders, and Gupta Tea.

Niladri Saha

Contemporary Brokers, Kolkata



8th edition of Agro Pack Iraq

SILIGURI HOSTS 7TH STAC SPORTS CARNIVAL WITH ZEAL



7th STAC Sports Carnival, Siliguri

Siliguri buzzed with energy on February 1, 2026, as Utsav Resorts welcomed the 7th STAC Sports Carnival - a lively fusion of sports, family fun, and camaraderie. Kicking off at 8:30 a.m. with an inaugural ceremony graced by Chief Guest Mr. Mukesh Tyagi, Inspector General of HQRS North Bengal Frontier, BSF, the event drew members, families, and children into a whirlwind of competition. Four spirited teams - Savana Hunters, STTA Strikers, Chai Super Kings, and Bengal Gold - clashed in tunnel ball, futsal, relay races, cricket, and tug-of-war, infusing the day with colour and rivalry. Food stalls and playful activities amplified the festive vibe, culminating in a spirited prize distribution that crowned another triumphant edition of this annual highlight.

Ena Bandyopadhyay

Contemporary Brokers, Siliguri

88th ATPA (ASSAM TEA PLANTERS ASSOCIATION) AGM AT JORHAT GYMKHANA CLUB



88th AGM ATPA, Jorhat

TEA AND BESTSELLERS BREWED A STEAMING SUCCESS AT 49TH KOLKATA BOOK FAIR



Jay Shree Tea & Industries Ltd at the 49th IKBF



Books on Tea by Sampark Publishing House in the 49th IKBF



The 49th International Kolkata Book Fair, held recently at Salt Lake's Central Park, proved once again that in Bengal, literature and tea are not just hobbies - they are a way of life. Running from January 22nd to February 3rd, 2026, the fair recorded a staggering footfall of 32 lakhs and a record-breaking turnover of Rs. 27 crores, marking a triumph for both publishers and tea connoisseurs.

Amidst over 1,000 stalls featuring Guest of Honour Argentina and participants like France and Spain, tea flowed as freely as ideas. Jay Shree Tea & Industries Ltd reported using an average of 20 litres of milk tea daily just to keep up with the demand, with numbers spiking on holidays. However, tea was more than just fuel for bibliophiles; it was a protagonist. Sunandan Roy Chowdhury of Sampark Publishing House highlighted the enduring popularity of their tea-centric bestsellers, such as Chaer Desh Cheen and The Land of Tea. He revealed plans for a new title exploring the history of Indian tea entering Bengal. Dismissing fears of digitalisation, Roy Chowdhury noted the market remains robust, stating, "The

market is very indifferent to digitalisation."

The love for the leaf transcended borders. Officials from the Ukraine Embassy shared their cultural traditions, describing their affinity for herbal blends with thyme and mint served to guests. As the fair concluded with promises of a larger venue and a new 'Boitirtha' attraction for the upcoming 50th anniversary, one thing remained clear: the blend of fresh prints and hot brews is a recipe Kolkata will never tire of.

Srinjini Swar

CELEBRATING COMPLIANCE AND CARE

Dikom, Kharikatia Tea Estates earn top honours



Dikom and Kharikatia Tea Estates

Dikom and Kharikatia Tea Estates have been conferred prestigious labour welfare awards by the Labour Welfare Department and the Commissionerate of Labour, Government of Assam, in recognition of their exemplary compliance and sustained commitment to worker welfare and statutory excellence.

Dikom Tea Estate was adjudged the Best ATEPFO Compliant Tea Estate for 2025, an honour that acknowledges its outstanding dedication to the welfare of the labour community and its exemplary

adherence to employee provident fund norms.

Kharikatia Tea Estate, meanwhile, received the award for Best Tea Garden Compliant Factory for 2025, in recognition of its consistent compliance with statutory requirements, strong emphasis on workplace safety and quality standards, and proactive efforts in promoting employee welfare alongside sustainable industrial practices.

The awards were presented by the Government of Assam as part of its ongoing initiatives to encourage best practices in labour welfare and industrial compliance across the state's plantation sector. Certificates of Appreciation marking these achievements have been issued by the authorities and are being disseminated for public information.

The recognition underscores the role of responsible tea estates in setting industry benchmarks, reinforcing Assam's commitment to fair labour practices, safe working environments, and sustainable growth in one of its most vital industries.

DURRUNG TEA ESTATE EARNS GLOBAL RECOGNITION



The Postcard Durrung Tea Estate has achieved a landmark global honour, being named World's Best Hotel for 2025 by Gallivant's Guide, one of the world's most respected luxury travel publications. The announcement was made by Assam Minister Shri Ranaj Pegu, marking a proud moment for Assam and the Northeast.

This is only the fourth time in the last three decades that an Indian property has secured the top position

in Gallivant's Guide rankings, firmly placing Assam on the global map of ultra-luxury hospitality and tea tourism.

Set within the historic Durrung Tea Estate, the property was recognised for its distinctive hospitality that blends Assam's tea heritage with world-class luxury, earning wide international acclaim.

The honour is expected to strengthen Assam's position as an emerging destination for premium tea tourism and highlight the region's growing presence in the global luxury hospitality landscape.

EIH HOTELS TO DEVELOP LUXURY OBEROI RESORT AT MAKAIBARI TEA ESTATE, DARJEELING



Mr. Vikram Oberoi, Mr. Rudra Chatterjee & Mr. Arjun Oberoi

EIH Limited, the flagship hospitality arm of The Oberoi Group, has announced the signing of a management agreement for a luxury resort at the iconic Makaibari Tea Estate in Darjeeling. The property, to be branded as The Oberoi, Makaibari Tea Estate, Darjeeling, is scheduled to open in 2030.

The resort will feature 25 luxury keys and is being developed in collaboration with Luxmi Tea Co Private Limited, owners of the historic Makaibari Tea Estate. Architectural and design responsibilities have been entrusted to Nava Design Studios Co. Ltd., Bangkok. Located approximately 35 km from Bagdogra International Airport, the project is expected to cater to high-end experiential and tea tourism.

The Makaibari development forms part of EIH Hotels' broader expansion strategy, which includes 29

upcoming hotels and luxury cruisers, adding around 2,251 keys globally by 2030, reinforcing the group's focus on heritage-led luxury destinations.

EAU DE CHAI

Prada pours a cup of luxury with new 'Santal Chai' fragrance



Your morning cup of masala chai has just received a high-fashion upgrade. In a move that blends Italian craftsmanship with one of India's most cherished daily rituals, Prada has launched a new addition to its prestigious Les Infusions collection: the Infusion de Santal Chai Eau de Parfum.

This unisex fragrance is turning heads - and noses - by bottling the warm, comforting essence of tea, proving that "chai time" can now last all day long. According to the fashion house, the goal was not just to mimic tea but to elevate it. The fragrance profile is described as a spicy symphony, balancing the warmth of a traditional brew with fresh, bright notes. The olfactory breakdown includes:

The Base A fusion of creamy sandalwood combined with a chai latte accord, creating a rich, milky foundation.

The Spice Deep notes of cardamom, the heart of any



good masala chai.

The Zest A fresh touch of citrus to cut through the creaminess, resulting in a distinctively woody and spicy fragrance.

Prada's attention to detail extends beyond the scent to the bottle itself. Reflecting the theme, the perfume is housed in a brown-hued glass bottle, topped with a signature camel Saffiano leather cap. The aesthetic is designed to echo the warm, amber hues of a perfectly steeped cup of tea.

The unconventional concept has sparked lively conversations across social media, particularly among Indian netizens who are delighted to see their local staple immortalised by a Milanese luxury giant: "Omg, I want to try!! Love the chai," wrote one enthusiast, while another user commented on the cross-cultural appreciation: "Every Indian product, like... chai, is also very great and perfectly useful for all the world."

As tea culture continues to influence the global lifestyle market, Prada's latest offering suggests that the world is ready to wake up and smell the chai - literally.

Sushmita Poddar
Contemporary Brokers, Kolkata

S K Forge Pvt Ltd

CTC Single angle milling cutter & grooving chasers

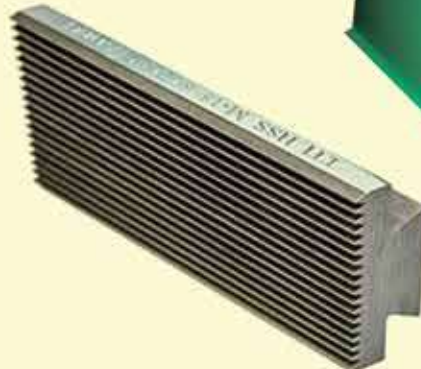
S K Forge Pvt Ltd leaders among manufacturer of CTC Rollers Sharpening Machine, having over 25 years wealth of experience with Tea Industry, is now introducing the Premium Quality sharpening tools for Clean, Better, and Cost Effective sharpening. The necessity of the better quality sharpening tools was felt when most of the workshops were not satisfied inspite of having latest developed machines. The reason being lack of communication between the Tool manufacturer and the end users. After extensive research and field trials at our workshop, as well as at over hundreds of Tea Roller Sharpening workshops, over the years, we have developed and introduced HSS and Super M-15 quality of CTC Milling Cutters and Grooving Chasers in the industry. Our research engineers have developed these sharpening tools with appropriate geometry after studying the properties of AISI 201 and AISI 304 quality Stainless Steel. Our tools are ideal for fresh CTC Segments (for new Teeth generation) as well as for the re-sharpening of CTC Rollers. We have received appreciation from almost all the gardens who have used our cutters at their end.

CTC MILLING CUTTER

S K Forge's C. T. C. Milling Cutters having standard size 3"x 5/8"x 1.1/4" and 3"x 1/2"x 1.1/4" are available ex-stock with 72 deg 70 deg 68 deg 65 deg 62 deg 60 deg 55 deg and 52 deg angles in Left Hand and Right Hand Profile. SKForge's Cutters are designed with adequate chip clearance space, with proper rake and relief angle to facilitate clean and smooth cutting operation.

CTC GROOVING CHASER

The CTC Chasers are available in different threads and Profile. Special attention is given during processing for accurate profile of our Chasers. Our Chasers are readily available in 8 and 10 TPI in 55 deg U' or 'V' profile in 2.1/4" x 3/4" x 4.1/2" as well as in Mini 1"x 3/8" x 4.1/2" size 2.25 deg 0.375 deg 0.75.



LIST OF OTHER PRODUCTS

CTC Milling Machine | CTC Milling Cum Grooving Machine | Forged CTC Segments.

CTC Roller Grooving Lathe | CTC Roller Inspection Berich | CTC Tool Cutter and Chaser Grinder.

Continuous developments to suit the latest design techniques may necessitate change in the above details without notice.

S K FORGE PVT LTD

Suite No 60 | Karnani Estate | 209 A J C Bose Road | Calcutta-700 017 | India

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A JOURNEY IN TEA

Blending the art and alchemy of tasting

This article is the continuation (last part) of three-part reflection on Mr. Kurush Bharucha's remarkable career in tea tasting.

As more brands and establishments invest in the quality of their ingredients, tea will continue to gain respect. Today, more premium-quality teas are sold - across an endless array of flavors - than ever before. For many consumers who wish to refine their tastes in tea, this abundance can seem overwhelming.

With that in mind, here are my simple **10 tips**:

Build a foundation. Know what tea is, where it grows, how it is made, and how it is enjoyed. This framework will anchor your upcoming voyage of discovery. (Read a book, explore online, or take a "Tea 101" course.)

Taste - and taste a lot. I've always believed the best way to learn about tea is simply to taste it. Be intentional, and truly experience the experience.

Taste with a friend. Trust your gut, be honest - there's no right or wrong.

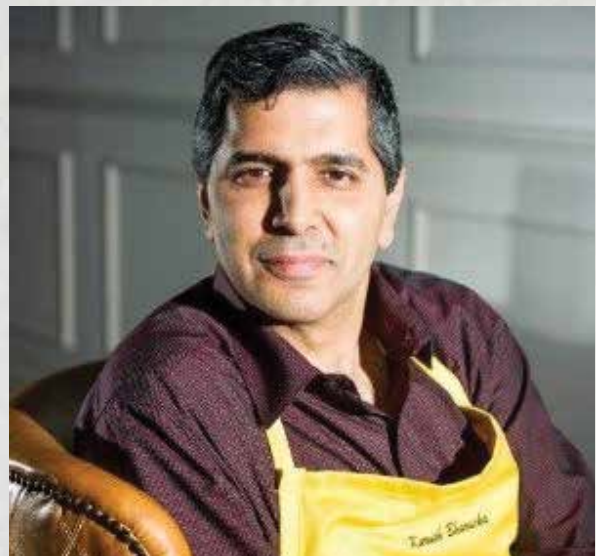
Get the basics right. Use good-quality water, don't re-boil, and brew at the recommended time and temperature.

Use good-quality tea. (When I joined the industry, every wooden tea chest bore the stencil: "It pays to buy good tea." That remains timeless advice.)

Start light, then go strong. Work your way from white to green to oolong to black. This acclimatizes your palate and prevents early overwhelm.

Taste in families. For example, devote an afternoon to a range of Oolongs. Comparative tasting sharpens your notes and helps spot preferences. Contrast is an excellent tutor.

Know there is no perfect tea. There is only the tea



Mr. Kurush Bharucha

that's perfect for your palate. Taste is between you and you.

Don't give up. If you haven't found your favorite, it only means you haven't found the right one yet. It's out there - 100%! Keep sipping, savoring, and having fun.

Be warned. Once you discover your true "nectars of nature," there's no going back to what you drank before.

One of my key responsibilities in my final years with Unilever/Lipton was to steward the company's global tea expertise capability. This included overseeing the tasting proficiency of its worldwide cadre of up to 70 tasters (including apprentices). Unlike most tea companies with tasters clustered in one or two hubs, Lipton's scale required them across more than a dozen countries - some in our tea gardens in Kenya

and Tanzania; others in buying offices in Africa, Sri Lanka, India, Vietnam, and the Americas; still others in blend-recipe roles serving factories; and yet more in R&D product development. Collectively, they taste more than 10,000 cups each week to ensure the company's blends stay "on form."

It was vital that all tasters were calibrated to a uniformly high level of proficiency so their palates could operate as finely tuned human instruments - all singing from the same hymn sheet. To achieve this, we used our unique classification and categorisation language called **Tealingo**.

As the company's Tea Quality Standards ombudsman, I took great pride in owning and leading this Global Taster Calibration Programme, which nurtured, protected, and expanded our specialist skill base. While tea cupping may appear subjective, we continually "objectivised subjectivity" and "quantified quality" by embedding rigor and robustness into training and benchmarking. Tasters underwent monthly multi-origin assessments, blind-tasting samples and fingerprinting them in Tealingo across three key dimensions: dry leaf (size, make, shape,



style, attractiveness), cup color (clarity, depth, brightness), and taste (flavour, aroma, mouthfeel).

My mantra was simple: **Practice makes perfect - so perfect your practice.**

Over time, apprentice tasters worked hard to qualify as operational tasters, overcoming internal challenges to earn their formal License-to-Taste Graduation Certificate. Along with this came a pure silver, name-engraved tasting spoon - a token of recognition and a tool they would use with pride throughout their careers.

Nothing gave me greater satisfaction than building and embedding this "always-on" learning programme, and seeing the joy on tasters' faces when they graduated - Certificate in one hand, silver spoon in the other. As the team knew well: you win or lose at the tasting table.





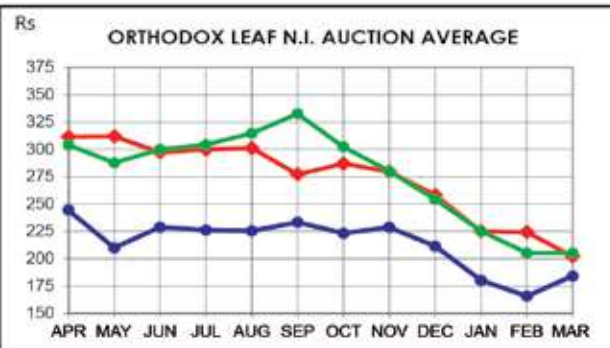
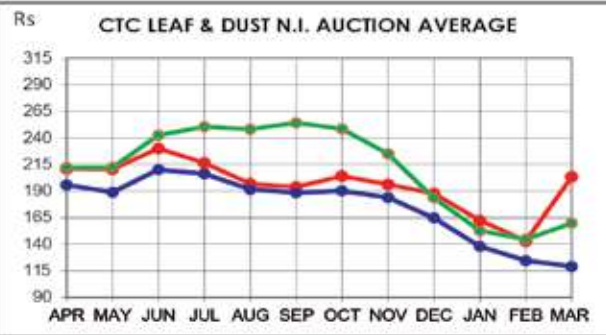
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N. India Market Graphs April to March

North India - CTC Leaf & Dust

Months	2025/26	2024/25	25 vs 24	2023/24	25 vs 23
APR	211.10	211.91	-0.81	195.81	15.29
MAY	210.52	212.11	-1.59	188.86	21.66
JUN	230.03	242.39	-12.37	210.15	19.88
JUL	216.50	250.47	-33.98	206.17	10.32
AUG	196.78	248.17	-51.39	191.60	5.18
SEP	193.79	254.06	-60.27	188.50	5.29
OCT	204.03	248.46	-44.43	190.13	13.90
NOV	196.22	224.91	-28.69	183.92	12.30
DEC	187.60	183.59	4.01	164.70	22.90
JAN	162.37	152.62	9.75	137.97	24.40
FEB	142.95	144.89	-1.74	124.52	18.43
MAR	203.40	159.87	43.53	119.01	84.38
April to March	198.33	218.77	-20.44	179.90	18.43

Dust : Excluding Orthodox Dust



North India - Orthodox Leaf

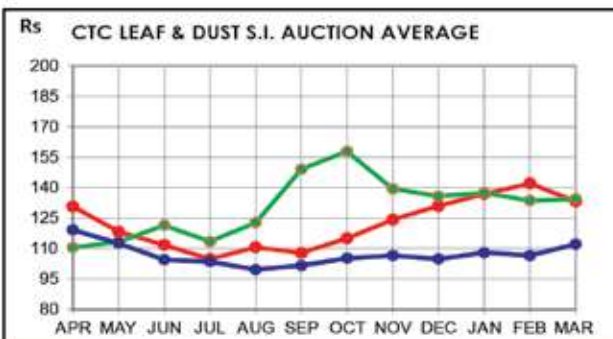
Months	2025/26	2024/25	25 vs 24	2023/24	25 vs 23
APR	311.30	303.93	7.38	244.42	66.88
MAY	311.79	287.69	24.10	209.82	101.97
JUN	297.24	299.80	-2.56	228.77	68.47
JUL	299.77	304.22	-4.45	226.04	73.73
AUG	301.03	314.61	-13.58	225.35	75.69
SEP	277.10	332.59	-55.49	233.22	43.87
OCT	286.79	302.23	-15.43	223.23	63.56
NOV	279.66	279.92	-0.26	228.64	51.02
DEC	258.06	254.20	3.86	211.32	46.74
JAN	225.00	225.13	-0.13	180.22	44.79
FEB	224.18	205.14	19.04	165.63	58.55
MAR	202.08	205.08	-2.99	184.01	18.07
April to March	281.00	287.63	-6.63	220.78	60.22

Darjeeling Leaf

Months	2025/26	2024/25	25 vs 24	2023/24	25 vs 23
APR	822.49	1136.32	-313.83	819.19	3.29
MAY	676.24	643.20	33.04	599.39	76.85
JUN	450.20	361.23	88.97	352.18	98.02
JUL	570.74	569.62	1.12	396.47	174.27
AUG	473.40	496.89	-23.48	400.53	72.87
SEP	448.17	437.16	11.01	294.40	153.77
OCT	420.75	356.69	64.06	251.67	169.08
NOV	325.06	333.80	-8.74	259.42	65.63
DEC	273.01	285.33	-12.32	235.24	37.77
JAN	245.22	195.45	49.77	175.58	69.64
FEB	248.61	226.14	22.48	156.02	92.60
MAR	232.77	216.11	16.66	160.68	72.09
April to March	431.09	396.64	34.45	324.45	106.63



(*Subject to minor revision)



South India - CTC Leaf & Dust

Months	2025/26	2024/25	25 vs 24	2023/24	25 vs 23
APR	130.71	110.55	20.16	119.15	11.55
MAY	118.29	113.26	5.03	112.60	5.68
JUN	111.78	121.40	-9.62	104.51	7.28
JUL	104.85	113.45	-8.60	103.54	1.31
AUG	110.59	122.70	-12.11	99.41	10.98
SEP	107.84	149.00	-41.14	101.60	4.26
OCT	115.04	157.80	-42.76	105.21	9.84
NOV	124.19	139.38	-15.19	104.53	17.46
DEC	130.94	135.77	-4.81	104.84	26.11
JAN	134.88	137.40	-0.52	107.97	28.91
FEB	142.04	133.58	8.49	104.54	35.52
MAR	133.29	134.42	-1.13	112.11	21.18
April to March	120.14	131.13	-10.97	104.32	13.84

Dust : Excluding Orthodox Dust

Month-wise District-wise Auction averages

CTC Leaf & Dust

Assam : Estate

Months	2025/26	2024/25	Diff (+/-)
APR	275.79	285.33	-9.54
MAY	266.49	258.23	8.26
JUN	292.78	312.75	-19.97
JUL	279.80	307.61	-27.81
AUG	243.07	297.75	-54.67
SEP	232.87	298.57	-65.71
OCT	244.22	279.81	-35.60
NOV	231.85	246.86	-15.01
DEC	211.41	201.67	9.75
JAN	183.39	163.43	19.96
FEB	165.04	157.19	7.85
MAR	189.29	161.36	27.93
April to March	239.65	254.56	-14.92

Dooars & Terai : Estate

Month	2025/26	2024/25	Diff (+/-)
APR	257.10	272.02	-14.92
MAY	243.14	232.18	10.95
JUN	265.72	281.49	-15.77
JUL	241.23	255.98	-14.75
AUG	211.95	252.81	-40.85
SEP	201.43	254.23	-52.80
OCT	212.53	246.44	-33.92
NOV	216.71	226.76	-10.05
DEC	209.59	185.28	24.32
JAN	200.87	161.85	39.02
FEB	174.74	144.59	30.15
MAR	315.29	244.37	70.92
April to March	221.21	223.96	-2.75

Cachar : Estate

Month	2025/26	2024/25	Diff (+/-)
APR	210.13	192.24	17.89
MAY	213.55	186.66	26.88
JUN	205.70	214.51	-8.81
JUL	214.32	212.44	1.88
AUG	196.38	229.55	-33.17
SEP	179.51	237.22	-57.71
OCT	187.87	226.50	-38.64
NOV	186.29	203.12	-16.83
DEC	185.74	166.93	18.81
JAN	171.61	141.58	30.03
FEB	165.56	139.15	26.41
MAR	180.45	123.22	57.23
April to March	189.96	195.58	-5.63

Tripura : Estate

Month	2025/26	2024/25	Diff (+/-)
APR	237.77	207.75	30.02
MAY	179.93	156.19	23.74
JUN	171.48	180.39	-8.91
JUL	161.86	180.86	-19.00
AUG	155.09	199.16	-44.07
SEP	140.61	205.47	-64.86
OCT	144.94	202.91	-57.97
NOV	163.78	182.64	-18.86
DEC	159.02	145.39	13.62
JAN	142.53	124.70	17.82
FEB	124.88	117.92	6.97
MAR	127.31	102.71	24.60
April to March	155.82	174.51	-18.69

Assam : BLF

Month	2025/26	2024/25	Diff (+/-)
APR	187.11	198.34	-11.23
MAY	177.69	170.72	6.97
JUN	197.15	206.06	-8.91
JUL	189.66	219.85	-30.18
AUG	170.77	230.42	-59.65
SEP	161.86	230.09	-68.22
OCT	169.57	229.35	-59.78
NOV	163.97	206.76	-42.79
DEC	161.21	170.20	-8.99
JAN	144.41	140.53	3.88
FEB	136.28	135.56	0.72
MAR	131.28	135.06	-3.78
April to March	171.00	198.38	-27.38

Dooars & Terai : BLF

Month	2025/26	2024/25	Diff (+/-)
APR	134.53	130.73	3.80
MAY	129.45	133.57	-4.12
JUN	122.54	143.26	-20.72
JUL	115.00	148.50	-33.50
AUG	110.99	169.86	-58.87
SEP	112.92	185.50	-72.58
OCT	122.32	194.81	-72.49
NOV	126.61	169.34	-42.73
DEC	130.57	147.82	-17.25
JAN	124.17	131.03	-6.86
FEB	121.55	128.30	-6.75
MAR	134.26	131.61	2.66
April to March	122.19	158.00	-35.80

Dust : Excluding Orthodox Dust



Compiled by Soumen Bagchi

TEA IN CULTURE & Beyond

tea Time

QUIZ!

A Quiz for the Culturally Curious

From teacups in space to traditions steeped in heritage, tea has brewed its way through every corner of popular, ethnic, and sporting life.

Test how well you know this global obsession and see if you can earn the title of *True Tea Connoisseur!*

1. In which famous British TV series does a character insist, "Tea. Earl Grey. Hot."?
A) Downton Abbey B) Doctor Who C) Star Trek: The Next Generation D) Sherlock
2. Which Asian country's traditional tea ceremony is called Chanoyu?
A) China B) Japan C) Korea D) Thailand
3. In which Latin American country is the traditional herbal mate infusion sipped from a gourd - most popular?
A) Chile B) Argentina C) Colombia D) Mexico
4. The idiom "It's not my cup of tea" originated in which country?
A) England B) Ireland C) Australia D) USA
5. Which British tradition holds tea as a major celebration?
A) Morning tea B) Evening tea C) Afternoon tea D) Bedtime tea
6. Which British writer famously said, "You can never get a cup of tea large enough or a book long enough to suit me"?
A) C. S. Lewis B) John Lennon C) Paul McCartney D) George Orwell
7. The Tibetan po cha or "butter tea" is made with which unusual ingredient?
A) Coconut milk B) Yak butter C) Goat cheese D) Almond paste
8. Which cricketer once endorsed Lipton Tea in a famous Indian TV commercial?
A) Kapil Dev B) Sunil Gavaskar C) Sachin Tendulkar D) Sourav Ganguly
9. In Chinese culture, offering tea traditionally symbolises what gesture?
A) A business proposal B) A challenge C) Respect and gratitude D) Friendship testing
10. Which popular British children's book character is known for his love of "a nice cup of tea and honey"?
A) Paddington Bear B) Winnie-the-Pooh C) Peter Rabbit D) Rupert Bear

Tiebreakers

11. Which famous world leader was known to pause meetings for his afternoon tea, often with scones and jam?
A) Winston Churchill B) Franklin D. Roosevelt
C) Jawaharlal Nehru D) Charles de Gaulle
12. In which Olympics did the organisers offer Darjeeling Tea to the distinguished guests attending the games?
A) Moscow Olympics B) Los Angeles Olympics
C) Tokyo Olympics D) Beijing Olympics

11-A | 12-D
8-B | 9-C | 10-B
1-C | 2-B | 3-B | 4-A | 5-C | 6-A | 7-B



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COMPLETE ORTHODOX & CTC MACHINERY SOLUTION!



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(18", 24", 30", 36", 48" with
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(Available in various sizes, from
100kg/hr upto 650kg/hr)



MEYER Colour Sorter (Ancoo)
(Available in various sizes and in
3 stage, 4 stage, 5 stage, 6 stage,
with reverse sorting)



MATRIX CFM
(Available in various sizes,
from 100kg/hr upto 650kg/hr)



Kaizen CTC
(Available in various sizes,
from 100kg/hr upto 650kg/hr)



VIBRANT
(Available in various sizes, from
100kg/hr upto 650kg/hr)

TIGL stands tall as a globally trusted tea manufacturer, celebrated for its unmatched quality, steadfast support, and a rich legacy of delighting customers for over seven decades. At TGI Global Ltd. our passionate team of 500+ professionals operate across 28+ countries, uniting to transform the tea processing landscape.

Some of our renowned machines are, WIZARD Continuous Withering Machine, KAIZEN Nova CTC, MATRIX CFM, VIBRANT VFBD DRYER, SHOLA Cast Iron Heater, AXIS Auto Milling Machine, SMART AXIS Auto Chasing Machine, ROLLOMAX Rolling Table, CONQUEST Combination Dryer, QUESTEA Conventional Dryer. We do provide Turn Key solutions in Tea Factories.



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Green Tea Machinery
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Cord or Cordless

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DUAL SPEED CONTROL !

SALIENT FEATURES

- Lightweight- 1.12 Kgs without the battery pack, making it currently the lightest harvester in the market more suitable for female workers in Tea Estate.
- Dual Speed Controller (2100/ 2450 CPM) for using higher speed only when needed enhancing battery life.
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- One of the highest average life cycle. (425+ charging cycles)*
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- Shock Resistant to protect from daily use and accidental drops.
- Best quality cells used in the batteries to ensure highest retention of charge capacity even after multiple charging cycles.
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