



The Times

The McLeod Russel
House Journal

July 2016



*“Let others sing in praise of wine;
Let others deem it joy divine
Its fleeting bliss will never be mine –
Give me a cup of tea.” (Anon)*

So, sipping a cup of fresh, aromatic tea, delve into this issue...

Those who have been posted at Bhooteachang T.E. and Raidang T.E. can revisit and rekindle memories while those who haven't can explore them in *Treasury*.

In *Narration*, read how the women workers on our estates have been positively influencing their community for decades, while young girls are being educated about their rights and encouraged to find their 'place in the sun'.

Education is a cause that the Company and its executives believe in implicitly. An initiative by a resident of one of the estates was given impetus by the Management, resulting in an English medium school for the estate's children. We bring you the Green Valley Academy at Koomsong T.E. in *Beneficence*.

We have many talented, interesting people working in the Company whom we feature in *Cameo*. This time, it is the turn of an adventurous young planter with an unusual hobby.

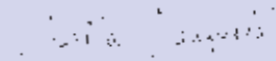
In addition to our regular features, we bring you a story that reflects the fact that the world is indeed 'a small place' and that coincidences, sometimes serendipitous ones, do happen! A poet, writer and inveterate tea drinker from Tasmania, Australia, bought a tea chest off the internet and through a series of happy

coincidences, traced it back to its origins. We invited him to share his story with us in *SerendipiTea*.

All the Company's estates in the Moran circle were part of the Ahom kingdom and still retain relics of their illustrious past but it is Rajmai T.E. which is situated closest to the historic town of Sivasagar. In *The World Around Us*, one of the executives from the estate tells us about the monuments that still remain in and around Sivasagar. Incidentally, a statue of Siu-Ka-Pha, the Shan prince from China who founded the Ahom dynasty in 1228, is situated just outside Lepetkatta T.E.

Six months of the year are gone and the next six lie before us, like chapters of a book waiting to be written. What would we like to achieve? Where would we like to go? What would we like to have happen in our lives? Let's fill those pages with memories we can look back on with happiness and no regrets.

Au revoir ...



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Balipara Foundation Lifetime Service Award 2015

CITATION

“This award is for an individual whose life has been devoted to the ecological welfare of the people of the Eastern Himalayas and whose philosophy and purpose have been guided by the need to protect, restore and care for nature. A true hero; an Indian woman or man who is an inspiration to all.

B.M. Khaitan, the doyen of the tea industry, is known throughout the country for his ethical and moral values and philanthropic way of life. His ingenious move of acquiring tea companies in Assam when several of the big players diluted their interest in plantations, ensured that the tea estates were in safe hands, before those with short-term ulterior motives could lay their hands on them. He has always given special importance to the preservation of natural habitats in and around the tea estates and has been involved in various programmes and initiatives to conserve biodiversity in the surrounding areas. He has helped carry out several much-needed soil conservation programmes. His invaluable support extended to the Assam Valley Wildlife Society helped the Pygmy Hog and White Winged Wood Duck conservation programmes that saw the revival of the almost disappearing populations of these species.

In recognition of his immense contribution to industry, environment, society and humanitarian causes, the Balipara Foundation is humbled to bestow the Lifetime Service Award for 2015 to Shri Brij Mohan Khaitan. His exemplary vision, zeal and enthusiasm are truly inspiring.”



Mr Giri Sodhi retired as Visiting Agent, Assam, after a distinguished career spanning more than three decades. In partnership with his wife, Prabha, he is presently engaged in the promotion of medicinal plants related to oncology, in north-east India.



My Early Days in 'Tea'—Anecdotes

~ G.S. Sodhi, Tezpur

It was on the 14th day of March 1966 – a chilly, foggy morning – that a young man in his early twenties boarded a Fokker Friendship Indian Airlines hopping flight from Calcutta to Tezpur. The aircraft landed at Gauhati and its charted route was Cal – Gau – Tez – Lil – Dib (Mohanbari) and back to Calcutta via Tezpur. The flights, piloted mostly by ex-IAF pilots and those formerly with Jamair and Kalinga Airlines, were invariably on time and without much turbulence! Giri Sodhi was told in Four Mangoe Lane, Calcutta, by Mr Gillem Sandys Lumsdaine that he would be received at Tezpur airport by Mr W. J. Lyness, the Manager of Majulighur T.E.

There were several people at the terminal at Tezpur and when all, including the expatriates had left, only two remained – one of them a short, middle-aged Bengali gentleman and yours truly. At this juncture, Mihir Chaudhary (father to Bidhan and Neela) hesitantly walked up to me and enquired if I could possibly be G.S. Sodhi, the Assistant Manager designate of Majulighur T. E. My nod invited a most disapproving look, probably because the wait at the terminal had been considerably long! I then asked whether he, by any chance, happened to be Mr W.J. Lyness to which his reply was a short and curt, “No such luck! I am just his Pilot Assistant.”

The immediate ‘fallout’ was to head for the IAF Mess a stone’s throw away and we found ourselves in the midst of six fighter pilots who had just returned from their early morning Sortie. When offered a drink I opted for a beer of which there was plenty around the table! Mihir immediately turned around and said, “All this young blighter deserves is a beer mug full of milk!”

The drive to Majulighur was smooth – perhaps lubricated by the couple of beers we had imbibed!

Mihir’s wife, Geeta, was a great hostess – a charming and very warm human being. She took care of me for the next three days or so till Mihir decided that there was a chance of a Fan Club developing right under his very own roof and unceremoniously shunted me off to occupy my own accommodation – No. 5 Bungalow. (I was posted in the Factory.)

Jimmy and Barbara Lyness were great Burra Sahab and Burra Memsahab, except on the evening that I was invited for dinner to meet K.P.S. Gill and B.D. Kharagwal (then the Superintendent and Additional Superintendent of Police respectively, of the erstwhile Darrang District. Both later became DGPs of Assam). Seeing that I had arrived sans a necktie, Jimmy kept me concealed from Barbara in the verandah till he fetched me one from his wardrobe. He obviously knew his gracious but ‘pucca pucca’ wife very well!

A few months later I was asked to share my bungalow with Bhushan Chhabra, then posted as Mistri Sahab at the neighbouring Pertabghur T.E. At that point of time, Pertabghur was one bungalow short as the Chung Bungalow occupied by Alan Leonard had been gutted in a fire. This was one of several thatched bungalows (heavily insured) to be gutted during the late 60s much to the dismay and disbelief of the insurers.

Bhushan was very possessive of his newly acquired sky blue Herald car and most reluctant to part with the steering wheel even to his good friend, Giri Sodhi, particularly driving back from an Air Force party in the wee hours of the morning! He would rather pull off the road and take a short snooze to freshen up, but always drove himself. The only exception to the rule was his bearer-cum-driver, Dasro, who had the privilege of driving this buggy out of the garage, washing, polishing and putting it back under covers every Sunday. All was well for a few Sundays till one fine morning Dasro, while reversing the car into the garage, put his foot on the accelerator instead of the brake... The deafening crash woke Bhushan up! After expensive repairs, he willingly offered the vehicle to his good and trusted friend, yours truly, who by then had been allocated a ten-month-old white Ambassador car in almost mint condition which had belonged to John Stephen, the Mistri Sahab at Behali T.E.

Although I did not take up Bhushan’s offer often, I did so on one or two occasions, to look up my girlfriend at Monabarie – perhaps the first step towards the merger with Jardine Henderson or what is today known as MRIL!!

Treasury



~ Sarita Dasgupta

The 149-year-old Bhooteachang T.E. is situated in the Udalguri District of Assam, 125 kilometres from Guwahati. The estate lies by the foothills of Bhutan, very close to where the borders shared by Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Bhutan converge, and is just 24 kilometres from the pilgrimage centre, Bhairab Kund, where the river Bhairab flows serenely through unspoiled natural splendour.



It is believed that the ancient name for the area where the estate is located was Khalingduar, named after one of the six 'duars' or 'passes' in the Bhutan hills bordering the area. It is mentioned in the travelogues of authors who had passed through the 'duar' while exploring the Himalayan kingdoms of Bhutan and Sikkim. The Bhutanese people also used this pass to come to the Indian side in order to trade. Some of them settled here, building their distinctive homes on stilts, called 'changs'. As the Bhutanese were called 'Bhutias' by the local populace, the area where they lived came to be known as Bhutiachang.

Macneil & Barry Limited were the pioneers who planted tea at Bhutiachang in 1867. Although they retained the name for the estate, they spelled it 'Bhooteachang'.

In the beginning, the leaf was taken to Kalaigaon on bullock carts for manufacturing at Singrimari T.E. from where the finished product was brought to Tangla and dispatched to Calcutta by rail.

The forest that lay between Bhooteachang and Tangla was populated by tigers and herds of elephants, and the person driving a bullock cart carrying tea to Kalaigaon and Singrimari T.E. through the forest path would quite often be attacked by tigers. In fact, there was a particular area where such incidents frequently occurred, and this was christened 'Baaghe Khowa' ('Tiger Bitten' or 'Tiger Eaten'). After suffering many casualties, the Company decided to build a factory on the estate and commissioned engineers from Calcutta to do so in 1897. However, after about a year of having their colleagues attacked by tigers, the engineers all returned to Calcutta. Fortunately, some of the workers had learnt to run the factory machinery by then, one of them being Jhondhe Kheria who became the first Generator Operator.



Although tiger attacks are a thing of the past now, herds of elephants from the Khalingduar forest are still regular visitors to the estate, and

sometimes cause a great deal of damage. Many ways and means have been explored to keep these mammoths away, but to no avail. In 2011 the estate's workers, along with the residents of the neighbouring estates and villages, got together and decided to leave food (mostly truckloads of bananas) at the edge of the forest for the elephants, hoping that this would stop them from coming to the villages and tea estates looking for food. In 2014,

Bhooteachang was felicitated for its concerted efforts at elephant conservation by 'Elephants on Line', an initiative by the University of North Carolina, USA, to preserve these animals from man-animal conflicts.



Other creatures that may stray into the estate from time to time – such as snakes or baby hares – are rescued and handed over to the proper authorities for rehabilitation.



It was Jhonde Kheria, the first Generator Operator, who is believed to have planted

the Ficus Robusta inside the factory compound in 1901. A huge gong dating back to around 1935 used to be tied to the tree. This would be struck to announce the 'kamjari' timings before the advent of the siren.



Ficus Robusta



An 'antique' item – the weighing scales in the estate office – dates back to 1905 and was used to weigh the parcels before they were sent

to the Post Office. It is still in use today even after 110 years! Another relic of the past is a water tank dating back to 1942.

Kalsi Division



The estate has two Divisions, of which the larger – Kalsi – comprises 314.58 hectares while the smaller – Nonoi – covers 257.17 hectares. Kalsi Division slopes from north to south at a gradient of 150 feet which serves as a major obstacle in surface water retention, thus magnifying the effect of drought in the Division. 85% of the estate has been covered under DTW Irrigation as its greatest defense against drought. Bhutia Nullah, a small stream flowing parallel to the Division, was diverted into the Division's drought prone areas and 'zero' year young tea in 2015, following the principles of flood irrigation.



There is a Ganesh temple in the Division where the workers of the estate pay their respects.



Nonoi Division has 13.09 hectares of manually planted afforestation area which gives shelter to hundreds of elephants during the rains and from the scorching summer sun. A 'bundh' built in 1989 along the bank of the river Nonoi protects the Division from floods.

A tree house built during the tenure of Mr F. P. Ansari provides a panoramic view of the Nonoi River.





The estate is following a continuous and sustained programme of replanting after uprooting an average of 20 hectares of the total area. A rejuvenation planting programme is underway in 35.72 hectares. Around 2,00,000 plants on an average are planted under the continuous Infilling Programme.



The tea nursery has an average turnover of 4,50,000 saplings so far, and has the capacity to nurture 5,00,000 saplings in future.

Around 65 MT of vermi-compost is produced by the estate, which is utilized to enrich the soil in various field practices including replanting and infilling. 35 MT of



Novcom is produced for enrichment of the top soil in the young tea areas and around 120 KL of BHS (Bio Humic Solution) is cultured for foliar application which builds up the health of the bushes, especially in Kalsi Division. Vermi-wash production has been introduced since last year, projecting an annual production of around 13 KL.



The estate's Management has also initiated a vermi-compost project at a neighbouring village to help the villagers earn additional income.



Vermi-compost: CSR Project

The annual estimated crop for the estate is around 8.5 lakh, with the highest crop – 13.31 lakh – being recorded in 2010. Although the mainstay of the production line is CTC teas, the estate has successfully attempted a sizeable production of Orthodox teas lately.



Hospital & Mehboob Ali (inset)



The wellbeing of the workers is of paramount importance to the Management of the estate, in keeping with the Company's ethos.

The hospital, built in 1916 – a hundred years ago – is continuously modernized and well equipped to look after the health care of the estate's populace. Records say that the first Medical Officer was Mehboob Ali, a Legal Medical Practitioner from Tangla. He managed to save the lives of many a worker injured by elephants and tigers. Mehboob Ali's son, Taffajul, was a talented lyricist, musician and writer. He retired as the HoD of Assamese at Guwahati Commerce College and passed away in 2008. He was awarded the Padmashree for Art & Literature posthumously in 2009.

Since Mehboob Ali's time, sixteen qualified medical professionals have successively and successfully taken care of the residents of the estate.

The hospital is the first among the tea estate hospitals in the Mangaldai cluster to have been nominated as a protégé under the National Health Mission by the District Health Society, Udalguri. This has enabled the Management to receive a grant of ₹7.5 lakh annually towards promoting and sustaining health care initiatives amongst the residents of the workers' Lines, including



Medical Camps

non-working family members, thereby ensuring total health care for the populace. A recent initiative is documenting the haemoglobin levels of the estate's female population in order to ensure that the estate achieves an 'Anaemia-Free' status in the next three years.

The resident Senior Medical Officer along with his team, and with the support and encouragement of the Management, has successfully launched and sustained several programmes on primary health care in the District.

The hospital personnel have been felicitated by the District TB Unit for three consecutive years for their efforts towards Effective Control of TB among the estate's residents. The rampant cases of malaria of the past have been arrested due to prolific anti-malaria measures implemented annually around the estate.

The novel approach of keeping 'low birth-weight' babies interned, administering the best of neo-natal care under constant supervision till they achieve 2.5 kg body weight, has resulted in the effective control of infant mortality. The hospital's programmes on Control of Maternal and Child Mortalities have been lauded by the Regional Resource Centre, Guwahati. The estate has contributed to the Company's CSR initiatives by promoting IOL implantation among retired staff and workers; hosting health camps for the aged and infirm; and distributing orthopaedic aids among the differently abled residents.



The estate's LP Schools impart free primary education to the workers' children. An alumnus, Sri D.K. Chauhan, went on to qualify as a journalist and has won many accolades for sterling work in the field of journalism.

The Jawa Community Video Unit based at Dimakusi T.E. was set up in 2010. They produced their first Video Magazine, 'Aiy Podbo', (Come, let's Study) on the

importance of education among the tea garden community. The screenings at Bhooteachang were immediately followed by changes, many of them taking place overnight. The workers admitted themselves and their children at the night school in Bhooteachang. Workers like Line Chowkidar (watchman) Anmol Deka signed up their whole family in the school. He says that it is an opportunity that he would not want to miss. The school is currently holding classes for around 100 people.

Saraswati Puja is celebrated by the teachers and students of the estate's LP school every year. Durga Puja and Kali Puja are celebrated with great pomp by the whole estate, although the latter has always been celebrated in January, unlike in the rest of the country.

Sports and cultural activities are popular among the workers, and the estate's youth are very keen on sports such as football, participating enthusiastically in inter-Line and inter-garden tournaments, such as the Bhooteachang Trophy, which is held with great fanfare.

Bhooteachang was awarded the Best Performance Award for Mangaldai & Thakurbari Districts in 2010-11, and the estate's Management has always strived towards implementing and achieving the concept of 'Good Governance' for its workers and their families. Towards this end, the Management encourages all the workers to send their children to school; implements the principles of Fair Treatment both at work and after hours; promotes the concept of 'Total Health Care' by providing palliative

and preventative medical care for all; ensures that people of every religion have the freedom to follow their own customs; and, under the Company's CSR initiatives, makes sure that every adult resident has a means of livelihood for basic sustenance.

We wish the team at Bhooteachang success in all their endeavours.

(With inputs from Mr A.P. Singh & Dr S. Bisswall)



The Team (L to R): B. Pandey, J. Deka, N. Saikia, A. P. Singh (Manager), M.S. Rathore & Dr S. Bisswall

Sakina Hussain was an Assistant Editor with The WM Times from its inception till her husband was posted with PhuBen in Vietnam. She continues the association with her regular contributions to Phu Ben Communique.

Celebrating years



– Sakina Hussain
Phu Ben, Vietnam

On 8 March 1995, an industrious group of people got together to form the relatively small PhuBen Joint Venture company in the sleepy hamlet of Thanh Ba Village in north Vietnam. This year the Company celebrated its 20th anniversary. Someone once said, “Teamwork is the secret that makes common people achieve uncommon results.” This is so true of PhuBen, whose name literally means ‘riches forever’. From a modest start of one factory and a plantation, today the Company under the McLeod Russel banner, with seven factories and three plantations, is the biggest producer and exporter of tea in Vietnam. Thanh Ba too has grown with PhuBen and is a bustling town now!



The function to celebrate the occasion was held on 26 November 2015 in the company hall. We were humbled to receive a number of honourable guests. The event was graced by Her Excellency Mrs Preeti Saran – Indian Ambassador to Vietnam; Mr Aditya Khaitan – Vice Chairman and MD, Mcleod Russel; Mr Rajeev Takru and Mr Azam Monem – Directors, Mcleod Russel; and Mr Dhruva Guha Sircar – General Manager, McLeod Russel.

We were also honoured to receive distinguished guests from Phu Tho Province – His Excellency Mr Hoang Dan Mac – Party Secretary, Chairman of People’s Council and several other heads of various government departments.



The evening began with the singing of the National Anthems of India and Vietnam, followed by a cultural programme of traditional songs and dances. The strong tenor voices of the singers and the graceful movements and colourful costumes of the dancers entertained all present.



The evening of mirth and enjoyment also had a sense of achievement and satisfaction. PhuBen was elated to receive the prestigious Hung Vuong Memorial Medal from the Province.

The speeches have fired the enthusiasm of all at PhuBen, I'm sure.



A sit down dinner for 250 people on the PhuBen House lawn followed. The elaborate Vietnamese cuisine was enjoyed by all. Several toasts later, the evening came to an end with a jubilant Team PhuBen raising their teacups and pledging their undying effort to successfully ride the tough tide. Here's to the next twenty!

It's
a **Wild World** 



~ Rupa Saikia
Boroi T.E.

One summer evening some moons ago, when we were at Nya Gogra T.E., my husband and daughter returned from the local market and handed me the shopping bag, filled not with the products I had expected, but this tiny brown ball of fur, who turned out to be an adorable baby civet cat. They had rescued him from the vegetable vendor's basket after hearing him mewling plaintively. Of course, palms had to be greased before he was reluctantly handed over.

He was beautiful, this little being, with coal black eyes and a small black nose in a pointed face, offset by a soft grey furry body, and a tail as long as his body, which would be curled protectively around him when he slept. Having had some experience rearing another civet cat earlier, this time around I was rather confident of looking after this little

one. Soon he was hungrily sucking milk from an ink-dropper. Then with a full stomach, he warily looked around and promptly disappeared under the bedroom closet. That first night was a quiet one, with me checking on him time and again, but letting him be, since he was still very scared. The next few days passed by with us seeing him only at mealtimes. Then one morning he woke me up with that lovable 'tick-tock-click' language, the civet tongue I was familiar with. He was sitting on the bed next to my ear and chattering away, probably asking me to hurry up with his breakfast! I knew then that I had won his trust and that was the start of a beautiful relationship.

We christened him Pit-Pat, as his tiny feet would busily patter around the bungalow as he explored his new surroundings. However, our boisterous family of five



doggies and two cats were highly aggrieved at the sudden ban on their entry into the bedroom, and were constantly at the door, begging to be let in. It was time to introduce Pit-Pat to the rest of his family. At first he was petrified by this sudden barrage of huge, unknown animals sniffing him all over and even turning him upside down to inspect him fully! Then Wendy, our German Spitz, took him under her wing and they were soon inseparable companions. As he grew, Pit-Pat became boisterous in his games, which Wendy found difficult to cope with, and so he slowly became friendly with the rest of his four-legged family. But however much he played around, time and again he would look for me, climbing onto my shoulders and affectionately nibbling my ears. If he didn't see me, there would be an onslaught of high pitched calls, which I answered in my own imitation of his voice, and he would quieten down once he found me. All this while he was growing at a furious rate and soon developed the customary black stripes on his body and tail, and those long canines which he would occasionally bare at the bungalow help should they dare to stop him entering the bedroom! Another favourite pastime of his was to snap at the bare toes of the helpers and one would often see them dancing around the house with this tiny chap busily nipping at those tempting toes.

Pit-Pat was very affectionate towards his three human family members, sitting on our laps or sleeping on our stomachs. He loved being around us. He also loved napping in a corner of the ceiling of the verandah, with

his long tail dangling down. Well, we've had many a visitor beating a hasty retreat, deeming it to be a snake! And we've also had others running away from behind a closed gate when they perceived a motley group of dogs, cats and a civet cat, barking and mewing, all running towards them on hearing the gate being opened! Perhaps Pit-Pat had an identity crisis then!!! Often when I would be gardening, he would pounce on my fingers. The first time this happened, I fell backwards in shock in the most ungainly manner and that too, right in front of the 'malis'. I did suffer from a bruised ego for a few days! And of course, the bungalow always inevitably looked like a hurricane had worked its way through it, with the furniture all askew and clothes, magazines, etcetera, thrown all over. This was the result of the hide-and-seek games that were regularly indulged in by all our pets, with our daughter and me joining in the melee most times! Those were fun days indeed. But our little Pit-Pat had suddenly matured over the year and he now had the characteristic smell of civet cats. We would be compelled to change our clothes when he rubbed himself against us, since the smell was overpowering. Then too, he would take off during the day into the tea bushes and reappear in the evening or sometimes not at all. The frequency of his disappearances increased, until he left home altogether. No, we did not call for him for it was Nature who had claimed her own. We missed him terribly as did our doggies. And so we were left with another set of paw prints imprinted forever in our hearts...





~ Sameer Singh
Pfunda T.E.



Sameer Singh has recently been transferred to Pfunda from India, and is enjoying exploring the estate and its surrounding areas.

Lake Kivu – Boon or Bane?



The greatest advantage of being posted at Pfunda is its close proximity to the beautiful and picturesque Lake Kivu which is luckily just around 20 minutes' drive from Pfunda Tea Estate.

Lake Kivu, which shares its vast surface area of 2,730 square km between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, is the sixth largest lake in Africa. It has a maximum depth of 485 metres. Idjui Island, the world's tenth largest inland island, lies in Lake Kivu too.

Interestingly, the fish population in Lake Kivu is relatively poor and includes just a few species. The reason behind this is the high gaseous content in the lake which also restricts the size of the fish.

With peace and tranquility prevailing in Rwanda after the infamous genocide of 1994, various small beach towns like Gisenyi, Kibuye and Cyangugu have emerged as some very attractive destinations for the 'locals' as well as for domestic

and foreign tourists. Hotels catering to the needs of tourists ranging from those on a shoestring budget to high end niche tourists have emerged in these areas. Not to forget the small, cozy shacks and restaurants which have sprung up along the beautiful beaches of the lake!

My favourite is this particular pub in Gisenyi which transforms into a very lively joint on the weekends. It plays some very soulful Congolese Rumba music, enticing many a 'local' as well as tourists.

However, the other reason why Lake Kivu remains in the headlines is because of its rich methane content. It is roughly around 60 billion cubic metres along with 300 billion cubic metres of carbon dioxide existing in the lake.

Other than that, there are various other deadly gases which come from the very famous Nyiragongo volcano, thus representing both danger and a vast economic potential.

It has great economic potential because of the rich methane content which, if effectively extracted, could easily generate 700 MW of electricity over a period of 55 years, thereby





solving the power supply issue of Rwanda to a large extent.

But again, this very lake poses a big threat to 2 million people living around the Lake Kivu basin with Mount Nyiragongo being just around 20 km north of it.

For those of us not aware of Mount Nyiragongo, it is an active volcano with an elevation of 3,470 metres (11,382 feet) in the Virunga Mountains. It has erupted at least thirty-four times since 1882, with the latest eruption being as recent as 2002, in which 147 people lost their lives and 4,00,000 people had to be evacuated. The hot, molten lava erupting from it destroyed 15% of the town in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, comprising 4,500 buildings including the Goma International Airport, before it eventually flowed down to Lake Kivu.



That triggered a fair amount of fear and anxiety among many people who thought that the mixing of the lava and the various gases present in Lake Kivu could create a catastrophic reaction leading to a wide explosion of poisonous gases endangering the lives of millions.

Fortunately, nothing like that happened, but researchers and scientists still do feel that with an enormous volume of various gases present in the lake, it does pose a potential threat along with vast available opportunities.

Only time will tell whether this great lake will be transformed into a huge pool of energy for the people of Rwanda and its neighbour, the Democratic Republic of Congo, or turn into a major threat to its surroundings.

Till then, I keep my fingers crossed and hope for the best for this beautiful 'Land of a Thousand Hills' – Rwanda.



~ Nick Flittner

Launceston, Tasmania, Australia

Bordubi C06047B



The Tea Chest came into my life on a sunny Tasmanian morning. It was Friday, January 1st 2016. I bought it off the internet. I liked the look of it – I thought it would look good in my old Victorian house in Launceston.

It was a standard Tea Chest, the sort commonly used for moving house years ago. My brother-in-law, a removalist, hated these chests – they had metal strips along the edges which often caused cuts and tears, and the owners always filled them so full that they were too heavy to pick up. But I liked this Tea Chest – there was large stencilled lettering on every side. The man I bought it from, John, didn't know much about it other than that he had bought it in September 2015 from someone in Longford, a small town about 15 minutes away from Launceston.

From the lettering I quickly learned that this Tea Chest came from Assam, and it was called Bordubi. I didn't know what that meant, or even where Assam was, other than in India somewhere. I went back to the internet and discovered that Assam is a region in north-eastern India where a lot of tea comes from. And Bordubi is a tea estate there. I couldn't find much information, but I came across a photograph of the General Manager's house on the Bordubi Estate, on a website run by a lady called Shona Patel. I e-mailed her...

Hello Shona – I've just bought an old Indian tea chest, and it is covered in writing. It's from Bordubi, and has a number – C06047B. On one side it says It Pays To Buy Good Tea! It has the trader's (I assume – or grower's?) name on it – George Williamson (Assam) Ltd, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Gurwahati 781001.

I did a search on Bordubi and it brought me to your website. Can you tell me anything about Bordubi – does it still grow tea? Have you been there? What was/is it like?

I'm intrigued. I live in Launceston, Tasmania most of the time and sometimes in London. Or elsewhere. I've never been to India. That is high on my wishlist. In the meantime I have a little touch of India in my living room!

Hope to hear from you soon.

And I did – Shona wrote back immediately.....

Hi there Nick,

Yes I am familiar with Bordubi Tea Estate and am friends with the current General Manager and his wife. Bordubi is located in the Tinsukia district of Upper Assam and makes very fine Assam Tea. It is a very beautiful tea estate. Here is a photo of the bungalow:

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/48695239698584618/>

Let me know how else I can assist you!

Happy New Year!

Nick Flittner comes from a long line of farmers from Cornwall, England, dating back to the 1600s. He had a small farm in Tasmania until a few years ago and worked for the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association from 2007-2010 as their Drought and Climate Change Manager. He is currently managing a project at the University of Tasmania to encourage more people from rural areas to go to university. He is a writer and a poet and would love to visit India, and Bordubi, one day.



Bordubi Tea & Chest Reunited





The 'Mistris'

TREE ROOF

~ Nick Flittner

*I can't possibly reach the top
where denuded fingers
tickle the sky*

*and branches light of leaves
hold out and wave.*

*My eyes grin
through wind-whipped tears
and I feel rooted*

*to earth
to the earth,
beneath the boughs*

*beneath the sky,
beneath the time-full
ages of trees.*

A Spoonful of Bordubi Tea



The Lavender Plant - A Living Memorial to Ramanuj



And from there I was put in touch with Sarita Dasgupta who lives on the Bordubi Estate and she has told me all about Bordubi and sent me photos of the people who actually made the Tea Chest and it's all very interesting and exciting. It's a world I knew very little about. I love tea and drink a lot of it, and it seems there could be Bordubi tea in any number of the teas that I drink!

I would love to find out how the Tea Chest came to be in Tasmania, and something of its journey from the Bordubi Estate to my house in Cimitiere Street in Launceston, Tasmania. It sits in pride of place and every now and then I turn it around so I can read the lettering on each side.

Bordubi C06047B George Williamson (Assam) Ltd, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Guwahati 781001.

It Pays To Buy Good Tea

Indian Tea 4-1991

Bordubi C06047B (with MM stamped above)

And details of the shipment on the bottom - *Gross weight 45.6kg Nett weight 41.0kg*

I understand that Tea Chests aren't used any more and the tea is shipped in vacuum packed bags nowadays. Very sensible I'm sure. But I'm thrilled to think that I have a piece of Indian history sitting in my living room proudly displaying my Peace Lily.

The sequel...

17 April 2016: *Hello Sarita - Bordubi arrives! I came home last week to find a notice in my letter box - a parcel awaits at the Post Office! With great excitement I collected the package and brought it home. But I had to wait till the weekend to open it, when two of my kids - Anna and James - would be visiting. My other daughter Emma bought me a tea set as a belated birthday present. She knew all about the Chest and she told me a few weeks ago she had found 'the perfect present' I had promised them a Tea Party.*

And Tea Party it was!

I opened the well-sealed bag of tea with an enormous kitchen knife! Then, the Bordubi Tea was placed in the Bordubi Tea Chest for the first time since 1991... a homecoming. While I fully intend drinking all the tea, I have left a spoonful in the bag in the chest, so the Tea Chest will once again fulfil its destiny and its role in life - holding Bordubi tea.

So there you have it. Bordubi Tea and the Tea Chest are reunited, and I am really enjoying the flavour of the tea. It is very strong, which is how I like it, I'll experiment over the next few days to get the amounts just right.

So thank you so much! And please thank Ramanuj.

Time for a cuppa!

Regards,

Nick

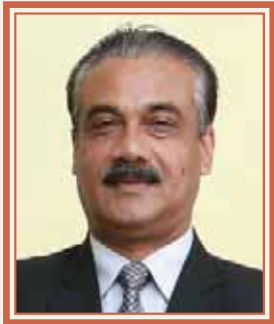
Epilogue

7 May 2016: *Hello Sarita - excuse the intrusion, and I hope you don't mind, but I've planted a Lavender plant in my garden in honour and memory of Ramanuj. It is in a huge urn right outside my kitchen window. I put a teaspoon of Bordubi tea in the soil, so the plant is sitting on the leaves Ramanuj sent me so recently. My little garden does not get much direct sunlight, but the urn is in the best spot where the Lavender plant should thrive.*

Sincerely,

Nick

BENEFACTORS



~ Leslie Peter Watts
Assam Valley School

Mr Leslie Watts has been at the Assam Valley School from the very beginning and has seen its progress first hand. He can take credit for shaping many lives over the last twenty-one years. Presently, he is the Event Manager at the school.

MOVING ON...

Two decades later and scores of successful and happy alumni, eager to return to their alma mater, the Assam Valley School stands tall and always eager to take on challenges in an ever changing educational landscape. Like any other successful industry our strength has been our ability to adapt to latest trends and to keep abreast with innovative methods of teaching and guiding young boys and girls in making the most of their innate potential.

The year gone by saw AVS reap rich dividends on the academic firmament with superlative examination results at the ICSE and the ISC level. While the entire community worked hard to ensure stellar board results, the teachers kept upgrading their skills in order to bring learning alive for children. Traditional methods of chalk and talk are seen far less now in the classrooms and students are guided to become active and lifelong learners. With parents becoming more discerning and actually shopping around for good value for their hard earned money it really is par for the course if establishments like AVS wish to stay in business. Then again, children too, are

Chief Guest Rabul Bose at Founders' 2015



more aware of the world around them, better informed of their rights and more concerned about having aspirations and realistic goals. Gone too are the days of gullible toddlers and teenagers who believed in Santa and tooth fairies. So, the last year saw lots of ground being covered in professional development so as to enable teachers to be able to deliver sterling service by incorporating active learning, learning through drama and effective use of technology.

We pride ourselves on being a school where the focus is on the all round development of an individual and not mere academic proficiency. Against this rather lofty backdrop it is indeed a daunting task to offer worthwhile opportunities to young boys and girls where they can discover and enjoy talents in sport and culture.

We hosted the North East Soccer Tournament, the first Invitational Swimming Meet and an Invitational Basketball Meet. We have improved upon our cricket grounds and equipment and hope that this will translate into better cricket both away and at home. It is important that we constantly look outwards and pit ourselves against the



Alumni Meet

Rebirth of a Tree, Ardhanarishvara



best talent in the country and to this end we have done particularly well at tennis, coming home with trophies at the National Level last February and May. We also

did quite well in Squash, with Sanjukta David, Dewangi Sharma and Junafisa Pakyntein walking off with bronze at the IPSC Under-19 tournament held at Daly College, Indore in April 2015. Twelve players trotted off to Chennai in February 2016 being selected for the SGFI Nationals (ISA). Gaining membership to the Indian Public Schools Conference (IPSC) has also meant that our top performers in various disciplines have been able to benchmark their talent – both as individuals and as a team – on a much bigger sporting arena.

Dance and music have flourished and we have had some international accolades as well in Dance. Our Indian folk and classical dancers and Indian musicians did us proud at the All India Pune Fest held in May 2015 and also at the International Dance Fest held in Bangkok in December 2015. Of course these outings across the length and breadth of the country are expensive affairs but at the end of the day the euphoria of knowing you are the best, the confidence it embeds, the friendships it forges and the goodwill it fosters, makes it all worthwhile. The Athenaeum once again hosted the prestigious East India Debates and although we lifted the trophy after many years, we stuck to tradition and presented the winner's trophy to the runners-up – Vasant Valley School, New Delhi. For the very first time at Founders' 2015 we really had a coming together of Indian and Western Music, Indian and Western Dance and Theatre in a wonderfully coordinated adaptation of Rabindranath Tagore's 'Tasher Desh'. The Mass PT and the Torchlight Tattoo which had been abandoned for many

years were revived. The students were delighted to have Rahul Bose as the Chief Guest at Speeches and his speech which was anecdotal was received very well by one and all inspiring them to be positive through the troughs of life and not to forget to be humble at the crests. We were fortunate to be able to host renowned flautist Pt Hari Prasad Chaurasia in March 2016.

It is always a good thing to try and build tradition and the long forgotten Rock Concert was revived last year to the sheer delight of all the students and the Fete, which was discontinued about seven years ago, is being merged with the Summer Fest. We are cut off from the outside world and living such an insular life for an extended period cannot be good for anyone. Such interludes which have nothing to do with academics are something to look forward to and they help ease tensions in the absence of educational outings and expeditions – these too, I have no doubt, will be revived in the very near future. We have moved forward on every front and the awkward transitional phase will only fight for fleeting mention in the annals of the school's history.



ASSAM VALLEY LITERARY AWARD



The Assam Valley Literary Award for 2015 was conferred on Sri Apurba Sarma – renowned novelist, short story writer and former Editor of ‘Ajir Asom’, the Assamese daily from The Sentinel Group.

Graduating in Economics (Honours) from the prestigious Cotton College, Guwahati, Sri Sarma went on to do his M.A. in Economics from Guwahati University. After a three-year stint as a Staff Reporter for The Assam Tribune, he taught Economics at Nowgong Girls’ College from where he retired as Principal in 2002. Sri Sarma returned to journalism and worked as Editor of ‘Ajir Asom’ from 2004 to 2012.

Sri Sarma received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2000 for his collection of short stories called ‘Baghe Tapur Rati’ and the Swarna Kamal (the National Award for the Best Book in Cinema) for his book ‘Asomiya

Chalachitrar Cha-Pohar’ in 2002. His short story ‘Bahiroloi Jowa Baat’ was adapted into a screenplay for an award-winning film called ‘Dwaar’ (Door).

Sri Sarma received the Award from the Chief Guest, Dr Chandrakant Patil, celebrated poet, critic, translator and editor in Marathi and Hindi. Dr Patil is on the jury for various literary awards, including the Sahitya Akademi Award.

In his speech, past recipient of the Award and present panel member, Dr Lakshmi Nandan Bora, lauded the Williamson Magor Group’s efforts to promote the literary, cultural and social heritage of the state.

Sri Apurba Sarma modestly said in his acceptance speech that while he was honoured

to receive the prestigious Award, he felt that he was “far from mastering the legacy” of his predecessors, nor had he been able to “mark out the right path” for his successors. However, he pledged to be a “part of the endeavour” of all those “engaged in rediscovering humanity against the terrible anti-human forces.”

Coincidentally, his brother, Sri Arun Sarma, was conferred the Assam Valley Literary Award in 2005.



L to R: Mr R.S. Jhavar, Dr Chandrakant Patil, Sri Apurba Sarma, Mr P. Chaudhary & Dr Lakshmi Nandan Bora

Karan Jaswal has been a sportsman since childhood. When he started playing cricket seriously from the age of twelve he realized the importance of maintaining a balance between sports and studies. He endeavours to impart this knowledge to the students of the Green Valley Academy, Koomsong T.E., in whose progress he takes a keen interest.



GREEN VALLEY ACADEMY – KOOMSONG T.E.

~ Karan Jaswal, Koomsong T.E.



Smti Rita Kishan (extreme left) & Sri Pandu Kishan (in white shirt) with teachers and students

The Green Valley Academy was established in 2012 with the idea of making the English language accessible to the children of Koomsong. The school was initiated by Smti Rita Kishan and her husband, Sri Pandu Kishan. Both played a vital role in executing the foundation of an English medium school in the neighbourhood. Sri Kishan, who finished his high school education from local schools, could not complete his graduation as he lacked



knowledge of the English language. The nearest English medium school was a 40-minute walk from the estate. It was this that inspired Sri Kishan to work towards a better future for the children of his locality.

The estate's Management made the land available for The Green Valley Academy to build a school and run classes from Lower KG to Class II. The Management also helped the Academy



with building material to construct a good infrastructure and ensured that toilets were included. The focus of the Management is not only to provide English medium education to the estate's children but also to ensure that they are inculcated with the right civic values at a young age. I have personally taken an interest in introducing a Physical Training (PT) period besides the recess, as physical activities during childhood are vital for the health of children. The Green Valley Academy currently has sixty-four students, which is a big number given that the average strength of students in a school in this region is between thirty and forty.

The estate's Management is committed to the cause of The Green Valley Academy and will continue to provide help and support in the school's progress towards developing a better educational system in the area.



Empowering Women on the Tea Estates



~ Sarita Dasgupta

When one thinks of an empowered woman, the image that comes to mind more often than not is of an educated, financially independent woman.

The women workers of the tea estates certainly earn their own living but many of them, especially those above 50 years of age, have never been to school. Others dropped out after Class 8 or so while a few of them have finished school. Yet, these are the women who are members of the Mothers' Club – the group that assists each estate's Medical Team and Management to communicate important messages regarding health and hygiene in the workers' colonies or Lines.

The Mothers' Club

The Mothers' Club at Bordubi T.E. has representatives from all the workers' Lines. Of the twenty-two members, fourteen have never been to school. Yet, they were nominated by their respective Line Chowkidars and have the respect of their fellow workers. Three of the women – Subho Khecha, Jayanti Bhokna and Janki Pator – have been members since the Club was founded in 1998. All three did not receive a formal education but are the most active and respected members of the Mothers' Club because of their strong personalities, positive attitude, maturity and empathy, according to their fellow members. "Our people are willing to listen to us," says Subho Khecha. Having personally experienced the disadvantages of not being formally educated, they are able to convince the workers of the importance of educating their children and sending them to the estate's LP Schools. "In the last eighteen years, the Mothers' Club has

managed to bring about positive changes in the attitude and lifestyle of the estate's workers," says Janki Pator with a sense of satisfaction.

The following are some of the areas in which this group of women has brought about changes:

1. Personal & Social Hygiene and Sanitation (Hand washing; cleanliness of the home, surroundings and Lines; washing of food items; boiling of drinking water; cleanliness of latrines and ablution area)
2. Spreading awareness of the causes, symptoms and treatment of communicable diseases such as TB, Leprosy, Diarrhea, Malaria, Japanese Encephalitis
3. The importance of education
4. Proper nutrition, especially for children and pregnant women
5. The advantages of hospital births, pre- and post-natal care, and availing of various government sponsored schemes
6. Spreading awareness about the importance of regular vaccinations and de-worming for children
7. Ensuring that children and pregnant women take their Iron and Folic acid tablets to prevent anaemia
8. Maintaining social harmony in the Lines (eg by curbing alcohol abuse)
9. Educating people about proper waste disposal in their household and Lines
10. Disseminating ideas for the betterment of the community and bringing the correct feedback to the Management and Medical Team

The Adolescent Girls' Club

The Adolescent Girls' Club on each estate plays a very important role in educating young girls about their rights as women and human beings, thus empowering them. 27-year-old Higher Secondary educated Purnima Bhumij of Bordubi T.E. was chosen by the Circle Coordinator to undergo training before she was appointed as the Facilitator for the two Clubs at Bordubi T.E. – Togor and Drishti; Rosemary at Phillobari T.E. and Jyoti Madhuri at Koomsong T.E. She holds weekly meetings for the members of each club, in which she propagates ideas such as the importance of education and the ill effects of underage marriage. She hopes that the members will impart these ideas amongst their friends as well. In fact, some girls who had dropped out of school for some reason or the other have enrolled once again.

The members are encouraged to play sports like basketball and volleyball and participate in dance and aerobics workshops in order to develop their talents and gain self-confidence.

"If I can empower even a handful of adolescent girls by educating and influencing them to make the right choices, I will be serving society," says Purnima.



McLeod Russel PGTI Tour Championship at RCGC, 24 - 27 December 2015

S. Chikkarangappa



Jyoti Randhawa



Khalin Joshi



The top sixty players from the Rolex Ranking 2015, including former champion S.S.P. Chowrasia along with Jyoti Randhawa, Khalin Joshi, Gaganjeet Bhullar, Rahil Gangjee, Chiragh Kumar, Himmat Singh Rai, Digvijay Singh and players from four foreign countries (M. Siddikur Rahman – Bangladesh, Mithun Perera – Sri Lanka, Koh Deng Shan – Singapore and Sean Navin Shrestha Einhaus – Germany) were seen in action at the Rs 1.5 crore prize money McLeod Russel Tour Championship, the PGTI's year-ending tournament, held at the prestigious Royal Calcutta Golf Club from 24 to 27 December 2015.

The tournament was a 72-hole stroke-play championship with no cut applied after 36 holes.

The Pro-Am event preceding the tournament was played on 22 and 23 December.

The 2013 PGTI 'Emerging Player of the Year', Bengaluru's S. Chikkarangappa, achieved double honours by capping a memorable 2015 with a victory at the season-ending McLeod Russel Tour Championship that also won him his maiden Rolex Player of the Year title for the PGTI order of merit. At 22 years and 3 months of age, 'Chikka' became the youngest winner of the Rolex Ranking title. "I quite enjoy playing here and winning the first title three years after turning pro means a lot to me. This is a dream come true," said Chikka. "It's amazing to win the biggest tournament on the PGTI and also the ranking title on the same day. Emerging Order of Merit champion is special for me because I've been finishing second on the merit list for the last two years."

Gurgaon-based Jyoti Randhawa and Khalin Joshi of Bengaluru were joint runners-up at 11-under-277.

McLeod Russel Inter-Company Rose Bowl Tennis at Margherita Club, 17 April 2016



WINNERS: MRIL 'A'

1. Mr S. Hazarika & Mr M.S. Shekhawat
2. Mr B. Bannerjee & Mr A. Thoumong
3. Mrs R. Borgohain & Mr P.S. Aswal



RUNNERS-UP: MRIL 'B'

1. Dr D. Sonowal & Mr R. Sharma
2. Mr R. Gogoi & Mr C. Dutta
3. Dr (Mrs) H. Deka & Dr P. Deka

Births



1. **HARSHITA**, daughter of Sunit & Pretty Rekha Saikia, Margherita T.E. *1 December 2015*
2. **BRIJRAJ**, son of Santanu & Jutika Kalita, Behora T.E. *6 September 2015*
3. **KRISHNAV**, son of Pranjal & Julee Borthakur, Beesakopie T.E. *21 October 2015*
4. **SATVIK**, son of Ravi Ranjan Singh of HO Kolkata, and Manisha *26 September 2015*
5. **RAJNANDINI**, daughter of Somnath Sarkar of HO Kolkata & Debapriya *21 July 2015*
6. **RAYIRTH**, son of Jayanta & Gargi Sarma, Sepon T.E. *14 October 2015*
7. **MUHENDA JOSHUA**, son of Rolema Richard & Kabahumuza Gertrude, Ankole T.E. *23 October 2015*
8. **AINEMUKAMA JEREMY**, son of Karungi Ritah & Bahame Joseph, Ankole T.E. *5 October 2015*
9. **NATASHA**, daughter of Denis Havumiragira & Gertrude Mbabazi, Mwenge Central *27 January 2016*



Williamson Magor Group Ex-Planters' Annual Get-together, 2016 — Delhi



The Gentlemen...



... their Ladies

Weddings

Tuladri Mallick of
HO Kolkata wed
Indrani on
15 December 2015



Vishal Saklani of
Corramore T.E.
wed Suruchi on
14 October 2015



Sanjay Sharma
of Mwenge T. E.
wed Bathsheba on
29 December 2015

Diptesh Das
of HO Kolkata
wed Smita on
20 January 2016



Anindita,
daughter of
Mr Kalyan
Mukherjee of
HO Kolkata
& Priti, wed
Dr Kaustav
Mazumder on
20 January 2016



Sushmit, son
of Dr Dilip &
Chandana
Sarmah of
Pertabghur T.E.
wed Madonna on
21 January 2016



Amit Dey of
HO Kolkata, wed
Mukulika on
21 January 2016





Farewell

We bid farewell to colleagues and wish them a contented retirement



Mr C.M. Khong, Assam ~ 4 December 2015



Mr Baldeep Singh, Rwanda ~ 12 March 2016



Mr S. Guha Neogi, HO Kolkata ~ 31 March 2016

Team Up India & India Tea Trade Dinner 2016



Mr Azam Monem (3rd from left) on the Panel

All stakeholders of the Tea Industry got together on the morning of 9 April 2016 to discuss various issues relevant to the Industry as a whole, such as Challenges and Opportunities facing the Indian Tea industry; Approaches to Estate Improvement and Change; Climate Change; Improving Community Wellbeing & Life; Nutrition & Health; Improving Future Opportunities for Young People; and Improving Livelihoods and Sustainability for Smallholders.

The Senior Executives of MRIL, both from HO Kolkata and the estates, attended the meeting, while Mr Azam Monem, Director – MRIL, was among the panelists discussing the first issue.

The Indian Tea Trade Dinner was held the same evening, at which the ITTD Chairman, Mr A.K. Bhargava, gave a speech.



Mr A.K. Bhargava addresses the Gathering

Here are some excerpts:

“India Tea Trade Dinner was conceived by my predecessor, Mr Aditya Khaitan, in 2008 as an occasion for all segments of the Tea fraternity to meet at the onset of the production season, chit chat on the tea scenario, strengthen relationships and explore ways of working with each other for a common cause – to further the Tea Trade. It has become a fixture on our Tea calendar.”

* * *

“The Indian Tea Industry as well as the Tea Trade are 200 years old and reflect a spread of strong traditions recorded in history. Our goal is that all stakeholders in the trade chain win. This gathering more than ever remains relevant towards fostering transparency and harmony so essential for any industry to survive and grow.”

* * *

“Many countries are rediscovering the very magic of tea.”



Senior Executives of MRIL



Impressions - Kaziranga Literary Festival, 29 & 30 January 2016

~ Sarita Dasgupta

I was privileged to be invited to attend the first ever Kaziranga Literary Festival organized by the Department of Tourism, Govt of Assam, in conjunction with the Tourism Festival, 'Rongali', in Guwahati on 29 and 30 January 2016. The Literary Festival was held in collaboration with the North East Writers' Forum (NEWF) in association with Libri d'Aqua and supported by FREED (Force for Rural Empowerment and Economic Development).

28 January, PM: Dinner hosted by the Department of Tourism for all the members of NEWF, Libri d'Aqua and FREED at Hotel Brahmaputra Ashok, where writers, filmmakers and bureaucrats got acquainted in an informal environment.

29 January, AM: a) Inauguration of the Kaziranga Literary Festival with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp by Chief Secretary of Assam – Mr V.K. Pipersenia; His Excellency the Vice Ambassador from Italy – Mr Gianluca Grandi; President of Libri d'Aqua – Dr Vera Slopej; eminent Italian writer and filmmaker – Mr Sergio Scapagnini; Economist and member of Libri d'Aqua – Mr Federico Raimondi Slepoi.

AM: b) Speeches followed by an interactive session on the

importance of Children's Literature, moderated by the President of NEWF, Mr Arup Kumar Dutta, author of 'Chai Garam'.

PM: Dinner at the historic Guwahati Club.

30 January, AM: A panel discussion on 'My India – A View' held at Cotton College. The panelists expressed their individual visions of India most eloquently, clearly presenting our country's many dimensions and facets.

PM: a) 'Book Adda' on 'Relevance of Thought on Non-violence' at the venue of the 'Rongali' tourism festival, moderated brilliantly by Dr Ananya Shankar Guha – Regional Director, IGNOU Meghalaya.

PM: b) Ferry ride to an 'island' on the Brahmaputra River, where poets from the northeastern states read or recited their original poems on Love. This session, moderated by Shrutimala Duara and Robin Singh, was followed by a mesmerizing performance of Indian classical music. Dinner was served on the ferry before we returned to the mainland, singing evergreen favourites (including an impromptu rendering of 'Strangers in the Night' by Signor Scapagnini and yours truly!) and dancing to Bihu numbers, in which the Italian guests sportingly joined in.



with Dr Vera Slopej & Sergio Scapagnini



with Samir Tanti, AVLA Recipient 2012



with Senior Bureaucrats & Guests



with Tikbor, SAG Mascot



Inaugural Session



H.E. Mr Gianluca Grandi & Writers of the Northeast



After the Inaugural Session...



Mitra Phukan: 'My India - A View'



Dr Guha moderates the 'Book Adda'



Love Poems by the Brahmaputra



The Appreciative Audience

The Chairman's Visit to the



The Chairman and his esteemed guests stayed with Assistant Visiting Agent Mr Nisar Ahmed and his wife Mrs Namita Ahmed at Hill House from **23 to 27 March 2016**.



The Management at **Namdang T.E.** was privileged to show the Chairman and his guests around the estate and host them for lunch on **24 March 2016**.



Margherita Estates, Assam



It was indeed a privilege for us to have the esteemed Chairman, Mr B. M. Khaitan, along with his guests, visit **Dirok T.E.** on **25 March 2016**. It was an honour to take them around the Factory and host them over lunch.

It will long remain a cherished memory etched in the minds of those Workers, Staff and Managerial Staff, who had the opportunity of meeting and interacting with this rare visionary of our times.



No.	Date	Name & Address	Phone	Comments
	25/3/16	Banjie Khaitan		It is a pleasure to have done this

* * * * *



DATE	NAME	ADDRESS
26/3/2016	Banjie Khaitan	It is a wonderful Factory, very well equipped; and more a pleasure to see the staff smiling. An Honour to be here. Thank you
	Mr. B. M. Khaitan Chairman, M.L. Road India Ltd.	

It was an honour for us to host the Chairman, Mr B.M. Khaitan, along with his distinguished guests, who visited **Bogapani T.E.** on **26 March 2016**. We were privileged to get an opportunity to show them our estate and factory, and interact with them over lunch.

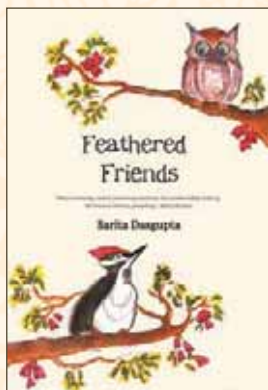
LAURELS

HUNG VUONG MEMORIAL MEDAL

PhuBen was proud to be bestowed with the highest honour of Phu Tho Province, the Hung Vuong Memorial Medal on 26 November 2015.

The award was given in recognition of the contribution made by PhuBen towards the development of the entire region as well as the Company itself. From providing employment to thousands, bringing international standards and knowhow to the area, being conscious of its social responsibilities, to being a brand Ambassador of PhuTho, PhuBen does it all.

The medal, a citation and bouquet were received by Syed Nishat Hussain, General Director, from His Excellency Mr Hoang Dan Mac – Party Secretary, Chairman of People’s Council of Phu Tho Province.



Sarita Dasgupta’s maiden collection of short stories for children, ‘Feathered Friends’, has recently been published by IBD (India Book Distributors) under their imprint Amazing Reads.

Previews From Other Authors

“Feathered Friends is a delightful collection of short stories set in the Bird World. Heart-warming, varied, humorous and true, the stories subtly hold up life lessons without preaching. This beautifully illustrated book will surely endear itself to children and adults alike.” ~ **Mitra Phukan** (Classical singer, columnist, translator and award-winning author)

“The community of ‘Feathered Friends’, whose stories have been narrated by Sarita Dasgupta in a clear and elegant style, is a place where we can find Gentleness, Compassion, Attention and Respect towards others, Friendly Solidarity, and a joyful Sense of Humour as elements that drive this small society of lovely living beings. It has good lessons, gently told, for both children and grown-ups, of how our world of human beings could and should be.” ~ **Sergio Scapagnini** (noted Italian filmmaker, Adviser to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation; and author of Lala’s Story - the tale of an Indian boy)

“Birds are everywhere in our lives. Yet we hardly spare them a glance. Mrs Dasgupta’s delightful stories draw you into the realm of birds. The forest home of Hooter, Woodsy, Fledge and Emerald will enchant you and their adventures will keep you turning the pages.” ~ **Deepak Dalal** (naturalist, traveller & author of the VikramAditya series of adventure stories for children)

Treasury



~ Rupa Saikia

Straddling a part of the National Highway 37, and bordering the Tea town of Doom Dooma in Upper Assam, lies the sprawling Raidang T.E. It is actually the amalgamation of two estates and one Division of the erstwhile Doom Dooma Tea Company Limited holdings, which was started in the year 1859-60 by the Warren brothers, in the old Assamese earthwork forts in Hansara and Beesakopie. Initially a joint enterprise, this partnership firm was later converted to a public limited company in the year 1877, with an expansion in the number of plantations around the town. Subsequently, after a few changes in ownership, from the Brooke Bond group in 1962, to Hindustan Lever in 1984, McLeod Russel India Limited finally took over the group in the year 2006.

Raidang has a total area of 2014.14 hectares, with 994.41 hectares under tea cultivation and another 1.43 hectares covered by the tea and shade nurseries. It is divided into three divisions, namely, Raidang, Hansara and Panikhowa, of which the former two were individual estates earlier. The Hansara T.E. became a division of this estate after the MRIL takeover, while a section of the Panikhowa estate

which had been a part of Samdang T.E. earlier, was transferred to Raidang T.E. in the year 2008-09. The estate's name, Raidang, was apparently derived from the varieties of cane which grew wild in the area, and was used by the



local people for various purposes. Hansara too has an interesting background dating back to the reign of the Muttock dynasty that ruled in this region prior to the Ahoms. It is said that Gadabar Barbaruah, the commander-in-chief of the Muttock king Sarbananda Singha, dug a pond here for his ducks. Hence the name Hans (ducks) and Sora (swim around). The pond is still existant, though it is now dry, and lies between the Doom Dooma District Planter's Club and the Makum Ali Line of the estate.

The estate's own crop is 18,50,000 kg annually, with another 4,00,00 kg green leaf coming in from the neighbouring Daimukhia T.E. which does not have a factory, and 5,00,000 kg of bought leaf from the small tea growers in the vicinity, totalling 27,50,000 kg.



The Main Office with its Glass Dome



Raidang is ISO 22000 and Rainforest Alliance certified.

The main office has a unique and interesting architectural style with a glass dome in the centre.

The management has taken steps to ensure the conservation of the local flora and fauna. Cutting of trees and hunting are strictly banned, calling for disciplinary measures if anyone is found indulging in the same. Signboards to this effect are prominently displayed all over the garden. Water conservation is an area in which the management has created awareness by holding camps to educate the workers on its importance. Leopards have been spotted time and again in the garden and one even had a greenhorn Assistant running for dear life when he saw it, though this magnificent animal hardly spared a glance his way!





Non-Biodegradable Waste Pit



The waste disposal system has been streamlined here, with the workers being encouraged to segregate and dispose of their garbage on a daily basis. Biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste is collected from all over the estate and kept separately in

designated areas. Non-biodegradable waste is then sold to a certified vendor who collects the garbage and gives a certificate attesting to it.

There are three schools on the estate where children are also educated on the importance of the preservation of

animals, birds and the ecology, besides other important issues. The Society for Wildlife Conservation has also held a camp here last November, stressing on this important aspect. There are two central crèches and one mobile crèche with experienced attendants who help in taking care of young children. The Mothers' Club is very active and, along with the Mahila Samiti, has stopped the sale of illicit liquor on the estate. They also inspect the fortnightly markets held here, to ensure that good quality produce is being sold to the consumers. Mother and child care, hygiene, nutrition are other aspects they look into, for the benefit of the workers. An Adolescent Girls' Club has been established in the year 2015, with an aim to creating awareness of the rights of the girl child in the community by its members.



The Crèche

The Volleyball Team



Street plays have also been organised by them on this subject as also on the Swach Bharat (Clean India) programme initiated by the Prime Minister of India. These adolescent girls have also formed a volleyball and kabaddi team, and are very active in these sports. The Swach Bharat programme has been started at the Panikhowa Division and is now being extended to encompass the other Divisions as well. Under the aegis of the Assam Branch Indian Tea Association and the UNICEF, the programme on Child Protection has been implemented in the estate.

Inter-Line Football Tournament



and other festivals are celebrated with fervour by the workers here. Football is a very popular game and each year there is enthusiastic participation in the Inter-Line Tournament.

Some of the workers' Lines have very interesting names, such as Depot Line, Pocha Line, Church Line, Bazaar Line, Singlijan Line, Palong Line, Pucca Line, Tikrapara Line and Makum Ali Line.

The Hospital



The hospital here is looked after by a doctor and his able team, catering exclusively to the workers' needs. Camps are held regularly to create awareness on diseases such as tuberculosis, filariasis, Japanese encephalitis, etc involving the workers, school teachers, school children and the clerical staff of the garden. Health and hygiene camps are held as well. All these camps are well attended, portraying the awareness of everyone on the estate, on these issues.

Having a sizeable number of Hindus and Christians, there is a Shiv temple and a church for the worshippers. Pujas



Among the staff, there are some whose children have done well for themselves, among them being the two sons of Shri Bhadreswar Borah, Head Clerk, whose elder son, Samiran, is a lawyer and the younger, Himangshu, a doctor. Computer staff, Shri Dipak Deb's son, Dipankar, too has had an excellent educational career, resulting in his employment at a multinational firm at Bengaluru as of October last year.



(Top: L to R) Sri Bhadreswar Borah, Sri Samiran Borah & Dr Himangshu Borah. (Bottom) Sri Dipak Deb (L) & Dipankar Deb (R)

Doom Dooma Planters' Club



An interesting anecdote has been mentioned by John Griffiths in his book 'Tea – The Drink That Changed The World'. The date of the incident is indeterminate, but would have been before the 1940s. It appears that there was a garden Sardar at Hansara Estate, who, in a fit of anger, killed his wife and was promptly hauled off to the Doom Dooma 'thana' (police station), by the 'daroga' (policeman). For the Manager, this was 'terrible news' as the Sardar was required to manage the work on the estate. So he jumped onto his pony and galloped off to Doom Dooma 'thana', demanding the release of the Sardar on the grounds that work on the estate was suffering and so he could not be spared from his duties! After some argument the murderer was released into his Manager's custody, on condition of good behaviour in future and that was the end of that matter! Justice was served!

The Doom Dooma Planters' Club is located on the garden premises. This club, being one of the oldest, is also one of the largest, boasting a sizeable number of members from all the gardens located nearby.

Raidang has been the proud recipient of the Company's Performance and Quality Awards as given hereunder:

2008-09: Overall Performance Award – South Bank

2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12: Best Circle Award – Quality (Doom Dooma District)

2013-14: Best Circle Award – Performance (Doom Dooma District)

And as this garden strives for greater heights, may their cup always bring good cheer!



The Team (L to R): Dr K C Das, N.K. Sinha, C. Chakraborty, S. Gupta, R.K. Gogoi (Superintendent), V. S. Rathore, A. Borbora & P. Sharma



Avinash Khadka

~ a profile

Siddharth Thapa is a keen sportsman and excels at football. He trained at the Williamson Magor Football Academy which used to be at Monabarie T.E. and then at the Mohun Bagan Academy in Kolkata. He played professional football for Mohammedan Sporting Club, and later for Eveready Sports Club, both in Kolkata, before joining the Company as an executive on the estates.

~ Siddharth Thapa
Beesakopie T.E.



“Kosto Chha?” (“How are you?” in Nepali) is our way of striking a conversation with this very dear friend of ours – Avinash Khadka. A person with multiple talents, a Gentleman with Class and someone with a smile on his face even in times of distress, Avinash is posted as a Welfare Officer at Phillobari T.E., Doom Dooma, Assam.

Born on 6 July (Two days after America got its Independence?? Okay, he is not that old!!) in the country through which flows the mighty Bagmati River and houses the imposing Singha Durbar – Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal – Avinash studied at Shivalik Public School and then graduated from DAV Chandigarh.

Like everyone else, he was at the crossroads after completing his graduation and like me, he joined the Tea fraternity with his first posting being at Majuligarh T.E. under the umbrella of M.K. Shah Ltd in 2008. In 2010 he bid adieu to his parent company and decided to join our Company. He created a niche for himself when our

Company posted him at Halem T.E.

I met Avinash at Bishnauth Gymkhana Club on a club day and the first impression I had of him was of a jovial person with a great sense of humour. To be honest, I felt I had met someone of my own kind. Since then we’ve become good friends and have been having a great time together.



Avinash is an ardent music lover and enjoys singing and playing his guitar. He has composed many a song on his own and loves singing them at house parties and get-togethers. His passion for

music is such that he keeps practising the guitar for hours whenever he is free. On many party nights one finds him with a guitar, ready to rock and roll.

This soft-hearted, ardent soul is passionate about adventure sports and that too of the extreme kind. He has gone bungee jumping! (I mean, who wants to jump without hoping that he won’t die!!) He did the bungee jump from one of the





day trek to the Annapurna Base Camp 1 via Pokhara and Ghandruk. His dream is to scale the heights of Mount Everest one day.



Whenever he is on annual leave he makes it a point to take part in adventure sports. I am just glad to see him alive whenever he returns in one piece!!

As tough as he may sound, Avinash is also known for his artistic skills at making aquariums from scratch. It was just an attempt to make something different and unique in a Class VIII Science project, but that attempt turned into a passion. So, whenever he gets the time he tries to make different kinds of aquariums.

longest suspension bridges in the world (166 metres) and one of the highest (200 metres). It is the only privately owned bridge in Nepal, situated at the Last Resort, 12 kilometres from the Nepal-Tibet border. The jump site is 160 metres (520 ft) above a gorge with the Bhotekoshi River, known to be one of the wildest rivers of Nepal, raging below. A full 8 seconds, it is the longest free-fall in the world! He is planning to go for it again during his next annual leave and hopes to break his previous record!



As a nature lover he was a member of the Wildlife Conservation Trust during his school days. He grabbed every opportunity to go trekking and escape from the boring daily class schedules, even though the steep roads are so vertical that they seem to touch one's nose! He did a few short treks to every snow-capped hill in the Kathmandu valley, the most memorable being the three-



Bungee jumping and trekking on one side, and making music and aquariums on the other – interests that are poles apart – that's what makes him special. He is as hard as a rock and as soft as snow.

Avinash has created a place for himself with the kind of versatility that he has and the passion to move forward in life. I wish him all the best in his future endeavours... particularly while jumping off bridges!



Delegation

“Surround yourself with the best people you can find, delegate authority, and don’t interfere as long as the policy you have decided upon is being carried out.”

~ Ronald Reagan

A major challenge that managers face today is effective management of time and consequently the ability to think out of the box and find creative business solutions. Delegation can ease a manager’s load of work and leave him/her free to invest time in more qualitative and innovative work. Effective delegation also helps juniors in the company to learn and be emerging leaders for the next generation.

While the benefits of delegation are far reaching, managers often find it very challenging. *“The most common Catch-22 we hear from managers is that they can’t delegate because their people are not good enough; they can’t do the work...”* writes Lombardo and Eichinger in their book For Your Improvement. They list the following causes why managers fail to delegate successfully:

- ☛ Delegate but don’t follow
- ☛ Delegate by throwing tasks at people
- ☛ Delegate little pieces
- ☛ Don’t develop your people
- ☛ Hoard most things to self
- ☛ Not plan work
- ☛ Not trust others
- ☛ Overmanage people
- ☛ Too busy
- ☛ Too controlling

Some key ways to avoid the above to become good at delegating are:

Informing

How do you set the pace to ensure that the task in hand is done well by another person? The right person, clear instructions and guidelines, definite targets and timeline can help a manager to accomplish the work satisfactorily.

☛ **Identify the person:** Different people have different strengths and interests and a good manager identifies and acknowledges these strengths and interests. Linking the right person to the task to be completed is a first step for effective delegation.

☛ **Explain the task:** The identified person needs to fully understand and appreciate the work given to him/her. The key role of the manager here is to adequately explain the work to be completed. Remember that he/she may be new to the task and may need time to understand it. Never lecture; let it be a two-way process of talking, where you give the person the chance to ask questions and clarify doubts.

☛ **Set targets and time:** To avoid ambiguity on how and when the task can be effectively completed, always set targets and timelines that are mutually agreed upon between you and the delegatee.

☛ **Follow-up:** In order to ensure that the message has been received



~ Raj Kamal Phukan
Guwahati Office

Raj Kamal Phukan is based in the Company’s Guwahati office where he manages the centralized staff recruitment for Assam estates, provides legal support, handles all land related issues and is involved in the recruitment and training of executives. In his spare time, he reads, and goes hiking and trekking. He is a keen birder and bird photographer and has contributed photographs to several Indian and international publications.

clearly by the delegatee and the task has been understood, send a follow-up email or set up a second face-to-face discussion. Give scope to the employee to voice his/her ideas and concerns about the task.

Measuring outputs

How do you know that work is progressing well and not going in a direction that will not bring the result that you are expecting?

Regular updates from the delegatee and patient and clear feedback from you will help you.

- 📌 **Set the timeline for receiving updates:** Regular updates on the task will help to keep it on track, prevent unpleasant surprises and guide the employee to complete the task well. However, a timeline needs to be set for the updates, which will demonstrate your confidence in the employee and will also keep you free from micromanaging the task.
- 📌 **Analyze and give feedback:** Analyze the updates, and provide quality feedback to the employee so that he/she can learn and complete the task as per standards.
- 📌 **Document:** Document the outputs and incentivize good work.

Developing/Training second liners

A valuable result of delegation is that a pool of second-in-line leadership can be created for the company. How do you do that?

📌 **Select wisely:** Pick your person with care. The famous delegation story quoted by experts is about the wolf and shepherd. The shepherd trusts the wolf to look after his sheep while he goes to the village to get food and returns to find many of his sheep missing.

📌 **Be patient and give a realistic timeframe:** Often managers judge capacities of people based on their own capabilities and have higher than realistic expectations. Remember, delegation is about freeing your time to enable you to invest in more strategic work. This can only happen if the person learns the task well enough and develops his/her ability to manage with minimum interference from you.

📌 **Discuss with seniors:** Companies have their visions, missions and priorities. As you embark on the path to delegate effectively, discuss with your seniors and map out the deliverables for you and your team with your seniors.

In Lewis Carroll's famous book 'Through the Looking Glass', a conversation between Alice and the queen goes like this:

"I can't believe that!" said Alice.

"Can't you?" the queen said in a pitying tone. "Try again, draw a long breath, and shut your eyes."

Alice laughed. "There's no use trying," she said. "One can't believe impossible things."

"I dare say you haven't had much practice," said the queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."



Celebrating 30 years' service

KISHALAYA DEB | FAISAL P. ANSARI

VIVEK SETH | SIVAJI DUTT | KENAL SHEKHAWAT



Bathsheba is a researcher-artist who combines information practices and aesthetics in her work inspired by the hidden histories of people, their interior lives and the interactions between them. Her art work has been shown in India, USA, Uganda, South Africa, Namibia and Switzerland. Currently, she is on contract with the United Nations and travels for work from Mwenge where her husband, Sanjay, is posted.



A Memento of Home

~ Bathsheba Okwenje-Sharma
Mwenge T.E.

Shall I tell you a little bit about Uganda, and then about the people on the Mwenge Tea Estate?

Well! Uganda, the Pearl of Africa, is a landlocked country in Eastern Africa. This verdant land, bisected by the equator, is rich in wildlife including the endangered gorilla and chimpanzee. Although Uganda is fairly small in size when compared to its neighbours, its population of 37.5 million people make up over 40 different ethnic groups. For example, the Baganda, the largest of the ethnic groups, are from the South of the country, the Batoro are from the West, the Acholi from the North and the Basamia, the East.

I recently moved to Mwenge, one of the largest tea estates in Uganda. It lies within the Toro Kingdom (we have monarchies here too!) which is in the western region of the country. Mwenge is massive! It covers 2280 hectares, 1046 hectares of which are cultivated. It has an equally large workforce of 1345 resident workers which swells to 2452 during the peak season.

New to life on a tea estate, and to the tea community in general, I was drawn to, and took comfort in the landscape: the bucolic views of rolling hills and natural forest that stretch all the way to the snow-capped Rwenzori mountains on a clear day; the extraordinary sunsets that we experience daily on our runs along the airstrip; and the graphic contrast of the workers in orange overalls against the green of the tea bushes.

On my walks around the estate, I encounter groups of people employed here, walking to and from work. As I pass, I catch snippets of conversations, each one in a different language. Over time, it dawned on me that Mwenge could be seen as a

microcosm of Uganda – a convergence of different national ethnic groups and foreigners within a specific boundary brought together for a common goal – in the case of Mwenge, the quest for the perfect Ugandan cup.

As I settled into this life, it was this convergence of ethnicity and nationality on the tea estate that I kept returning to. Who were the people that made up this community? Where did they come from? How far did they have to travel to get here? What memories of home did they carry inside them? What memento of home did they carry with them?

I set out to find out. I started asking the people I met questions about home, about the distances travelled, the memories held and the mementos carried. Here, I present to you some of the answers I received. I see it as a very, very small but indicative cross section of the people that work at Mwenge and the reminders of home that they brought with them.



Sanjay is the Estate Manager at Mwenge Tea Estate. Although from Nagaland and Rajasthan in India, Sanjay considers Darjeeling home. Two years ago, Sanjay travelled approximately 6800 km over two days to get to Uganda. It took three time zones, three flights and two four-hour car

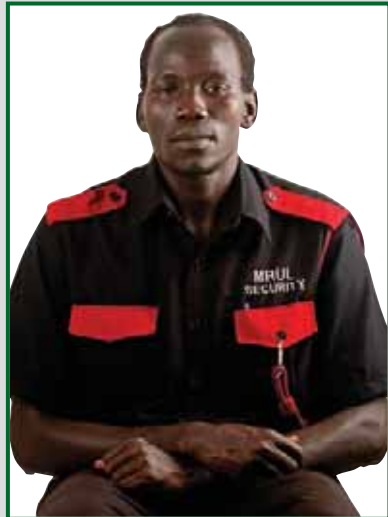
rides to get here. Of something that reminds him of home, Sanjay brought along with him a photograph of himself with his daughter, Danielle, taken during a fishing trip three years ago on the River Rangit in Darjeeling.



Maureen is a Domestic Worker at Mwenge Tea Estate. Her home is approximately 224 km from the estate, in the Ankole region of Western Uganda. Even though Ankole is relatively close by, Maureen's journey to the estate was an arduous one that took 10 hours in an overnight bus, a matatu (taxi van) and a boda boda (motorcycle taxi). Maureen says the

most important memento that she brought along with her, as a reminder of home, is a top her mother bought and wore when expecting her. Her mother gave it to her when she left home to take up this position a year and a half ago.

Benson is a Security Guard at Mwenge Tea Estate. He is from Arua, a district in Northern Uganda that borders the Congo and South Sudan. Benson's 415 km journey to

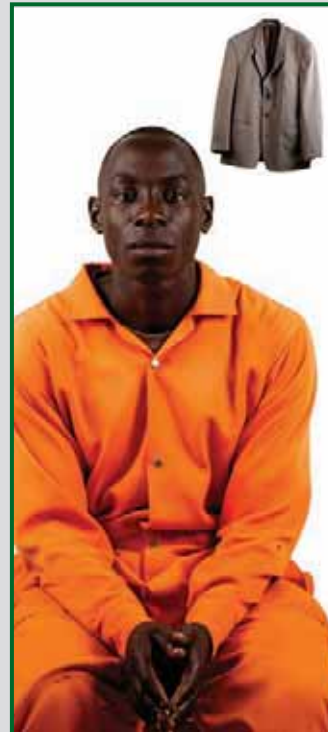


Mwenge from Arua was a circuitous one that took two days, two buses and a boda boda. Of a memento that he carried with him to remind him of home, Benson said he had brought some artefacts, but his wife took them back to Arua where she lives, and so now he has none.



Grace, Administrative Clerk at Mwenge Tea Estate, travelled 250 km by bus and boda boda from her home in Wakiso District, central Uganda, to Mwenge to take up the position a year ago. The journey took her six hours. As a reminder of home, Grace carried with her a sisal basket that she had made five years ago

while on vacation from secondary school. It hangs on a wall in her home in Mwenge.



John Francis is a Field Headman. He comes from Soroti, a district in the Eastern region of Uganda, 530 km from Mwenge. After two days of travel that included two buses and a boda boda ride, John Francis arrived at the estate nine months ago to take up his position. The memento he brought along to remind him of home is a jacket that his father gave him. He says the jacket fills him with pride and keeps him warm when it gets cold.

And there are 2447 more stories at Mwenge waiting to be told!

Photographs by Bathsheba Okwenje-Sharma

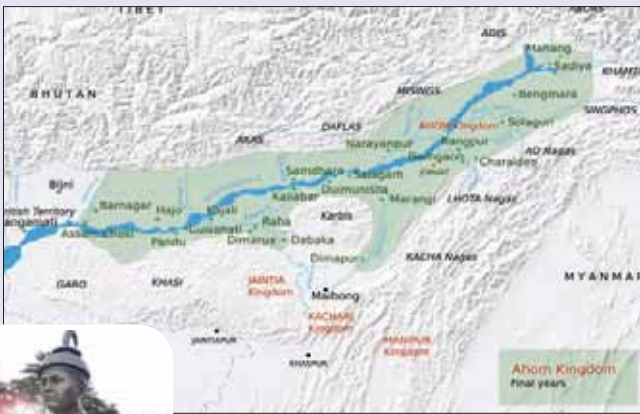


Rajdeep's interest in the history and heritage of his community, the Ahoms, has deepened after being posted at Rajmai T.E. which is situated just a few kilometres away from Sivasagar, the Capital of the Ahom kingdom for six hundred years. Relics of the past at Rajmai bear testimony to the fact that it was very much a part of the kingdom at one time. Rajdeep also has a keen interest in wildlife and goes bird watching in the neighbouring Panidihing Bird Sanctuary in winter, when the migratory birds arrive.



Sivasagar – The Seat of the Swargadeos

~ Rajdeep Buragohain
Rajmai T.E.



Rajmai T.E. The Swargadeo had built a palace made of Singari wood which was known as Singari Ghar. Although nothing remains of this palace, some 'maidams' (burial mounds of royalty), farms and old ponds or tanks bear testimony to the bygone days. (*The Ahom kings were addressed as Swargadeo as they were believed to have divine origins.*)



Most of the royal 'maidams' are located at Charaideo, about 30 km away from Sivasagar, which was the first capital of the Ahom kingdom established by the founder of the Ahom

dynasty, Chao Lung Siu-Ka-Pha in 1228. Though the capital of the Ahom kingdom moved many times in and around Sivasagar, Charaideo remained the symbolic centre and thus the final resting place of the royal family.

A small temple called Thawra Dol is situated next to a tank to the east of Sarguwa. Both were constructed by Alon Dihingia Borgohain during the reign of Swargadeo



Raj means *Raja (king)* and *Mai* or *Mao* means *Mother*. According to local legend the 8th Ahom king Swargadeo Sudaipha (1397-1407) established a pond in the memory of his mother a few kilometres away from Sivasagar. Gradually the inhabitants named the place Rajmai. When the tea garden was planted there, it was called Rajmai Tea Estate. Sarguwa, the capital founded by Swargadeo Sudaipha, was a part of





Gadadhar Singha or Supaatpha (1681–1696) who was responsible for taking Guwahati back from the Mughals for good, and establishing a strong rule of 'blood and iron'. It was earlier, during the reign of Supangmung, also known as Swargadeo Chakradhwaj Singha, that the famous General Lachit Borphukan fought the Mughal forces, finally defeating them in the Battle of Saraighat in 1671 during the reign of Sunyatphaa, or Swargadeo Udayaditya Singha.

To the east of Rajmai is Attabarrie T.E. where Suhungmung or Dihingia Raja, made a farm with a large pond which still exists, its waters reflecting the Manager's Bungalow on one end and the Shiv Temple on the other. Suhungmung was the first Ahom king to take a Hindu name – Swarga Narayan.



One of the most important historical monuments of the Ahom Kingdom is the Shiva Dol, a temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, situated by a large tank called

Borpukhuri in Sivasagar town. The tank, covering 52 hectares, is 27 feet deep, and its water level never fluctuates even during the monsoons. It was made during the reign of Swargadeo



Shiva Singha at the command of his queen, Ambika Konwari, in the 1730s.



The central tower of the Shiva Dol is believed to be one of the tallest in India at a height of 104 feet, and is crowned with a pot-shaped dome of pure gold. Two other temples, Vishnu Dol (dedicated to Lord Vishnu) and Devi Dol (dedicated to Goddess Durga), situated on the same bank

of the tank, were also built during this time. All three were built in the Shikhara or Ahom temple architectural design.



Joysagar, believed to be one of the biggest man-made lakes in the country, is spread over 318 acres bordering the town of Rangpur (an erstwhile Ahom capital) 5 km away from Sivasagar. This lake was built by Swargadeo Rudra Singha in honour of his mother, Joymoti.





Situated near Joysagar is the Rangpur Palace, the largest of all the monuments built by the Ahom kings. The four floors above ground constitute the Kareng Ghar while the three storeys underground, with two secret tunnels to facilitate a strategic exit in times of war, make up the Talatal Ghar. Swargadeo Rudra Singha (1696 - 1714) constructed a palace made of wood and other locally available impermanent materials. It was Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha (1751 - 1769), who converted it to the edifice of brick masonry that still remains today. The architecture of the palace's underground levels resembled the contemporary Mughal style but the wooden work of

the top level resembled typical Assamese architecture. A set of canons are still preserved in good condition.



Rang Ghar, the oldest amphitheatre of Asia, is a two-storey building which was the Royal Pavilion from where the Ahom kings and noblemen witnessed games like buffalo fights, elephant fights and other sports on the Rupahi 'pathaar' (paddy field) specially during Rangali Bihu. The roof of the Rang Ghar is shaped like a royal Ahom longboat, with a crocodile at either end. The amphitheatre was constructed during the reign of Swargadeo Pramatta Singha in 1746 and is located by the side of NH 37, a little outside Sivasagar town.

All these monuments that still stand after centuries, were constructed of special thin bricks which were joined together using a paste of rice and eggs as mortar, bearing testimony to the genius of the Ahom architects and masons.



Panidihing Bird Sanctuary – A Wetland Ecosystem

Situated off the highway, 8 km inward from Rajmai T.E., between the rivers Disang and Demow, is the 34 sq km stretch of rich wetland ecosystem called the Panidihing Bird Sanctuary. It was declared a Sanctuary in 1996 and is considered a Ramsar Site, as over 20,000 resident and migratory birds belonging to around 165 species can be sighted here in winter. Some of the birds commonly seen here are several kinds of storks, ducks and geese. Birds of these species can also be sighted on the Rajmai tank every winter, wading and looking for fish.

The estate cooperates with the Sanctuary authorities in spreading awareness about the importance of keeping these birds (some of which are listed among the endangered species) safe from harm.



Common Pochard



Ferruginous Duck



Fishing Eagle



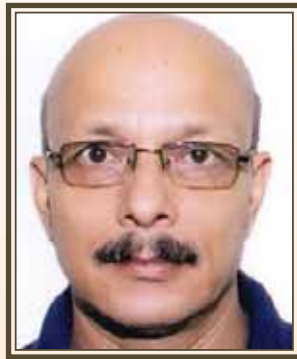
Lesser Adjutant Stork



Spot Billed Duck



White Necked Stork



VERTIGO

~ Dr Neelmonee Dutta
Phulbari Central Hospital
Phulbari T.E.

Health Watch

Dr Neelmonee Dutta is an ENT Specialist with many years' experience in treating various conditions, including Vertigo.

'Vertigo' comes from the Latin word 'verto' which means whirling or spinning movements. Vertigo is a sense of rotation or of the world spinning, experienced even when someone is perfectly still. A person feels as if he or the objects around him are moving, when they are not.

Children attempt to create a sense of vertigo by spinning around for a time. This type of induced vertigo lasts for a few moments and disappears.

In comparison, when vertigo occurs spontaneously, it tends to last for many hours or even days.

There are two kinds of vertigo – Peripheral and Central. Peripheral vertigo is caused by problems in the inner ear while Central vertigo arises in the brain or spinal cord.

Causes of Peripheral vertigo:

- 1) BPPV (Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo)
- 2) Ménière's disease
- 3) Vestibular neuritis

Causes of Central vertigo (occurring less often):

- 1) Head injury
- 2) Stroke
- 3) Brain tumour in a certain area
- 4) Certain medications (Anti-seizure medication, Antidepressants, even Aspirin)
- 5) Drinking alcohol

Studies show that 2% to 3% of the population is at risk of developing BPPV, with older women being at slightly higher risk.

Symptoms:

Vertigo is often triggered by a change in the position of your head. People usually describe it as a feeling of

Spinning | Tilting | Swaying | Imbalance | Being pulled to one direction

Other symptoms that may accompany vertigo include:

Feeling nauseated | Jerking eye movements | Headache | Sweating | Ringing in the ear | Loss of hearing

Symptoms can last from a few minutes to a few hours or even more.

Treatment of vertigo:

Treatment depends on the cause. In many cases it goes away

without any treatment. In some cases treatment is needed. Treatment includes - Vestibular rehabilitation with Physiotherapy, Medicine and Surgery.

Vestibular rehabilitation (Epley Manoeuvre):

If your left ear is suffering, sit on the edge of your bed, turn your head 45 degrees to the left, place a pillow so that it rests between your shoulders rather than under your head when you lie down. Next, lie down quickly, face up, with your head on the bed. (Your head should still be at a 45 degree angle.) Wait for 30 seconds. Now turn your head 90 degrees to the right without raising it. Wait for 30 seconds. Now turn your head and body on its side to the right, so that you are looking at the floor. Wait for another 30 seconds, sit up slowly but remain on the bed for a few minutes. If the vertigo comes from the right ear, reverse this manoeuvre.

Do these movements 3 times before going to bed every night until you have gone 24 hours without vertigo.

Medication:

Medication may provide some relief but it is not recommended for long term use. Meclizine is prescribed for persistent vertigo. Diazepam is also effective. Other medication may be used to decrease nausea and vomiting. Medication can only provide symptomatic relief but is not considered a cure for vertigo.

Surgical treatment:

Surgical treatment is helpful in curing Ménière's disease.

Can vertigo be prevented?

Controlling risk factors for strokes may decrease the risk of Central vertigo. This includes making sure that cholesterol and blood glucose levels remain within optimal ranges. Decrease in salt intake helps in preventing vertigo from Ménière's disease.

If Peripheral vertigo has been diagnosed, then performing vestibular rehabilitation exercises routinely may help in preventing episodes of vertigo.

As most cases of vertigo occur spontaneously, it is difficult to predict who is at risk, so complete prevention may not be possible. However, maintaining a healthy lifestyle will decrease the risk of vertigo.



Hridayesh is a multi-talented personality, with interests ranging from gardening to music. Over the years he has mastered the art of Bonsai and here he shares his expertise.

The Art of Bonsai



~ Hridayesh Chettri
Dimakusi T.E.

To write a short note on Bonsai is similar to a précis of the Iliad!! It is a living art form, an art that one continues to develop throughout one's life time. I was fortunate to have been introduced to it by a friend, who owns a plant nursery in Darjeeling and the love affair has continued since then.

Bonsai are not just works of art, but also expressions of one's ideas, taking any shape or form chosen by the creator. To Bonsai a plant is to keep it from growing in its natural form and control its growth. Simple forms of Bonsai are pruned hedges and rose bushes; slightly more advanced Bonsai are shaped trees or bushes (topiary), and, of course, tea. Anyone growing a plant in a pot is accidentally creating a Bonsai. The Art of Bonsai combines pruning and growing the plant in a container in a manner that creates a pleasing shape. It may be a small bush or a highly advanced 3 foot specimen that resembles an ancient 20 metre high tree. Here are the answers to some FAQs:

Which plants are suitable for Bonsai?

Any easily managed shrub or tree can be turned into a Bonsai if it can exist in a smaller than normal sized container for many years. It can be shaped and styled regularly to resemble a miniature tree. It is essential to understand the plant first, then the rules of Bonsai. The important questions are: Can the roots be trimmed and branches cut? Will the plant survive in a shallow pot? Is it an indoor or outdoor plant?

My personal experience has been to collect saplings/ plants growing in tree hollows and on walls of buildings as these have a head start as far as age and thickening of the stem are concerned. Bougainvilleas kept in drums for years make for excellent material, as do plants from old bungalow hedges and topiary. Basically, the collection depends on your eye for the subject's potential. Local plants should be given preference as they are more suited to the environment.

Where can a Bonsai be kept?

A Bonsai should be treated in the same way as it would if naturally grown – outdoors, indoors or in the shade as required. A pine tree should be in almost full sunlight except for the hottest part of the year.

Can Bonsai be kept indoors?

An indoor plant needs good direct sunlight, fresh air movement and humidity. Of all the plants, only Ficus and Schifflera have stood out as good indoor Bonsai. Other outdoor tree types can survive indoors for a few weeks and must be moved back outside to recover. All members of the conifer family should not be brought indoors into warm areas over the winter period while dormant. I have lost many a plant this way.

How is a Bonsai kept small?

Once a plant is chosen, one must decide how big it will be allowed to grow and spend time in improving the shape of the plant within that size. Many people create Bonsai without realizing it. A hedge or a topiary cut every year is the same as maintaining a Bonsai. Proportions of the plant should match the pot size, be it in a 10 cm or 60 cm pot. At these sizes, most common Bonsai species can be kept for many years. A common term used in Bonsai is 'sacrifice branches'. These are particular branches which are allowed to grow, so that the stems can thicken, and then removed to allow new branches to take their place. The simplest way to keep a Bonsai small is to cut back all new growth to a particular size. This Bonsai, while remaining a small tree, will have no shape and will eventually take on a ball-like appearance. To get the best Bonsai, remove those branches that look awkward and encourage those that look proportionate. Basically, the same technique as in plucking tea, applies here – pinch off the new shoots, even for pines, to encourage more shoots.

Branches can be shaped by cutting or by bending and holding them in place for a few months with a safe wire, though I personally do not prefer this technique, as it is tedious and time consuming.

When does a Bonsai need to be repotted?

To grow a proper Bonsai and create that amazing miniature tree effect takes many years. Regular repotting, feeding and watering are essential. The idea is to grow the plant well and train it regularly. Repotting means that the plant must be removed from the pot, its roots teased open and most of the finer roots removed. The ground rule is to not only keep the plant small but allow it to grow more healthy, vigorous roots in the same pot. In the year after repotting, the plant will grow well and slow down only when it runs out of food or when the pot is root bound, preventing new root formation. The only time a Bonsai is planted in a bigger pot is if its size is out of proportion to the existing pot or for reshaping. Many Bonsai are grown in larger containers or even in the ground for some years till the desired shape is reached and only then, put into a Bonsai pot. Plants can be removed from Bonsai pots and placed into the ground for a year or two to thicken the stems.

Which are the best plants for Bonsai?

The best plants are those that are easy to look after, happy to be trimmed, have their roots aggressively cut and have small leaves. Most conifers and pines make great Bonsai due to their needle-like leaves. Ficus are probably the best for beginners to start with, as they are almost fail safe and can also survive short dry-out periods.

How does defoliation help?

This is my personal favourite. To reduce the leaf size to match your tree, July/August are the best months to

defoliate, leaving enough time for new leaf growth and prepare for the winter season. Defoliate after the new spring growth has hardened. Conifers/pines should not be touched though.

What is the importance of Nebari?

A very important aspect of a Bonsai is its Nebari or the visible surface roots that provide visual balance to a tree. Creating a Nebari can be done using two methods; by regularly pruning the downward growing roots so that they start growing sideways and the more difficult air-layering, which I have not tried. A shortcut would be to slowly expose the roots by watering, as time goes by.

What are the different styles of Bonsai?

This is a vast subject in itself as both the Chinese and Japanese have their own particular styles. The most common are: formal upright, informal upright, slanting, semi-cascade, cascade, raft, literati and group/forest. Less common forms include windswept, weeping, split-trunk, and driftwood styles. These terms are not mutually exclusive, and a single Bonsai specimen can exhibit more than one style characteristic, the common practice being to describe it by the most dominant or striking characteristic.

A frequently used set of styles describes the orientation of the Bonsai's main trunk. Different terms are used for a tree with its apex directly over the center of the trunk's entry into the soil; slightly to the side of that center; deeply inclined to one side; and inclined below the point at which the trunk of the Bonsai enters the soil.

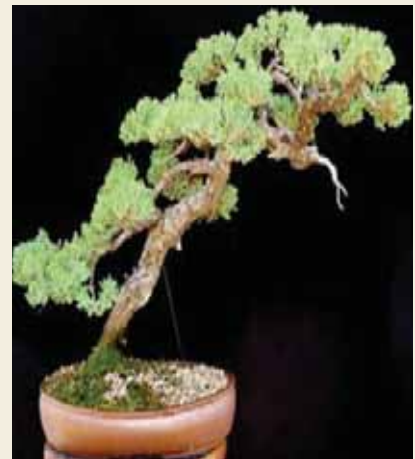
Styles of Bonsai



Formal upright or **chokkan** style trees have a straight, upright, tapering trunk. Branches progress regularly from the thickest and broadest at the bottom, to the finest and shortest at the top.



Informal upright or **moyogi** trees incorporate visible curves in trunk and branches, but the apex is located directly above the trunk's entry into the soil line.



In the slant-style or **shakan** Bonsai, the trunk emerges from the soil at an angle, and the apex of the tree is located to the left or right of the root base.



Cascade-style or **kengai** specimens are modelled after trees that grow over water or down mountain sides. The apex of a full-cascade style falls below the base of the pot.



A number of styles describe the trunk shape and bark finish. For example, the **Deadwood** Bonsai Styles, identify trees with prominent dead branches or trunk scarring.



Shari or **sharimiki** style portrays a tree struggling to live, while a significant part of its trunk is bare of bark.



Root-over-rock or **sekijoju** is a style in which the roots are wrapped around a rock, entering the soil at the base of the rock.



Growing-in-a-rock or **ishizuke** or **ishitsuki** style, has the roots growing in soil contained within the cracks and holes of the rock.



Forest/group or **yose ue** style comprises planting several trees of one species, typically an odd number, in a Bonsai pot.



The **sokan** and **sankan** styles have all the trunks growing out of one spot with one root system, so it is actually a single tree.



Raft-style or **ikadabuki** Bonsai mimics a tree toppled onto its side. Branches along the top side of the trunk continue to grow as a group of new trunks.



Literati or **bunjin-gi** style has an almost bare trunk line, with branches reduced to a minimum, and foliage placed toward the top of a long, often contorted trunk.



Broom or **hokidachi** style is used for trees with fine branching, like Thuja. The trunk is straight and the branches form a ball-shaped crown.



Windswept or **fukinagashi** style describes a tree that appears to be affected by strong winds blowing continuously from one direction.

To conclude, let the various styles and foreign names not deter you. It is your aesthetic sense that will serve you well in creating your Bonsai. In art, rules are meant to be broken and sometimes Bonsai which break all rules are the most dramatic. Keeping these in mind...the sky is the limit!

Visitors' Vignettes

Tim Robertson recently undertook a nostalgic journey to Boroi T.E., founded by his great-grandfather, Alfred Absolum Glass.

Trip to Boroi/Singli

~ Tim Robertson
Suffolk, England



I should explain how and why an Englishman the wrong side of fifty came to be in India. It all began with a conversation some three years ago with my boss about a problem that had arisen in a Joint Venture we had in Calcutta. Some months later, I was asked if I would like to take the position for two years. I agreed, and told my family and friends of my new position and departure date. My mother pointed out that we had a long history with India and Calcutta as this was the place my grandparents had met. Further, my great-grandfather had owned a tea estate in Assam where my grandmother was born and which she had inherited. This resulted in some research that brought up a newsletter with an article about my great-grandfather, Mr A. A. Glass, that had some information, which, although colourful, was not actually correct. With my second key objective, the words “the family history must be corrected” ringing in my ears, I set off to Calcutta in 2013.

Just before Christmas 2015 I contacted Mr Rajat Dutt who responded with lightning speed. A phone call and a few e-mails resulted in the date being set to visit Boroi T.E. on the 17th of January 2016, along with my good friend, Mr Vinay Agrawal.

We set out at 5 am to catch the flight to Guwahati, which was four hours late. From Guwahati, we were driven to Boroi. I noticed the speedometer was not working but this

seemed not to worry the driver as we sped off on the highway. It turned out to be a bit further than I thought, taking six hours. As we moved further into Assam I could not help but notice its sheer beauty with wide rivers, flood plain, agricultural land and forest. As we drew closer the driver got a call saying the bridge was out and we would have to take the back way in. We stopped and got out to stretch our legs when a vehicle drew up and a man with a gun got out beckoning us to follow him. This was a bit of a shock but added to the excitement of actually going to where my great-grandfather had formed a tea estate.

We arrived very late and were welcomed by Jayanta and Rupa Saikia. Over a drink before supper it became apparent they had only moved in the last week to Boroi, so to welcome two strange people into their home was an achievement in itself. As I have been involved in agriculture all of my life I was keen to know more about the issues facing the tea industry. Jayanta was very knowledgeable and mentioned that labour issues were a key concern though mechanised plucking had begun to counteract this. Following an excellent Supper we agreed to meet at 7am for a tour of the estate.

We met Jayanta in the office where I was able to see my great-grandfather's name as the first Manager on a board listing all the managers to date, although he had actually owned it. We were taken around the factory which was in the maintenance phase in readiness for the new season. We saw the large drying tables and the grading machines. It was during the tour that I realised it was my grandparents who would have agreed to the factory being built. After the tour and a vital cup of tea we set off to see the estate.

The estate has two rivers on its boundaries – the Boroi and the Singli. This answered the question why it had originally been called Singli Tea Estate and then named Boroi. Our first stop was the River Boroi where, during the monsoon, it had broken its banks and formed a new river bed, taking a fair piece of land. We were shown the work that had gone into building a new bank directing the river back to its original course.

From here we headed towards the original site of the

bungalow my great-grandfather had built, passing tea bushes which had been pruned. We arrived at a small hill with three lychee trees. These trees, planted by my great-grandfather, were still flourishing. Apparently the local children still pick the fruit every year. We fought through the foliage and arrived at the top where some bricks remaining from the bungalow were pointed out to me. The bungalow itself was destroyed by fire many years ago. The view across the estate was incredible and I could see why this spot had been chosen. As we moved back down some elephant dung was pointed out. This was a major issue for my great-grandparents as they had inadvertently built the bungalow on an elephant trail. This caused issues as the elephants tried to go through the bungalow. My great-grandmother apparently spoke of this often with great sadness.

From the hill we moved towards the river where we were shown the well and the footings for the pump system with the bolts still in the concrete where the pump would have been situated. The stable footings were still evident as my great-grandfather was a keen huntsman and brought his horses and hounds. When he arrived he realised there were no foxes and in his letters home said he had found new game to hunt. We were then led down to the river where my great-grandfather had built a hydro-electric dam. Both sides of the brick dam structure still exist although the actual dam has long since disappeared. He had built a brick tunnel in one of the walls which diverted the water to the turbine and the bolts built into the wall showed clearly where the turbine had been connected. Building it and actually getting it to work was clearly an engineering feat, as it was miles from anywhere, in a jungle. It was believed to be the first source of electricity in Upper Assam.

We then went down to the grave of my great-grandfather. He was laid to rest on the estate having been shot by an arrow while patrolling the outer fences ensuring that there was no elephant damage. He died from septicaemia that set in following the injury. From the letters he wrote to his mother back in Somerset, England, it is likely he had contracted malaria but in those days little was known about

it, let alone a cure. This, combined with the wound, would not have improved his survival rate. The grave faces out onto an incredible view and one can only imagine my great-grandmother buried him in his favourite place, a sufficient distance from the bungalow. He died on the 1st of September 1908 but the gravestone inscription states 1904. My guess is there was a mistranslation from the handwriting but we will never know.

I laid flowers and lit candles on his grave. My thanks go to Jayanta for arranging this and for looking after the grave so well. I found this an emotional time, reflecting on how a man from an estate in Somerset could arrive in Assam, build a bungalow, form a tea estate and even provide electricity. This would have been no mean feat as when he arrived there was no railway or bridges across the rivers. Simply moving required materials to build the infrastructure would have taken months. Then to clear the jungle and form a tea estate is beyond comprehension.

As we headed through the estate towards the bungalow we were able to see the various stages of the tea plants in the estate. Some of the older plants could well have been planted by my great-grandfather but that may be wishful thinking on my part. The estate is so quiet and beautiful – I could see the attraction of living there. Sadly, after an excellent breakfast it was time to say goodbye to Jayanta and Rupa and to the Boroï Tea Estate. The return journey to Calcutta resulted in another flight delay but this time I thought that, had this been in the 1800s, it would have taken me days to get there and back – not the nine hours it takes today.

As I write this in my study with the rain beating on the window and winter still here in the UK, Boroï seems so far away but is embedded in my memory. It is nice to think what was started by my great-grandfather is still in operation and providing employment even today.

I would like to thank Mr Rajat Dutt, Jayanta and Rupa and all who made this a very special visit. I met my second key objective and, as I write, am drinking a cup of Boroï tea which I would highly recommend. I would love to return again one day, but who knows...

We are informed by Mr Tim Robertson that his great-grandfather, the founder-owner of Boroï T.E. (erstwhile Singlijan T.E.) Mr Alfred Absolum Glass, was, in fact, an Englishman from Somerset, and not a German national as mentioned in Treasury (Boroï T.E.) in the July 2013 issue.

Mr Robertson also informs us that it was on 1 September 1908, aged only forty-one, that Mr Glass breathed his last. A worker had been caught stealing tea by the Manager and, afraid of being punished by Mr Glass, shot him with a bow and arrow while he was out on his horse checking the fences at night. Already in a weakened state caused by malaria for which there was no cure in those days, Mr Glass succumbed to the septicaemia which had set in from the infected wound inflicted by the arrow.

We would like to thank Mr Robertson for providing us with this information.

~ Editors



Rajnish Das is the Senior Assistant Manager at Attareekhat T.E. In addition to his hobbies which include listening to music, travelling and adventure sports such as rafting, Rajnish also has a keen interest in the history that surrounds him.

Atri Muni's Ashram

~ Rajnish Das
Attareekhat T.E.

Attareekhat is a very picturesque garden with a panoramic view of the Bhutan hills, and the mighty Himalayas in the background can be seen on a clear day. The estate is situated in the Udalguri district of Assam.

Just as most of the tea estates usually have some interesting reason or source for their name, Attareekhat too has an association with an unusual story of religious significance. It is named after Sage Atri's ashram (hermitage) which has been in existence here since time immemorial.

Atri Muni ('muni' means 'sage'), legendary scholar and bard, was believed to be the son of Lord Brahma and his name has been mentioned in the great Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

Sage Atri was one of the ten Maansa Putra (brain children) of Brahma, and the first of the Saptarishis – the seven great sages. He was also a teacher of Ayurveda. His wife was Sati Anasuya, sister of Sage Kapila. As a boon from the Lords – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva – she had Chandra, Dhattatreya and Durvasa as children. Sage Atri was the father of Sage Attreya Punarvash, who was the teacher of Cakara. As mentioned in the Ramayana, when Lord Rama along with Sita and Lakshman visited Atri Muni, Sati Anasuya gave Sita a discourse on the duties of a wife.

The Mahabharata mentions that it was Sage Atri's kind and wise advice that eventually made Dronacharya stop his rampage on the battlefield and meditate deeply amidst the turmoil until his soul left his body.

The ashram of Atri Muni still stands today and has been renovated and thereon maintained by the Company. In the vicinity of the ashram area, there is a very large dry pond behind the Ram-Sita temple. This pond is said to have been used by Atri Muni as a 'havan kund' where he performed a 'yagna' continuously for six months. This 'havan kund' is believed to be in existence since the 18th Adhyay of the

Aranya Kand in the Ramayana. Interestingly, this pond never fills up with water even during the heaviest monsoon months when the water in the adjoining drains of the sections flow at a higher level.

A yearly 'havan' is still performed here for seven days in February/March. This is organized by the Managing Committee of the Attareekhat Atrimuni Jagya Kunda. Since the 1980s the ashram was looked after by Baba Harnandan Das Tyagi. He handed over the charge of the establishment to his disciple, Baba Mangal Das Tyagi, who sought refuge with him since 1946. According to his followers, Baba Harnandan Das Tyagi left for his heavenly abode in 2003 at the grand old age of 135 years and thereafter Baba Mangal Das Tyagi continued to look after the ashram till 2010. Presently, his disciple, Baba Lal Das Tyagi is in charge of the establishment and of performing the Pujas.

The Atri Muni Mandir was inaugurated after renovation by Mr S. K. Mawandia in August 2015, when 'Pran Pratishtha' of idols of Sage Attrimuni, Lord Rama, Sita and Hanuman was done.





*The Memsahab's Guide
to Gracious Living*



~ Roshni Dagar
Bordubi T.E.

In addition to items influenced by Indian, English, Dutch and Portuguese fare, Sri Lankan cuisine includes traditional dishes passed down from generation to generation. As Roshni's mother hails from Sri Lanka, the 'Pearl of the Indian Ocean', she has grown up savouring these delicacies, and here she shares three recipes with us.

இலங்கை சாண்டி

The primary ingredient in Sri Lankan cuisine is coconut. Almost all gravies/curries are cooked in either coconut extract or coconut milk. Whether it is a simple potato curry, vegetables, pulses or even sweets, coconut forms the base for all Sri Lankan food. Readymade coconut milk powder or coconut milk tetra packs are easily available in the market but there's nothing like freshly extracted coconut milk. The extraction of coconut milk may be a little time consuming but it's worth it.

To get the milk from the coconut add a sufficient quantity of water to the grated coconut and extract the thick milk. Milk can be extracted from the pulp a second and third time, which will be thinner than the first extract. In the recipes here only the first extract (thick milk) is required.



சிக்கன் சரூ

Preparation Time – 30 minutes

Ingredients

- ½ kg chicken
- 3 tbsp grated coconut
- 3 tbsp oil
- Curry leaves – a few
- 1½ tsp finely chopped ginger and garlic together
- 3 green chillies, slit
- 2 onions - chopped
- 1 tomato - chopped
- Chilli powder, turmeric, salt
- Sri Lankan curry powder (Can be substituted with roasted cumin powder)
- 2 tbsp thick coconut milk

Method

Dry roast the grated coconut till golden. Do not let it burn. Cool and grind to a paste. Keep aside.

Heat the oil in a pan. Add curry leaves, chopped ginger and garlic, green chillies, and then the chopped onions. When the onions turn brown add the tomato. Once the tomato is cooked add salt, chilli powder and turmeric powder. Add Sri Lankan curry powder or roasted cumin powder. Let it cook. When the oil starts to separate add the coconut paste and a little water and simmer on medium heat till the coconut is done. Add the chicken and stir well. Add two cups of water and cover and cook on medium heat till the chicken is cooked. Lastly, add the coconut milk and boil once. Serve with rice.

banana flower

Ingredients

1 small banana flower

2½ tbsp oil

2 green chillies - chopped

Curry leaves - a few

1½ onions - chopped

Black mustard – a pinch

½ cup thick coconut milk

Salt, turmeric, chilli powder

Maldive fish (optional)

Method

Discard the falling/loose petals of the banana flower and wash it without damaging the flower. Cut the flower in two halves. Slice both the halves very fine. Add salt, turmeric powder, chilli powder and mix well. Keep aside.

Heat oil in a pan. Add green chillies, curry leaves, onion. Sauté. Add a pinch of mustard. After that, add the banana flower. (Do not cut the banana flower too much in advance.) Add the Maldive fish now, if you are using it. Mix the ingredients well, cover and cook on medium heat stirring in between. Cook till the water dries. Once dry, add coconut milk and let it simmer on medium heat till cooked. Serve with rice.



vattalappam

Ingredients

2 cups thick coconut milk

6 eggs

250 gm jaggery

A pinch of cinnamon powder

A pinch of grated nutmeg



Method

Beat the egg yolks and whites separately. Then beat well together, mix in the finely scraped jaggery, the coconut milk and spice. Strain and pour into a greased mould, cover with greased paper and steam for 40 to 50 minutes. Refrigerate and garnish with cashew. Serve in the mould.

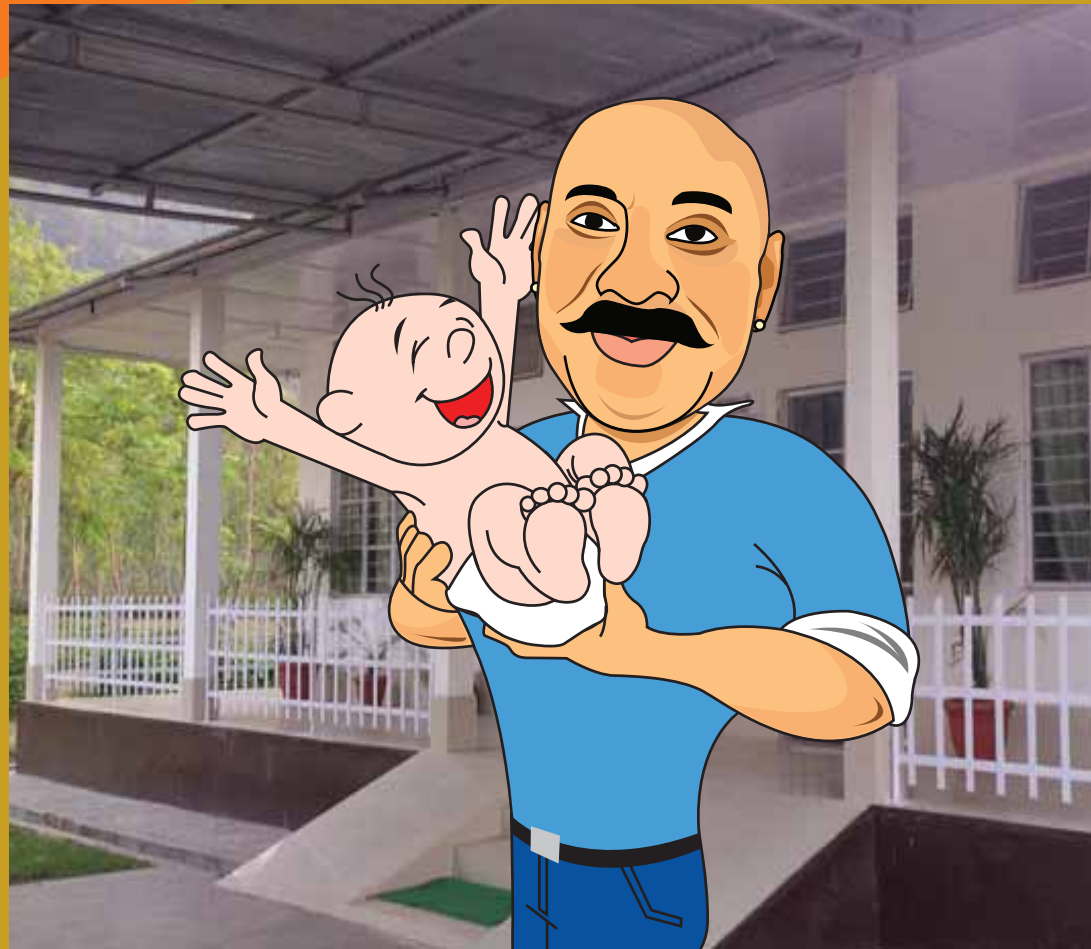
Alternatively, this mixture may be baked at 180° for 20 to 25 minutes. Make sure to cover the top with foil while baking.

Vattalappam is a famous pudding in Sri Lanka and is specially prepared during Ramadan (Ramzaan).

Kamjari

A maverick who tackles the mundane and the unexpected with equal élan - that's Sivaji!

The Accidental Midwife!



~ Sivaji Dutt
Margherita T.E.

KAMJARI...a singularly unique word found in no dictionary or in any language but which features every day and hour in a planter's language and lifestyle. As a kid in diapers, Mum would tell us, "Dad has gone for kamjari", or we would hear Dad admonishing someone over the field telephone, "Kamjari kyu nahi kiya?" A decade and half later, I actually got to know what kamjari actually meant.

Kamjari, other than being a work detail or a schedule to be maintained, covered the maverick's existence of a tea planter. Years ago, a young lad returning home from an 'out of estate' rendezvous decided in his wisdom, derived from all of one year's experience, to enter the hospital to make his presence felt. Strolling past the maternity ward he could hear the agonising groan of a mother-to-be. He walked in, and to his surprise assisted in delivering a baby girl! It still amazes him and even to date, he rarely fails to visit the hospital and gently converse with the indoor patients.

'A kamjari given is a kamjari done', is the dictum of a tea planter. Once, a Manager instructed his Assistant to plant the tea saplings which were in polythene sleeves. The job was done without any questions asked, sleeves and



all! A perfect example of adherence to the boss' instructions.

Walking along the plucking paths, the Field Assistant heard the women making a hissing noise. He queried and was told that the noise would keep the snakes away from the plucking table. After a short while, to his amazement, he actually did see a viper. To impress the women, he decided to catch the snake and managed to let it loose in the adjoining 'hulla', thus keeping his macho image intact.

In the Dooars where some gardens have no definite boundaries, it was quite usual to see freshly inducted trainees crossing over to the other estate and giving instructions to the bemused workers. The accommodating workforce would give him that understanding maternal

smile and invite the 'Baccha Sahab' to join them for lunch. It was a widely prevalent and accepted system earlier, to be with the work force and partake in their cultural/social merrymaking.

A planter's kamjari has no specific work station. He could be with government officials on an evening, with elbow crooked, amber liquid flowing, calmly discussing various issues that require solutions. Even the golf course is a level playing field to discuss work and assist each other.

Many a time, executives have been in hostile territory, without fear, negotiating with undesirable elements and have successfully prevailed over the situation.

On one occasion, a Chota Sahab was called to the Manager's bungalow for a drink. By late evening he was given an armload of kamjari that would require an

Einstein's brain to remember and which needed completion within a specified period. Being battle scarred, he managed to comply with all orders, despite his inebriated state. It would appear that a planter's capacity to retain is unaffected, perhaps even enhanced by Bacchus' Brew!

The Burra Sahab's frame of mind during morning kamjari hours is an indication of how the day would progress. There have been numerous instances of paper weights flying, pencils snapped, books sailing out of windows, total silence greeting the young Assistant's explanations, smoke rings floating around, and the sharp retort of a palm hitting the table top. These behavioural patterns of the Burra Sahab actually make the kamjari more interesting and strengthens the young executive's resilience towards eccentric behaviour. The story goes that Assistants in a garden, during morning discussions, were given the kamjari to secure a water reservoir. The 'Burha' told them to use imaginary grenades and machine guns to set up a protective defence perimeter around the tank. Talk of eccentricity!

Another story is of a very senior planter calling his boys to his bungalow to discuss kamjari. In his rather merry state, the Burra Sahab decided to test their allegiance towards him, along with their courage, at the point of a revolver, which he was sure had no bullets in it. He decided that it would be fun to play a game of Russian Roulette with them, since the revolver had no ammunition. After pulling the trigger thrice, with all three 'targets' almost wetting their shorts, it was time for the junior most and bravest of the lot to be tested. Much to the consternation of both the Assistant and the Burra Sahab, the gun went off and the live round almost sent the lad to his Maker! In order to exact revenge, the wily lad decided to give his Burra Sahab some sleepless nights by revving his misfiring scooter around the Burra Bungalow way past midnight!

Over a period of three decades, kamjari makes a planter adept at handling aberrant situations and moulds him to also be a doctor, a lawyer, an engineer... you name it... apart from honing his administrative and persuasive oratory skills.

Long may the 'Never Say Die' spirit of a planter live on!

Elegant and graceful, Jayati is the quintessential Tea lady. She keeps a lovely home, reads a lot, loves knitting and is an avid gardener.



~ Jayati Thapa
Chuapara T.E.

The Chuapara and Central Dooars Swimming Club



The planters' club has always been an integral part of a planter's existence in Tea. So many tales have been swapped about the 'good ole days' at the club and yet so many more are in the making even as the times are 'a-changing'.

Nestled in the Eastern part of the Dooars in the brand new district of Alipurduar in North Bengal is one such club: The Chuapara and Central Dooars Swimming Club. Records date its existence since before the 1940s. As the name suggests, it was formerly the 'watering hole' for only two estates – Chuapara and Central Dooars. This changed in the late nineties with the Polypack Packet Tea Division being set up and the acquisition of three more estates, namely Bhatpara, Jaibirpara and Mathura. From a mere fifteen odd members the club was suddenly bursting at its seams, boasting more than fifty members.

Home to many seasoned planters, the club has, over the years, welcomed into its fold many rookie planters and many shy young brides who have left its comforting bosom teary-eyed when the time came for transfers to new districts.

Despite its diminutive club house in the days of yore, it boasted its own swimming pool, a hard court for tennis, a squash court and a small field for badminton in the cold weather that also doubled up as a 5-a-side football field. In fact, the Inter-Company Quadrangular 5-a-side football was hosted here several times, the last being held in November 2000. This used to be played between the estates of Assam, Darjeeling, Dooars and Head Office.



Till the recent past, due to fewer members, the club had only one main lounge/bar, a verandah and a service pantry-cum-kitchen with a powder room for ladies and a gentlemen's restroom. Around 2006-07 with an increased membership and the addition of many children, the need for a children's room was felt and finally around 2010/11, one was added to the existing club house.

As in the rest of the world, the effect of global warming was felt even in this tiny corner and so the air conditioner made its entry around 2007-08. A pool table was also



introduced around the same time and of course it too made its way into the lounge/bar! Games took

on a new meaning on Wednesdays, with several golfers taking to the course (the airstrip for the Cessna having doubled up as a nine hole course!), the lone tennis court being packed from around 4.30 pm till close to 10 pm and the rest of the non-playing members congregating around the pool table for a shot, including the ladies and yours truly! That left the children, who made every available open space their playing field, with ayahs in tow. The inclusion of the ACs led to a rise in card games and so the lounge/bar was the most packed area, with players as well as non-players staking their own space!

In February 2008 the club hosted its first ever Flower Show, it being Mr Rajeev Takru's brainchild, who felt that the club now had a considerable membership to hold this event. Except in 2011 when the Dooars saw some major political upheavals, the Flower Show has now become the most important fixture in the club's calendar.

With an increase in members, the need for space was also felt and so in 2013 a call was taken to renovate the club house. It took a whole year for the renovations to be



completed and so the Wednesday teas were shifted to the Hangar - yet another story for another day! The newly renovated club opened its doors in February 2014, just in time for the Flower Show. The Club now boasts a newly done up nineteenth hole - the bar - and a billiards room. After the bar, generally hogged by the 'burhas', the billiards room qualifies as the room of choice for all the young planters. From the days of one cozy lounge (read packed) the members today are distributed all over the club premises.

A new table tennis table has also been acquired to give members more choice of games, but soccer in the summers and tennis-ball cricket in the cold weather remain a religion not to be messed with. Of course there is no stronger love than that of the loyal golfer who refuses to stray to younger and greener sporting pastures!

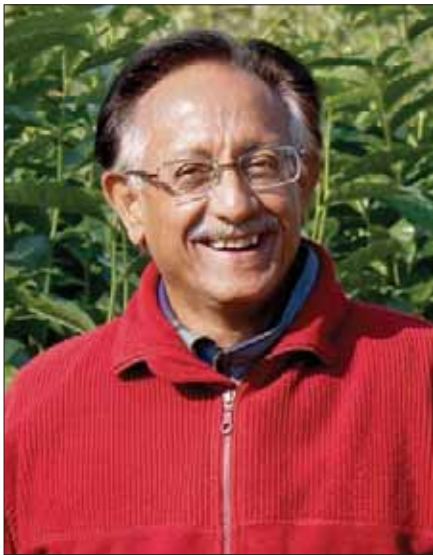
Apart from all these sporting activities, Diwali and Christmas are celebrated with much fervour and gaiety. The monthly club supper is a celebration in itself as each estate puts up a feast fit for kings. Wednesdays remain the most important mid-week link for all the members to play, swap stories, talk shop, and make memories, methinks. The ladies too are kept busy, doing what they do best - catering! Despite the distance, Jainti too makes up the numbers on most Wednesdays, doing their bit to stay in touch.

True to the spirit, this club has remained an integral part of the Planter's existence. Surely every member, past and present, has at least one story to share about the 'good ole days' at the club.

Cheers to CCDS club...many more yarns are in the making, biding their time for spinning.

Requiem

RAMANUJ DASGUPTA



1957 - 2016

SUBHAN GOGOI



1953 - 2016

“ If I should die and leave here awhile
Be not like others, soon undone, who keep
Long vigil by the silent dust and weep
For my sake turn to life and smile
Nerving the heart and trembling hand to do
Something to comfort weaker hearts than thine
Complete these dear unfinished tasks of mine
And I, perchance, may therein comfort you.”

~ Anon

poSt Script

Wistful Thinking...



It is said that we leave a bit of ourselves behind when we leave a place... we stay there, even though we go away. So it is, when each subsequent transfer carries us from one garden to the next. We grow roots where we stay, with the

place nurturing us as much as we do it. There's that little corner of the garden where one would disappear to with a book; those lovely birds which would fly down for some crumbs each day; that well-trodden path one would take regularly for a walk; old, familiar faces of the bungalow help, who had been family for the time one had spent there...so many tiny things which made our life beautiful. One not only misses the people and place, but also misses the person one was then, at that place, since one would never be this way, ever again.

Tea children treasure their time spent in every garden, for this is where their life's milestones have been made. Their memories are enchanting and

mesmerising. From hunting for fairies and pixies among the flowers, to learning to admire and respect nature as young adults, they have indeed been so fortunate to have grown up in these surroundings. They have been taught the invaluable lessons of compassion, having observed first hand, the gentle lifestyles of wild animals. Many of the children have their own pets, for, with the run of the huge compounds, one can have happy animals in the home. And so our children build their cache of memories, reliving precious moments spent in each garden.

And life goes on. We look forward to new places, building bonds over the years, remembering the old yet eagerly taking root in the new place once more.

“How hard it is to escape from places. However carefully one goes, they hold you – you leave little bits of yourself fluttering on the fences – like rags and shreds of your very life.”

Rupa Saikia



THE WM TIMES TEAM

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The Lone Ranger at Bhoteachang T.E.



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