



The McLeod Russel
House Journal

B.M.KHAITAN



LEGENDARY TEA BARON
&
GENTLEMAN EXTRAORDINAIRE

January 2014



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Commemorative Issue

Mr B. M. Khaitan

Celebrating 50 years as Chairman

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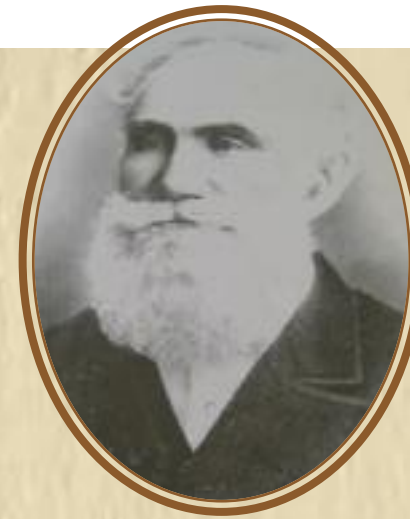
narration

Foreword

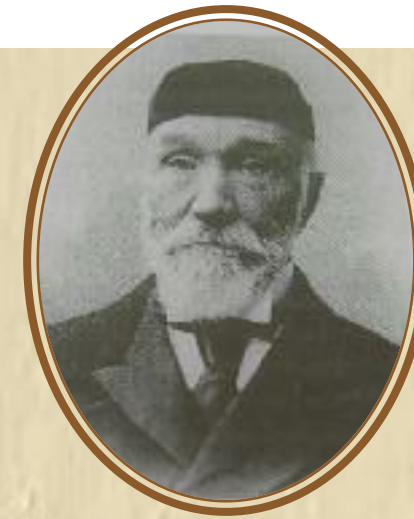
Tea occupies a unique place in human life and part of its romantic appeal stems from the exotic, remote Oriental origins of the plant. In the early 19th century the pioneers of the industry initiated the planting of small holdings in Assam which consolidated over time into businesses. The fledgling industry attracted many adventurous individuals amongst them being the Williamson family, notably George Williamson Senior and his cousins George Williamson Junior and Captain James Hay Williamson (younger brother of George Junior). At that time there was considerable debate over the merits of the Chinese ‘jat’ versus the Assam ‘jat’ of tea and the Williamson brothers are said to have decided on the indigenous variety; this momentous decision is responsible for the growth and success of one of the country’s most important industries.

The two Georges became closely involved in tea, George Senior leasing land and establishing estates and George Junior taking over the responsibility of running Assam Company in Assam. Capt. Williamson gave up his position as skipper of a steamer and worked as agent for the East India Tea Company and for the interests of the two Georges. In 1866 he met Mr R.B. Magor, an assistant with the Great Eastern Hotel in Calcutta, where he was a Director. Their subsequent association led to the signing of the First Partnership Deed in 1869, valid for a period of two years, to form the Williamson Magor Group. This was an auspicious year in that it also saw the opening of the Suez Canal, an important landmark for the expanding export market for tea. The agreement was renewed in 1871 and by 1875 its term was increased to five year periods. The Company had its first office at 7 China Bazaar Street in Calcutta from where they shifted to Hampton Court at 4 Mangoe Lane, in 1894.

Captain Williamson died in 1898 while his cousin and partner in London, George Williamson Senior, died in 1903. The following year, the Partnership Deed was renewed between Mr R.B. Magor and Captain Williamson's brother-in-law, Robert Lyell, both enjoying an equal share and Williamson Magor & Co. continued to work closely with its London partner, George Williamson & Co.



Captain James Hay Williamson



George Williamson



Richard Manuel Blamey Magor

As the fortunes of the Indian tea industry grew, so did those of the Williamson Magor Group. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Company was managing forty-four tea estates and became involved in other businesses. The post-WWI slump and the Depression caused by the Wall Street crash in the 1920s affected the export of tea; however, both George Williamson & Co. and Williamson Magor & Co. (the London and Indian partners of the Group) strengthened their positions in the tea industry through the first three decades of the century.

Mr R. B. Magor passed away in 1933, leaving the Company in the hands of his grandson, Richard Magor, and Captain Williamson's grandson, Pat Williamson. The latter introduced Mr B.M. Khaitan to the Group in the late 1940s. Mr Khaitan began supplying the estates with fertilizers and tea chests and was in a position to advise and help when the partnership found itself under threat. Seven years after Williamson Magor had become a Limited Company an investor acquired a 25% stake in Bishnauth Tea Company, the flagship of the Group. Mr Khaitan raised the funds to purchase the investor's stake and was subsequently invited to join the Board. In 1963 he became Managing Director and, a year later, Chairman of the Group.

Mr Khaitan's vision of fifty years has steered the Company 'Beyond Boundaries', as "geography has become history", (Mr A. Khaitan, February 2012). The number of tea gardens in Assam and North Bengal has grown to include fifty-six estates; 'Quest Overseas' has brought properties in Vietnam, and Uganda and Rwanda in Africa, into the fold. We now produce over 100 million kg of tea which have commanded the highest accolades for their excellence; we can proudly proclaim that we are the largest producer of quality tea in the world.

The above Narration, our rich legacy, is a testimony to the strength of the organization. The epic journey of the Group has followed in the footsteps of the Chairman for half a century. "A corporate general, confident of himself and his worth," (Business Maharajas), Mr Khaitan believes that, "Tea is not a mere commodity for us. It is heritage based on values and culture full of sentiments and commitments."... the philosophy which lies at the heart of the enterprise and of the Patriarch.

~ Vidya Kaul

Four Mangoe Lane



“...come again to my humble little tea shop at Four Mangoe Lane.”

B.M. Khaitan

The largest private tea company in the world has its headquarters at Four Mangoe Lane, Kolkata. The story of the office and address is an interesting one – it is believed that the street on which the building is located was lined with mango trees and presumably took its name from these; what is baffling to all is why or how the ‘e’ which normally appears only in the plural form should have been added. Another tale lost to posterity!



Originally a private residence known as Hampton Court, the Company leased the property in 1894. The double storey colonnaded office was occupied by the clerks on the ground floor and the senior executives on the first floor. An elegant round table occupied the lobby – today it dominates the entrance to the ninth floor in the new building.

Mr B.M. Khaitan initiated the construction of the new multi-storied premises; his proposal was to rent out the lower floors and occupy the top floors as offices for the Group.

The foundation stone of the building was laid by Partner Mr O.J. Roy’s wife in 1966 and completed in a record period of two years. The offices were officially opened in December 1968, to coincide with the Company’s centenary celebrations.

The inaugural ‘bash’ was followed by a debate on what the building should be called. As there was no consensus over a name the building continued to be known by its address.

Over a decade later Kolkata’s municipal authorities renamed the lane and in one stroke Mangoe Lane became Surendra Mohan Ghosh Sarani. Demonstrating a keen sense of tradition the Company chose not to give up the century-old identity and christened the building, Four Mangoe Lane.

~ Vidya Kaul





Fifty Years at the Helm...

“In business, as in life, there are ups and downs...but even in the most difficult of times I do not believe I ever changed my principles of kindness, honesty and integrity.”

B.M. Khaitan (July 2013)

These words portray the ethos of the Chairman, the underlying philosophy with which he has steered the fortunes of the Company for over half a century. *“I was not a Tea man,”* he says humbly. He was invited by the Partners in London to join Williamson Magor in 1962 when a crisis occurred. The shareholdings of Bishnauth Tea Company were at risk; it was a question of either losing the Company or paying the price for the shares, to get the holding back into the fold. In his own capacity as a friend connected by way of trading, Mr Khaitan had created a trust in the minds of the Partners and was confident in giving them advice on the steps to take in these circumstances. In September 1962, he met with them in London and affirmed that Bishnauth Tea Company was the pride of the rupee companies and without it Williamson Magor would not be worth its weight in the tea industry. It was imperative that the shares be purchased and the finances for the investment would be provided by him. This suggestion was agreed upon and Mr Khaitan was invited to join them as a Partner. (At that point in time, Gladstone Lyall, with their shipping interests, had a 49% share in the Company, the remaining 51% being held by Williamson Magor.) *“It is an honour if you invite me and for me to accept,”* said Mr Khaitan. *“I like working with Williamson Magor as it is a family set-up and fits in with our way of thinking.”*

On the afternoon of 4 September 1962, Mr Khaitan received the letter inviting him to join the Company as a Partner. The price of the shares was not mentioned but he signed the document with no questions asked. The Senior Partner, Mr O.J. Roy, pointed out that finances had not been discussed. Mr Khaitan replied, *“You are the Chairman of the Company, looking after five Partners; you might as well look after the sixth! What you feel is fair and justified I will accept.”* Mr Roy confirmed that this was not the issue; Mr Khaitan would be looking after their interests in India. A twenty percent premium would be charged to conciliate the shareholders. Thus the document was signed and Mr Khaitan became a one-third partner in the ‘box’.

At the close of this momentous year, in the month of December, the infamous Chinese Aggression took place. The expatriate managerial staff on the estates was worried as to the repercussions of invasion and many wanted to return home. Mr Khaitan was then a shareholder with the Company but it was widely known that the constitution of the Board of Williamson Magor had changed and he would be a Member. He took the view that nobody should restrain executives from leaving the country. Meanwhile the ceasefire came into being and very few personnel left the services of the Company.

The following year, 1963, the application to the Government of India for approval to modify the shareholdings was made. It took eight months for the submission to be accepted and in December, on the polo grounds, a popular venue in the social calendar of the cold weather months in Calcutta, Mr O.J. Roy enquired of Mr Khaitan if he would look after the affairs of the Company after Mr Peter Nicholls retired on 31 December. Subsequently, at a Board meeting on 4 January 1964, Mr Khaitan was co-opted as Managing Director and Active Director of Williamson Magor.

There was however a setback with regard to the 49% share in the Company which belonged to Gladstone Lyall; the business had been bought over by Mr G.D. Jatia on the basis of these shares in Williamson Magor. The Chairman, Mr Pat Williamson, was of the opinion that till the legal matters concluded, Mr Khaitan should not visit the estates in Assam. He, however, attended Board Meetings and dealt with correspondence.

In 1965, the Company suffered a great loss when Mr Pat Williamson, fondly known as ‘the last of the nabobs’, suddenly passed away. There was no scheduled Board Meeting for a period of four to five months and a vacuum was created for Chairmanship till Mr Khaitan persuaded the Company that matters had to be finalised with regard to Gladstone Lyall. The result was a three-way structure - 33% holdings with the Magors, 33% with Mr Khaitan and 33% with Gladstone Lyall (who retained shipping); Mr Khaitan took over as Chairman of the Group. Subsequently, Gladstone Lyall sold their shareholding to Magor Holdings Limited.

The following year, Mr Khaitan travelled to Assam. Pertabghur T.E. (Bishnauth Tea Company) was the first garden he visited. There was a purpose behind this decision. The acquisition of Bishnauth Tea Company triggered Mr Khaitan’s interest in Tea and hence he had a special regard for this property. It was decided that the upcountry Head of the Group would be located at Pertabghur T.E. The Visiting Agent, Mr John Morice, who was stationed at Sangsua T.E. (Moabund Tea Company), was invited to join the Board, as was Mr Eric Hannay, the Advisor at Keyhung T.E. (Tingri Tea Company). With these two gentlemen relocating to Calcutta, Mr R.R.L. Pennel, Senior Superintendent, Bishnauth Tea Company, took charge at Pertabghur.



(L to R): Mr H.P. Barooah, Mr John Morice, Mr B.M. Khaitan, Mr Dharam Vira, Mr O.J. Roy, Mr R.B. Magor, Mr Eric Hannay

The year 1965 was the watershed; Mr Khaitan began to take an active interest in the Company's affairs. He understood the business and was aware of the intricacies of management, labour relations and allied aspects of running a tea company. Mr Morice and Mr Hannay were the stalwarts he relied upon; the former was in charge of the Assam estates and the latter's forte was labour

management (he took over as Chairman, Indian Tea Association). With their inputs and assistance, the base of operations transferred from London to Calcutta. *"We were a fine team,"* reminisces Mr Khaitan, *"these two gentlemen did not interfere in finance and workings in Calcutta. Mr O.J. Roy and Mr R.B. Magor were frequent visitors from the UK and the latter reported on his trips upcountry."*

Unfortunately, hostilities broke out between India and Pakistan in the same year and the Company lost almost one-third of its annual produce as the consignments could not be transported from Assam through East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). In those days the dispatch of tea by rail was unheard of and the Company supported the river navigation business. The entire crop of the months of June, July and August was lost in transit and the Company was shaken by the loss. Mr Khaitan's role was of utmost importance within the Group as the government and financial institutions were happy to have his presence at the helm of affairs.

Whilst the Company was recovering from the effects of the Indo-Pakistan war, the government struck a blow within the business community by devaluating the rupee. There were about six thousand expatriates working in Calcutta in banks, insurance and tea companies and almost five thousand returned to their homes on British Airways flights as they were asked to leave their places of employment. Mr Khaitan held the firm view that no personnel from Williamson Magor would be asked to leave. *"I think this is the best decision I ever took,"* he recalls. The Company initiated a Devaluation Allowance to make up for any loss in remuneration. *"In my mind, this decision has made Williamson Magor what it is today,"* says Mr Khaitan. Continuity of management was maintained with executives retiring at the right time, with no personal financial losses to worry about. The Company was able to recruit Indian personnel without disrupting systems or human and labour relations, and everyone was happy. *"This was a landmark...since there were no changes we continued to be a happy family,"* concludes Mr Khaitan.

The only weakness within the structure of the Group during this period was that Williamson Magor was a managing agency in that they had no financial involvement with the companies they managed on the strength

of the managing agency agreement. The Company formed two investment firms in which South British Insurance Company and Commercial Union (both insurance companies) purchased shares. With the capital attained the Group acquired shares in the tea companies under their charge, like Gohpur, Dufflaghur, Bhorelli and the East India Tea Company. The sterling companies were consolidated under Williamson Tea Holdings and Mr Khaitan was invited to join the Board. The gold mine that the Group represented soon became evident, there was no fear of take-overs and, *"Four Mangoe Lane consolidated into a strong team, with forty million kg of tea and George Williamson and the Rupee companies as one."*

Before the sudden demise of Mr Pat Williamson, discussions had been held regarding Hampton Court, the premises which served as the Calcutta office. The Board decided on constructing a multi-storied building at the site within a time frame of three years, to be ready for the centenary celebrations of the Company and on 6 January 1966 the foundation stone for the new complex was laid. Mr Khaitan remembers how they leased the offices of Brooke Bond & Company in the interim period. These premises were situated just behind Hampton Court and since Brooke Bond too were in the process of relocating to new office space on Theatre Road, there were no difficulties in shifting to temporary quarters. In two years the iconic structure, Four Mangoe Lane, was ready for occupation. As Mr Khaitan says, proudly, *"Williamson Magor became a strong company having land, the building, holdings and income."*

The next step was to merge the Rupee companies and by 1968, when the Company celebrated its centenary, Mr Khaitan was confident that, *"We are a very sound, good family of tea planters and tea managers."* The business plan was to merge the holdings and plant out every available bit of land. *"By 1972,"* says Mr Khaitan, *"we had literally planted five gardens in Assam."* Consolidation made the Group stronger; the crop went up, costs were down and profits improved. *"The Company became solid, cash-wise,"* affirms Mr Khaitan. *"I was concentrating on finance management, consolidation and integration. In four years, from 1968 to 1972, we changed from a happy-go-lucky organisation to a proper tea company."*

As the fortunes of the Company grew with good quality estates, healthy cash-flow and the export of superior teas there were overtures for mergers with other firms like Macneil & Barry and James Warren. None of these were acceptable to the Board till 1974 when the Inchcape Group bought the London shares; the Company was held by Mr Khaitan and Lord Inchcape till 1982 when Mr R.B. Magor purchased the London shareholding. The transaction was completed, 'sterling to sterling', and Mr Magor was once again a part of Williamson Magor. The Group remained thus for almost two decades when the Magors opted out with George Williamson Assam Limited in 2000. Mr Khaitan agreed to take over the shares of the London Company. Mr Magor gave the clearance and the Calcutta offices of George Williamson moved from Four Mangoe Lane to Lansdowne Road.

Mr Khaitan admits that this was a difficult period in the affairs of the Company. Fast growth, expansion and acquisition brought their share of uncertainties. When McLeod Russel was taken over by the Company in 1985-86, the assets grew proportionately; however, the first decade of the new century saw trying times.

Mr Khaitan recalls a discussion he had with his sons. *“I told Deepak and Aditya that acquisition is the way forward.”* There was no scope for expansion within the land holdings of the Company. There was no acreage to plant more tea and the cost of production was rising. He felt that ‘bought leaf’ would be productive; the target would be to increase the crop from forty to hundred million kg. This proposal was realised by taking over Moran Tea Company, DoomDooma Tea Company and George Williamson. The banks supported the initiative and as capacity increased, so did the margins, and the Company turned the corner.

“Deepak is responsible for bringing George Williamson back into the Group in 2004,” says Mr Khaitan. The understanding between the Khaitan and Magor families was that if the latter wished to give up their stake in the concern, the former would be offered the purchasing rights. When Mr Deepak Khaitan got to know that this business deal was being considered he flew to London to meet Mr Philip Magor and concluded the transaction. The finance was guaranteed by ICICI Bank and George Williamson Assam became a part of the Company.

“A lot of the credit for what we have achieved in Vietnam and Africa, first Uganda and then Rwanda, must be given to Aditya,” affirms Mr Khaitan. He admits that he was not in favour of venturing into Africa, an unknown continent, but states with pride that, *“Today, the African investment has become very sound.”*

The large volumes which the Company has access to allows for a strong presence in the world market. There are a few pertinent reasons for this; *“Cost is controlled, we have more muscle power to sell our teas and because we are a large Group we will go forward in profitability,”* proclaims the Patriarch. *“This is a chapter in history which I hope continues.”*

~ Vidya Kaul



*The Patriarch with the Heirs to his Legacy
Sons Aditya (left) & Deepak (right) and grandson Amritanshu (standing)*



“I am convinced that it is the strength of its systems that has enabled the Group to keep pride of place as leader in this industry.”

B.M. Khaitan

- ✔ Respect for old traditions in business: he believes that the reason for his success is that he stuck by these in the ever-changing world of today.
- ✔ Old fashioned values of honesty, integrity, sincerity, loyalty and “doing the decent thing”. Even during the 'downs', he did not change his value system.
- ✔ Staying positive even during the worst of times, believing “things will change”.
- ✔ Commitment to service and to those dependent on him and the Company.
- ✔ No procrastinating – when he wants to do something, he wants to “get on with it”.
- ✔ Leading a disciplined life.
- ✔ Having a broadminded outlook: it widens one’s horizons, undoubtedly helps in one’s personal development and influences one’s way of doing business.
- ✔ Respecting others’ expertise in their own fields and letting them ‘get on with their job’. “Leave it to the experts,” he says.
- ✔ Making calculated decisions keeping the long term benefits of the Company in view.
- ✔ Being kind and helping people even if one is under no obligation to do so.

“We consider ourselves custodians, expecting nothing in return. Pour a bucket of water at the base of a tree and move on, not caring about how juicy the fruits will be. You will have done your bit.”

B.M. Khaitan



Celebrating with Staff...



Ladies' Tea Party ▶



◀ *Inauguration of Four Mangoe Lane*



Centenary Cup Golf at RCGC ▶



Memorable Moments...



*Cruising Down the
Hooghly...*



Milestone

100....



“ I got the best reception, enjoyed the best atmosphere, friendliness and hospitality. I was proud of it, how the planters interacted; I got so much respect.”

B.M. Khaitan

In 1964, Mr B.M.Khaitan was co-opted as Managing Director and Active Director of Williamson Magor. The inaugural trip upcountry, however, took place after a gap of nearly three years, in 1966. Pertabghur T.E. (Bishnauth Tea Company), was the first property he visited and to date he has a special corner in his heart for this domain. *“It was all new to me,”* he says, *“I was curious to understand the problems, excited and in the learning process.”* He went around the factory but could not really understand the different steps to manufacture. *“Being the head of the Company and not knowing what fermentation was! It was all double Dutch,”* he laughingly admits.



A Traditional Welcome for Mr & Mrs Khaitan

In the initial years at the helm of affairs Mr Khaitan's focus was on finance and consolidation. He left the actual running of the estates to his trusted team of two, Mr Morice and Mr Hannay. In 1972, Mr Morice moved to London and, shortly thereafter, passed away. Mr Hannay, too, relocated to London and, soon after that, Mr Pennel retired from the services of the Company. Mr J.G. Oliver was posted at Pertabghur T.E. as Visiting Agent and invited to join the Board; the establishment became the upcountry headquarters of the entire Group. This is so even today, with the Visiting Agent posted there while the Assistant Visiting Agent is located at Margherita T.E. in the South Bank.

At the Factory



Mr Khaitan remembers his trips upcountry with affection, *“I was so well looked after; it was very comfortable and nice.”* He went up at least once a year; he felt that there was no need to visit more often as Mr Richard Magor made an annual trip to Assam in February and Mr O.J. Roy in November/December. The two gentlemen discussed the affairs of the estates after they returned to base and accordingly, decisions would be made in Calcutta.



The Cessna (painting by Paresh Maity)

Pertabghur T.E. was the hub; the Cessna was based there and that eased the logistics of travelling within the state. Mr Khaitan admits that flying in the Cessna was not a comfortable experience for him; however, it did facilitate touring from district to district. He had key personnel to assist in organising and managing the affairs of the Group. Mr R.R. Stammers and Mr J.M. Trinick were the experts on quality and all contributed towards labour relations, a high standard of manufacture and subsequent sale of teas.



Aspects of the Estate (paintings by Paresh Maity)

Planting a Tree in the Factory Compound



"But I had one weakness," says Mr Khaitan with a smile. "Whenever I visited upcountry, bets were laid at Mangoe Lane as to what I was going to commit to!" In those days bungalows on the estates did not have the luxury of refrigerators, air conditioners or televisions, and swimming pools were a rarity. Mr Khaitan always sanctioned an item which may not have been a necessity yet surely made life more comfortable for planters. *"When I returned to Calcutta, Michael (Late*

Michael Rome), Eric and John would say, there goes another large sum...the cost of tea is going up!" This largess created difficulties within the other tea companies but this fact never bothered Mr Khaitan. *"The welfare of planters is paramount in my mind and that used to be the main reason for my visits."* Over a drink at the club or whilst being entertained in a bungalow, Mr Khaitan would hear of what the district/bungalow needed and sanction the finances.

The goodwill and warmth experienced on his many trips to the estates are cherished by Mr Khaitan.

From the planters' point of view, "It is rare to find a corporate star for whom everyone has a nice word, and even rarer when it comes from his subordinates." (Business Maharajas)

~ Vidya Kaul



With Mr Trinick at the Visiting Agent's Bungalow, Pertabghur T.E.



Our father is a self-made man. He got his first break in 1963 and that was in Tea. From that day onwards, he has expanded his Group to the size that it is today through his foresight, passion and love. We both feel very lucky to have him as our role model.

By God's grace, he is still fit at 86. He continues to play golf and takes an active interest in business, being fully aware of what is happening in the Company. We can only say that we would consider ourselves blessed if we could achieve even a quarter of what he has, and even that would be a Herculean task. As a family, we are truly amazed at our father's abilities and achievements, while people in Kolkata and in business circles know and respect him for his integrity and loyalty. One cannot find the words to describe the extraordinary person that he is.

Deepak Khaitan

Aditya Khaitan

I first met Mr Khaitan 50 years ago in the old Mangoe Lane Building where I was introduced to the executives of Williamson Magor following my appointment as Tea Taster and Manufacture Adviser to the Williamson Magor and George Williamson estates. Little did I realise that within a few months Mr Khaitan would become the Chairman of Williamson Magor following the demise of Pat Williamson.

Under his Chairmanship and with the backing from London it soon became apparent that quality as opposed to quantity was required. The first major step forward was to ensure that the green leaf plucked for manufacture was of the required standard and the factories were properly equipped to make quality tea. When this was achieved the teas increased in popularity with the buyers, particularly those from overseas.

It would take many pages to list all the projects in which Mr Khaitan has been involved at the highest level; the following are a selected few:

- A new building for Four Mangoe Lane
- The Assam Valley School at Tezpur
- The Balaji Temple at Guwahati
- Increasing productivity and the number of estates
- Using paper sacks to replace tea chests
- Introducing Vacuum Packing
- Updating factory machinery

In the book 'Four Mangoe Lane' Mr Khaitan is described as "a motivator with the unique knack of being unobtrusively helpful and invisible but always there". I entirely agree with this description and thank Mr Khaitan for his invaluable help and guidance given to me and the estate personnel for the last 50 years.

J.M. Trinick

Tea Taster & Manufacturing Advisor

As we grow in years and reflect back we are often reminded of people who have had a lasting impression on our lives. Mr B.M. Khaitan is one such individual and I am fortunate to have had the privilege of working under such a wonderful human being; anything that I write falls short of the respect that I have for him.

Apart from being a legend and a visionary who created an empire from scratch and modelled the business on strong human values, this is in fact the true personality of this very humble individual: he is a man of few words and his style of functioning is unique. He is a professional industrialist who believes that the real assets of an organisation are the people which no amount of investment can replicate. He cares for them like his own family and his gentleness and kindness generate the goodwill which makes him a charismatic leader.

Over the years he may have mellowed with age but his mind is as sharp as before. He remembers in great detail major events and challenges which he faced during his lifetime and has very interesting stories to tell. He has a heart of gold and his generosity has no limit.

May God give him long life and good health.

Rajeev Takru

Director

What do I write about a man, a legend who I have been fortunate enough to have worked for and, more importantly, to have worked with. The quintessential gentleman, the epitome of class, sophistication and aristocracy; he will probably scowl at being compared to aristocracy as he is proud of his humble beginnings and his self-made empire. However, I cannot help but compare him with those whom we looked up to in our growing years but perhaps none as gracious, humble and understated as the legacy of BMK. There is so much to learn from him, and lots to admire...

My first association with Mr Khaitan was in 1979 at the Four Mangoe Lane lunch room. I was a trainee and honoured to be lunching with the senior executives and Board members. Michael Rome (MLR) was the 'all in all' at Mangoe Lane (or so he made us believe) and would naturally sit at the head of the table. But on one rare occasion, BMK was to join us for lunch. He would usually sit at 2 Fairlie Place, the engineering abode, and I was eager for the first meeting with him. I was prepared for him to walk towards the head of the table but to my utter surprise he came and sat at the side and allowed Michael Rome to continue to head the table. It was unthinkable for me at that time; if you were the boss then you had to wear the position on your sleeve and repeatedly proclaim your position. Here was a lesson to be learnt, of subtlety and delegation of authority – the style of a 'King-maker'.

My second and most important meeting was perhaps a year later, when the peon came down to the eighth floor and said, "Burra Sahab salaam dia". I immediately rushed up with the Auction Catalogues and various sales statements and continued to nervously replay in my mind all the sales figures that I could recall. On entering his room, Mr Khaitan asked me to be seated as he flipped through the pages of the Auction Catalogue, and then asked two questions. "Do you like tea?" (as in the Industry) I replied, "Yes sir". Then he asked, "Would you like to work here?" The rest is now history.

I have now been a part of Mangoe Lane since September 1979, arguably the longest amongst the current working brigade, longer than the time spent with my family, but then, isn't he our family?

A few like me are fortunate to lunch with our 'Burra Sahab' almost everyday, as he continues to sit by the side. We have the luxury of sharing our experiences and predicaments, discussing our issues and problems but most importantly learning and imbibing from a legend – a legend who is the Maharaja of Tea, a Father to the Industry and Family to us.

Azam Monem

Director

Shri B.M. Khaitan, 'Burra Sahab' (as he is addressed in Four Mangoe Lane) has had an inspirational impact on my professional career. His understanding of Tea business even in this changing environment is impeccable and we always look forward to his guidance on various issues. His philosophy of "honouring all commitments" practised over decades has earned him an unmatched credibility in the market place especially with financial institutions and banks. Another philosophy which he has always followed is compassion when dealing with people, which has earned him respect and created tremendous faith and loyalty amongst all. I wish and pray that his guidance carries on for many more years and gives us the strength to take forward his philosophies in years to come.

Kamal Kishore Baheti

Director

When I joined Macneill & Barry Limited on 1 September 1960, it was then a fully British Company owned by Lord Inchcape, with a formal English culture in all its dealings and operations. In 1974, the Company was taken over by Shri B.M. Khaitan. At that time there were uncertainties and rumours floating across the office indicative of transformation to a Marwari culture and it was suggested to people at our level, that it would be wise to change over to some other organization.

I, however, decided to stay on for some time and observe the impact of the change. To my utter pleasant surprise, a couple of interactions with Shri B. M. Khaitan were sufficient to convince me that the person with whom I would now be working was much more affectionate, understood the problems well, had a practical approach and believed in delegation of efforts. There was no looking back and, of course, no regret.

I just wish to mention a few incidents during my career, which signify the graciousness and genuine interest of our Chairman towards the wellbeing of the people working with him.

In 1994, I suffered from acute renal problem, which required regular dialysis. One morning, Mr Khaitan came to know of this from Dr Mor and on his arrival to office, he came straight to my room on the 7th floor and told me not to worry. He asked me to procure a machine immediately and just for a moment I thought he was referring to a computer since during that period we were purchasing quite a few of them. But soon I realized that he was referring to the dialysis machine so that the dialysis could be performed at home. He gave me instances of people who were coping with the disease well and assured me not to be troubled. After few months when further treatment was necessary, he on his own made all the arrangements for my treatment in the U.K. and gave personal instructions to his Doctor there. Although, it was eventually not essential for me to go to the U.K., the comfort which he gave speaks volumes of his generosity and concern.

Another instance which I can recall was in November 2002 when our family had organized a nine day religious discourse on The Bhagwad in my native village in Rajasthan, close to Ajmer. I requested Shri B.M. Khaitan to kindly grace the occasion on the inaugural day. To my pleasant surprise, he agreed despite his hectic schedule. He travelled by the evening flight to Delhi where he stayed overnight and next morning took a special flight to the Kishangarh airstrip. He then travelled close to 70 km by road to reach our Village. During that period, he also visited a village school and gave a donation not only towards its development but also for the welfare of a Goshala.

In the process, the impression, which he left on the local people was truly wonderful. They felt fortunate that such a great personality had visited them. A person so great, yet so simple, munificent and spiritual. Even today, they continue to remember him with immense respect.

This incident clearly portrays the quality of Our Chairman, to leave behind a memorable impression without any publicity wherever he goes and the extent of trouble he can take to fulfill some of the odd requests made to him. Shri B.M. Khaitan has made so many silent charitable contributions throughout his life.

I can say with absolute confidence that though in today's world we may come across many industrialists bigger (in net worth and fortunes) than Shri B. M. Khaitan but to find a noble, simple and virtuous person like him is next to impossible. He is simply unparalleled. His business decisions, based on experience and foresight, are invariably accurate.

I am fortunate to have had the opportunity of working so closely with him and the knowledge and wisdom that I have gained during this tenure is and will always remain my greatest and most valuable asset.

His magnetic, charismatic personality and goodwill swayed everyone who met him. I have always noticed people going to him, even with problems, come out pleased and satisfied.

We pray that he continues to guide us for many, many more years to come.

R.S. Jhavar
HO, Kolkata

Industrialist, philanthropist and doyen of the Tea Industry, Mr B.M. Khaitan personifies grace, refinement and magnanimity. As a humanitarian he has, in his illustrious career, been the architect of many social initiatives long before the term 'Corporate Responsibility' entered the corporate conscience.

Health care, education, the arts, literature and sports are sectors which have gained significantly from Mr Khaitan's munificence. He firmly believes in contributing to the social good, silently and without any fanfare, expecting nothing in return. Each of Mr Khaitan's endowments, to mention only a few – such as the Assam Valley School, The Assam Valley Literary Award, The Williamson Magor Education Trust, The Vivekananda Kendra Auditorium, the ITA Cultural Centre and the Law Faculty Building – have been lauded for excellence and have been deeply entrenched in the psyche of the state of Assam and its people.

A dream project of Mr Khaitan's has been the Purva Tirupati Balaji Temple at Guwahati. Ever since the idea was conceived to its present eminence, Mr Khaitan's guidance and involvement have been paramount. To implement the project he gathered a group of persons from diverse backgrounds and callings and empowered them to create an institution which would bring peace, prosperity and tranquility to the state and its people. Amidst the urban din, the temple today is an oasis of peace and harmony. Mr Khaitan's vision, association and, most of all, serene guidance have to a large measure made this possible.

His quest to do good leads him to new areas such as setting up a cultural centre in the Temple premises. The centre has helped many budding artistes to get a foothold and develop their skills. The list goes on.

Mr Khaitan has that rare touch of motivating people to do their best. He empowers them with trust. In short, he makes a person feel good.

Parimal Kr Borkakoty
Guwahati, Assam

I recall that as a new young Manager of Behali Tea Estate of the Majuli Tea Co in the early 1960s, being in Calcutta and speaking to Eric Hannay in his office in the old Mangoe Lane offices, when I walked this very new Director of WM & Co who Eric introduced me to as Briju Khaitan. As Eric was more interested in the Test Match being relayed over the wireless from Eden Gardens, Briju very kindly asked me about my estate and quoted most of the relevant points from my letters to the Board which were copied to the office in Calcutta!! He was very good at retaining information in all that he read and really keen to know what went on in the estates.

From 1967 until I left India in 1977 as Visiting Agent on the South Bank and Darjeeling I got to know Briju very well and was grateful to him for his extreme kindness and understanding both to myself and my family. I still treasure the silver cigarette case that he gave me when I left – to remind me of all the times that I used to use his cigarette box when in his office!!

R.R. Stammers
Visiting Agent (Retired)

My wife and I would always try to see Mr Khaitan on our way through on Home Leave etc and what cannot be forgotten is that he was a true gentleman. He was never too busy in his office to see us for a few minutes and we have never forgotten the 1968 Centenary of Williamson Magor & Co Ltd which included a visit to the Calcutta races and a boat trip on the Hoogly River. Since my retirement in 1984 Mr Khaitan helped us on two occasions to visit Assam again which was much appreciated. However, the most treasured memory of all is that, since 1984, we have exchanged Christmas Cards every year and we know that we shall be doing this again for many years to come.

P.A. Bayley
Superintendent (Retired)

The quality of leadership, more than any other single factor, determines the success or failure of an organization and there is no truer example of this than MR B.M. KHAITAN.

Mr Khaitan's entrepreneurial verve made WM achieve many milestones in a short span of time. A businessman of rare vision and high values, he carved a place for himself in India's business, commercial and community life. His personal qualities, especially his immense humility, made him reach out to all, through the spectrum of the organization, which had an electrifying effect on morale, motivating them to achieve even greater heights.

Planters always welcomed Mr Khaitan's visits to the Estates.

He was well versed with the SWOT of each Estate, yet he chose not to make his visits "inspectional" but to encourage the managerial staff and provide a tonic for employees' morale.

I vividly remember my initial meeting with Mr Khaitan. It was on his first official visit to the Estates. A cocktail party was hosted at Pertabghur T.E., but in a significant departure from 'dastoor', even Assistants were invited. At the party, four of us junior-most Assistants were huddled in a corner, when Mr Khaitan joined us, introduced himself, addressed us by our names and expressed how proud he was that we had joined the Company.

Mr Khaitan always conveyed the impression that Planters gave so much to the Company and that their wellbeing was of prime importance. As the Late Michael Rome would humorously comment, whenever Mr Khaitan planned an Assam visit, he would first need to check with 'Accounts,' that there was enough money in the Bank, as Mr Khaitan would be at his magnanimous best in Assam.

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy. When dark clouds descended on the Industry and there was dejection, we were confident in the knowledge that, 'WHEN BMK IS THERE, ALL WILL BE WELL.'

He is truly the "King of the Tea industry".

Bhushan Chhabra
Advisor (Retired)

It is a privilege to pen a few words regarding my association with Mr Khaitan. I have known him for over four decades as a well wisher, guide and a friend. He is one of the most courteous, kind and generous human beings, willing to extend help whenever required.

I remember the early days when as a member of the CTTA sports committee we had to approach him because we were short of airfare/ accommodation. His response was, "Send the bill to us". Later, when as Brokers we faced problems because one of the large Buyers had delayed prompt, we used to land up in his office on a Tuesday morning and his reply, which came as a great relief, was short and sweet, "You may delay our prompt".

In the last few years I have been privileged to play golf with him over the week-end. Despite his age he out drives us on most of the holes, leaving us awe-struck. He is a fine sportsman who has kept two institutions alive in Kolkata, the Royal Calcutta Golf Club and the Royal Calcutta Turf Club. Biju or B.M. he is well known amongst his friends and admirers, is a man of perfect manners, fond of good food and wines, and is aptly referred to with reverence as a 'Perfect English Gentleman'. May God give him a long, healthy and happy life and many more years on his favourite Royal Golf Course.

Harish Parekh
Chairman (Retired)
J. Thomas & Company Limited

I am told that B.M Khaitan has steered the Magor group of companies for nearly half a century and to commemorate this extremely important milestone a special edition of The WM Times is being published.

Mr Khaitan has led the Group through the latter half of the last century which was full of tumultuous events. One Super Power that dominated the world collapsed in exhaustion, Science took giant strides, Communications improved beyond imagination. This did make life easier but brought its own set of problems. Issues not related directly to our own Country had to be taken cognizance of, such as, the Global Economic turmoil that just refuses to go away. Through all this 'chaos' the MAN at the helm has stood firm and provided the stability to survive and grow.

My interaction with BMK is probably around three decades old, and, in my view much of his success may be attributed to his keen adherence to equity and fairness, and his ability to get the best out of people. It is without hesitation that I admit that at the end of every interaction with BMK I felt professionally and personally valued.

Om Kaul
Chairman (Retired)
Carritt Moran & Company

I feel privileged and deem it a great honour to have been asked to pen down a few words on my association of over 45 years with Mr B.M. Khaitan, Chairman of the Williamson Magor Group of Companies.

My first meeting with BMK was in early 1966 when he engaged me to serve as an Assistant Manager at Majulighur Tea Estate.

During this period of nearly five decades this suave and charismatic gentleman has left a distinct mark on the industrial map of not only Assam and West Bengal but the entire country.

Having started from the 1960s he has been instrumental in the establishment of the largest tea producing Empire in the world.

BMK possesses a high verbal ability, a keen power of observation and an exceptionally great level of creativity.

Besides this, he has a heart of gold and has been extremely generous and caring towards his staff and their families. The state of Assam and, for that matter, the entire North East, will always be grateful for the most precious gifts that BMK graciously presented to them i.e. the Assam Valley School at Balipara and the Balaji Temple at Guwahati, built on the lines of the famous temple at Tirupati in South India.

His farsightedness and courage, despite several odds, has been instrumental in guiding the Williamson Magor Group towards stability and its present position of strength and prosperity. A family man, he has imbibed in his children the core values that he believes in. The business community and all well wishers of the Group are assured that the future of the Company is in competent, safe hands.

We wish him and his family good health and continued success.

G.S. Sodhi
Visiting Agent (Retired)

Mr B.M. Khaitan personifies the saying, "the greater the personality the greater his charisma, simplicity and even greater his magnanimity".

A pioneer and a towering personality, he brought Indian Tea firmly on the international map by his progressive thinking, genius, creativity and perfection. As Chairman of the Company for the past fifty years, he has played a major role in bringing the Company to the present heights, yet what everyone who meets him notices are his humility, personal touch and human concern. Throughout his tenure as Chairman, he has been concerned about the welfare of the people, especially those upcountry, and done his utmost to look after their needs: medical, social, spiritual and educational.

I personally have been deeply touched on occasions when he himself hands over the plates to all his executives from the estates during the 'working lunch' at Head Office. This is his way of honouring planters. Some years ago, I remember his address to all planters, when he enquired about everyone's wellbeing and said, "We are here because you are there"; an example of his personal touch and kindness.

Another memorable expression, by a retired employee of the Company, "I am in this Company for more than forty years as I have seen God in our Burra Saheb". This speaks volumes about Mr Khaitan's personality. He always values the people who worked for him.

"The heights reached and maintained by great men are not attained by sudden flight, but, while their companions slept, they toiled into the night." These lines aptly describe Mr Khaitan's genius, his diligent, visionary and philanthropic personality. He is a gentleman par excellence. He rose to great heights by sheer hard work and an iron will. A lover of painting, culture, music and education, Mr Khaitan has amply encouraged and supported these fields. "Simple living, high thinking" – this has been his motto in life. I earnestly wish we could imbibe some of his qualities and traverse the pathway to success.

On behalf of all of us, I take this opportunity to express gratitude, heartfelt admiration and respect for our Chairman on this momentous occasion.

A. Pandit
Visiting Agent

"In 2005, when leaders like Tata Tea and Hindustan Uniliver exited production to concentrate on entirely a large suit of beverages, tea industry doyen B.M.Khaitan surprised everyone by picking up gardens in a bear market," states one of the top business magazines in India in its corporate news segment. How correct that decision was!! Today his Company is the largest black tea producer in the world. Little did the business world know that there would be more surprises to follow!

The amazing story of a businessman who became owner of world's largest tea company is no longer a secret to the world.

In 1869 two business families namely, Magor and Williamson in the United Kingdom, formed a company to manage tea estates in Assam. They named it Williamson Magor & Company Ltd. The Company operated from modest offices at 3 Mangoe Lane, in Kolkata, and a century later expanded to manage forty prime tea estates in Assam producing 14 million kg quality tea. Soon Williamson Magor ranked amongst the top three tea managing firms in India. After Independence, this blue chip outfit became the target of Indian companies for acquisition. By the late 1950s only eighteen estates out of forty remained with the Company.

Realising the vulnerability and to eventually safeguard Williamson Magor's future, Richard Magor and Pat Williamson reorganized the holding pattern of the Company and seriously considered having an Indian partner capable of confronting these threats and save the Company's Indian operations. They chose Mr. B.M.Khaitan; the rest is history.

To the employees of the Company "Burra Sahib", as he is fondly addressed, is a father figure and guide. We congratulate Mr B.M.Khaitan wholeheartedly, on completion of fifty years as Chairman of the Company.

P.S. Dowerah
Assistant Visiting Agent



I take refuge at the feet of Sri Venkatesha

- Sri Venkatesha Prapatti

purva tirupati shri balaji mandir





“**T**he three things I had always wanted to do in Assam were to set up a residential school of international standards, build a temple which would be an oasis of serenity and calm, and a hospital with state-of-the art facilities,” says Mr Khaitan. “The hospital, unfortunately, could not become a reality for various reasons. However, we have tied up with Sankara Netralaya and Operation Smile, and bear the cost of eye operations and cleft lip and palate surgery for the staff and workers of our estates, as well as their families.” Mr Khaitan did try to set up the hospital in Kolkata but, to his deep disappointment, could not get enough land to build the kind of facility he had envisaged.

“I am very happy that Assam Valley School is doing so well and has benefitted so many students from the region,” says Mr Khaitan. “My other dream, that of building a temple, came true quite by chance,” he adds.

Mr Khaitan had accompanied a friend to Kancheepuram during the 100 years’ celebrations of Jagadguru Sri Shankaracharya Mahaswamigal. “There was a huge crowd and in the midst of that I heard someone say, ‘Mr Khaitan, the Shankaracharya wants to meet you.’ I didn’t quite hear what the person had said, because of all the noise, but I followed him all the same,” recalls Mr Khaitan. “He took me to the ‘second-in-command’, so to speak, who said something to me in accented English. I couldn’t really understand what he said, so I just nodded my head and came away, thinking to myself, ‘I wonder what he wanted? Never mind, I’ll ask somebody to follow it up’. Back in Kolkata, for the next six months I was occupied with work and the happenings in Assam, so I forgot all about the incident,” he adds, “till one Sunday morning, when five people from Kancheepuram came to see me, saying that I had promised to

build a temple for Lord Balaji in Assam. It was only then that I realized what the exchange in Kancheepuram had been about!” The delegation showed Mr Khaitan the map of the entire temple complex, confirming that they had already been allotted the land in Guwahati. “A promise is a promise,” avers Mr Khaitan, so he agreed to build the temple and look after every aspect except the religious part, which he requested that the Shankaracharya take charge of. “As a ‘layman’ I could not take on the responsibility of the rites and rituals,” he explains. “Sri Shankaracharya Swamiji believed that the temple would bring peace and prosperity to Assam, so I was happy to be the harbinger of these much needed qualities to the state.”

Mr Khaitan had become a great believer in Lord Balaji. When people at Mangoe Lane asked him if he realized what he had committed to and what the cost of building the temple would be, he replied that the cost did not matter. Happily, it did not seem to matter to any of the Partners or shareholders either. When he put the proposal to the Board, no one opposed it and matters went smoothly, “I felt so privileged to be chosen by Sri Shankaracharya Swamiji, to put up this temple dedicated to Lord Balaji,” says Mr Khaitan humbly, “So, what better life for me?”

He flew down to Kancheepuram with Mr T.R. Swaminathan, to understand the whole project. He was told that the temple would be quite a costly venture and take about five years to build, but Mr Khaitan assured them that this was not a problem. He then went to Guwahati where he saw the plan and became very interested. The complex, covering two acres of land in the Betkuchi area of Guwahati, is built in the Dravidian architectural style of South India.

Set amid green lawns interspersed with flowering shrubs, the magnificently carved edifices glisten white in the sunlight and emanate a pearly sheen at night. The temple dedicated to Lord Ganesha is situated at the entrance to the complex. Once one has paid one’s respects to Him, one can walk on the paved path to the main entrance – a magnificently carved wooden door. Entering through this, one passes the Dhvajastambham – the sixty foot tall flag pole made of a single Sal tree covered with brass-coated copper plating – and pays obeisance to Lord Balaji while Garuda keeps a watchful eye from across. The main temple is flanked by the shrines dedicated to Goddesses Padmavati and Durga. The latter was built in deference to Goddess Kamakhya, the reigning deity of Guwahati.



Pujas and other rituals like ‘abhishekam’ and ‘archanas’ are performed daily, beginning with ‘Suprabhatam’ and ending with ‘Ekantaseva’. While daily, monthly or annual prayers are conducted in the names of devotees from all over the country as per their request, they may also offer ‘bhog’ on any day and partake of the free ‘prasadam’ which is distributed to devotees twice a day. The famous ‘Tirupati Laddu’, prepared by experts from the South, is available at the Temple.

‘Sahasranama Archana’ is performed every Saturday for Lord Balaji, and ‘Archana’ is performed for Goddess Durga every Tuesday and Friday. There is a ‘Yagnashala’ within the complex where devotees may have ‘yagnas’ performed.



An auditorium or ‘asthanamandapam’, used primarily for religious and spiritual activities, was built adjacent to the temple, following the same architectural style. Cultural functions are held there on Sundays and aspiring artists from the region are allowed to display their work, free of charge, for a fortnight.

The priests are housed in comfortable residences while visiting dignitaries are put up in the guest house. Mr Khaitan has formed a corpus for the Trust which looks after the temple. The interest from this is used to maintain the complex, pay wages and cover all other expenses.

Mr Khaitan loves to visit the temple. *“I like the quiet and peaceful atmosphere. I always admired the serenity of cathedrals and wanted that same atmosphere for this temple, so that people can pray in peace. The paths, the lawns, shrubs, the music – all create a wonderful ambience.”* The temple is as much a boon for him as for the people of the region. He says with a smile, *“As I grow older, it becomes harder for me to travel all the way to Tirupathi, so I come here to pay my respects to Lord Balaji.”*

~ Sarita Dasgupta

Playing Fields

What distinguishes Mr Khaitan from most others in similar positions of responsibility is his firm belief in the importance of leisure time. He encourages everyone in the Company to spend after-work hours and weekends in pursuit of leisure activities.

How much significance he gives to the matter is reflected in the fact that the café at Four Mangoe Lane has a dartboard and pool table.

He is always ready to upgrade the facilities of all the clubs located on the Company’s properties, so that planters and their families can relax and enjoy themselves in their free time. The Company has also sponsored many sporting events upcountry for the benefit of the planters.

Every estate has clubs for the use of the staff and workers respectively, and inter-Line football tournaments are fixtures on all properties.

As for himself, there are three sports close to Mr Khaitan’s heart – polo, horse racing and golf.

He became involved in the first two because of his love of horses and his interest in riding. Although he never played polo, he loved the sport, and, along with a few other individuals, was greatly responsible for making the Calcutta Polo Club the ‘Mecca of Polo’ in the 1960s.

His love of horses and riding led him into horse racing, and the polo grounds being in the middle of the race course, he naturally spent a lot of time at the Royal Calcutta Turf Club. Over the years, he owned quite a number of race horses in partnership with his friends and close associates, and won many a prestigious event.

Golf is the sport he loves the most. It has been his ‘panacea for all ills’. Weekends are sacrosanct and spent exclusively on the greens of the Royal Calcutta Golf Club with his golfing partners of many years. He believes that the friendships one makes on the golf course are lifelong. He also believes, like Bobby Jones, that “Golf is the closest game to the game we call life. You get bad breaks from good shots; you get good breaks from bad shots - but you have to play the ball where it lies.”

In December 2012, for the very first time, the Tour Championship was held at the ‘Royal’, hosted by McLeod Russel in conjunction with the Professional Golf Tour of India.

~ Sarita Dasgupta



Polo was introduced to Calcutta by two British soldiers, Capt. Robert Stewart and Lt Joe Sherer (later Major General) who had seen the original form of the sport – Sagol Kangjei – while posted in Manipur. Joe Sherer is universally acknowledged as the ‘Father of English Polo’.



The Band of Brothers

He organized and promoted the sport at the Silchar Polo Club in Cachar, Assam, and at the army station at Barrackpore just outside Calcutta. When he established the Calcutta Polo Club in 1862 one of the first matches played there was between a Manipuri team called ‘The Band of Brothers’ and the Club team. The guest team, brought over in a country boat by Lt Sherer, thrashed the home team!

The oldest polo club in the world still in existence, the Calcutta Polo Club, still runs the first ever polo tournament, the Ezra Cup, named after Sir David Ezra, a leading business tycoon in Calcutta who patronized the sport in the city. The first Ezra Cup was held in 1880. The other old tournaments still held at the Club are the Carmichael Cup (1910) and the Stewart Cup (1932).



Mr B.M. Khaitan became a member soon after WW II and was Honorary Secretary of the club in the 1960s when Mr Pat Williamson was the President. It was Col Maharaj Prem Singh of Jodhpur who encouraged Mr Khaitan to ride horses by gifting him a very nice filly – a polo pony – which he used to ride in the middle of the race course. It brought him a lot of confidence and also got him interested in horse racing and polo. As John Wayne famously said, “Planes, automobiles, trains – they are great, but when it comes to getting the heart going, they can’t touch a horse.”

Mr Pat Williamson, Chairman of Williamson Magor, and a personal friend, was also part of the racing scene. As Steward and Senior Steward of the Royal Calcutta Turf Club respectively, Mr Williamson and the Maharaja of Burdwan took over maintenance of the polo ground when it shifted to the middle of the race course. They were also President and Vice President of the Polo Club respectively, while Mr Khaitan was Honorary Secretary and Mr Ivan Surita was Home Secretary, and the foursome worked very well together, bringing their own areas of expertise to the table; Mr Khaitan’s being Finance. They spent many happy hours throughout the year, meeting over lunch at Firpo’s (the ‘in’ restaurant of that era) brainstorming, planning and organizing events for the polo season, which was from October to December. In the process, Mr Williamson developed a respect for Mr Khaitan’s business acumen and started asking his advice on company matters too, although the latter was not a part of Williamson Magor at that time.



Firpo's in the Fifties

As Mr Khaitan says, “*Polo kept us occupied all year round, meeting over lunches at Firpo’s and talking about what to do, what not to do, how to bring foreign players, what teams to bring to Calcutta. 1962 was the centenary year of the Polo Club, so we had to start work three-four years ahead to organize it properly.*”

We put our heart into making the Calcutta Polo Club one of the top polo clubs in India. There

was a lot of glamour attached to polo because of the dashing personalities involved, such as the Maharaja of Jaipur and Rao Raja Hanut Singh of Jodhpur. The Jaipur, Jodhpur and Delhi teams were regular visitors since 1957. Other teams from Pakistan, UK, Santa Barbara (USA) and Argentina also added lustre to the Season. From 1955 to 1962, polo was the most popular sport in Calcutta and became a very important part of one’s life. Its glamorous social side attracted many investors as well. During that time, Calcutta was in its prime socially; as THE venue of polo.”



Fine Dining at Firpo's

Maharaj Prem Singh’s son-in-law, Mr Vijai Singh, is an excellent polo player who played for the Club and also captained the Kolkata team. He was heartfelt in his praise for all the work Mr Khaitan had put in during his tenure as Secretary – inviting polo teams from all over the world, organizing the logistics of their stay, the stabling of their horses and looking after them generally. Mr Khaitan would put his whole office (where he worked before joining Williamson Magor) at the disposal of the Club during the polo season so that all the work was done efficiently.

Mr Singh believes that Mr Khaitan was largely responsible for making polo the centre around which most of the social activities revolved in the month of December. “Polo at Christmas” was a catchphrase coined by Mr Khaitan, as the most important tournament of the season – the final match of the Indian Polo Association (IPA) Cup – was played at the Calcutta Polo Club on Christmas Day.

It brought an end to the Season which began with the Stewart Cup and included a month full of sporting and social events such as the Polo Ball. Not only the players and Club members, but the general public too thronged the grounds to watch the match on Christmas Day. According to Mr Singh, it was an event everyone so looked forward to that the biggest threat used by parents to keep their children in check was that they would not be taken to the watch the Christmas Day polo match unless they behaved themselves! Mr Khaitan agrees, saying, *“Everyone wanted to enter the Club grounds on Christmas Day, not only to enjoy the match but also to be seen, socially, at the event.”*

In 1962 the Club celebrated its Centenary Year with a host of events, including a visit from Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip.



L to R: Mr B.M. Khaitan, Alec Harper, Billy Sodhi, Mr Pat Williamson, Maharaj Prem Singh, Hesky Baig & Ivan Surita

Mr Khaitan looks back at that time fondly, stating simply, *“It was a very happy time of my life.”* Once he joined Williamson Magor, however, he found he was too busy to do justice to his post as Secretary of the Club, especially after the sad demise of Mr Pat Williamson in 1965. He remained a member, though, and continued to support the Club as much as he could, financially and otherwise, well into the 1970s but the sport started losing its charm for the general public and steadily declined. After a period of inactivity, the Club was rejuvenated in December 2006, when the members celebrated 150 years of its existence. The Club now organizes various polo tournaments at the Pat Williamson Ground in December.

Mr Khaitan was Patron of the Calcutta Polo Club and still enjoys watching a game of polo.

~ Sarita Dasgupta



“At one time racing was important in my life as a sport,” says Mr Khaitan. *“In 1953, I joined the Royal Calcutta Turf Club as a member and this gave me access to an exclusive social circle and thus to top business and mercantile houses as well.”*

Horse-racing in Kolkata dates back to 1769 when the races were held at Akra in the suburban Garden Reach area. In 1799 this popular sport saw a five-year hiatus after which it was taken over by the Bengal Jockey Club which had been formed with the objective of keeping the sport alive.

In 1809, the venue of the races shifted from Akra to the Maidan area of the city, and in 1812, the new course was laid out where it is today. The Calcutta Welter, the most important event of that time, was shifted to Calcutta from its original venue, Barasat, in 1825. Calcutta was the first centre in the sub-continent to stage a Derby race in 1842, called the Calcutta Derby Stakes. It was five years later, in 1847, that the Calcutta Turf Club was officially born – perhaps the most significant event in the history of horse-racing in Calcutta.

By the end of the century, the standing of Calcutta Turf Club was very high; its jurisdiction covering all the courses in Burma and India except the ones in western India. The term 'Royal' was added to the name of the Club in 1912, after King George V's second visit to the Calcutta Races.

In 1908, Calcutta Turf Club appointed a Stipendiary Steward – a first in India. The same year Maharajadhiraja Bejoy Chand Mahtab of Burdwan became the first Indian to be elected to full membership of the club, followed later by his son, Sir Uday Chand Mahtab, who was Senior Steward of the Club when Mr B.M. Khaitan was a Steward in 1971. They became close friends.

Mr Khaitan, Mr Pat Williamson and the Maharaja co-owned many horses over fifteen years, along with a fourth partner, some of whom were Mr M.W.D. Oldman, Mr O.J. Roy, Mr A.H. Billimoria, Mr M. Parekh, Mr M.J. Chaytor and Mr H.P. Barooah. *“We were called The Four,”* says Mr Khaitan with a laugh.

Mr Khaitan's foray into horse racing began in 1949, with a horse named Red Rival.

He spent most mornings riding with other members of the Calcutta Riding School at the Ballygunge Maidan, where a string of fifty horses brought for the Calcutta Mounted Police by the owner of an Australian stable would be put through their paces. Once the police had chosen their horses, others were allowed to buy the rest. Mr Khaitan bought two of them and a friend suggested he put them to race. One of these two horses was Red Rival.



"It was the first time I had gone to the races," recounts Mr Khaitan. *"But before that I went to Pat Williamson and asked what my horse's chances would be. Pat said that if he drew 4 or 5, he had a chance. So, on 24 December 1949, I went to the races for the very first time. I didn't even know where the paddock was! Anyway, I found my way there. It was probably just before the 4th race and Red Rival was walking around in the paddock. My friend, Mac Chaytor, from Williamson Magor, decided to put some money on him. I said that it's drawn 4 and Pat had said that*

if he draws 4, he has a chance." Not knowing anything about betting, Mr Khaitan put all the money his father had given him for the Christmas and New Year's Eve festivities, blindly on Red Rival in the Holly Plate race. He had no way of knowing that it had very good odds! *"I then went up to the Grand Stand,"* continues Mr Khaitan. *"In front of me was Jim Robinson, Superintendent of Jagannath Ghat. I used to meet him quite often to organize the transportation of fertilizer and tea chests to Assam. I asked him the latest on Red Rival. Jim replied, 'Oh, that donkey!' The horse was just going to the start line and it dawned on me that I'd put all my money on the 'donkey'! All my Christmas and New Year's entertainment money! Jim said, 'Your donkey's running last', but just near the finish, he was on the outermost track and started romping, catching up with the others and winning by a short head! I almost fell from the third tier of the Grand Stand out of sheer excitement. I went to the bookie and asked for my money. The bookie remarked, 'What made you put your money on this horse? It had very long odds.' I answered simply, 'He's my horse.' I took my money and left with Mac Chaytor. We had a whale of a time at Firpo's that evening!"*

The next morning, Christmas Day, he went to Mr Williamson's house for the Champagne and Black Velvet (a blend of beer and champagne) Lunch. There was a crowd of people on the inside lawn and as he got out of his car in the portico, Mr Williamson shouted, "You don't know what you're doing! Your father will think I'm leading you into gambling!" Not expecting to be greeted thus, Mr Khaitan was literally in tears. He tried to explain, saying, "Sorry, I didn't know. You told me that it had a chance if it drew 4, so I put money on it." Mr Williamson replied, "You can't put such large sums on horses." Later, Mr Khaitan came to know that the whole race course was talking about Mr Williamson having had a good punt! *"He was more annoyed that his name was being brandished about when he hadn't won a penny!"*

says Mr Khaitan now, with a laugh. *"Anyway, I promised never to gamble on horses again. I only put a token 50 bucks on my horse to show my support and give to the jockey and syce, but only if my trainer put money too. I loved the races, so I bought a number of horses and raced a lot but I never gambled again."*

All his horses were dear to him and gave him a great deal of pleasure but his two favourites were The Spook and The Minstrel.



The Spook wins the Indian Champion Cup, 4 January 1958

These words from 'Henry V' (William Shakespeare) could well have been describing The Spook: "... he is pure air and fire; and the dull elements of earth and water never appear in him... he is indeed a horse, and all other jades you may call beasts." When the horse won the prestigious Indian Champion Cup on 4 January 1958 Mr Khaitan and his co-owners, Mr Williamson, the Maharaja of Burdwan and Mr M.W.D. Oldman, were thrilled. *"The Spook was a lovely horse and the Indian Champion Cup was a beautiful trophy. It was a thrilling victory in a prestigious championship,"* says Mr Khaitan. Three weeks later, The Spook won the Independence Cup on 26 January, and exactly a year after that, the Curlender Cup.



'The Four'



The Minstrel, too, brought him a lot of happiness. He belonged to the Raja of Ramnath who gave up racing in the mid-1960s, so Mr Khaitan bought the horse in partnership with the Maharaja of Burdwan, Mr Pat Williamson and Mr M.J. Chaytor. The Minstrel not only won races, but hearts as well. *"He won eight out of nine races and was the darling of Calcutta,"* says Mr Khaitan.

The Sport of Kings



After Mr Williamson passed away in 1965, Mr Khaitan carried on racing for a while with the Maharaja of Burdwan. Then he became a Steward of the Royal Calcutta Turf Club and moved on to the Senior Stewardship after the Maharaja of Burdwan retired. An outstanding administrator, Mr Khaitan continued to maintain the Club's standards and reputation at the highest possible level as Senior Steward until 1981.

Once the Maharaja retired, Mr Khaitan says, *"I never had a partnership with anyone else, so then Deepak took over the string of six-seven horses. He went into racing in a very big way and won a lot of Derbys and Invitation Cups. The house is full of his Cups."* Incidentally, most of Mr Deepak Khaitan's champion horses were trained by well known gentleman-jockey turned trainer, the late Haskell David.

"In our days, to win a race and a Cup used to be very rare. Whenever a horse won we celebrated with weeks of cocktail parties," adds Mr Khaitan, saying that he enjoyed the social aspect of racing – celebrating wins with friends.

"In fact, we enjoyed ourselves throughout the year. From 30 October to 31 March, there would not be a single evening free. The entire mercantile community got together at various social events. Fancy dress parties were very popular. Golf on Sundays was followed by a Beer & Curry Lunch; and there were parties hosted by various teams and individuals during the polo season. The highlights of the social calendar, however, were the parties thrown by the Vingt et un Club, the Golightly Ball, the Merchants' Cup Evening and the Polo Ball."

The Vingt et un ('twenty-one') Club was made up of twenty-one British bachelors who used to invite five people each for dinner at their own house and then carry on to Tollygunge Club for dancing. When a bachelor got married, he and his wife joined the Golightly Club and there would be a glamorous 'black tie' Ball at Camac Street. The Merchants' Cup at the RCGC in July would be the next big event. Upcountry planters also came for this. Two players came per week, over three weeks. The matches were played on Tuesdays and Fridays and the gala 'black tie' function would be held on the Friday of the 3rd week, in a large shamiana with fans. The Polo Ball was held in December during the polo season," explains Mr Khaitan.

Interestingly, Mr Khaitan himself, along with Mr Ivan Surita (who played Ranji Trophy cricket for the Bengal team, was awarded the Military Cross in WWII and joined the IAS), his elder brother Mr Pearson Surita (renowned cricket commentator and judge at horse races) and eleven others formed a club called The Apostles. They each invited ten friends for their 'fancy dress' parties in December-January. The themes for these get-togethers were 'The Sailor', or 'The French Paratrooper' or some other imaginative subject and the outfits would be especially ordered for the occasion. The Apostles were more cosmopolitan than the other clubs in that their guests included American and French nationals as well as British and Indian.

"There was never a dull moment," concludes the Gentleman Extraordinaire, of those halcyon days.

Mr Khaitan continues to take an interest in racing and was Patron of the Royal Calcutta Turf Club. The Company has sponsored many events such as the George Williamson Indian Products Stakes in 1989 and the Williamson Magor Indian Gold Vase in 1994 at RCTC.

~ Sarita Dasgupta



Mr B.M. Khaitan's father, a keen golfer himself and a member of the Royal Calcutta Golf Club, had tried to get his son interested in taking up the sport, saying it would do him a lot of good. The young man, however, being a rider and fond of horses, was very involved in polo and horse racing at that time.

One day in 1947, as he and his friends were driving home after Sunday lunch at Mr Williamson's place at Regent's Park, Mr Khaitan noticed the Jodhpur Club on Gariahat Road. He told his friends, Mac Chaytor and Pearson Surita, *"Let's get down and see what this place is."* Looking at the beautiful greens and the players, he added, *"Why don't we take up this game?"*

As the Royal Calcutta Golf Club (known fondly as 'The Royal' or simply 'RCGC') did not accept beginners as members, Mr Khaitan joined the Jodhpur Club. It had an 18-hole compact course which he enjoyed playing on during the cold weather and on holidays. Playing golf became something he looked forward to and he began keeping his weekends free for the sport, going less frequently to the races. When the Jodhpur Club closed down in 1952-53, the members were given Rs 5000/- each. Mr Khaitan used the money to buy himself a golf set and became a 'B' member of RCGC. *"As a 'B' member I had to play on the new course and was stuck there for two years. Then I became an 'A' member and was allowed to use the proper course,"* explains Mr Khaitan. *"Golf became a disease, an addiction. I wouldn't miss a game so I wouldn't go out of Kolkata over weekends. I became sincerely mad!"* he laughs. *"Even today, if I see a golf course, I have to play 3-4 holes at least, but there is no course to beat RCGC. In my most depressed state of mind, in the most difficult of times, I went to the golf course and for four-five hours just got lost in the game and forgot everything. There were no buildings to be seen, only forests and greenery. Golf was my lifeline. So, what I am today, I can sincerely say is because of golf and the Royal Calcutta Golf Club."*



This is high praise indeed for the second oldest golf club in the world, from someone who is also a member of the oldest golf club in the world – The Royal & Ancient Golf Club, St Andrews, Scotland. *“The Scots gave the world this wonderful sport,”* says Mr Khaitan. *“We should be thankful to them.”*

Mr Khaitan became Golf Captain of RCGC in 1970-71, during one of the most turbulent periods the city has ever gone through. Once, fourteen dead bodies were found in the tanks and other locations on the premises of the club. The power supply would be cut off for eight hours at a time due to ‘load shedding’. The Calcutta Corporation was laying a drain pipe along the Tollygunge tram track to the Royal, so members had to take a detour through the neighbourhood, which was not one of the safest. Mr Khaitan found that the course was not being played as the members kept away out of fear; only two to five people would be on the greens daily – on 220 acres of land. But through all the difficult times he carried out his responsibilities as Captain to the best of his abilities.

Mr Khaitan will never forget an incident which took place in 1973, in which, as he says, *“I was very close to being bumped off! Although I was afraid, I overcame it to deal with the issue.”*

He was playing a three-ball game one day, when some lady golfers informed him that they couldn’t play on the course because miscreants were creating havoc, throwing knives at the ball! As Captain, Mr Khaitan had four ‘darwans’ escorting him around the course to see that he wasn’t harassed and that nobody came near him, so he and his partners kept playing. As they approached the 13th, which was the drinks hole, they saw a group of people, armed with revolvers and knives, on the green. *“The other players drifted away towards the 17th but I couldn’t allow the miscreants to think that I was scared, so I walked up to the group and they surrounded me. They told me in Bengali that they wanted jobs. Till today, I can’t say what came over me or from where I got the courage, but I completely forgot terror and became firm in*

my mind, thinking, ‘What can they do to me except shoot me?’ I replied in Bengali, ‘Look, if you do what you’re doing, showing guns etc, throwing knives where the ball is, you expect me to give you a job? You must be mad! If you drive away the members with these kind of terror tactics, the club won’t survive so what job can I give you?’ They were all youngsters. One said, ‘Unless you give us jobs we won’t let you leave here.’ I said, ‘What will you do? Kill me? Fine, you think that will help you to get a job? You’ll go to jail. What will you gain by killing me? Nothing. The club will close down, the 500-odd people working here will become jobless. You stay here showing your guns and knives. I have nothing more to say. All I can do is give you some money but on condition that you don’t try and stop members from playing. The Pujas are coming, so I’ll give you money for the festivities. Don’t come back here from tomorrow.’ I told my caddy to take them to the club office and tell the person there that I had asked him to pay them a certain amount and debit it to my account. And, by God, it worked! They all disappeared quietly.”

However, since the new course meandered too close to the insalubrious neighbourhood, Mr Khaitan decided to sell it to the Government and keep the present course as it is now. *“I drew a line with a red pencil on the map, selling 55 acres and keeping 150 acres. Now the golf course is very compact,”* he says.





“Golf and the Royal became so close to my heart that I could not bear to see the Club in any difficulty. I would see that that any problem was dealt with, through the Secretary, without telling anyone. I will fight for the preservation of the Royal for as long as required,” says Mr Khaitan, showing clearly how much the Club means to him. It is only natural, as his father, uncles, cousins and sons have been, or still are, members. At one time, there were twenty members of the Khaitan family playing golf at the Royal! Mr Khaitan is a member of many other golf Clubs in the country and abroad, but maintains that, *“Nothing can compare to the Royal. Even today, the Royal is an oasis in Kolkata.”* Now an Honorary Life Member, he continues, *“The present management team has done a wonderful job and the golf course is as good as it was in the 1950s. The standard is still there, the serenity is there, the calmness is there. I frankly feel that if the Royal wasn’t there, Kolkata wouldn’t be a happy place.”*

Mr Khaitan’s loyalty and deep fondness for the Club earns him much respect from his fellow members. He accepts this humbly and is truly touched by it.

“I started playing golf as a young man and am still carrying on. The reason for my mental alertness is all due to golf. It makes you think. You concentrate only on the game and forget everything else till the next Monday.”



The Foursome (L to R) - Mr J. Lall, Mr B.M. Khaitan, Mr Raghu Modi & Mr Vijai Singh



Every other sport comes to an end at a particular age but golf you can play till the day you die. It can go with you to the crematorium. Today, my advice to anyone is, take up golf. I enjoyed racing and polo but golf is closest to my heart. Where health is concerned, golf has kept me going. Of course, I need the buggy after playing a few holes, but at 86, I’m still active, moving around.”

It is clear that Mr Khaitan would heartily agree with Arnold Palmer’s assertion: “Golf is without a doubt the greatest game mankind has ever invented.”

~ Sarita Dasgupta



“Tea is not a mere commodity for us. It is heritage based on values and culture full of sentiments and commitments.”

B.M. Khaitan

“The future of the tea industry is on a strong footing,” affirms Mr Khaitan. In India, consumption is rising by 2% annually; that is a total of ten to twenty million kg of tea. *“Expansion within the industry in Assam will be with small growers.”* Traditional Houses do not have fallow land to plant young tea and though uprooting/replanting will allow for a certain increase in crop, the results in the long run may not be productive. *“We have initiated these programmes from the very beginning and that is the reason we are ahead in the industry,”* he states.

The Company takes into consideration quality, quantity and labour wages/cost of rations and this strategy has been effective since 1968. Traditionally, leaf which is hand plucked is considered superior to that collected by mechanical plucking; however, the latter may become the norm in the future. In Africa, mechanical plucking has proved to be a success and in time Assam too will raise the benchmark for quality leaf plucked by mechanical harvesters.

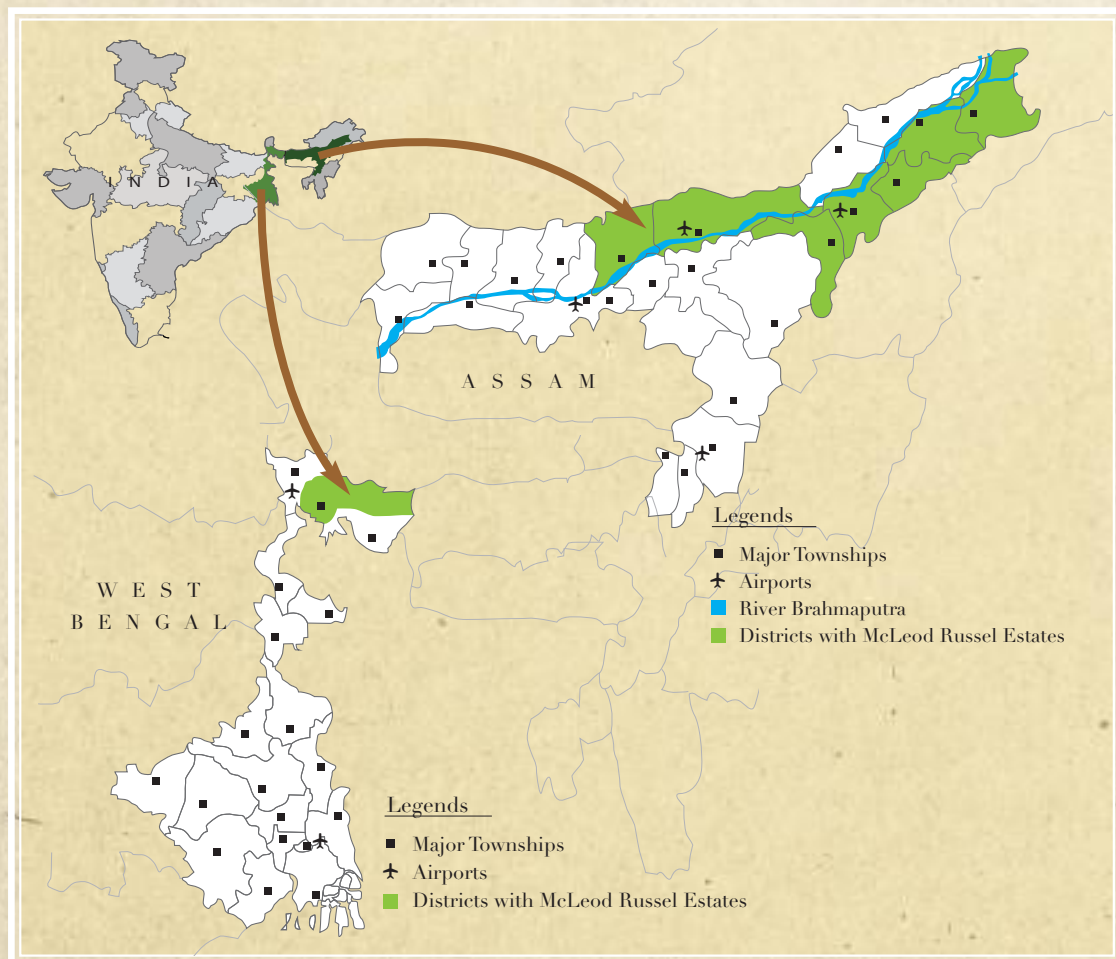
“There is a wave of prosperity sweeping across Assam,” says Mr Khaitan. The middle class has raised the standard of living, investing in homes, cars and businesses. Connectivity is as good as the rest of the country with television, mobile networks and daily flights operating from different cities in the state. The ‘hopper flights’, which made travel between the smaller towns so convenient, are being revived; *“As prosperity in the Northeast is improving, it will draw more airlines to Assam,”* believes Mr Khaitan. There is proficient medical care available for the public and excellent educational institutions; with more newspapers and improved online facilities, the residents of Assam are fully integrated with the outside world.

“Tea is still considered a very special, homely offering socially,” concludes Mr Khaitan. *“When you offer a cup of tea, you do so with your heart. It is personal, unlike a beverage bought from a shop.”*

For the Patriarch, ‘Believe in tea’ is an article of faith.

~ Vidya Kaul





“In the Group there is always a warm and caring feeling for Assam. We know this is where we started from...”

B.M. Khaitan



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