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# Editorial



Every experience in life is an education, but travel is perhaps the best way to expand one's mind and broaden one's horizons. As Saint Augustine said way back in the 4th century CE, "The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page."

Two estate Superintendents/Managers from Assam were sent by the Company to study the Community Development Forums on Sri Lankan tea estates, with the intent to implement the practices on the Company's own estates. Three others were sent to visit the Company's estates in Uganda. They share their experiences with us in Telescope and Visitors' Vignettes respectively.

Parts of the ancient Silk Route were reopened recently, and an intrepid traveller tells us about his travels on this historic road in Off the Beaten Track.

As conservation figures large on every estate's agenda, existing water bodies like the two lakes at Tarajulie T.E. are taken care of and used judiciously, while estates adjoining forests, like Attareekhat T.E., do their best to assist the authorities in ensuring the welfare of the forests' denizens. Some estates have 'gems' like the 'tame' fish which have lived for years in the pond adjoining the temple at Lepetkatta T.E.

Most upcountry executives have had encounters with wildlife, often saving lives (both human and animal), as you will discover in It's a Wild World, and 'animal' tales continue with an account of a close encounter with gorillas, and the endearing story of an adopted pup.

In keeping with the Company's ethos of community service, the Management at Corramore T.E. has built an extension for a college which does not get much assistance due to its location in difficult terrain. Assam Valley School continues to impart quality all-round education under the aegis of the Williamson Magor Education Trust; and the Trust's annual Assam Valley Literary Award was presented to yet another renowned Assamese litterateur.

Come summer and interests shift towards cold meals and keeping the garden pretty (without the beautiful winter flowers), so while one

Memsahab gives us recipes of some appetizing items for a cold luncheon, another gives us tips on planting a summer garden.

While HealthWatch shares some useful information on coping with Stress, planters@play features Mangaldai Polo Club, one of the 'watering holes' which play an important role in the planters' wellbeing as the facilities allow them to unwind and enjoy their leisure time after the rigours of Kamjari.

A Club much frequented by our Kolkata executives is the Calcutta Cricket & Football Club (CC&FC), which is the second oldest sports club in the world. Interestingly, a rugby trophy associated with the Club – the Calcutta Cup – is still in existence in England. We bring you the story of this trophy in Narration.

We join PhuBen in their Tet (Vietnamese New Year) celebrations, and bid farewell to some long-serving colleagues from Assam who retired recently, one of whom shares his Reminiscence with us.

"There is no trouble so great or grave that cannot be much diminished by a nice cup of tea," said Bernard-Paul Heroux. I hope the rest of the world agrees and drinks copious amounts of McLeod Russel tea this season!

Cheers!

*Sarita Dasgupta*

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# Treasury



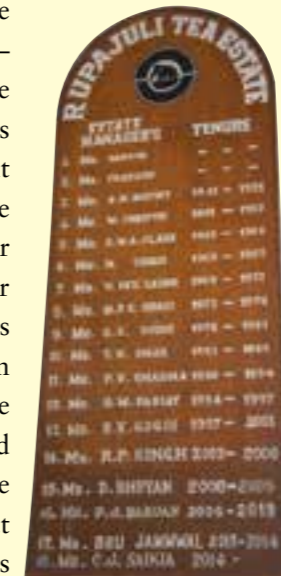
~ Rupa Saikia

Rupajuli T.E. lies a few kilometres to the north-west of the historical Tezpur town in Upper Assam. Come winter, the northern side of the garden offers one a grandiose view of the age-old sentinels of India – the mighty Himalayas. Much before the estate existed, this place was known as 'Kothalguri' – *kothal* meaning jackfruit and *guri*, the base of the tree, as there were a lot of the said fruit trees under which the early settlers had built their homes. It is not known when exactly this area was cleared and the tea plantation started. As per records available, The Rupajuli Tea Company was formed in the year 1907, much later than the surrounding estates. It is possible that another Company had existed earlier, as

some Sections in the Divisions have been recorded as having been planted out in 1894. The first Manager here was Mr Dawson, followed by Mr Pearson,

whose names, apart from their surnames and tenures, have been lost in the annals of time. Both were believed to have started this estate. Mr A.H. Maybey was the third Manager whose tenure recorded here was from 1941-1951.

The name Rupajuli has been somewhat anglicised by the British as it was originally called 'Rupajuri'. In the Assamese language, *rupa* means silver and *juri* means stream. Two streams run alongside the garden, going by the names of Borjuli and Dipota. The name therefore, probably referred to one of the streams, which had crystal clear water and shone like silver, in



comparison to the iron-tainted red water common to this area.



The estate has a total grant area of 593.91 hectares, with two Divisions, namely, Kuttalguri and Rupajuli, which are relatively equal in size. While the main Division, Kuttalguri, is located on a plain area, Rupajuli on the other hand, has undulating sections of tea and is located some kilometres away, separated by a neighbouring estate. In the olden days, the British planters would move around the garden on horses, and the sheds where the tea leaf was weighed, had an attached room for the horses to rest. In fact, one such shed in Section 15 of Kuttalguri is still known as *Ghora Ghar* (Horse House).



Rupajuli is ETP and ISO 22000 certified. The factory manufactures around 30,000 kg of standard Orthodox tea. The annual production of tea leaves is around 6.5 lakh kg, with another 1.5 lakh kg

being sourced from small tea growers in the vicinity. Gone are the days when the tea was transported by bullock carts and steamers, replaced now by a modern transportation network, which of course, is more viable.



The Management has developed a number of water bodies here, improving the micro-climate of the area. This has benefitted the garden immensely and has also attracted a large variety of birds, unseen earlier. These water bodies in Rupajuli Division also serve the purpose of irrigation in the winter months, when rainfall is scanty.



In the bygone years, leopards and tigers were said to have been spotted in the garden, but these days, the elephants are regular visitors

instead. Sri Ramchand, a retired worker in his 80s, had a sad tale to relate. The incident took place in 1972, when a leopard entered his home in Banglaguri Line and attacked his wife, resulting in her demise. Those days, the estate was surrounded by thick jungle inhabited by a lot of wildlife, which was gradually cleared for human habitation, resulting in wild animals slowly moving deeper into the forest. Awareness camps are held by the Management to protect the local flora and fauna.

Both Kuttalguri and Rupajuli Divisions have a vermicompost unit each, the combined annual production of organic compost exceeding 100MT. This is used in the nursery to grow healthy plants for the garden, besides being utilized to enrich the soil in practices like replanting and infilling. There is an ITK (Indigenous Technical Knowledge) unit as well, which helps in controlling pests in the garden.



The nursery on any estate plays a very important role and Rupajuli has a well maintained one, raising bi-clonal plants. It caters to an area of around 1.5 hectares annually, with healthy plants. A shade tree nursery too is maintained here, while ancient trees are protected and revered by the workers.





awareness about health issues and the importance of the girl child by routinely visiting the Lines and educating the workers on these issues. There are nine Anganwadi centres on the property. Once a month, the SMO along with the Welfare Officer, holds a meeting with the Mothers' Club members to discuss issues relating to health, hygiene and sanitation among the workers and addresses any problems faced by them. The SMO and her team, along with the ASHA and Anganwadi members, hold a Health Awareness Camp in the hospital on the first and third Wednesday of each month, which are also the days when vaccinations are given. Twice a year, they visit the garden schools where the haemoglobin level of each child is checked and treatment given to those with low levels. Health camps are held among the students as well. Tuberculosis Awareness Camps held on a regular basis have helped reduce the spread of this disease significantly in the Lines.



The estate has a hospital looking after the medical requirements of the workers, ably manned by a Senior Medical Officer (SMO) and her team. There is a dispensary in Rupajuli Division since it is located at a distance from the main Division. There are 21 Mothers' Club members and 5 ASHA volunteers who work towards the betterment of the workforce in the garden. They regularly inspect the Lines for cleanliness and ensure that expectant mothers visit the hospital for check-ups. They also visit the mothers post-delivery to check that they are getting the required nutrition, maintaining their personal hygiene, and getting the babies immunized as per schedule. The Anganwadi and Adolescent Club members too play an active role in instilling



The central crèche near the hospital has trained attendants to care for the workers' children when the parents are at work. The children are given milk and *khichdi* (rice, lentils and vegetables cooked together) daily, supervised by the hospital staff.



The Company has constructed a Shiva Mandir on the estate in 2014. Shiva Ratri is celebrated with great

fervour by the devotees each year. The Radha-Krishna temple located in Kuttalguri Division is believed to be one of the oldest in this area. People flock here to celebrate Janmashtami annually. Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Holi, Magh Bihu and Christmas are celebrated by all the workers, staff and executives here. During Kali Puja, the old custom of screening films outdoors still continues, with the football field doubling up as an open air theatre.

Football is a game which is very popular, with the garden team winning many a prestigious tournament. The girls too enjoy this sport. Rupajuli hosts an Inter-Estate football tournament, as well as some cricket tournaments which are enthusiastically participated in.

After the old Manager's Bungalow burnt down some time ago, the new one was built near the same site. The story goes that when Mr Geoff Clark, then Manager, realised there was no way of saving the old bungalow constructed of wood and thatch, asked the Bearer to set up a table and chair on the lawn. The gentleman then sat there, sipping a beer while calmly watching the bungalow burn down.

During the Chinese Aggression of 1962, as per government directives, Mr Bill Christie who was the Manager then, evacuated the bungalow and was sent to Calcutta (now Kolkata). After his departure, the bungalow Bearer found a bag left on the porch and went running to the Assistant Manager, Late Mr Zufi Sultan, who opened it and found a sizeable amount of money. Wasting no time, Mr Sultan, who later retired from here as Superintendent, somehow managed to catch a flight to Calcutta and handed it over to the Head Office with its contents intact.

Rupajuli has won The Best Circle Award for Quality among the Mangaldai – Thakubari district gardens in 2009-10.

The Rupajuli team is wished the very best in the years ahead.



Team (L to R): G. Thapa, A. Gurung, Dr T. Barua, C.J. Saikia (Manager) & P.P. Singha



## Community Development Forums in the Tea Plantations of Sri Lanka

~ Bidyut Bordoloi, Bukhial T.E.

Sri Lanka's most important industry, the Tea Sector, accounts for 19% of the nation's foreign earnings and provides direct employment to over 3,10,000 people, the majority of them being women. Sri Lanka is the world's fourth largest producer of tea. The humidity, cool temperatures and rainfall of the country's central highlands favour the production of high quality tea. The industry was introduced to the country in 1867 by James Taylor, a British tea planter who arrived in 1852. The major tea growing areas are Kandy and Nuwara Eliya in Central Province; Badulla, Bandarawela and Haputale in Uva Province; Galle, Matara and MulKirigala in Southern Province and Ratnapura and Kegalle in Sabaragamuwa Province.



A Typical Sri Lankan Tea Plantation

Recently, my colleague Partha Sen and I had the opportunity to visit Carolina T.E., a unit of Watawala Plantations PLC, Sri Lanka.

Carolina Factory



Carolina Tea Factory stands on the western slope of the Central Hill, where teas of exquisite quality are manufactured almost throughout the year. The factory was one of the original 'Central Factories' constructed by the river that ran by the estate, to avail themselves of hydro power. It now boasts a well established mini hydro power project. Carolina has been developed to produce the most sought after CTC teas that achieve premium prices on a regular basis at the auctions.

At Carolina T.E. we were introduced to the concept of CDFs or Community Development Forums set



up by the European Union funded Plantations Community Empowerment Project [PCEP] on each of the 13 participating tea estates. CDFs are designed to open up new channels of communication between stakeholders in the plantation sector. It serves as a forum where collective decisions about community development priorities and workers' work conditions are negotiated and decided in a transparent way. Management, workers, unions and community leaders are all represented. CDFs also form sub-committees to identify necessary changes within their communities and build linkages with local government authorities. People can work together in communities to increase their wellbeing and make their lives wealthier, fairer, safer, more skilled, healthier and more sustainable.

They are, in effect, 'mini parliaments' or participatory spaces. Collective decisions are sought, negotiated and decided upon with regard to community development priorities and worker conditions. Practices and mechanisms to enhance accountability, transparency and equity are also put in place so that development priorities reflect the needs of many, especially the most marginalized.

Chosen by the community, CDF members are answerable to their Section of the estate and responsible for keeping them informed of decisions taken on their behalf. Just as important is their responsibility to consult their community members on issues and concerns. The CDFs have also played a critical role in providing a platform through which Government and other service providers can connect with the community thus enhancing their accessibility to entitled services and other economic and social opportunities. Responsible for initiating estate development plans, the CDF facilitates

community consultations as part of designing plans that are based on priorities found to be the most keenly felt by the estate communities. While mostly funded by the tea companies and the PCEP Project, CDF Officers are increasingly taking the initiative in approaching local NGOs and charitable bodies in the area to apply for funding to match the estate Management's contributions. Since 2008 a total of 123 Micro Projects valued at Rs 14,357,868 have been completed, directly benefitting numerous families.

Workers on estates with CDFs have benefited from: improved working environment; improved access to key services such as health care and voter registration; increased ability to represent themselves democratically in and outside the workplace; and improved gender equality. Overall, an assessment showed that as a result of these changes, for every dollar invested in CDFs, over 42 dollars of social value was produced.

Reported benefits of CDFs in estates (including Carolina T.E.) can be summarized as follows:

- during an industry wide 'go slow' strike, estates with CDFs reported little effect on productivity levels and no incidents of damage or violence
- as a result of community meetings, the estate has now appointed female Supervisors [Kanganis] for the first time, and many female workers now collect their own wages as against the hitherto widely accepted norm of men collecting the wages for female relatives
- the practice of brewing and selling illegal alcohol and its associated problems has been curbed to a large extent by giving alcohol vendors full time paid work
- less tension between ethnic groups

- helped people to identify the problems and needs which they share, and respond to these
- helped people to discover the resources that they already have
- promoted knowledge, skills, confidence and the capacity to act together
- strengthened organization and leadership within communities
- introduced saving schemes for workers which also facilitate loan and grant facilities on specific grounds
- increased practical skills and income generation
- workers felt that they were better equipped to manage their finances
- introduced government-endorsed computer training facilities on the estate at a marginal cost
- helped set up small scale industries and projects that directly benefit the workers
- facilitated implementation of government's welfare schemes on the estate
- facilitated mechanization in field and factory
- advancement of female rights and increased worker morale and dignity
- increased pride in estate and enjoyment of work
- fewer strikes and conflicts: workers feel a greater sense of ownership towards the plantation
- improved productivity, with increases of up to 25% seen by some estates
- improvement in education, medical and recreational facilities
- improved quality of life: workers felt that their overall quality of life has improved

It is now widely accepted that giving workers access to forums where they can address challenges around working conditions alongside Estate Managers, empowers them and contributes to a more sustainable Tea Sector. The model facilitates communication between stakeholders in the plantations; and serves as a forum for collective, negotiated decisions regarding community development priorities and labour conditions.

Women are also given equal opportunities to participate and hold office at the CDF, ensuring that the views of the largely female workforce are represented. As workers and their families live on estates, working and living conditions are very closely related. In addition to opening dialogue, CDFs provide a means to identify improvements in community development. For example, a number of CDFs helped the Ethical Tea Partnership's programme aimed at improving tea estates' compliance with social and environmental principles. Others take on the task of establishing links with local government entities, facilitating access to identity cards, birth and marriage certificates, or pension entitlements. This model recognizes that not all social responsibilities should fall on the shoulders of businesses, but that businesses can play an important role in ensuring that supportive systems are in place. In addition to the benefits to individual businesses, worker empowerment is one way to increase social and economic sustainability of the Tea Sector as a whole. By empowering workers, estates benefit from access to new markets. Social and environmental certifications require social audits to prove that international labour standards are met. In this case, the presence of the improved relations and standards that come through the CDF confers a double advantage: it makes obtaining certifications easier through improved fulfillment of the workers' occupational health and safety and other base criteria, and it streamlines the administrative process once the certification is obtained.

"Worker empowerment is an investment in the future – one that becomes more, not less, urgent in times of financial stress."



Our Delegation with CDF, Carolina T.E.

It's a Wild World



## Trysts with Creatures Wild

~ Faisal P. Ansari, Koomsong T.E.

Tea is what you make of it. I don't mean whether you like it hot, cold or iced; with or without milk, but as a way of life. It was the closeness to nature and the outdoors that enchanted me.

At a time when game was aplenty, every estate's Jeep was customized for Sunday *shikar*, with a swilling spot-light and a brace for the gun. The planter of yore brazenly boasted about his kills, adding some spice, I dare say, to make it worth a listen to at the bar! Come Christmas and a wild duck roast was not a rarity.

Times have changed and planters today are committed to saving and conserving wildlife. I have had my fair share of trysts with creatures wild in the course of life in Tea. Some incidents may sound unbelievable but as the saying goes, "Truth is stranger than fiction."

Finding snakes in the extension planting area at Halem T.E. was a common occurrence; every time one heard a shriek one knew a snake had stopped work. Having a basic knowledge about snakes, yours truly



was always quick to reach the spot! Luckily, most of the time the snake was a harmless rat snake (*dhamna*) half inside its hole, more scared perhaps than we were! I would catch and release it away from the work area,

despite the *Munda* workers literally begging me to let them have it, as it apparently made a nice stew!

Once, a Line Chowkidar informed us that a python had been caught in the workers' colony. My only means of transport being my bicycle, I coaxed my colleague Noel to take me there quickly on his motorbike. We found an eight-foot long Burmese python with an arrowhead embedded in its back. After a struggle I managed to put it in a sack and carry it to the bungalow, with Noel shouting, "Oy, don't let go!" all the way. With the help of Dele, my Bearer, the arrowhead was removed and the wound bandaged with turmeric and mustard oil. In a month's time the python had recovered fully. In the meantime another python was rescued while being taken to the bazaar so I had two of them cohabiting with me.

I soon became quite famous for catching snakes. One summer afternoon a Sardar from the women's *challan* spotted a cobra in a hole in the drain close to which the women were having their lunch. Telling the women to leave quickly, he came to inform me. The grumbling had barely begun when the creature hissed loudly, making the women leap to their feet and scamper away. With misplaced bravado, (please, never try this!!) I jumped into the drain, went to the hole, caught hold of the snake's head, dragged it out and without looking back, started walking away with it coiled around my arm. The women were jumping and shouting in excitement (or so I thought), drowning out the Sardar's warnings. He threw me a bamboo pole, pointing behind me. I turned around and, for a

few seconds, thought I was staring at death as there was another cobra right behind me! Somehow, I pinned it down with the bamboo, trapped the head under my shoe and picked it up. There I was, with a cobra coiled around each arm and no one willing to come anywhere near me. How I got out of the drain cannot be retold here!!



On the same estate, a huge, beautiful Eagle Owl – with large, round orange eyes – was rescued by the workers. Dr Rajen Gogoi did his best but the bird unfortunately succumbed to its injuries a few days later.

At Tezpore & Gogra T.E., I rescued another python. Our hen had hatched some chicks but there were a couple of addled eggs which I placed in the python's pit. The next morning, one of those 'bad' eggs had hatched and the chick was happily sitting on the python's head, oblivious of danger! The python kept its head upright till the chick could be moved to safety... or so we fondly thought! Unfortunately, I didn't have a camera to record these beautiful moments.



I also rescued a baby monkey at Tezpore & Gogra, who became quite a pet, often feeding off my hand.

On a picnic at Upper Sejousa while posted at Dekorai T.E., I saw a large elephant sauntering on the road. Leaping out of the car, oblivious to the warning shouts from Mr Sanjay Batra, I started running to get a closer shot with my camera. I didn't realize that I was running parallel to a female in the ditch alongside the road until she suddenly emerged. I froze but elephants are myopic and the wind was, luckily, blowing away from me. Barely breathing I walked backwards to the car.



One evening I was driving the Acting Manager, Mr Rajeev Mehrotra, back from the Club. As we entered his bungalow I saw a leopard flash past and jump the fence. Mr Mehrotra would have none of it as leopards had never been sighted at Dekorai, so I drove to where the fencing wire was still oscillating, and keeping the headlights on, prised out a small tuft of fur from it. It was a leopard's! Getting back in the car I saw Mr Mehrotra staring at the fence. The big cat had returned and was sitting where, just moments ago, I'd plucked the fur from! All that separated us from the animal were a 15 ft wide gap and a 4 ft high fence! Wishing that the animal would do something, I balled some pieces of paper and threw them at it. Getting no reaction I got out of the car and threw my cap, which landed quite close to the fence. The leopard snarled...due more to the sweaty smell rather than fear, I presume! Mr Mehrotra was urging me back to the car but I don't know what came over me. I walked to the fence and picked up my cap. The leopard rose, glaring at me. Staring back at it, I walked backwards to the car, only to be greeted by a livid Mr Mehrotra raining expletives on me! I got lucky again but this stupid bravado is surely going to get me into trouble one day!!

In the late 90s Phillobari T.E. was rich in wildlife. White-winged wood ducks could be seen late in the evening around the river opposite Section 30, where the red-eyed tree frog was also a common sight. Yellow tree frogs regularly found their way to the bungalows in search of insects attracted by the lights. I made three rescues at Phillobari – a flying squirrel being hunted by the workers; a fawn being carried away by a hunter who'd already killed the doe; and the strangest, a sick fishing cat found near the river. All the animals were allowed to roam freely. The fawn



was a darling and my wife, Lubna, personally took care of it. Unfortunately, it was too young to survive without its mother. The flying squirrel succumbed to its injuries but the fishing cat was released near the river after it recovered. It didn't look back but shot through the undergrowth and disappeared in a split second. We would miss it but the joy of seeing it return to its natural habitat was indescribable.

The most exciting experience was being chased by a killer elephant! Visiting a friend at the Digboi Hosital, we took the Pengari Forest road as it cut the distance to Digboi by half. The papers had reported a rogue elephant at large which had already killed a dozen men including the hunter deployed by the forest department. En route we were stopped by the villagers, cautioning us not to go any farther as the rogue was somewhere ahead. But, my confidence bolstered by my new blue Gypsy 'imported' from Nagaland, I decided to go ahead. As we crossed a grove of trees the rogue emerged right behind us and started chasing the vehicle. The maid shrieked, "Haa...thi!" and threw little Sarah into Lubna's lap! In the rearview mirror I saw the pink tip of the elephant's trunk almost reaching the rear rail. I hit the pedal hard and the vehicle zoomed ahead. The road was so badly rutted that we spent more time in the air than on the road, with the beast chasing us hard. After about a hundred metres it gave up, to our relief. We took the longer route back home!



Although elephants are regular visitors to the North Bank estates – every visit causing trepidation as to what damage they might cause – it is rare to witness the birth of a wild

elephant in the garden and see the mother escorting the newborn to the safety of the forest within an hour of giving birth. I was lucky to witness this twice at Boroi T.E.

Where old bushes were being uprooted at Boroi, a clutch of large, rubbery reptile eggs was discovered under the soil. Hoping they were a cobra's eggs, I took them home and started incubating them in a litter of

rotten leaves in an old glass battery jar. However, some days later, I found baby monitors in the jar, and I duly released them near an ant hill.



Birds were in abundance there too. A beautiful sunbird, hardly measuring 3 inches from head to tail tip, would come to the office every day.

A Collared Scops owl (named Raowl by my daughter, Mehvish) was bought from a band of urchins. With enough love and care it regained its strength and, one fine evening, flew away from its perch in the *jaali kamra*.



I was pleasantly surprised to find an Indian flapshell turtle at Dirial T.E. The creature, weighing 10 kg and measuring 2 feet in length, may have ventured on land from the nearby Tingri River and landed in the hands of villagers. Had we not reached in time to save it with a mixture of cajoling and threats, it would surely have turned into turtle soup! We handed it over to the Wildlife Ranger at the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, where it was released deep in the swamps. Dirial is also home to India's smallest duck, the beautiful black and white Cotton Teal, which I saw many a time in the pond opposite Section 13 of Pailabari Division.

If you are a keen observer and love nature you can't ask for a better place to be than on a tea estate.





~ Benu Grewal  
Mwenge, Uganda

## Dak's Journey from the Himalayas to the Mountains of the Moon - The Rwenzoris

One vacation we decided to trek up to a rest house at Dhakuri on our way to Pindari glacier in the Kumaon region of the Himalayas. Disappointed that we were unable to see the majestic view of the Nanda Devi massif because of overcast skies, I insisted that we stay another day and wait to experience one of the most beautiful sights in the Himalayas.

The next day dawned with overcast skies and flurries of snow. As we were warming ourselves with cups of tea in a small tea shack, a tiny pup curled himself on my feet, warming my toes. I fell completely in love with him!!

Having lost a dog a couple of months earlier I had no intention of going through the trauma of rearing another one just to lose him again. However, with the mutt warming my toes, my heart ruled my head and I got Gary to get him for me to take home. I never



realized that training both the master, Gary, and the dog, Dak, would be equally difficult tasks!

So, I walked Dak into our lives. He took to us as surrogate parents and the six inch mutt looking up at a six foot Gary was a sight to behold. On the way down, half walking and mostly being carried, we brought him to the car and drove down to the nearest town searching for a dog-friendly hotel. He then travelled to Delhi with us and drove my brother's full grown dogs up the wall by nastily using his needle-like incisors.

Dak took his first flight to Guwahati and settled down at Bargang T.E. where he tried to dominate all and sundry, but failed with the Company mascot, Bijli Prasad the elephant. The 'hate' relationship started with Dak trying to bite the majestic elephant's legs and Bijli Prasad trying to get back by kicking him, uprooting divots in my lawn in the process!



When we were moving to Rwanda, we decided to take the dogs with us, against advice. They travelled in dog crates, but when I saw a member of the ground staff kick one of the crates while in transit at Addis Ababa, I lost my cool. As a result, I was allowed to walk Dak and Patch on the tarmac while we waited for the next flight.

In Kigali, we stayed in a double storey house. The balcony being new to them, the dogs initially explored it by walking tentatively to the edge, which eventually led to them viewing the world from an elevated position. A move to a bigger house with a lawn was a welcome relief.

Finding ways to escape was nothing new to this dog from the hills. Dak found his way out numerous times. He once entered our neighbouring guest house, much to the annoyance of many and the delight of a few. As he entered each room, the alarmed guests of both sexes ran out in various states of disarray – a welcome sight for Gary's eyes as he followed to catch him!

We were safe on his watch as no one got by him – be it a casual passer-by or some intruder. Dak nipped the friends and bit the intruders. He had a unique way of first nipping the household help and then endearing himself to all. The dog next door was rather attractive and the barking 'conversation' over the respective walls was, at times, too much to bear. Dak would perch on a pole with all four paws like a goat, trying to attract her.

The good times in Kigali came to an end and we were to move to Uganda. En route to Fort Portal, Dak the smuggler was made to sit on a covering under which were bottles of 'inebriating fluids'. No border guard

or Customs official attempted to open the vehicle and check; the snarling mutt deterred everybody!

Settling down in Uganda took time for Dak and me as we suffered from 'Kigali pangs'. Soon, however, with open areas to walk in and a number of animals to bark at and chase, Mwenge became home. A baboon met his sorry end much to the surprise of all. Bushbabies who managed to climb the trees were harangued by repeated barking. They were indifferent but our ears got the worst of it. The primates have decided to keep a safe distance from our bungalow and can only be seen swinging in the forest below.

Walking him in the Sections in Mwenge is a task in itself. Rather than me taking him for a walk, he takes me in any direction he wants!

Despite all my efforts at strengthening the fencing, Dak the escape artist runs off whenever he wants, followed by Gary and the Askaries (the household help). On being caught, he acts sheepish and indifferent, as if he has done nothing wrong.

Though he's never greedy and feeding him can be a problem (he has to be fed by hand at times), the smell of Thai food being cooked brings him running to the kitchen – an 'out of bounds' area for him – where he starts nudging me. He loves the spicy Red Thai chicken curry, Feta cheese, paneer, cheesecake, Tiramisu etc. That's Dak – the lover of gourmet food!

He sulks when we leave the house and on our return after a couple of hours, behaves as if we have been away for numerous days. Gary is welcomed back from work every time with a hug around his waist as if Dak has not met him for days.

He has added zing to our lives and we hope he continues to do so.





# The Memsahab's Guide to Gracious Living



Cucumber, Mint & Parsley Soup



Meatloaf



Potato, Egg & Pasta Salad



Pineapple & Lemon Soufflé



## Cool Culinary Delights

~ Ruli Bordoloi, Dekorai T.E.

Cooking and baking have always been my passion. Be it a simple dal for an everyday mundane lunch or very extravagant cuisine to tingle the taste buds of guests at a party, I am always ready and on the go. While the kitchen may simply be a space for cooking everyday basic meals for others, for me it is my home, my sanctuary. It is an expression of who I am.

With the ongoing summer creating a menace for everybody, one way to beat the heat would be a really sumptuous cold meal. Not only is it appetizing, appeasing the stomach, but it is also healthy. A cold lunch is preferable on a very hot day, and guests would enjoy it too. We can always start with any cold soups like Tomato and Basil, Cucumber and Mint, or Beetroot, followed by a main course with Sliced Chicken or Lamb Roast, Pasta or Noodles with a light sauce, Meatloaf or Wraps with a vegetable or non-vegetable filling. A salad is a must. We can serve a Caesar Salad, Greek Pasta Salad or any Fruit Salad with French Dressing. A meal is incomplete without a dessert. Soufflé, Trifle Pudding or fruits with cream go very well with a summer lunch.

Here are a few recipes for a cold lunch which I would like to share:

### CUCUMBER, MINT AND PARSLEY SOUP

#### Ingredients:

- 2 large cucumbers, peeled and diced
- 1 cup mint leaves
- 2 tsp chopped parsley
- 2 tbsp yogurt
- 3 tbsp thick cream
- 5-6 tbsp milk
- Salt to taste
- ½ tsp pepper powder
- 1 small onion sliced
- 6-7 garlic pods
- 1½ tsp butter

#### Method:

Heat butter in a pan, add the onion and garlic and saute for one and half minutes. Let it cool. Mix cucumber, yogurt, cream, milk, salt, pepper, onion and garlic in a large bowl. Blend them all together until the mix is smooth. Put in the mint and parsley and blend. Keep the soup mixture in the refrigerator for 2-3 hours. Serve chilled.

### MEAT LOAF (Serves 10)

#### Ingredients:

- 750 grams minced mutton
- 1 egg

- 2 medium sized onions, chopped
- 2 tsp minced garlic
- ½ capsicum, deseeded and chopped
- 2 tsp salt
- ½ tsp pepper powder
- 2 tsp butter or oil
- 3 tbsp dry breadcrumbs
- 3 slices fresh bread, crumbled
- 2 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 3 hard-boiled eggs, shelled
- 1 tbsp any chopped fresh herbs

#### Method:

Melt butter and saute onion and minced garlic. Add the meat, salt and pepper. Simmer covered for 15 minutes or until meat is dry. Remove from heat and cool. Pound coarsely. Add the rest of the ingredients except boiled eggs. Grease a loaf tin. Pack in half the mixture, then place hard boiled eggs length-wise on it. Fill with the remaining mixture, pressing to produce a meat loaf that is firm. Bake for an hour and 15 minutes, or until it is brown. Let it cool slightly, run a knife around the outer edge of the loaf, invert the serving dish onto a plate, holding the two firmly together, and turn out. Cut into slices. Serve hot or cold with brown sauce or orange sauce.

### POTATO, EGG & PASTA SALAD (Serves 8)

#### Ingredients:

- 1 cup mayonnaise
- ¼ cup cream
- ½ cup boiled pasta
- 3 potatoes, boiled and cut into cubes
- 3 eggs, boiled and cut into cubes
- ½ cucumber, peeled and cut into cubes
- ½ capsicum, deseeded and cut into cubes
- 1 small tomato, deseeded and cut into cubes

#### Method:

Mix mayonnaise with cream and refrigerate for two hours. Put all other ingredients in a glass bowl and refrigerate for 2-3 hours. Just before serving, mix the mayonnaise with pasta, egg and other vegetables. Serve cold.

### PINEAPPLE & LEMON SOUFFLÉ (Serves 6)

#### Ingredients:

- 2 eggs, separated
- 2 cups milk
- 1 tbsp cornflour
- 8 tbsp sugar
- ¾ cup chopped pineapple
- 1 tsp lemon rind
- 5 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tbsp gelatine
- 2 drops lemon colour (optional)
- 2 drops lemon essence
- ½ cup cream

#### Method:

Beat the egg yolks. Add milk, sugar and cornflour. Put the mixture on medium heat, stirring constantly for 15 minutes until the mixture is thick and creamy. Remove and cool. Soak gelatine in ¼ cup water. Dissolve over a pan of hot water. Mix the dissolved gelatine into the creamy mixture. Add pineapple, lemon rind, lemon juice, lemon essence and mix well. Whip the cream till light and fluffy. Beat the egg whites till stiff. Fold the cream and egg whites into the lemon-pineapple mixture. Pour the mixture into a soufflé dish and chill for 8-9 hours. Serve decorated with stiffly beaten cream, pineapple slices or candied peel.

Who wouldn't love a cold meal on a hot summer's day? So, put on that apron and get going!



# Tet Celebrations

CHUG MUNG NAM MOI ... Season's Greetings from PhuBen!

**T**et, the Vietnamese New Year, is observed during the first few days of the lunar calendar beginning at the second new moon after the winter solstice. It celebrates the arrival of spring, usually in January or February. The new year fell on 28 January this year.

'Tet' is short for 'Tet Nguyen Dan', or 'Feast of the first morning of the first day' in Sino-Vietnamese. It is the occasion for the Vietnamese to express their respect and remembrance for their ancestors as well as welcome the new year, and is undoubtedly the most important festival in Vietnam. Its significance is evident from the fervour that is attached to everything relating to it.

Preparations begin well in advance – the houses cleaned and sometimes even repainted, utensils polished, new clothes bought! On the 23rd day of the last lunar month, the Kitchen Gods are worshipped...apparently on this day each year they go to heaven to report to the Jade Emperor on activities of the household during the year and return to earth in the new year. The kitchen is cleaned while they are away.



Many special dishes are cooked during Tet, some of them being Banh Chung (steamed square cake made with glutinous rice, *moong* beans, pork etc), Gio Cha



(ham and sausage) served with Xoi (sticky rice), Thit Ga (steamed chicken), Mut (candied fruits) and Mut Tet (jam).



In remembrance and as a mark of respect to the ancestors, the ancestral altar is decorated with five kinds of fruit and votive paper. The fruit are symbolic of the five basic elements of oriental philosophy: metal, wood, water, fire and earth. They also signify the admiration and gratitude

of the Vietnamese to Heaven and Earth and their ancestors, and demonstrate their aspiration for a life of plenty.

Every member of the family heads back home for a family reunion. It is a time to ward off any evil or ill luck; to resolve, forgive and forget grievances; clear debts and start the year on a fresh note. It also happens to be the leisure time between harvesting one crop and sowing the next.

On the eve of the new year – Tat Nien – the last meal of the year is prepared with care and the entire family gets together, not only to eat but to share the experiences of the year gone by; review family traditions; show respect to elders; strengthen relationships and, of course, bring in the new year.





There are spectacular firework displays and people take to the streets with bells, gongs and drums to ward off evil. As part of the parade, people wear masks and dancers dress as Lan – part dragon and part lion – a symbol of strength which is supposed to be powerful enough to frighten away evil spirits.

All activities are woven around the numerous rituals and strong beliefs associated with Tet festivities. Vietnamese believe that whatever they do on the first dawn of Tet will determine their fate for the whole year.

The colours red and yellow are thought to be auspicious, bringing good fortune, and are hence seen everywhere. Before Tet, gifts are presented to elders like grandparents, parents, bosses and teachers as a mark of respect and gratitude. Children and old people receive ‘lucky money’ in red envelopes along with good wishes for the new year. Interestingly, the first person one visits (called ‘first-foot’) in the new year is believed to hold the luck of the entire family



in their hands so the person is naturally chosen with a lot of care in advance!

There’s a saying that Father’s Tet is on the first day of the new year, Mother’s Tet on the second and Teacher’s Tet on the third. Day One is spent visiting the father’s family, Day Two the mother’s and on the third day one visits teachers, relatives, friends and neighbours. It’s all about revisiting one’s roots!

Flowers and plants are an integral part of the Tet festivities. In the North, peach blossoms during the



spring symbolize strength, vitality and a brave heart, whilst the pink colour represents the love and joy amongst the people. A branch of the peach tree is kept in the house to ward off demons. In the South, the golden yellow Hoa Mai signifies the noble roots of the Vietnamese and also stands for the wealth and passionate love of the people. The kumquat’s abundant fruits, flowers, leaves, branches and roots represent wealth and happiness for the new year. The fruits represent the grandparents, the flowers represent parents, the buds represent children and

the light green leaves represent grandchildren. The tree thus symbolizes many generations. Everyone brings home these plants. Orchids, too, flood the market.

PhuBen House never misses out on getting the kumquat tree and orchid plant.

Traditional games popularly played during this time include Danh Du (swinging), Leo Cot Mo (slip pole climbing) and Dau Vat (wrestling), to name a few.

The annual Tet dinner at PhuBen is looked forward to and enjoyed by all. Everyone is dressed in their finery and the mood is festive. Tet bonus is given to all the workers as well as special gifts for those in need. On the eve of the new year, representatives of the PhuBen family gather to pray, expressing gratitude for the year gone by and asking for blessings in the coming year. Incense and offerings are burnt and vodka and water sprinkled on the fire for the harmony of earth and heaven.

After the first few days of Tet, everyone joins together to visit different Pagodas. Usually the same ones are revisited each year, starting with Mother Au Co temple, followed by the Hung King temple and then the various other Pagodas in Thanh Ba, Tuyen Quang and Yen Bai.





## The Temple Fish of Lepetkatta T.E.

Lepetkatta T.E. is located 16 km south of Dibrugarh town. The river Brahmaputra flows 13 km north-west of the estate, while the Sessa river meanders sluggishly along the eastern perimeter of Bolye division and to the south-east of Dewan Division. National Highway 37 runs along the eastern boundary of Lepetkatta Division.

In the history of Assam, it is mentioned that a local area controller called Lapet Phukon, operating from present day Medla, was involved in the death of the Ahom king. When the king's son ascended the throne, he took revenge by killing Lapet Phukon. Hence the name Lapet Katta, that is today's Lepetkatta. During the reign of Ahom king Swargadeo Kamaleswar Singha (1795-1811) a local administrator called Bolai Baruah used to reside where the Division office

is now located. Bolye Division is named after him. Medla Division is located 1.5 km to the south-west of the main Division. During the Ahom reign this area was under the charge of an administrator called Ma-Dola Phukon. Hence the name, Medla. Dewan Division is located 9 km away to the south, along the Sessa River. The name is derived from the Doyang Bheel which was a tributary of the Sessa River.

The Lepetkatta Shiva Temple is located in the Jungle Line of Lepetkatta Division. A special feature here is the statue of Lord Shiva donated by Sri Sanjeeb Kumar Das, which stands above the entrance. This temple attracts a lot of devotees. It is said to have been built by Late Sri Benu Mahali, a Sardar, by raising ₹5 from every worker during the time of Mr W.B. Rae (1957-1960).



A special feature of the pond located here is that its water never dries as it is believed to have a well in the centre, which supplies water continuously, even during the dry season. A small underground duct connecting the pond to the Shiva Lingam can be seen even today.

It was excavated by eight workers residing in the Jungle Line, namely: Late Babat Lunia, Chandan Nunia, Latipha Nunia, Jagen Chohan, Nandalal Chowhan, Ram Barun Nunia, Chandradeep Nunia and Lakhiman Nunia. The pond has had a big makeover and now remains clean and safe for its resident fish and tortoise communities, which had been introduced there to keep its water clean.

The workers look after the temple and there is a Committee which supervises all activities there. It was opened to the public in 1958 and since then, Shiva Ratri has always been celebrated with immense enthusiasm and devotion. The devotees wash their feet, bathe, and then carry water from the pond to the temple for worship.

The conflict between simple practicality and religious belief came to a head with a tragic incident some time back. The Jungle Line people speak of a resident of this Line, Late Aghnu Majhi, who, wanting to celebrate his son's birthday, went to the temple

pond and quietly took a big fish from it. When the residents of the Line got to know about it, Late Jitu Majhi advised him to take the fish back to the pond, which he did, and buried it next to the temple. But soon thereafter, his son lost his life and Aghnu too lost his permanent job in the garden and died after eleven days.

There is yet another tale relating to the fish in the pond. Sri Undal Das, a fish-seller, caught some fish during *Amavaishya* night. A section of Hindu people do not eat non-vegetarian food on this day, therefore Sri Das stored the fish and sold them the next day. Following the incident, he could not sleep well at night, had bad dreams and saw signs of great misfortune. In a tragic incident, he too lost his son. Then in a dream, he was told to visit a Shiva temple. So he visited the Lepetkatta temple and started donating ₹10 daily for worship. However, the temple priest asked him not to pay in cash but to feed the fish in the pond instead. Since then, Sri Das has been regularly visiting the temple and feeding the fish in the pond. He now leads a prosperous and peaceful life.

Ever since, the fish in the pond are so safe that they swim to the sides when called to be fed. People often throw coins into the pond as they believe there is a divine power there which fulfills their wishes.



# BENEFICENCE

## Truth is Strength

~ Mr Tushar Bharadwaj  
Assam Valley School



A significant number in an individual's life, 21 years, is in comparison a short period in the life of an institution. But within this short period, the Assam Valley School has not only carved a niche for itself but is considered one of the finest schools in India. Blessed with world class infrastructure and a progressive educational environment, AVS echoes the ethos of 21st century education where tradition embraces modernity.

It is a popular belief that boarding schools do not produce good results in academics but AVS breaks this myth year after year. The year 2016 saw us posting excellent results in Public Examinations with our ISC Batch consisting of 98 students scoring an unprecedented class aggregate of 88.69% while the ICSE batch comprising 100 students notched up an aggregate of 87.43%. These impressive results make up only one part



of the education we believe every child should have access to and we are committed to providing our students with a holistic education by promoting sports, cultural pursuit, adventure and social service.

A school is only as good as the quality of opportunities it offers to its students and it is our constant endeavour to create such possibilities where our students can explore and express themselves. 2016 was a phenomenal year for us in terms of our achievements in Sports and Cultural pursuit. At AVS, sports is a way of life and we are blessed with some outstanding athletes. Our success in IPSC Soccer, Tennis, Swimming, Archery, Squash, Track & Field and Cricket is a testimony to the diligent work put in by our students and their coaches. Many of our young achievers have been drafted into IPSC Teams and they have had the exposure of participating at National level Championships organized by SGFI. Our Equestrian team did us proud at the prestigious Delhi Horse Show and our Basketball and Badminton teams excelled at Inter-District Tournaments.

Our rich and varied Activity Programme creates wonderful platforms for our budding performers and artistes. We bagged a rich haul of medals at the Pune Fest organized by ABSS across various categories of Dance and Music. Our performers went on to win laurels at an International Cultural Fest held at Colombo. We had very high levels of achievement in IPSC Dramatics, Music and Visual Arts where our participants left behind a distinctive mark. Adventure too, plays an important role in a child's overall development. We sent out two groups of students to NIMAS for camping and adventure activities. In addition, our students went on educational tours to Europe and Mauritius.





Each year, we celebrate our Founders' Day in the month of November and it is at this time of the year that AVS is at its creative best. The English Dramatics Society staged 'Black Comedy... A Farce' using reverse lighting technique while the Hindi Department presented a fun-filled Play, 'Inspector Bankelal Chand Par'. The Dance School presented a vibrant show based on 'Mile Sur Mera Tumhara' and the Music School showcased the talent of our young musicians by putting up a rich variety of Indian and Western performances. There were more than 20 well-presented exhibitions on display as well.

Our Social Service League undertakes a number of projects through the year which give our students the opportunity to make valuable contributions to the less privileged who live close to the School. After the success of 'Project Toilet' we have undertaken the work of building pavers-block pathways in the local market which will be of immense help to the locals. Such projects instill a sense of responsibility and service amongst young students.

On a concluding note, AVS has continued to grow from strength to strength and our progress has been acknowledged by accomplished rating agencies like Education World and NDTV. Education World has rated us as India's 3rd most Respected Co-ed Residential School while NDTV has recently awarded us with Excellence Awards in Co-Curricular Education and Infrastructure Categories at the National level which is an immense achievement considering that AVS had been pitted against schools with close to a century and more of academic years to showcase. What a privilege it is for those who study and work here!



# Assam Valley Literary Award 2016



Sahitya Akademi awardee, novelist Dr Arupa Patangia Kalita, was conferred with the prestigious Assam Valley Literary Award for the year 2016 by the Williamson Magor Education Trust at a function in Guwahati on 18 March 2017. The Award was presented to her by renowned Malayalam writer, Sri K. Satchidanandan. The Award ceremony was followed by a cultural performance by the students of the Assam Valley School, Tezpur, which is also governed by the Trust.

Dr Kalita got her PhD from Guwahati University and retired as HoD Department of English, Tangla College, in June 2016.

Her novels, novellas and short stories, mostly about women and society, have been translated into many languages, and her writings have also been included in the syllabus of various colleges and universities.

When her name was announced as the 2016 recipient of the Award, Dr Patangia Kalita had told the media, "I am elated to be chosen for the Award. Writing is not a game or hobby for me. Pen should be used to portray the different classes of society and Literature should reflect the happenings of the age which would remain to be read by generations to come."



# Project – Extension to the Junior College at Harisinga



~ Vibhor Sharma  
Corramore T.E.

With a view to contributing towards the inclusive growth of society and industry over the years, McLeod Russel India Limited (MRIL) is conscious of its social responsibilities and the environment in which it operates. The Company has taken up several need-based sustainable social activities and projects impacting the larger society.

MRIL views social welfare as a genuine expression of goodwill and responsibility towards humanity and the nation. Fulfilling its duty of providing care to society, the Company has embarked upon massive programmes of educational, health, sports, cultural and infrastructural development endeavours and other welfare measures to improve the general standards of living in and around its tea estates, with special emphasis on the environment which surrounds the units of the Company.

Strengthening the rural development network in its operational areas, MRIL has been continuously striving towards the all-round development of the communities amongst whom it operates.

The rural education system of Assam is challenged by various socio-economic factors. These issues, including lack of higher educational institutions as well as poor economic conditions, are affecting the

education system of the villages. Such factors are decreasing the enrolment of students in colleges and increasing the drop outs, resulting in stagnation in the pursuit of higher education.

Under the CSR mission, governed by need assessment studies and baseline surveys of the targeted area, Mr Deepak Mehta (General Manager – Mangaldai Circle, MRIL) and Mr Kenal Shekhawat (erstwhile ABITA Circle Chairman and Superintendent, Corramore T.E.) had jointly devised a plan to raise the quality of education and ensure its availability to all by building an extension to the Junior College at Harisinga, a village close to Corramore T.E. in the Udalguri district of Assam. In order to improve the dilapidated state of the college, the initiative of building the extension was the need of the hour.

For a place like Harisinga where modern amenities are not easily accessible and it is a struggle to pursue higher education, this project has been a great boon for the people residing here.

Unlike any other corporate social welfare activities that are generally undertaken to provide livelihood for the garden people and adjoining areas, the idea of shifting the focus to promote education for all under Schedule VII of the Act has been greatly appreciated by the people benefitting from it.

## PGTI McLeod Russel Tour Championship 2016



The PGTI McLeod Russel Tour Championship, which saw the culmination of a landmark 10th PGTI season, was held from 22 to 25 December 2016 at the Royal Calcutta Golf Club, Kolkata.

The tournament was won by Thailand's Pariya Junhasavasdikul who drove home his overnight two-

shot advantage with an unwavering final round of one-under-71, ending up with a tournament tally of 15-under-273, and becoming the first foreign player to win the McLeod Russel Tour Championship.

“This win is all the more special since it’s my first event on the PGTI and also my first in Kolkata and the RCGC. I was here just to enjoy myself and didn’t practise through the week. I didn’t step on the driving range and the putting green. The atmosphere was unbelievable here at RCGC as the crowd responded to my good shots throughout. I’d like to thank McLeod Russel for their fantastic hospitality. I’d love to come back to India, especially Kolkata, to play more events,” said Pariya.

Delhi’s Rashid Khan bagged his second Rolex Player of the Year title after finishing runner-up at 12-under-276.

## MRIL Rose Bowl Inter-Company Tennis

Margherita Club, 9 April 2017



**Winners:** McLeod Russel ‘White’ (L to R) M.S. Shekhawat, A. Thoumoung, P. Deka, H. Deka, B. Banerjee & P.S. Aswal (Captain)



**Runners-up:** McLeod Russel ‘Gold’ (L to R) C. Dutta, I. Rahman, P. Bothra, D. Sonowal (Captain), H. Borah & R. Bezboruah



# India Tea Trade Dinner 2017

## Welcome Address by Mr Azam Monem, Chairman ITA & ITTD Committee



“Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the ITTD 2017. This is the 10th year of the India Tea Trade Dinner which we now all look forward to attending, in order to renew contacts and make new friends.

A very special welcome to His Excellency Bruce Bucknell, the British Deputy High Commissioner in Kolkata, who was gracious enough to accept our invitation and be in our midst this evening. This year is being celebrated as the UK-India Year of Culture and Your Excellency's presence reinforces our mutual commitment to strengthening our historic ties and progress in the UK-India Trade to greater heights.

We are privileged to welcome the Deputy Consul General of Germany, Mr Jurgen Thomas Schrod. Sir, we deeply appreciate your presence amongst us this evening. Germany's association with Indian tea is significant and very valuable to us.

I would also like to thank the Chairman Tea Board, Mr Sarangi, for being with us earlier this afternoon when we were able to discuss a few issues face to face. Unfortunately, he has had to attend to urgent business in Delhi and could not be with us but extended his good wishes and asked me to convey the same to all of you.

We are delighted to see Mr Siddharth, Past Chairman of Tea Board and Advisor, WBIDC, in our midst. Thank you so much for being here.

The industry moves into the new season of 2017 feeling optimistic. Early rains beckoned hopes for a good year. However, excessive rainfall in Assam in the last couple of days and the extensive damages in Cachar caused by hail storm have somewhat dampened our spirits. Life is not always a menu card of promises and in the year 2016, we had a fair share of trials and tribulations. The year saw costs outpacing prices. The newly introduced PAN India auctions from Sale 25 were beset with both technical and operational bottlenecks leading to frequent disruptions dampening the market.

The Demonetization effect followed with an adverse fallout on liquidity and demand.

Global production, as all of you are aware, was almost 116 million kg more compared to 2015. Assam and North India witnessed a surge in production. Kenya added 74 mkg in 2016 plummeting Mombasa averages sharply. This had a visible adverse affect on the demand for better quality North Indian CTC.

The maxim guiding production standards across the trade has always been that quality is the king. The buying trends last year, however, have somewhat compelled many of us in the producing fraternity to pause and wonder what has caused the visible shift from the top to the bottom of the pyramid in terms of buying preference. The fall in prices of high quality teas ranging at an average between ₹ 18-25/kg significantly impacted the bottom line of several companies in North India.

Year on year variations notwithstanding, the central issues of environment and ethical consumerism continue to engage us and bring to the fore new challenges as evolving standards guide production and trade dynamics. Economic sustainability of the Producer is the key to enable compliance with these standards. Simply put, farm gate prices must not only

cover such compliance costs but also assure an ROI for the producer.

In fact, the day's proceedings today dwelt at large on different scenarios trying to look at the sustainability road map aiming at increasing returns across the value chain. Amongst the identified interventions, demand creation, consumer engagement and product differentiators on quality, we believe must now progress on priority.

We in the ITA have made a beginning with Road Shows aimed at both the consumer and the trade in B2C and B2B formats with the most recent one held last month across Western and Northern India. The major takeaways and learnings point to the need for repositioning tea as a contemporary beverage attractive for the millennials who constitute the major part of our population.

In these endeavours, I solicit the cooperation of the Tea Board and all Stakeholders in the years ahead in order that our engagement with the consumer and the trade is sustained.

Our thanks to the Tea Board for the support it continues to provide. It has led several initiatives in the past both at the production and the marketing ends and continues to do so today with an eye towards sustainability of the tea business for the future.

We look forward to working closely with the Tea Board in progressing the developmental and promotional agenda in the days ahead.

The active Dinner Committee has steered this event and stood by each other to ensure the success of this evening. The ITA Secretariat as always has diligently left no stone unturned. Thank you so much.

Our thanks go out to our organising partners, Emirates and Taj Bengal for their support of this event and may we count on their continued engagement in the years ahead.

I would also thank 'Forum for the Future' for associating with us for today's interactive session held during the course of the day and providing their insights into consumer engagement and also on hedging mechanisms to protect margins.

I would now call upon my colleagues in the Tea Trade Dinner Committee to signal their presence as I mention their names and would request the gathering to put their hands together in appreciation and acknowledgement of a job well done:

Mr Vivek Goenka, Mr C.S. Bedi, Mr Anshuman Kanoria, Ms Nayantara Palchouduri, Mr Adarsh Kanoria, Mr Gopal Poddar, Mr Arun Singh, Mr Bharat Arya and Mr L.N. Gupta.

Thank you all for being with us this evening.”



# Births



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3



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4



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6



1. **Yash**, son of Vinay & Kripa Bist of Mahakali T.E. 15 September 2016
2. **Aaron Arthur**, son of Sanjiv & Anuradha Eastment of Bordubi T.E. 1 October 2016
3. **Vaidehi**, daughter of Bineet & Sushom Gurung of Baghjan T.E. 11 October 2016
4. **Kiaan Kayden**, son of Saurav Jyoti Bayan & Sethphen Yap of Harchurah T.E. 20 December 2016
5. **Daksh Raj**, son of Prayag Raj & Pranjita Das of Rajmai T.E. 5 January 2017
6. **Jorawar Singh**, son of Ajaypal & Manpreet Kaur Hundal of Samdang T.E. 16 January 2017



# Weddings



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1. **Dhrubajyoti Bora** of Bordubi T.E. wed **Citumoni** on 10 October 2016
2. **Manas Pratim Bhuyan** of Attareekhat T.E. wed **Nabanita** on 9 December 2016
3. **Angshuman Borthakur** of Mahakali T.E. wed **Ranjita** on 9 December 2016
4. **Anuj Pandit** of Monabarie T.E. wed **Dr Kriti** on 28 February 2017
5. **Debanjan Sarkar** of HO Kolkata wed **Swapna** on 2 March 2017

# Farewell

Assam, 2 February 2017



Mr Nisar Ahmed



Mr R. K. Gogoi



Dr N. K. Phukan



Dr J. C. Dutta

## WM Ex-Planters Get-together

The 9th Annual Get-together, held on 19 February 2017, at Gurgaon, was well attended with over 50 ex-WM planters and their spouses coming from USA, Jaipur, Chandigarh and Delhi NCR region. It was a great afternoon, with everyone reminiscing over the 'good old days' of being part of The Williamson Magor Group. Mcleod Russel India Ltd very kindly sponsored the lunch. (Courtesy: Mr A.K. Saxena)





~ Surender Jhijaria  
Gisovu T.E. Rwanda

## An Encounter with our Closest Relatives – the Gorillas



The morning began early. At 4.30am we left Gisenyi and drove 56 km north to the Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda. We were on our way to see the critically endangered mountain gorillas. Sharing 95% of our genes, there are approximately 880 gorillas left in the wild and only a handful of people have the opportunity of seeing them in their natural environment. Today, we were going to be two of those lucky ones.

It was still dark as we wound our way through the Land of a Thousand Hills. After driving for an hour or so, the dead silence of night unfolded into a thriving and bustling environment around us. Endless cultivated fields against the hazy blue mountains, young men carrying enormous bags of potatoes, women hoeing the soil, men waiting at the corners with their bike-taxis called Boda-bodas – it was all very captivating. I looked across at Mrs Nirula, one of our Company Directors, on her first visit to Rwanda. Her eyes were focused on the distant hill where she would soon experience her first encounter with the gorillas – our closest relatives. An experience of a life time!

We arrived at the Park’s headquarters in Kinigi at 6.30am and enjoyed strong cups of tea and coffee with other tourists before joining our fellow trekkers. People were divided into groups of eight and thereafter each group was selected for short or medium distance treks. We had opted for the short trek and today we were visiting the Titus family. Our guide was Tite – a short, stout man in his early forties.



The adventure began with an uphill hike. The landscape was awe-inspiring with fields of pyrethrum flowers covering the volcanic landscape like a bright and beautiful carpet. Children ran out of mud huts to greet us and people in the fields stopped to watch us walk by.

After hauling ourselves for hours we finally reached the top of the mountain and the stone wall at the edge of the rainforest. Across this wall we would soon come face to face with the gorillas. We met three trackers who explained they had located the gorillas and we would have to walk for about 15 minutes to reach them. We were instructed to put down our bags and walking sticks, and keep only the cameras handy. Tite once again reminded us of



the thumb rule of gorilla trekking: “Keep a distance of at least 7 metres from them, don’t look them in the eye and don’t threaten them.” He then made us practise the gorilla grunts.

We climbed over the stone wall and stepped into the dense forest. Our trackers expertly cleared a trail with their machetes and we trekked through the forest slowly and cautiously.

“We are very close,” Tite whispered suddenly and immediately started uttering grunts and moans. For a moment I thought something was wrong, but then I followed his eyes and my own nearly popped out. There in front of us were the gorillas!



The family included a large male Silverback who was chewing on bamboo shoots, a female with a cute infant and two other members who were lazily stretched out. We watched as the mother played with her child, kissing her feet and tousling her hair. I tiptoed breathlessly to get as close to them as possible but Tite gestured, cautioning me to back away. Gorillas are very prone to diseases. They can very easily catch flu and the common cold from us which could kill them. Sometimes even our breath can be fatal for them, so we have to keep our distance.

We spent the next hour watching them sleep and stretch out in the warm sun. We saw their magnificent hands grabbing plants and leaves for food and watched the baby playing with her mother,

occasionally looking at us with large inquisitive eyes. Each and every movement of theirs was like a human being’s. Every member of the group appeared calm and relaxed, not displaying any interest or enthusiasm. They did not care about our presence and carried on with their day’s activities as usual. This was the most exciting moment – very touching and unforgettable.

I was so engrossed in watching the mother and child that I did not see the male gorilla heading towards me until Tite shouted, “Stoop down! Stoop down!” Hearing this, I instantly stooped down so as not to appear threatening to the charging male, and started grunting like a gorilla. The gorilla went past giving me a slight pat on my shoulder. For a fraction of a second I felt the impact of a boxer’s punch – strong enough to break a rib or two! But luckily, though shaken, I was unhurt.

“He has given you the pat to appreciate your hard work in promoting Silverback Tea in Gisovu,” chuckled Mrs Nirula. I managed a flickering smile.

The next moment we were heading back to the base camp. At the foothills, I glanced up the mountain and sighed, thinking what an incredible gift those two hours had been. Then I turned towards Mrs Nirula and found her gazing towards the mountain too, trying to capture the last glimpse of the Volcanoes National Park, the home of our closest relatives – the gorillas.





~ Dr (Mrs) Chinmoyee K. Borah  
Dekorai T.E.

## STRESS – 'FIGHT OR FLIGHT'

Stress is our brain and body's response to different kinds of demand and threat. When we sense any danger, our body's defenses kick into high gear in a rapid automatic process known as the 'Fight or Flight' or Stress Response. This Stress Response is a protective response. When working properly, it helps us stay focused, energetic and alert. In emergencies, stress can save our lives, by giving extra strength to defend ourselves. It can also help us meet challenges. But beyond a certain point, stress stops being helpful and starts causing major damage to our health, mood, productivity, relationships and quality of life.

Stress is not always bad. In small doses, it can help us perform under pressure and motivate us to do our best. But when we are constantly running on emergency mode, our mind and body pay the price. If we frequently find ourselves feeling frazzled and overwhelmed, it's time to take action to bring our nervous system back in balance. We can protect ourselves by learning how to recognize the signs and symptoms of stress and taking steps to reduce its harmful effects.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

- 🔴 Distinguish between normal stress and stress that is overloading you.
- 🔴 Learn to recognize chronic stress.
- 🔴 Discover the factors that may influence your tolerance for stress.
- 🔴 Learn about your body's time tested ways of controlling stress.
- 🔴 Investigate lifestyle changes that reduce stress.

### WHAT IS 'FIGHT OR FLIGHT' RESPONSE

When you feel threatened, your nervous system responds by releasing a flood of stress hormones,

including Adrenalin and Cortisol, which rouse the body for emergency action. Your heart beats increase, muscles tighten, blood pressure rises, breath quickens, and your senses become sharper. These physical changes increase your strength and stamina, speed up your reaction time, and enhance your focus – preparing you to either fight or take flight from the danger at hand.

### CAUSES OF STRESS

#### 🔍 Common external causes:

- 🔴 Major life changes
- 🔴 Work or Education
- 🔴 Relationship difficulties
- 🔴 Financial problems
- 🔴 Being too busy
- 🔴 Children and family

#### 🔍 Common internal causes:

- 🔴 Pessimism
- 🔴 Inability to accept uncertainty
- 🔴 Rigid thinking, lack of flexibility
- 🔴 Negative self-talk
- 🔴 Unrealistic expectations/perfectionism
- 🔴 All-or-nothing attitude

### HEALTH PROBLEMS CAUSED BY STRESS

- 🔴 Depression and anxiety
- 🔴 Pain of any kind
- 🔴 Sleep disorders
- 🔴 Autoimmune diseases
- 🔴 Skin diseases such as Eczema
- 🔴 Digestive problems
- 🔴 Heart problems
- 🔴 Weight problems
- 🔴 Reproductive problems
- 🔴 Thinking and memory problems

### SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF STRESS OVERLOAD

#### 🔍 Cognitive Symptoms:

- 🔴 Memory problem
- 🔴 Inability to concentrate
- 🔴 Poor judgement
- 🔴 Negative outlook
- 🔴 Anxious or racing thoughts
- 🔴 Constant worrying

#### 🔍 Emotional Symptoms:

- 🔴 Depression
- 🔴 Anxiety and agitation
- 🔴 Moodiness, irritability or anger
- 🔴 Feeling overwhelmed
- 🔴 Loneliness and isolation
- 🔴 Other mental & emotional health problems

#### 🔍 Physical symptoms:

- 🔴 Aches and pains
- 🔴 Diarrhoea or constipation
- 🔴 Nausea and dizziness
- 🔴 Chest pain and rapid heart beat
- 🔴 Loss of sex drive
- 🔴 Frequent cold and flu

#### 🔍 Behavioural symptoms:

- 🔴 Eating more or eating less
- 🔴 Sleeping too much or too little
- 🔴 Withdrawing from others
- 🔴 Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities
- 🔴 Using alcohol, cigarettes or drugs to relax
- 🔴 Nervous habits like nail biting, pacing

### TOP 10 STRESSFUL LIFE EVENTS THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO ILLNESS

- 🔴 Death of spouse
- 🔴 Divorce
- 🔴 Marriage separation
- 🔴 Imprisonment
- 🔴 Death of close family member
- 🔴 Injury or illness
- 🔴 Marriage
- 🔴 Job loss
- 🔴 Marriage reconciliation
- 🔴 Retirement

Tolerance to stress differs from person to person. It is therefore important to know your own limit.

Factors that influence your stress tolerance level:

#### 🔍 Your support network:

A strong network of supportive friends and family members is an enormous buffer against stress. On the other hand, the more lonely and isolated you are, the greater your risk of succumbing to stress.

#### 🔍 Your sense of control:

If you have confidence in yourself and your ability to influence events and persevere through challenges, it is easier to take stress in your stride.

#### 🔍 Your attitude and outlook:

The way you look at life and its inevitable challenges makes a huge difference in your ability to handle stress. If you are generally hopeful and optimistic, you will be less vulnerable.

#### 🔍 Your ability to deal with your emotions:

Having the ability to identify and deal appropriately with your emotions can increase your tolerance to stress and help you to bounce back from adversity.

#### 🔍 Your knowledge and preparation:

The more you know about a stressful situation, including how long it will last and what to expect, the easier it is to cope.

#### 🔍 Improving your ability to handle stress:

**Get moving:** Regular physical exercise like walking, running, swimming and dancing are particularly effective in lifting your mood and serve as a distraction from worries, allowing you to break away from the cycle of negative thoughts that feed stress.

**Connect to others:** It is important to spend time with people who make you feel good. Do not let your responsibilities keep you from having an active social life. Try to make it a priority to build stronger and more satisfying connections.

**Engage your senses:** Another fast way to relieve stress is by engaging one or more of your senses – sight, sound, taste, smell, touch or movement. For instance, listening to soft music, petting an animal etc can help tremendously.

**Learn how to relax:** It is difficult to eliminate stress completely from one's life, but one can control its effects. Relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation and deep breathing activate the body's relaxation response – a state of restfulness that is the opposite of the 'fight or flight' or mobilization of stress response. When practised regularly, these activities lead to a reduction in your everyday stress levels and boost your feeling of joy and serenity.

**Healthy diet:** Eating processed food, refined carbohydrates and sugary snacks can worsen symptoms of stress. Make it a habit to have a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, high quality proteins and healthy fat, especially Omega-3 fatty acids, which can help you cope better with life's ups and downs.

**Adequate rest:** Tiredness can increase stress by causing you to think irrationally. So, adequate rest in the form of sleep is most essential.

### 5 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT STRESS

- 🔴 Stress affects everyone
- 🔴 Not all stress is bad
- 🔴 Long term stress can harm your health
- 🔴 There are ways to manage stress
- 🔴 If you are overwhelmed by stress, ask for help from a health professional



~ Ashok Krishan  
Keyhung T.E.

## The Road Less Travelled



The Silk Route – a 6,500 km network of ancient trade routes connecting Asia, Europe and Africa was opened up by Zhang Qian, Imperial Envoy to the World during the reign of the Han emperor Wudi, around 114 BCE. Many renowned travellers left their footprints on this historic route, including Fa Hein, Hiuen Tsang and Marco Polo.

An offshoot of this route enters Sikkim from Chumbi Valley and Nathula Pass, goes down to the sea at Tamluk (West Bengal) and onward to Sri Lanka and the Far East.

The Silk Route was recently reopened and we planned to do a road trip on a very small stretch of it in east Sikkim.

Interestingly, the most treasured items traded in this part of the route (between Yunnan, Tibet and India) were horses and tea, not silk! Unlike in Central Asia, where Bactrian camel caravans were used, horse caravans were used in this part of the south-west Silk Route.

We, of course, were doing it on neither; we had hired motorcycles to ride from Rangpo to Nathula Pass via Rangli, Zuluk, Gnathang Valley and then to Gangtok, in five days.



Vivek, Bharati and I reached Rangpo where we were met by Deepak Pradhan, Bisswadeep Banerjee's brother-in-law (who had planned and organized the trip and was accompanying us) and... surprise, surprise... Bisswadeep himself! After a leisurely lunch, we checked out the motorcycles (500cc Royal Enfields) and set off for Rangli. The next morning we drove through cardamom plantations and verdant green pine forests to one of the oldest natural lakes in Sikkim – the boot-shaped Lampokhari Lake (aka Aritar Lake) located at



4,600 feet. Returning to Rangli, we were eager to be on our way to Zuluk, our next halt, but a small incident delayed us. While shopping for good Sikkimese rum Deepak asked if anyone was missing a wallet. As all of us frantically checked, Vivek realized that his was missing! Cutting a long story short, a wallet had been found by a taxi driver and handed over to the police. Off we went to the police station where, after a cursory check, the police handed over the wallet to Vivek. Much to our relief and dare I say, amazement, nothing was missing – proof of the honesty of the local people.

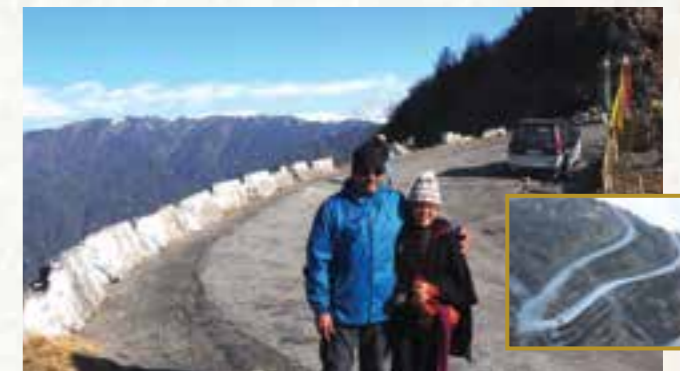


We rode on to Zuluk, a small hilltop village at around 10,000 feet, on gently winding roads lined with fluttering prayer flags – Lung Dar and Dar Cho – believed to emit positive vibrations and spread silent prayers through the wind. The road was generally good but our riding skills were tested on the last mile and a half to our home stay, the Mukhiya Resort.



Just as we had unloaded the bikes the village was engulfed by thick, dense fog in a matter of minutes! There followed a thunderstorm accompanied by some hail. After a simple but tasty dinner cooked by our hostesses, we retired to our clean and comfortable, but basic rooms (with no electricity, at least during our stay, or piped hot water) hoping that it would stop raining and clear up by morning.

Up early, we were happy to see the clear skies and inhale the crisp mountain air. The brave had bucket baths with the half bucket of hot water provided. We packed some boiled eggs and were on our way, eager to begin the most exciting part of the journey – Zuluk to Gangtok through Lungthung, Gnathang Valley, Changu Lake and Nathula Pass at 14,140 feet. The road to our next destination – Thambi View Point, 14 km from Zuluk – was like a serpent, twisting and turning with what seemed to be an endless number of hairpin bends. We stopped there, at 11,200 feet, for breakfast. The view was spectacular and for a brief moment before the clouds enveloped the peak, we got a clear view of Mt Kanchenjunga.



As we progressed, the landscape changed drastically, becoming more rocky and barren, with steeper climbs. We started encountering snow, which we had been dreading since we had been told at Zuluk that it had snowed heavily in the higher ranges and that the road to Nathula Pass had been closed. The spectacular landscape brought to mind what Marco Polo had commented about his trips: "I have not told the half of what I saw, for I knew I would not be believed."



After a relaxed breakfast we rode to Laxman Chowk (a one shop village), the beginning of Gnathang Valley. Here, at 12,500 feet in the middle of nowhere, we stopped for a cup of hot tea and momos and also some shopping! The road there onwards was totally snow covered and the skidding and sliding bikes were tough to control over large stretches of frozen ice. With every passing kilometre it was becoming apparent that we would have to turn back at some stage. The slopes were too steep and even a slight distraction or miscalculation meant going down thousands of feet! The decision was made for us when Vivek's bike skidded and he had a fall. Fortunately, no damage was done. With heavy hearts we decided to turn back all the way to the starting point – Rangpo – and then on to Gangtok.

We reached Gangtok late in the evening. After settling in at the hotel, we walked down to MG Road – the hub of the city.

The next day, after an early breakfast, we set out for Tsongmo Lake (Changu Lake) in a hired cab, the motorcycles having been returned. We had to work our way through traffic jams due to vehicles getting bogged down in snow. The effort, however, was well worth it as the landscape at Changu Lake was spectacular.



The glacial lake is shrouded in myths and legends. It is said that in ancient times, the Lamas used to predict the future by observing the lake's colour. It was extremely windy and biting cold and we were thankful to have hired snow boots on our way up at Kyongnosla. We walked around and watched yaks nimbly carrying people up and down steep slopes. On our return we sauntered around Gangtok picking up some souvenirs before returning to the hotel.



After an early breakfast the next morning, we finished the last chapter of our spellbinding visit, driving to Rumtek, 24 km away, where the famous 18th century Dharmachakra Buddhist monastery – the largest in Sikkim – is located at 4,900 feet.



We spent a couple of hours marvelling at the tranquil surroundings, the mesmerizing and haunting sounds of the Rag-Dung and Chod drums, and watched monks and monks-in-the-making, chanting mantras.

Visiting and riding through Sikkim was a wonderful, unforgettable experience. I just hope I can return one day and finish the incomplete journey. To quote Marco Polo once again, "I believe it was God's will that we should come back, so that men might know the things that are in the world..."



## The Taylors of Harrogate team at Gisovu

~ Harjot Brar  
Gisovu T.E., Rwanda

The Taylors of Harrogate team comprising Mr Andy Brown, Mrs Rachel Fellows, Mr Paul Cegon, Mr Henry Boocock and Mrs Joanne Grey visited Gisovu T.E. on 8 & 9 March 2017.



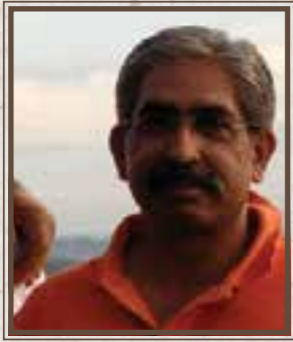
On arrival on 8 March the team visited the farmers' field school at the cooperative, after which they watched the football finals. Mr Andy Brown, as Chief Guest, presented the winners' trophy to Gisovu Tea.



On 9 March the team visited the Gisovu factory and tasted the teas comparing them to tea samples from Malawi, KTDA and Kenya which they had brought along. Their verdict was that the Gisovu teas were far better than the latter.



Before leaving, the team visited the new water project underway and due to be completed this year. Mr Andy Brown kindly agreed to help Gisovu with the project.



~ Kenal Shekhawat  
Bordubi T.E.

# A Trip to the Ugandan Estates



The 'three wise men' were handpicked for the visit to our Ugandan plantations, the selection done with true representation of the unity and diversity existing in India, so well represented within MRIL. The exchange of wisdom was initiated on the evening of 21 April at the Penthouse of Four Mangoe Lane much before we crossed the international border.

Prior to our departure we were very well briefed by Saneer Gurung on the 'do's and 'don't's and the itinerary was explained in the minutest detail, which greatly benefitted us during our entire trip. We were given a mobile set with Matrix cards to keep in touch with home and headquarters. This was not meant to be, as the mobile sets which were safely entrusted to 'Mr D. English' were (in)conveniently misplaced at the Kolkata International Airport security check. The loss of the missing phones was only discovered on our arrival in Africa. Thereafter there were only two 'wise men' left on the trip with the third being stripped of his title.

DJ, Dicky and I landed at Entebbe airport on the northern shores of Lake Victoria after a long layover at Dubai on the 23rd. Thus began our journey in Uganda, the 'Pearl of Africa', carrying the motto from

the land of Gandhi – "Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil." It was a four hour drive from the airport to Mwenge guest house where we arrived at night and were greeted by Grace, the housekeeper. After a welcome shower and change we were received by our hosts Mr and Mrs Grewal. Gary was accompanied by a mutual acquaintance – Mr Johnnie Walker – who kept us all entertained through the night into the early morning.

We visited Mwenge estate with the Manager, Sanjay. Mechanical Tea Harvesters were seen in operation. With the Skid attached, the height adjustments now allowed proper plucking and left the section lush green which, in the past, used to turn brown post plucking. Young Tea pruning and upkeep were explained; foliar spraying was also witnessed and a visit to the Tea Nursery was an eye-opener as the phenomenal growth was observed.



The factory is equipped with six cut CTC and Ghoggie, producing clean black teas. We also visited the workshop which maintains and services all field machines (MTH, SOH, Pruning Machine, Foliar Machines).

We visited Kyaninga Lodge which is located on a volcanic lake and had dinner in Fort Portal town.



Vikram (Manager, Kiko T.E.) welcomed us to his estate, where we visited the field, workers' colonies and the newly renovated hospital. The estate is very well kept and it was a pleasure to see the neatness and tidiness maintained. The workers had invented a very innovative way of providing light inside the house during the day. They filled an empty plastic bottle with water and bleaching powder, inserting it into the roof through a pocket. Once the sun's rays hit the bottle, it illuminated the interiors like a bright CFL bulb.

The factory at Kiko was equipped with a single line CTC producing 16 lakh kg annually, figures unheard of in India!



The three of us visited Queen Elizabeth Royal National Park and crossed the Equator during our journey. In the afternoon we were treated to a boat ride on the Kazinga Channel and spent the night at Mweya Safari Lodge. An early morning Jeep Safari was organized and we were lucky to spot a wild elephant, lion, hippopotamus, buffalo and deer along with various species of wild birds.

Thereafter we traveled to Ankole estate and were received by the Manager, George, who was nicknamed Smiley because of his ever smiling face.

We were shown the unique shutter-style glass windows which were installed in the Factory. In the field we visited the eucalyptus nursery where the cuttings are kept in the sleeves and grafting also done. From here they are transplanted into the field. These are then harvested in the 8th year to provide fuel for the factory.



In the field, there were no vacancies in the tea, and both MTH & SOH were in operation. High standards were maintained in the field. We also witnessed the Cessna airdropping the remittance for workers on the field. This is organized by the bank. The money is immediately collected by the police and estate security personnel.

We had lunch at Kyambura Gorge Lodge and undertook the three hour drive back to Mwenge.

On our last evening, Gary once again brought along 'Mr Walker' to bid us goodbye. Sweet memories of years gone by were refreshed, while Vikram and Sanjay joined us for dinner later in the evening.

We left at 6 am for Kampala which was a four hour drive and, after lunch, proceeded to Entebbe Airport which took us another two hours. After a three hour stopover at Dubai we landed back on home soil at Kolkata.

It was wonderful to see tea plantations with fully mechanized operations and productivity of 1000 kg with the aid of MTH. The field operations were limited to plucking, pruning, tea planting and foliar spray. There is no work under drainage, pesticide, shade planting and maintenance. Herbicide spraying is very limited and only on need basis. Owing to the favourable weather conditions harvesting is undertaken throughout the year with estates yielding up to 40 quintals, and certain Sections achieving a yield of 60 quintals.

The three recipients of the Golden Pen (Mont Blanc) felicitating 30 years' service, returned with greater wisdom and knowledge of plantations.

Our sincere gratitude to Gary and Benu, Vikram, Sanjay, George and all officials at MRUL for the warmth and hospitality bestowed upon us during our memorable visit.





# UN Women Team's Visit

~ Kaushik Saikia  
HO Kolkata



A five member delegation from UN Women visited Borengajuli T.E. on 18 & 19 January 2017. The members were as follows:

- Ms Kalliope Mingeirou – UN Women, New York
- Ms Laura Capobianco – UN Women, New York
- Ms Anju Pandey – UN Women, New Delhi
- Ms Selina Wilson – UN Women, New Delhi
- Mr Sohail Husain – Consultant

Mr Sandip Ghosh, Head of the Sustainability Cell – Indian Tea Association (ITA) accompanied the team to provide a wider perspective of the tea industry.

### The objectives of the visit were:

- To gain a deeper understanding of issues related to women's safety and gender-based violence in the tea estates of Assam.
- To identify community assets that can strengthen existing efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls. In particular, to learn from MRIL and other partnership initiatives serving the estate communities and growers.

The visit started with a meeting at HO, Kolkata, on 16 January 2017. The team, accompanied by the undersigned, arrived at Borengajuli T.E. on

18 January 2017 and conducted interviews with the estate's women workers and members of the Mothers' Club, Adolescent Girls' Club and Fairtrade Premium Committee to gather first-hand information on women's issues in order to formulate possible interventions. The response from the target groups has been very encouraging and much appreciated. The Adolescent Girls' Club presented street plays which are staged to raise awareness amongst the estates' residents on social evils like domestic violence, women's safety, health and hygiene, alcoholism, education, trafficking, child labour, child marriage etc.

The team also visited a woman small tea grower to understand women's issues followed by a visit to a neighbouring village – Borengabari. They were welcomed with a traditional dance by the women of the village. They interacted with two highly educated professionals, teachers, students, weavers, home makers and the men separately, to understand issues and formulate possible interventions thereafter.

The team appreciated the awareness of the women in and around the estates and also the interventions taken up by the estate's Management.

UN Women proposes to undertake such projects in MRIL estates, for which plans have been finalized.



## Laurels



### North America Tea Conference

At the North America Tea Conference held from 20 to 22 September 2016, Gisovu T.E. (Rwanda) and Keyhung T.E. (Assam) were placed second in the Black Tea PF1 and Black Tea GFBOP categories respectively, while PhuBen Factory was adjudged the winner in the Green Tea category.



### Felicitations

Dr Nipun Karmakar, Medical Officer at Paneery T.E. was felicitated on World TB Day by the District Health Society, Udalguri for his valuable contribution towards controlling tuberculosis in the district.



### Celebrating 30 years' service

DEBAJIT BHUYAN  
PUSHAPJIT SINGH GILL



## Down Memory Lane

~ Dr Nayan Kumar Phukan  
Guwahati

Never in my wildest dreams did I think that I would join Tea one day. I had planned on joining the Government Services, but destiny, it seems, had its own plans. Looking back, I now feel that 39 years of the most active and productive period of my life ended way too quietly, too quickly. They have, however, left me with numerous friends, colleagues and well-wishers, and a host of memories that I will always hold dear.

I started my journey in Tea when I joined Addabarie T.E on 16 December 1977. I didn't have a clue about tea life then. In fact, Mr Ashok Kaul, my first Manager, even told me once that I was a complete misfit. Thanks to Mr Kaul himself, though, I learnt the ropes

of tea life soon enough and he became a father figure to me. Many years later my wife, Boon, and I had the opportunity of meeting Mr and Mrs Kaul at their son, Mr Pavan Kaul's bungalow at Nya Gogra T.E. We were overwhelmed with emotion at the expression of their affection and love towards us. Mr Ashok Atal was my next Manager – considered by many as 'The Lion' because of his strict administration. It was necessary, of course, because of the changing situation. Basically, I started my journey in Tea under the guidance of two of the best. I was also very fortunate to have worked with stalwarts such as Mr D.K. Saha and Mr K.K. Bhuyan, from whom I learnt the finer points of tea life.

Addabarie in those days had successive good footballers like Mr Justice Lyngdoh, Mr Raja Sen, Mr N.S. Thapa, Dr S.C. Gogoi, Mr R.K. Gogoi and Mr G.J. Ambooken, to name a few. It was also vibrant with various activities – social, cultural, games and sports. There were regular Badminton and Table Tennis competitions, including the Macintosh Smith Badminton Tournament in the staff club premises, and various festivals were celebrated together by the staff, executives, and all their families. It was probably because of these get-togethers, and of course all the wonderful people there, that I felt welcome into the life that had seemed so novel to me initially.

Addabarie witnessed satisfactory progress during my tenure. I devoted all my time and energy to the development of its hospital, and very soon it became one of the best in the Company with respect to infrastructure and functioning. I got married while I was in this garden, and it was the first home for both our children. Having spent so many years there, I was beginning to be considered a fixed asset of Addabarie. I eventually did get transferred, of course, but after 14 years and 4 months.

In 1992, when I joined my next garden, Majulighur, it was strewn with problems. The terrible road to the out-garden, Ghiladhari, and the poor infrastructure and working atmosphere at the hospital especially, left me quite depressed. It took me a while to adapt, but I was soon able to take up the challenge. I worked hard and gradually my efforts started to bear fruit. Majulighur Hospital was adjudged the best Zonal Hospital in 1999.

An incident at Majulighur Hospital during my stay left a lasting impression in my life. One evening I was sitting in my hospital office with a heavy heart due to the sudden death of a chronically sick boy of 10-12 years of age, who was to have been sent to Phulbari Central Hospital for review the following day. I anticipated some trouble when a huge group of Union leaders and senior workers entered my office. They discussed the patient with me, and surprisingly, instead of creating any trouble, all of them started praising the hospital staff and me for our sincere efforts to save the young boy's life. Now I can proudly

say that, while those 9 years were the busiest period of my tea life, Majulighur Hospital progressed well during my tenure.

In 2001, I moved to Rupajuli T.E. A well located and otherwise peaceful garden, it was frequently raided by elephants in those days. I remember waking up at 3am one day to find a herd of them right behind the bungalow, two of whom had broken the fence, trampled over the vegetable patch and come into the front compound. While my children stood there on the porch in their night suits looking out in wide-eyed wonder, Boon found the subject of her next story that went on to be published and became one of her most widely read pieces.

While Rupajuli gave us a dose of wildlife, Corramore, which I joined in 2006, was balm to our senses because of its incredible scenic beauty. Apart from the communication problems we faced because of the bad roads and unpredictable rivers, Corramore was a near idyllic posting.

In 2008 I joined my last estate, Halem – a nice garden where the staff and workers were all excellent. I did not, however, want to work there indefinitely after my retirement and thought it was the right time for me and my wife to start our next chapter in life.

During my long career in Tea, I had the opportunity of closely associating with many respectable, learned and interesting personalities who enriched my life as a doctor and as an individual. This also made it possible for me to be actively involved in ABITA and take up different, extremely rewarding assignments, be it as Founder Medical Coordinator of Tezpur and Bisnauth Circle; Zonal Medical Coordinator; or Chairman of Branch Medical Advisory Sub-Committee. On the IMA side, my journey started as Honorary Secretary of Rangapara and Bishwanath Branch, and ended with my position as Vice-President of Assam State Branch.

All in all, I would say, Boon and I lived a productive and satisfying life in Tea. Of course, it wouldn't have been half as rich without the love and support of our friends and well-wishers. I take this opportunity, on behalf of my family, to thank McLeod Russel India Limited for giving us these wonderful years.



~ Cren Sandys Lumsdaine, UK

## The Calcutta Cup

*I have played rugby all my life; from a small and very skinny 6-year-old to a somewhat heavier and rather less agile nearly 50-year-old. For me, rugby is one of life's real pleasures and it has been a privilege to have had it as part of my life; the sportsmanship and camaraderie are rarely found in other sports.*

*Rugby is a physical game; it is demanding and requires a good fitness level and discipline to get the most out of it. It's a hard and demanding contact sport, but the rewards of such a game are friendships that last a lifetime. In fact, two of my children have godparents who I played rugby with when I started a long, long time ago.*

The Calcutta Cup – the oldest trophy in world rugby – is a Rugby Union trophy awarded to the winner of the annual Six Nations Championship match between England and Scotland.



On Christmas Day 1872, a game of rugby was organized between 20 players representing England and 20 representing Scotland, Ireland and Wales, in Calcutta, India, at the ground now known as the Calcutta Cricket and Football Club (CC&FC). The match was such a huge success that it was repeated a week later. These lovers of rugby formed the Calcutta Football Club in January 1873.



The Calcutta Football Club joined the Rugby Football Union in England in 1874. Despite the Indian climate not being entirely suitable for playing rugby, the club prospered during that first year. However, when the 'free bar' was discontinued, the membership took an appreciable drop and the Calcutta (Rugby) Football Club was disbanded in 1878.

The members, however, decided to keep the memory of the club alive by having the remaining 270 silver rupees in their bank account (equivalent to approximately £60 then) melted down and made into a trophy which was presented to the Rugby Football Union (RFU) to be used as "the best means of doing some lasting good for the cause of Rugby Football" with the provision that it should be competed for annually.



Despite the request of the Calcutta Football Club that the trophy be used as rugby's answer to football's FA Cup, the RFU refused to turn the Calcutta Cup into a knock-out competition for English club sides. They believed that "competitiveness" ran against the amateur ethos and instead decided that a game should be played each year between England and Scotland and whoever won would keep it for that year. The first Calcutta Cup match was played at Raeburn Place, Edinburgh (the oldest bespoke sports ground in Scotland) on 10 March 1879 and ended in a draw; Scotland scored a drop goal and England a goal. The following year, on 28 February, England became the first winners of the Calcutta Cup when they defeated Scotland by 2 goals and 3 tries to 1 goal in Manchester. Matches have continued on an annual basis ever since except for three interruptions due to the two World Wars between 1915–1919 and 1940–1946, and during the Great Dispute of the 1880s which ultimately led to the establishment of the IRB (now World Rugby).



The handcrafted cup, standing approximately 18 inches (45 cm) high, is a beautiful example of Indian workmanship. The body is finely engraved with three king cobras forming the handles and the domed lid is surmounted by an Indian elephant which,

it is said, is copied from the Viceroy's own stock. The inscription on the wooden base reads: "THE CALCUTTA CUP PRESENTED TO THE RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION BY THE CALCUTTA FOOTBALL CLUB AS AN INTERNATIONAL CHALLENGE CUP TO BE PLAYED FOR ANNUALLY BY ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND 1878." The base has additional plates attached which record the date of each match played, the name of the winning country and the names of the two captains.

The original trophy is now in too fragile a condition to attend functions or go on tours. When won by England it is put on public display in the Museum of Rugby in Twickenham, where it slowly revolves in a showcase. Both nations have full size machine-made replicas of the Cup. 135 Calcutta Cup matches have taken place to date, with England winning 75 matches, Scotland 42, and 18 being drawn games. Today the annual match between these two nations in the Six Nations Championship alternates between the respective home national rugby stadiums Murrayfield Stadium, Edinburgh (on even years) and Twickenham Stadium, London (on odd years). England has held the trophy since the 2009 Championship.



*Editors' Note: Founded in 1792, CC&FC is one of the oldest existing sporting clubs in the world, and has always had a close association with the city's tea companies and brokerage houses. It has absorbed several sporting clubs over the centuries: Calcutta Cricket Club of 1792 vintage, Ballygunge Cricket Club (1864-1950) and the revived Calcutta Football Club in 1884, introducing the Kolkata (Calcutta) version of the Calcutta Cup in 1890.*

*Since then, Indian rugby clubs have been battling it out for the Calcutta Cup. Like its older counterpart the Indian version of the Cup is also an intricate work of art, decorated with local scenes dating back to the late 19th century, including ships sailing down the Hooghly and pilgrims walking to Kalighat Temple.*



# The Pygmy Hogs of Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuary



~ Vishal Mahindra  
Hunwal T.E.



Earlier, the hogs were found in abundance along the Indian subcontinent, Bhutan and Nepal, but are now severely restricted to Assam. Their population has been decimated by habitat destruction due to the expansion of the human population, uncontrolled thatch burning in the region and development of commercial plantations. They are the sole surviving representatives of the 'Porcula' genus. The species is confined to the tall grass, upland of Manas National Park and its surroundings in Bornadi area, with an estimated population of below 250. They are very sensitive to any change in habitat and do not adapt well to changes in their ecosystem. Their survival today is solely dependent on the fast disappearing grassland home they share with tigers, elephants and rhinos.

In May last year, when we were reeling under a heat wave, waiting for the monsoons to do their bit, I had a learning experience which was nothing short of a 'green channel' for me. On a relatively warm morning, as I was headed to my bungalow for breakfast after finishing my morning *kamjari*, I received a call from Mr Ranjeev Dutta, my Senior Manager, intimating me about a visit by some guests from abroad. On reaching the office I was introduced to the international freelancing team of wildlife researchers working on conservation of the endangered Pygmy Hogs.

Pygmy Hogs are the smallest pigs in the world and rarest 'extant suid', that are not just endangered, but also rarely visible to humans because of their shy nature. Only a handful of people claim to have seen them in the wild. Also known as *Porcula Salvania*, the hogs are 55-71 cm long, weigh around 8-11 kg and stand just 20-30 cm tall.



Team Pygmy Hog Conservation Program at Senior Manager's Office



Old Map of Bornadi Range at Range Beat Office

The Pygmy Hog Conservation Program (PHCP) was set up to provide expertise and support, after the species was rediscovered in 1971 by Mr R.A. Graves, former Manager of Attareekhat T.E. near Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuary. Today PHCP is restoring previous grasslands, trying to save the depleting species from extinction through a captive breeding and release programme while also restoring previous grassland ranges.

The first stage of the process begins after hogs are born in captivity. Specially built enclosures protect the young hogs or piglets from predators and they are monitored from birth by keepers and veterinary staff. Although the diet is supplemented by the PHCP team to ensure hogs get all the vitamins and protein they require, Pygmy Hog babies display natural behaviour from the start, learning the basics such as foraging for food and nest building. They are usually fed on roots, tubers and insects.

The second stage makes life a little tougher for the hogs. As they grow in size and become stronger, support is gradually reduced, leaving them to fend for themselves in larger, wilder and tougher enclosures.

These environments have been designed and recreated to encourage these sensitive animals to build up the full range of life skills they would need to survive in the wild. Hogs then have minimum contact with humans for up to six months, before they are released into the wild, boosting their population. They usually breed in the monsoon season after a gestation period of over 100 days.

The 100th Pygmy Hog to go through this process has been recently released into protected Assam grasslands that have seen intense restoration and renovation work. The continued refurbishment of additional grassland areas is required to improve the Pygmy Hog range, increasing survival chances while also benefiting the health of other species that thrive in healthy grassland habitats.





## The Lakes of Tarajulie T.E.

~ Himanka Baruah, Tarajulie T.E.



their thirst at the Julie Lake. There have been very rare sightings of herds taking a bath in the Julie Lake's waters.

In addition to being an important part of the ecosystem, the lakes also fulfil the purpose of sustaining the tea bushes in the adjoining Sections during the prolonged dry period of the winters, by acting as massive reservoirs for irrigation. Devoid of any natural perennial source of water except the Gabharu River along its western periphery, both the lakes are a boon to the estate and are very helpful in providing water for irrigating a number of Sections. Water accumulated in the lakes from the perpetual monsoon rains provides a stable supply for around 45 days of continuous irrigation. This is being done carefully, keeping the preservation of the aqua fowl habitat in mind.

Repeated hunting of the aqua fowl and trespassing into the lakes by the locals for fishing threatened the wildlife species and their natural habitat. However, since the past couple of years, initiatives and steps have been taken by the estate's Management to further conserve the ecosystem as well as preserve the habitats of the avian species in and around the lakes. Meetings have been held in which the local populace has been urged to cease hunting and fishing in the lakes. Boards have been put up along the banks citing that hunting is strictly prohibited and those found guilty would be prosecuted as per law. These steps have been very helpful in replenishing the population of the resident as well as migratory avian species and other fauna in and around the lakes, and their population can now distinctly be seen flourishing.

Every necessary step shall be taken in the future to preserve the beauty as well as nurture the ecosystem in an around both the lakes so that they reflect our efforts to contribute towards nature and help in building a healthy ecosystem within the estate.



Nestled within the neatly maintained Sections of Tarajulie T.E. the Tara and Julie are two naturally formed lakes from which the name of the estate is derived. Apart from beautifying the landscape, they both provide a natural habitat for various fauna and are a source of water for irrigating the adjoining Sections during the dry winters.

Both the lakes cover an area of approximately 6 hectares and are situated in the two Divisions of the estate, also named 'Tara' and 'Julie'. Though the lakes' only source of water is the rain, they remain filled throughout the year. Blossoming water lilies on the surface add to the picturesque backdrop of the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh – a view which would make anyone stop to procrastinate and get lost amidst its beauty.

The lakes also provide shelter to various avian species – both local and migratory – as well as to other fauna. During the monsoon season, when there is tall grass covering the shallow marshy areas near the banks, species of wild ducks can be seen nesting among them. Moreover, other species of birds like the cattle egret, large egret, common teal and kingfisher can be seen during the early morning and evening hours, scouring the expanse of the lakes for food. Other fauna like various species of snakes, mongoose and wild hare can be seen around the banks and the adjoining tea Sections. Herds of elephants, which are frequent visitors to the estate, coming down from Nameri National Park and Sonai-Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary across the Gabharu River, can be seen quenching



*Bex having tea with my mother*

The PHCP team includes The Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Ecosystems-India and the Forestry Department, Government of India.

After learning extensively about the Pygmy Hogs, I invited the entire international team to my bungalow for tea. The four member team of Bex Bohea, Daniel Craven, Craig Jones and Dr Paragjyoti Deka enjoyed sumptuous snacks arranged by my mother and had earnest conversations about their stay and work in Assam. While chatting with Craig, I learnt that he was an ex-serviceman from the Royal British Tank regiment which also has an affiliation with my late father and elder brother's regiment.

Once they finished their work and left for their respective countries, I received a message from Craig Jones on Facebook and since then we have been in touch and also exchange photographs regularly through Whatsapp.

This experience has not just nurtured the wildlife enthusiast in me but has also made me aware of how the world comes together to protect and preserve nature, and conserve the rare and endangered wildlife species.



*Dr Paragjyoti Deka and Daniel Craven enjoying a cuppa*

~ Suchetana Dutta  
Attareekhat T.E.



"After women, flowers are the most lovely things God has given the world."

- Christian Dior

Once the colourful winter months are over, the compound suddenly looks absolutely empty. But with a little extra planning and care, we can easily have a beautiful and attractive summer garden, which is as pretty as a winter one.

But how do we start? It is not that difficult. Blending of colours on a lush green carpet is like painting on canvas. We have to imagine and execute it in the garden. Over the years, I have gained some practical experience, which I would like to share, so that everyone can have a beautiful summer garden.

- Collect and Save Cuttings:** When we repot our plants, we must save a lot of cuttings of ferns and a variety of plants for our garden. We must also collect Crotons and Coleus, as they make the garden colourful. They are easily available and have an extremely beautiful effect on our garden.
- Beautification of the Compound:** Before planting the summer flowers, it is equally important to do some beautification of the flower beds. As the rainy season approaches, some varieties of plants can be used as borders in round, triangle or half-moon shaped beds in a corner of the garden. These add a lot of colour too.
- Maintaining the Lawn:** Summer is the time when we can execute new ideas regarding the lawn, so that it looks perfect during winter. If, for instance, the lawn is uneven, then we can even it out with sandy soil and water it regularly until the grass grows. We can change the shape of our flower beds too. If the size of the lawn is small, it is advisable to use all corners of the garden for planting shrubs. However, if the compound is large, we can construct a few raised beds so that all the flowers are visible from the verandah.
- Choosing Summer Flowers:** I have given below the names of some flowers which grow well during the summer, with some tips on looking after them:

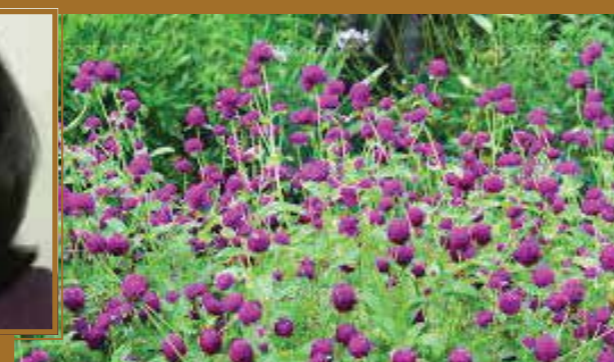
- Balsam
- Amaranthus (Celosia / Cockscomb)



Balsam



Amaranthus (Cockscomb/Celosia)



Gomphrena



Sunflower



Zinnia



Flower Bed



Lawn & Garden



Caladium



Garden Corner



Periwinkle

- Gomphrena (Globe Amaranth / Bachelor's Button)
- Zinnia
- Globe / Ball and other Lilies
- Sunflower
- Portulaca
- Madagascar Periwinkle (*Nayantara / Vinca Rosea / Catharanthus Roseus*)
- Clitoria Ternatea (*Aparajita*)

**Balsam:** It is easy to grow this plant, which can tolerate full sun to partial shade and comes in a variety of colours. Balsam flowers resemble miniature roses and require 60-70 days from sowing the seeds, to produce flowers. It is resistant to common pests and grows lushly in well-drained soil. Once it starts flowering, watering should be done from ground level to prevent 'powdery mildew', a common disease afflicting plants.

**Amaranthus (Cockscomb / Celosia):** A common flower, it is easily grown from seed. The seedlings should be planted at intervals of 8-12 inches. Depending on the height of the plants, the taller variety can be planted at the back and shorter ones in the front, to give a beautiful effect. It is important to keep the soil moist on very hot and sunny days. Discard damaged leaves and flowers to prevent fungal diseases. It has no fragrance but is a lovely flower to use in decorations as it stays fresh for a long period of time.

**Gomphrena:** This flower prefers a sunny spot and well-drained soil. It requires regular watering, forking and pinching, to get bushy plants. Liquid manuring at regular intervals is important, so as to get more flowers. They can be used in dry arrangements too.

**Sunflower:** These flowers like the summer season and can be propagated easily from seed. Both tall and short varieties are available. It is usually trouble free as it tolerates drought conditions. The soil should be loose, light and well fertilized, so that its roots spread out, thus producing good blooms. Just one bed of Sunflowers brings a lot of colour to a summer garden.

**Zinnia:** Zinnias grow fast and bloom in abundance. They flourish in well-drained and fertile soil. It is advisable to sow the seeds in succession so that there are flowers throughout summer. Bacterial and fungal infection is very common in them, so it is advisable to remove the damaged leaves and flowers manually.

*Aparajita* can be trailed like Sweet Peas while *Nayantara* can be put out in flower beds. Apart from the above mentioned flowers, *Caladium* looks very pretty in a summer garden. Then, there are a lot of different varieties of summer lilies which add colour to the summer garden as well.

Regular forking and fertilizing are required to get more blooms. Pinching is required to get bushy plants.

So, enjoy planning and planting out your summer garden and be rewarded with its rich and varied colours.

Have a beautiful summer garden this year.

# Kamjari



~ Gautam Bhattacharya  
Mathura T.E.

## Fully Tea-minded!

My introduction to the word *kamjari* happened on 16 July 1982. After attaining my Masters Degree in Botany (Microbiology) I was engaged in research work on DNA Hybridization at the Bose Institute when I received the appointment letter for the job that I was interviewed for a month earlier. Thrilled, I decided to leave the laboratory and accept the job.

I landed in Assam to begin my career as an Assistant Manager on a tea estate, with a heart full of hope and aspiration to become a successful tea planter. Reaching the garden I met the Manager, an avid planter himself. After exchanging niceties he gave me some valuable introductory lessons on Tea. In a baritone he added, “My boy, remember, to achieve success in this field, you have to be fully Tea-minded. It is actually a twenty-four hour job. Sometimes you may not even get to have your meals on time or proper sleep for nights on end. So think about it again and then decide whether you still want to join or not. Else...!” With a shrug he gave me a clear hint to rethink my choice. However, taking it as a challenge, I joined the next day and started fine-tuning myself to be fully Tea-minded.

I was posted in the factory where I started becoming familiar with the words *Kamjari*, *Burra Sa’ab*, *Chbota Sa’ab*, *Kolghor*, *Jugali* etc. I also learnt that the ‘*Mistry-sa’ab*’ is actually the ‘Factory Assistant Manager’ who needs to know every operation in and outside the *kolghor* which included looking after the pets of Seniors at times!! ‘Proper sleep’ was becoming a fairy-tale and I often found myself munching a ‘mobile’ breakfast at midnight while supervising the manufacture.

My *kamjari* used to start at night. As a beginner, I was learning various aspects of tea manufacture in detail. My bungalow *chowkidar* Faagu was like an alarm clock. He used to wake me up well in time to attend factory at midnight. Starting with a sober knock on the door at 11.30pm, he used to call, “*Sahab utbiye*”. Failing to get his ‘*Sahab*’ on his feet, his next knock would become a bang after ten minutes, accompanied by an almost threatening tone when he shouted, “*Sahab utbiye, kamjari ka time ho*

*gaya*.” Finally, the *Mistry Sahab* had to get up and go to the factory cursing this brew called TEA and wondering why this divine decoction could not be processed only during the day! (Later, I discovered that my delay in going to the factory was unfavourable to Faagu’s sleeping pattern! After my departure he used to curl up on his makeshift bed and get his uninterrupted beauty sleep!)

After a few years I got married. The honeymoon could not be fitted into the short span of leave so I promised my ‘better half’ a grand trip once we got back to Assam. It was end-March and spring was in the air with all its romantic melodies. We planned a honeymoon trip to Arunachal Pradesh. Accordingly, I returned to the estate five days before my scheduled day of joining.

That very evening, my *Burra Sa’ab* dropped in and said, “Come over for dinner tomorrow. Madhumita can get introduced to all your colleagues and their wives.” It was very kind of him and we were delighted to accept, but before leaving, he called me aside and quietly added, “By the way, Gautam, I think there is no point in wasting five days sitting in the bungalow. Join tomorrow because the factory is already operating full swing. Your presence is required.” Seeing me fumbling and in two minds, he asked, “What is there to do in the bungalow...huh?” (Good question to ask a newly married man!) Sensing that our honeymoon was about to get eclipsed I gathered some courage and requested, “S...Sir, p...please grant me two more days, I need to meet some relatives.” “Well, ok...join after two days,” he said and left.

“Phew...saved!” Thankful that he had agreed I quickly started rescheduling a mini-honeymoon trip. However, the next morning I received a handwritten note from the *Burra Sa’ab* stating, “Your teas are burnt. Join immediately.” I didn’t know how I had managed to burn my teas without even joining my duties! The message was very clear and I ran to start my *kamjari* leaving my bride fuming. The honeymoon cruise took a plunge in the deep sea, like the Titanic, and that irreparable wreckage is carefully preserved in her mind-museum. During stormy days, it does re-surface

like a nightmare and I take cover behind a newspaper!

Some years later, I was posted on an estate in a remote corner of Doomdooma. Considered to be a soft target of militants, heavy security was deployed all around. Two PSOs had to accompany me in my Gypsy with another vehicle filled with more armed guards following. While checking different *kamjari*, I noticed one PSO, Sri Nagen Das, observing the instructions being given by me very keenly. His special interest and main focus was on plucking and young tea pruning. So, when the other security personnel were looking around for possible threats, Sri Das used to stand next to me watching my field *kamjari* closely. Before departing on another posting a few months later, he met me to express his heartfelt thanks. He confessed that he had a small tea garden and had learnt a lot about the care of tea bushes by watching my *kamjari* every day. So much for my security!

On our third night at another estate bordering a dense forest and a beautiful river, the *chowkidar* woke us up to say that ‘*Mama*’ had arrived. We were quite surprised at how our ‘*Mama*’ (maternal uncle in Bengali) had reached that remote estate without informing us and that too at such an odd hour. Hastily, we came out to welcome our *Mama* but there was no one there!

“Where is *Mamaji*?” I enquired.

“Wahan,” said the *chowkidar*, pointing towards the darkness.

“*Mamaji* standing there? You didn’t call him upstairs? Are you mad?” I shouted, quickly followed by “Oh My God!” as I espied two huge elephants (one a tusker) standing on the lawn.

“*Hatibaba ko hi hum ‘Mama’ bulate hein*,” (we call the elephant *mama*) he explained with a grin.

It was worth watching the two live ‘hillocks’ from such proximity. Finally, we thanked the *chowkidar* for calling us.

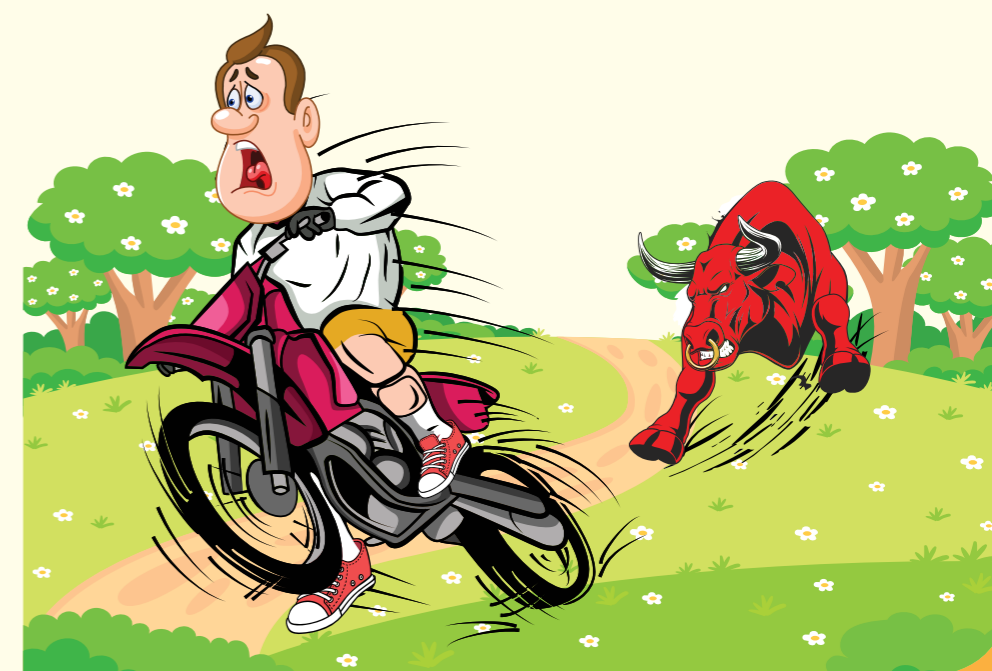
I came across the royal pachyderms several times. Once, in the wee hours while waiting for the General Manager, I suddenly found myself standing just a few feet away from a full-grown tusker. Panicked, I was unable to decide – ‘fight or flight’! Thankfully the elephant found me insignificant and went its own way. I was saved by a whisker. Thank God!

The monkey population being menacingly high on another estate, growing vegetables or even flowers in the bungalow compound was almost impossible. Root to seed,

everything was palatable to their taste buds. Once, while *Puja* was being performed in the factory on the first day of manufacturing, rows of monkeys sat on the factory roof, eyeing the fruits being offered. Suddenly the big red-faced chieftain slid down a pillar, picked up a bunch of bananas and jumped back onto the roof top again. In the process, the monkey unknowingly put a switch ‘on’ resulting in the rolling-table starting immediately. Amazed and very happy were the workers, to have the factory started by none other than Bajrangbali Ji himself!

A remarkably unique encounter with a bovine sprinter occurred on another estate where I used to ride a vintage bike for *kamjari*. One afternoon I took a shortcut through a rather deserted, narrow, *kuchcha* alley to reach a particular Section in a hurry. Considering me an intruder, a solitary grazing bull first gave me an unforgiving look. Then, terribly annoyed by the sounds from the non-functional silencer of that classic two-wheeler, it started chasing me at high speed. That path bordered by tea bushes being just broad enough to accommodate a bike and a bull, my only option was to accelerate faster than the hoofed rogue. The matchless rally continued for about five long minutes after which the bike suddenly withdrew from the contest and sputtered to a halt after coughing out profuse black smoke. I was expecting a back-breaking blow from the chasing bull but the fanatic herbivore somehow overtook me, continued his marathon at full pace and proclaimed a joyous victory by holding his tufted tail high before going out of my sight. I, for the first time, patted my ‘oldie’ for stopping midway for no reason, and happily pushed it back to the factory.

There were many such anecdotes throughout my journey in Tea and, after all these years, I don’t know whether I have become fully ‘Tea-minded’ or not, but I do know that ‘Tea’ is the ultimate refuge of my life. Believe it or not, it is a blessing to have had this wonderful journey!





## The Mangaldai Polo and Gymkhana Club (MPGC)

~ Anuj P. Bordoloi  
Paneery T.E.

The Mangaldai Polo & Gymkhana Club is located in Paneery T.E. It has been the epicentre of social life for the planters and their families in the remote Mangaldai tea district. The club has been carefully preserved, retaining the flavour of the 1900s, but with modern amenities as the times are changing. With the scenic Bhutan Hills in the background, it resembles an exquisite picture postcard.



The exact year of establishment of MPGC is unknown, though the Club documents point to it having been started in the early 1900s, by the Agency tea companies for their executives to socialize and network over a few drinks. These tea planters and their families would participate in sporting and recreational activities on the

Club Day. The club has a strict dress code and it is mandatory for the gentlemen to be in ties from November until March.

### Long-serving Club Bearers



Today the club has members from twelve tea estates. However, as an old practice, the office bearers allow non-member officers from the nearby Hattigor Army Cantonment to utilize the golf course facility and invite them for social events as a goodwill gesture. Newcomers joining the fraternity are welcomed with the signature Planter's Punch, after which they ride back to their estate with massive hangovers and splitting headaches. In earlier times, bachelors who had decided to extend their 'happy hours' way beyond midnight, would be treated to chicken curry and hot *parathas* cooked by the Club Babu's wife.

The Club Day is generally held on Wednesday, when the members play their games which is followed by high tea. On Sundays too, the sports enthusiasts sweat it out on the golf course or the tennis courts, followed by a session at the bar. Earlier, the club had a gramophone in the billiards room with a collection of 30-40 records that would be played in the evenings, accompanied by



lively dance sessions. The grand old piano that was imported from London still stands strong next to the fireplace in the conference room.



MPGC is equipped with six grass tennis courts, a billiards table, a squash court and a picturesque 9-hole golf course. A section of this course is also used as an airstrip for the Company's Cessna, which transports visitors to this district. In the good old days, Dakotas of Kalinga Airlines and Jam Air, which transported teas, would also bring in culinary items such as tinned food and cold cuts every fortnight, which would be over in no time! At one end of the airstrip, is a cemetery with a few graves of British planters who had passed away while serving in the district.



The members would use the swimming pool located in the Burra Bungalow, which is no more the case. However, it is on the cards to revive the pool once again. The club also has a library where one can borrow a wide range of books catering to varied intellectual requirements. There is a very well-stocked Convenience Store, which is a rare facility in tea clubs nowadays, and a blessing for the memsahabs and *chokra* sahabs.

In 2015, the club underwent major renovation in infrastructure and décor, that has created an excellent ambience which would be the pride and envy of many clubs in the tea circles. It boasts of a bar, aptly named the 'Polo Bar', which is regarded as the heart and soul of the club by the gents. There is an air-conditioned conference cum TV room, a large central hall with a wooden dance floor, and a well-equipped modern kitchen.



A series of annual events are routinely organized here. Golf, tennis, football and cricket tournaments are frequent fixtures on the club's sporting calendar. Events such as Men's Nite, Rain Dance, the Annual Club Meet, Bihu, Diwali Night, New Year and Christmas are celebrated annually and are eagerly looked forward to by the members. One cannot miss mentioning the colourful Annual Flower Show where the members display their gardening and culinary skills.

The club has always imprinted fond and lasting memories upon its members, which is evident when old planters in the vicinity never miss a chance to visit it. Due to its homely atmosphere, it has remained the revelry hub for generations of planters, who relax their aching bones and overcome the district's hazards of remoteness and boredom.



# Requiem

NORMA AHMED



(1945 – 2017)

SANTANU KALITA



(1975 – 2017)

*“Life is but a stopping place  
A pause in what's to be  
A resting place along the way  
To sweet eternity  
We all have different journeys  
Different paths along the way  
We all were meant to learn some things  
But never meant to stay...”*

## Many Lives, One Path...



Folks in the gardens prefer to relax in the *jaali kamra*, where one gets an idyllic view of the lawn and its surroundings. So it is, that one often enjoys just relaxing here, soaking in the ambience, busy with one's thoughts.

Oft times while sipping a cuppa here, I have wondered at what these majestic bungalows have witnessed, as they stand stolidly through the years. There would have been so many people who have enjoyed sitting here as I do today. The footfalls of yesteryears would have trod the same familiar paths we take today. These old walls stand as silent testimony to the years gone by... to the many events and incidents that have occurred... if they could talk, they would surely have many a tale to tell. Sitting here in the evening sometimes, I can almost see a memsahab with her parasol, attired as in the days of yore, daintily taking a walk down the garden pathway. Well, many people have had their fair share of encounters with the unworldly, or so it is told, which does add a further air of mystery to these structures!

The older trees in the compound too, speak their own tales of the days gone by. Perchance an old *mali* will recall who planted them, and we marvel at how they've withstood the ravages of time. Whenever I plant trees here, I always like to think that perhaps someone in the distant future will appreciate them being there... maybe even write about them, as I am doing now! I remember this massive banyan tree in one of the compounds of a bungalow we lived in earlier. Peering into the hollow of the main trunk I could see an iron post that was swallowed up, plus a number of earthen lamps which the roots had taken over. I felt like a

child again, so awestruck was I! However, nobody could recall when it came to be planted there, and it probably survived so long due to the myths woven around it, purportedly of great calamities befalling any person who dared to harm it! Such beliefs have protected a great many trees here. Particular favourites of mine are the sprawling litchi trees, which always bear an abundance of fruit each year, their branches bowing low with their delicious load. Once the litchis are ripe and ready, they are distributed among the people, and there is always enough to make some squash, wine or preserves. I always bless the thoughtful soul who planted them. However, all living beings have their life spans, so, one should always plant more such trees... it could be one more sapling of a litchi tree next to the older one, for instance.

Well, we owe it to the world and the future generations, to look after the place we are in now... the legacy must be beneficial for everybody in the years to come. And as I go pottering around the bungalow, I can always hear the echo of another time...

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