The Times

WM

The McLeod Russel House Journal



July 2018

Editorial



It has been the *dastoor* from the very beginning for tea plantation executives to live in individual bungalows built 'far from the madding crowd'. Even nowadays, when the Company builds new premises for its executives on the estates, they build bungalows. It is rather a novelty, therefore, to read about the Company's executives posted in Vietnam living in apartments in one building. They have the best of both worlds actually – their privacy as well as companionship. They also share a beautiful compound and a kitchen garden in which they grow the familiar vegetables from 'home' that they miss.

The kitchen garden is an essential feature in every home on a tea estate in India. All the executives, staff and workers living on an estate make the most of their kitchen gardens and enjoy feeding their families, friends and guests with organically grown seasonal vegetables. This is such a boon in a world of painted and tainted vegetables!

While the world has recently discovered the nutritional and medicinal properties of 'superfoods', we have been growing them in our kitchen gardens for years! One such 'superfood' is the humble pumpkin. It is easy to grow and every part of the plant and vegetable is edible, including the skin in unripe pumpkins. There is a variety of dishes that can be made from the stem, leaves, flowers, and fruit of this versatile plant.

Around 100 gm of pumpkin contains over 200% of the recommended daily intake of Vitamin A per person, making it extremely beneficial for the eyes. Its antioxidant properties help in fighting infections and infectious diseases, its water content keeps one hydrated and its fibre content keeps one sated for a longer time so that one doesn't feel hungry for a while.

Other 'superfoods' also available aplenty on the estates are turmeric –cultivated in the kitchen garden – curd and ghee (clarified butter) made from the milk of one's own cows, and the *amla* (Indian gooseberry) and jackfruit growing on trees in nearly every compound. All of these have preventative and curative properties related to one's health. Eating healthy is thus a way of life on our tea estates.

Water is a depleting resource around the world so it is imperative that we use it wisely and save as much as possible. Harvesting rainwater and putting it to good use is the Company's contribution towards the conservation of this precious resource.

Sport is a great way to make people come together and bond, as shown by the inaugural cricket tournament held at the splendid Gahanga Cricket Stadium in Rwanda, in which the Company's executives from Pfunda and Gisovu estates also participated. The stadium was the dream of one man but translated into reality by his son and others who completed feats of endurance in order to raise money to build it.

The hospitality of planters is legendary. They go out of their way to look after a guest, especially when he is one of their own, even if they have never met him before. Retired planter Ken Baber's daughter, Rachel, discovered this when she brought her father on a nostalgic visit to Assam some months ago.

Ultimately, life is measured by the strength of our commitments and the ties that bind us.

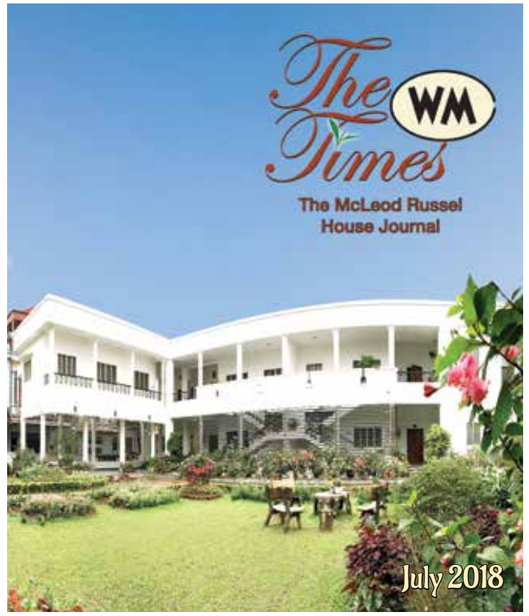
Wishing all a fruitful season,

Sarita Dasgupta

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~ Sakina Hussain, PhuBen, Vietnam

From Warehouse To Phuben House



April 1996

"We drove down from Hanoi airport to Thanh Ba, our new home. On arrival at the residential compound, I was totally taken aback when told that this was going to be where we were to live! The building was an old Russian warehouse with the ground floor packed with old worn out material, iron ore, wooden beams, etc. There were three rooms on the first floor with an apology for bathrooms and toilets! I was obviously very upset. Depression set in but I realized nothing could be done at this stage except move forward.

The room was filthy as was the bathroom. Spent the next day cleaning up. It was infested with rats, termites on the doors and windows, and cobwebs all over. With no kitchen to cook in, we had all our meals at the village restaurant, at the Company's expense of course! It was decided to convert the warehouse into residential flats. Before the work started we moved into a neighbouring school guest house till such time that our own accommodation was ready a few months later. Once furnished and ready, our families joined us. When in Hanoi I used to buy enough bread and cheese to last for a week. The first few months were a nightmare and tough going. I won't deny, the peg or two of whisky in the evenings did help! Time went by and a lot of pioneering was done."

~ Mr Noshir Jalnawala.



March 2018

Over the last seven years we too have been witness to the change that has metamorphosed a warehouse into a warm and welcoming home for those who live here. It now houses four flats, one of which is a guest house. Of the five small rooms on a single floor on one side of the compound, two are store rooms, one with the treadmill is our very own gym, and the other one houses one or two interpreters who come in very handy when we get stuck whilst communicating with the domestic help.











This, I admit, is more akin to a game of dumb charades with their meagre English and our limited command of Vietnamese. However, it never ceases to amaze me how we usually manage to get through a day without any major miscommunication. On a lighter note, it's a lesson in how few words one actually needs to speak to be heard and understood!!

Apart from the regular vegetables, the small kitchen garden at the back gives us an ample supply of *bhindis* and green chillies of the kind we like! We share the compound in the front in every sense of the word… from gardening, to walking, to sitting out for a chit chat.

When living miles away from home in a land, albeit friendly, but where language is a major barrier, the layout of the flats made a lot of difference. It's here that I learnt the joy and convenience of 'community' living! Loneliness is never a problem, for trials are shared and joys are celebrated together. The ladies may at times not share the morning cup of tea but the four o'clock cuppa is seldom had alone! Friday nights are a gourmet treat with pot luck dinner in one of the flats. I must concede, the best omelette and *anda bhujia* is made by the men! They are also extremely sporting when it comes to being guinea pigs for new recipes and cuisines tried! Festivals are celebrated together in the true spirit of it… turkey for Christmas, *sewain* for Eid, *gujjias* for Holi and *teen patti* on Diwali!









It couldn't have been better said…
"We have all known the long loneliness, and we have found
that the answer is community" ~ *Dorothy Day*

The Memsahab's Guide to Gracious Living

The Versatile Pumpkin



~ Madhumita Bhattacharya, Mathura T.E.

"Pumpkin *halwa*…you mean *Kaddu*? OH MY GO(UR)D!", Annu, my old friend, screamed. "It is a horrendous, overweight, awfully spooky and ugly vegetable! How can you be such an inexcusable, unwise, thoughtless and cruel human being? You made *halwa* from that horrible thing? Pumpkins are only meant for carving those ghostly Halloween lanterns which flicker uncannily. Because of those monstrous, appalling lanterns, I spend so many nail-biting, sleepless, cold Halloween nights, quivering under the quilt." She stopped to breathe.

This *Comedy of Pumpkins* took place on a holiday evening over dinner at our place. Annu had come to visit us after ages. The dish I had cooked for the main course was highly appreciated by her. But the frenzy occurred when I offered her the cardamom flavoured, cashew garnished, glossy pumpkin *halwa*. It looked delicious but I was unaware of her dislike for pumpkin.

"Come on, dear, try it, you'll love it. Pumpkins are truly versatile, and an all-season food." Knowing her passion for healthy diets and a strict exercise regime, I desperately endeavoured to boost her confidence. "They are a great source of beta-carotene, an antioxidant which can reduce the risk of cancer; and are also loaded with potassium, calcium and other minerals. Above all they are a low-calorie treat, trust me. Moreover, their seeds pack about 1.7 grams of dietary fibre per ounce, while mashed pumpkin has only 50 calories per cup and 3 grams of fibre. Can you believe that?" I asked.

"But pumpkins are fat accumulators, aren't they?"

"No, that is absolutely incorrect. Rather the reverse. The pulp can perform miracles in smoothening out wrinkles on the face!"

"Really?" She was showing some interest at last.

A bit hopeful, I continued, "The tender shoots, leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds - every part is edible. Seeds are used as a taeniacide (to expel parasitic worms from the body), tonic and diuretic, while the flesh is used as a poultice on boils, burns and inflammations. In ancient times, people used this vegetable as anti-venom for snake bites." I desperately tried to glorify pumpkins and rescue my culinary skills from denigration.

"Have you ever tried Pumpkin Flower Fritters, Pumpkin Leaf Saag, Pumpkin Soup or Pumpkin Risotto?"

"No, give me the recipes if they taste good."

"Sure, I will."

"And how do pumpkins cure snake bite?" she enquired, while taking another scoop of *halwa* on her plate.

"Oh, that's simple," I replied. "Before the snake bites you, throw a big pumpkin at it. The snake will disappear and you can run away."

She stood speechless and I silently thanked the 'versatile pumpkin', my saviour.



PUMPKIN FLOWER FRITTERS

Ingredients

- Pumpkin flowers - 10
- Flour - 4 tablespoons
- Gram flour - 1½ tablespoons
- Rice flour - 1½ tablespoons
- Red chilli powder - ½ teaspoon
- Turmeric powder - ½ teaspoon
- Salt to taste
- Refined or Mustard oil to deep-fry
- Potatoes - 2 medium (boiled)
- Poppy seed paste - 2 tablespoons
- Cumin powder - ½ teaspoon
- Coriander powder - ½ teaspoon
- Turmeric powder - a pinch
- Chillies (chopped) - as per taste
- Onion - 1 medium (finely chopped)
- Baking powder - a pinch

Method

1. Discard the stamens and wash flowers carefully.
2. Mash boiled potatoes with a pinch of salt for the filling.
3. Heat oil in pan, fry chopped onions till slightly browned; add powdered coriander and cumin. Fry for some time, then add mashed potato.
4. Adjust salt, add a pinch of sugar. Stir well, add the poppy seed paste. Fry till all ingredients are mixed well.
5. Fill the flowers with the potato filling, pressing down the petals to seal them. Keep aside.
6. Make a thick and smooth batter with flour, gram flour, rice flour, turmeric powder, salt and water.
7. Dip the flowers into the batter. Coat evenly.
8. Heat oil and fry the batter-coated, stuffed flowers one or two at a time till they turn light brown.
9. Drain the oil and place the fried flowers on absorbent paper.



PUMPKIN LEAF SAAG

Ingredients

- Tender pumpkin leaves - 20
- Onions - 2 medium (finely chopped)
- Garlic - 2 cloves
- Ginger - ½ teaspoon (grated)
- Green chillies - 2 (chopped)
- Coriander powder - 1 teaspoon (toasted & ground)
- Vegetable oil - 2 tablespoons
- Butter - 1 teaspoon
- Salt - as per taste
- Sugar - a pinch

Method

1. Wash the leaves thoroughly under running water and leave to dry in a colander. Drain well.
2. Chop the leaves roughly.
3. Heat a flat pan; toast the chopped leaves till they let out a nutty aroma. Set aside to cool.
4. Heat the oil. Add onions and fry till they change colour. Add the green chillies, garlic and ginger.
5. Add all the spices and sprinkle a little water so that the spices do not burn. Add the toasted leaves; cook for about 5-7 minutes.
6. Keep sprinkling water so the mixture does not stick to the bottom of the pan. Season with salt. Add a pinch of sugar. Remove from heat and cool.
7. After cooling, transfer it all into a blender and run till the contents become smooth.
8. Taste and adjust the seasoning.
9. If it looks runny, then transfer to the wok, simmer and keep stirring till it is done.
10. Add butter and serve.



PUMPKIN RISOTTO

Ingredients

- Chicken / Vegetable stock - 4 cups
- Arborio / Basmati rice - 1 cup
- Pumpkin puree - ½ cup
- Pumpkin (cooked & chopped) - 1 cup
- Onion chopped - 1 medium
- Dry white wine - ½ cup
- Parmesan cheese - 6 tablespoons
- Nutmeg - ½ teaspoon
- Garlic (minced) - 1 clove
- Olive oil - 1 tablespoon
- Salt and pepper - to taste

Method

1. Bring the stock to a simmer. Reduce the heat and keep it warm.
2. Heat olive oil. Add onion and garlic; stir till onions become soft and translucent.
3. Stir in rice and coat well. Add the wine and stir until it is completely absorbed by the rice.
4. Add a cup of stock with the nutmeg, to the rice. Reduce heat; cook till stock is absorbed.
5. Repeat with another cup of stock; continue stirring until the rice is almost tender.
6. Stir in the pumpkin puree, pumpkin chunks, cheese, salt and pepper. Cook another 2 minutes.
7. Serve hot.



PUMPKIN SOUP

Ingredients

- Pumpkin - 1 kg
- Onion - 1 large (sliced)
- Garlic - 2 cloves, peeled whole
- Chicken / Vegetable stock - 3 cups (750 ml)
- Water - 1 cup (250 ml)
- Salt and pepper - to taste
- Cream - ½ to ¾ cup (125 to 185 ml) or ¾ cup (185 ml) milk

Method

1. Cut the pumpkin into 3 cm slices. Peel the skin and scrape the seeds out. Cut the slices into chunks.
2. Place the pumpkin, onion, garlic, stock and water in a pot. The liquid need not cover all the pumpkin. Bring to a boil, uncovered, then reduce heat and let it simmer until the pumpkin is tender.
3. Remove the pot from the heat and use a hand blender to blend until smooth. If you don't have a hand blender, use the usual blender.
4. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
5. Stir in the cream. (Never boil soup after adding cream, as cream will split.)
6. Ladle soup into bowls, drizzle over a bit of cream, sprinkle with pepper and parsley if desired.
7. Serve with crusty bread.



A Journey of Three Decades

~ N.R. Srinivasan
Kolkata

After thirty-four years, I retired from the services of the Company on 31 March 2018. It was a long journey, well travelled. Time marches on. It seems like just the other day I was entering the lobby of Namdang House for my first day of work with the erstwhile MR(I)L in 1984. In the lobby, names of seventeen tea estates were printed on a board. For a city-bred person, these were strange sounding names – Addabarie, Bogapani, et al. I thought to myself, "God, how am I going to remember these names?!" Little did I know then that one day, I would remember sixty-nine of them (in India, Vietnam and East Africa)! I hope the day will come when someone will have to remember one hundred of them.

It has been a decades long journey starting from Namdang House, on to Guwahati and then back to Four Mangoe Lane. I cut my teeth in the corporate tea world in erstwhile MR(I)L at Namdang House. MR(I)L had structured systems and a corporate culture. It had a lovely dining room on the top floor for senior executives where the napkin holders had individual executives' initials on them. The year 1987 was a period of unrest at Namdang House due to the agitation by the staff union against the proposed introduction of computers. The staff was not co-operating, so the finalization of accounts and audit were getting delayed. To complete the work, the night before Durga Puja holidays were to begin, the executives in the accounts department moved to a hotel with their books and documents, worked through the holidays and finalized the accounts on Vijaya Dashami day. By the time the staff returned to work after the puja break, accounts were completed and audited, much to their chagrin. Those were exciting days.

By 1987, the MR(I)L office in Guwahati was operational and the process of computerisation was started there. In early 1988, I was transferred to Guwahati. It was a completely different experience from the structured corporate regime of Namdang House. The office had to be set up from scratch. The first requirement was a telephone. During those days of 'license raj' and shortages, it was a Herculean task to get a phone connection. The normal waiting time for a landline connection was two to three years! We managed to 'arrange' for two telephone connections at a 'cost'. When we approached our then Finance Director (a very disciplined and, figuratively speaking, ramrod straight person) for approval of the 'cost' he, fully realizing the necessity of the telephone connection but also quite conscious of his principles, gave a cryptic reply: "Use your discretion." So we did, and got the two telephone lines for the Guwahati office.

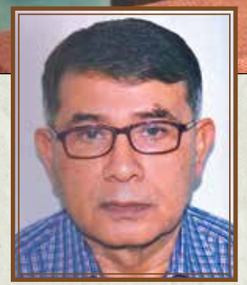
I spent seventeen years in Guwahati. The office has been a support entity for the entire Group. My duties in Guwahati were not restricted to finance and accounts but also involved giving support to estates in all respects – be it arranging for someone's admission in hospital or being the unofficial representative of the Assam Valley School. This brought me in touch with many planters and some of them are my dear friends now. Despite all its infrastructural problems, Guwahati was an enjoyable experience. I met warm, lovely people there who have remained dear friends to date.

In 2005 I was brought back to Calcutta, which coincided with Williamson Tea Assam coming back to the WM fold. Those were heady days with plenty of challenges which the Group weathered smoothly. Four Mangoe Lane was a completely different cup of tea (pun unintended) from my Guwahati days. The environment is very different from the staid, strait-jacketed entities normally seen in corporate structures. Any reference to Four Mangoe Lane is not complete without mentioning the newly introduced cafeteria, Quatro. I looked forward to my regular fifteen minutes of *adda* with colleagues over a cup of coffee there. I never suffered 'Monday morning blues' coming to work at Four Mangoe Lane.

My exciting journey to East Africa started in September 2010, a few months after MRIL made its first acquisition in Uganda. It was an exciting and challenging assignment. The culture was different, people were different, and it was a formidable task to make employees accept new bosses. However, the transformation was smoother than expected and McLeod Russel Uganda Ltd (MRUL), firmly in the MRIL fold now, is performing excellently. In 2011, we acquired Gisovu Tea and in 2014, Pfunda Tea in neighbouring Rwanda. Despite being neighbours, these two countries are very different in terms of culture and attitude towards life. Gisovu today is rated among the best tea estates in Africa.

My stint of thirty-four years in WM/MRIL has been very satisfactory. My biggest takeaway from this long tenure has been that I met many good people who graduated from being colleagues to dear friends. This is one company which treats its employees with utmost grace and I have not come across any other company with such graciousness. Soon WM will complete 150 years. I wish the Company, with its unique culture, the very best for the future.





My Years in Tea

~ Dr Rajen Kumar Gogoi
Guwahati

My fascination for tea garden life began from my schooldays. Koilamari T.E. of the erstwhile Jokai Assam Tea Company was only 8 km away from my home in North Lakhimpur. One of my uncles was working there and I used to cycle around on the tarmac roads in the garden with my cousins.

After graduating from Assam Medical College, Dibrugarh, I worked with the Assam Rifles and in Arunachal Pradesh under the Central Health Service. It was during this period, in 1975, that I married Anita, the daughter of Late P.D. Gogoi, who was then Director of Health Services. She has been standing rock solid with me all these years.

My childhood fascination was, however, always at the back of my mind. So, when I got the opportunity, I joined Sonabheel T.E. near Tezpur. I fondly remember my first Manager, Mr R.B. Wood. He helped me get acquainted with and adjust to the practical life in the tea garden.

In 1982, I joined Monabari T.E. of Mcleod Russel India Ltd when Mr Clive Roberson was the Manager. There, I met Late Mr Ramanauj Dasgupta, who was popularly known as RD. He was the Assistant Manager in charge of New Lines Division. He took us to the club and introduced us to the other members.

Three years later, in 1985, I was transferred to Hunwal T.E. where Mr Ata Khan was the Manager. My stay in Hunwal was not for very long and in early 1986, I was transferred to Halem T.E. where Mr T.C. Bordoloi was the Manager. I served there for 14 years and was delighted to meet RD again, who was the Senior Assistant Manager. It was during this phase that the ULFA movement was at its peak.

During my tenure in Halem, I learnt to play tennis and was later elected Tennis Captain of East Boroi Club. During my captaincy we went on to win the inter-club Chummery Cup tournament a number of times.

After the memorable years in Halem, I was posted at Corramore T.E. in 1999. Corramore, located in the foothills of Bhutan, has breathtakingly beautiful scenery. In those days, the approach road was in a deplorable condition and one had to cross two rivers (without bridges) to reach the garden. Often, while going to and returning from the club, my Gypsy would get stuck in the river and we had to call for help from Mr Ajit Hazarika.

Once, on a Sunday evening when Anita and I were returning from the club after playing tennis, our Gypsy got stuck in the river Kulsi. It was dark and the river was in full spate. We somehow managed to crawl out of the window. Though I was holding Anita, she was panicking and started shouting "Help, help!" Then she realized that the locals might not understand English, so she shouted in Assamese, "*Rokhya karok, rokhya karok*." From nowhere a young man, a godsend for us, appeared and offered to carry Anita on his back. She hesitantly agreed. She was terrified and clutched his neck so tightly that he could not breathe and started choking. We managed to reach the bank of the river and by this time Mr Ajit Hazarika too had reached the spot from Badlapara T.E. Taking stock of the situation, he sent a wireless message to Rani (his wife) to send a tractor with a chain to pull out the Gypsy. It was the most memorable river crossing ever.

It was here in Corramore that we witnessed 'Operation All Clear' by the Army in Bhutan. During this operation one night I had to accompany two COs through the Bhutan jungles to treat a soldier's bullet injuries.

After six eventful years in Corramore, I was transferred to Baghjan T.E. in Doom Dooma, which was my last posting. During my tenure here, the Labour Room in the hospital was constructed under my supervision. When Dr Rizwan Sadique, Chief Medical Advisor, visited, he stated that the Labour Room was the best in the Group.

To my great satisfaction, Baghjan recorded 100% hospital delivery, 100% immunization and nil maternal mortality rate during my tenure. Baghjan was adjudged the Best Hospital on the South Bank in 2012-13 and was also the recipient of the ABITA Family Welfare Award in 2017.

Towards the fag end of 2017, we decided to call it a day. We had spent the better part of our marital life on the tea gardens and can honestly say we savoured every bit of it. The ups and downs, the hiccups, have all given us a host of memories to fondly reminisce over in our golden years.

My heartfelt thanks go out to every colleague and friend who helped me with their love and support in my life in the tea gardens.

I thank Mcleod Russel for giving me a wonderful platform to put my best foot forward in serving the Company and, last but not the least, the opportunity to live out my childhood dream of belonging to the tea fraternity.



Assam Valley Literary Award 2017

~ Sarita Dasgupta, Kolkata



L to R: Mr R.S. Jhawar, Padma Shri GN Devy, Sri Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi, Dr Rita Chowdhury, Sri Sananta Tanty & Mr P. Chaudhary

The 28th edition of the prestigious Assam Valley Literary Award, sponsored by the Williamson Magor Education Trust, was presented to three luminaries of Assamese literature by distinguished author, literary critic and Padma Shri awardee GN Devy at a function held in Guwahati on 24 March 2018. The award, initiated by the Trust in 1990, carries a citation, a trophy designed by late sculptor Sobha Brahma, and a cheque for Rs 4 lakh.

The recipients for the year 2017 were poet Sananta Tanty and novelists Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi and Dr Rita Chowdhury. The award has been conferred on the three eminent litterateurs from different spectrums of society as a Lifetime Achievement Award.

Sananta Tanty, born into an Oriya-speaking tea garden family at Kalinagar T.E. in Karimganj district, has several collections of highly acclaimed Assamese poems to his credit, such as *Ujjwal Nakshatrar Xondhanot*, *Moi Manuhar Amal Utxav*, *Nizor Biruddhey Xesh Prastab* and *Moi*. Many of his poems have been translated into other languages



as well. Among the several accolades he has won are the Mrinalini Devi Goswami Award, Bir Birsa Munda Award, Krantikal Samman, Nizora Kavi Sailadhar Rajkhowa Award, Osman Ali Sodagar Samannaya Award, Pandit Padmanath Bidyabinod Smriti Sahitya Puraskar and SIRISH-OIL Literary Award.

Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi, born in Jigaon, West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh, joined the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) in 1992 and retired as the Chief Information Commissioner of Arunachal Pradesh in 2015. He learned Assamese as it was the medium of instruction in erstwhile North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) as Arunachal Pradesh was earlier known. He has several short stories, plays and novels to his credit, such as *Mouna Outh Mukhor Hridoy*, *Saw Kata Manuh* and *Bih Konyar Dexot*. He was conferred with many literary awards, including the Bhasha Bharati Award, Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha Literary Award and the Sahitya Akademi Award for his novel *Mouna Outh Mukhar Hriday* in 2005. Some of his work has been included in the academic syllabus of several states while films based on his novels have been internationally acclaimed. Sri Thongchi is the President of the Arunachal Pradesh Literary Society, which was started on his initiative.

Dr Rita Chowdhury, currently the Director of the National Book Trust, has been an Associate Professor in the Political Science department of the iconic Cotton College in Guwahati since 2001. She is an established poet and novelist whose immense body of work includes several collections of poems and novels such as *Abirata Jatra*, *Tirthabhumi*, *Jala Padma*, *Deo Langkhui*, *Ei Xomoy Xei Xomoy* and *Makam*. The last has been translated into Marathi and English and been acclaimed both within the country and abroad. She is the recipient of awards such as the Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha Award, Sahitya Akademi Award and Lekhika Samaroh Sahitya Bota. Dr Chowdhury is a social activist and Chief Trustee of Adharxila, an organization that seeks to empower young writers in Assam.

"Apart from its inherent beauty and richness, Assamese is a language of great philosophical knowledge. I wish and hope that the dignity attached to this Award continues in the future as well," observed Sri GN Devy.

The award function was followed by a cultural show presented by the students of the Assam Valley School, which is also an initiative of the Williamson Magor Education Trust.





~ Sameer Singh
Pfunda T.E., Rwanda

Cricket Builds Hope

Cricket, largely an alien concept in Rwanda, first came to the country after the 1994 Genocide. In the months and years that followed the atrocities, thousands of Rwandans who had lived as refugees in countries like Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, came home to Rwanda with a new sport called 'cricket' to rebuild their lives in the land of their ancestors. That's how the Rwanda Cricket Association (RCA) was formed in 1999, and in 2003 Rwanda became an affiliated member of the International Cricket Council (ICC). As years passed, some of the Rwandan cricketers created a name for themselves in the sport. Players like the Rwandan cricket team's captain, Eric Dusingizimana, became a Guinness world record holder for the longest cricket nets by batting for an unbelievable 51 straight hours!





This also inspired Cathia Uwamahora, his compatriot in the women's team, to go on to create another world record for the longest ever cricket net. She also gathered laurels by batting for 26 straight hours.

With cricket fast gaining popularity, there was a need for a top class cricket stadium with necessary facilities to enable Rwanda's budding players get exposed to the international cricket standards, and to help them play competitive cricket against the best in the world.

Until then, cricket's growth had been hampered by the dearth of proper facilities. The only cricket pitch the players had was the Kicukiro Oval. This consisted of an artificial cricket pitch in the centre of a dusty outfield pitted with ant hills and snake holes. Worse, the field was also the site of one of the worst massacres of the Genocide in which more than 2000 Tutsis were hacked to death by the Interahamwe Hutu militia.





Imagine how traumatic it must have been for some of the cricketers to be playing on such an infamous ground! Some players had also discovered bones and skeletal remains of the Genocide victims while playing cricket.

Mr Christopher Shale was a British citizen whose brainchild was the charity called Rwanda Cricket Stadium Foundation (RCSF). It came into being in 2011 and a site for the stadium was chosen in Gahanga which is roughly half an hour's drive from the centre of the capital, Kigali. Mr Shale unfortunately passed away and the baton of this responsibility was passed on to his son Alby Shale, who completed the Gahanga Cricket Stadium (GCS) which was inaugurated in October 2017.

The stadium consists of an ICC International standard wicket with a pavilion and a bar, as well as community amenities such as a medical centre which allows the biomedical facility to deliver free HIV testing.

To commemorate the opening of this beautiful stadium, a tournament called 'Cricket Builds Hope' was organized. Eight teams participated in the tournament, including the Under-19 national teams of Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya.

Taylors of Harrogate, which happens to be one of the major buyers of Rwandan teas, including Pfunda and Gisovu teas, and also a major company which helped in financing the stadium, also put up a team called 'Yorkshire Tea'. As they did not have the required number of players, Bikramjeet, Justin, Ankur and yours truly from Pfunda and Gisovu tea estates joined the team along with Patrick, Aime and Jean from Sorwathe Tea Estate.



The other players, led by Mathew – a very able captain – included Patrick, Paul, Ian Brabbin and last, but not least, Cathia Uwamahora! Yes, the very same lady who has a world record under her belt!

It was fun, although I was terribly under-prepared, considering the last competitive cricket I had played was in 2010 during my tenure in Assam, where I played the Inter-Company and the John Morice matches under the very watchful and strict eyes of Mr Sanjeeb Deka, a former Ranji Trophy player representing the state of Assam.

The teams were divided into two groups of four teams each, and as luck would have it, our very first match was against the Ugandan national side, coached by the well-known former cricketer, Steve Tikolo, widely regarded as the greatest Kenyan cricketer ever! This team boasted some very professional players including Bilaal, formerly a member of the Pakistan national cricket team. Boy, did he bowl fast! Justin and Bikramjeet would definitely vouch for that, considering the number of black and blue bruises they were inflicted with! Luckily, I didn't have to face him much.

The tournament was played from 23 to 29 October 2017 and we played our four matches against Uganda, Kenya (Under-19), Grannies and Surrey. Needless to say, we lost all our matches against the top quality sides but the joy of being part of the tournament was great, considering we were going to go down in history as players who had participated in the inaugural tournament at this beautiful stadium.

Already being referred to as the 'Lords of East Africa', the Gahanga Cricket Stadium complements the magnificence of the Rwandan landscape and promotes reconciliation through sport.



Editors' Note: Batting for a Cause



In July 2013, 22-year-old Alby Shale batted non-stop for 26 hours at The Oval (Surrey, England), to break the previous record of 25 hours held by Jade Child, and raise awareness and funds for the Gahanga Cricket Stadium. He even had the Prime Minister at that time, David Cameron, bowl to him.

When Eric Dusingizimana batted for a record 51 hours to raise money for the same cause, Tony Blair was among those who bowled to him.



~ Anjali Subba
Hunwal T.E.

Mariani Planters Club

Clubs are not mere buildings of bricks, wood and mortar, but historical monuments and should be preserved.

The Mariani Planters Club was established in 1880 by the British. It was an old fashioned wood house originally situated in the railway colony right next to the railway station and main market. With the advancement of railways in the 1920s and 1930s, the tiny fishing village just grew and grew to become a small but busy town. By the late 1950s the little club was sitting in the middle of the town facing a lot of problems in terms of encroachment. So, Mr Alan Macintosh Smith, then Manager of Hunwal T.E. and Chairman of the club committee approached Jardine Henderson Ltd who kindly granted enough land at Hunwal T.E. to build the new club.



Once the spot was chosen, the architectural committee was formed and a 'demolition party' took place at the club the night before the actual day of shifting. There were quite a few Scottish planters who decorated the club according to their custom and wore their traditional kilts. The party continued till the wee hours of the morning as the old clubhouse was demolished.

To save on expenses it was decided to use as much material from the old club building as possible. The 'tongued and grooved' teak wood floor was lifted very carefully, nail by nail, turned over, refitted and relaid in the new building where it looked surprisingly new.





"The old Mariani club, near the railway station had once caught fire and a large part of it had burned down but the original teak wood floor was still intact and a temporary club was established on the site with a thatch roof and thatch walls with the help of elephants. The club galas and parties were in full swing even in the temporary club." (Anecdote – Alan Wood)

The present day Mariani Planters Club situated in Hunwal T.E. overlooking the Bhogdoi River was inaugurated in June 1961 under the leadership of Mr Alan Macintosh Smith. The first Bearer was brought by Mr Davey Lamont from Silchar Club.



In those days the Mariani Club parties and galas were inventive and unique. The Club was well known for its children's Christmas Party and there would be a big mystery about how Santa Claus would arrive. One year, Santa Claus came on an elephant and another year he flew in on the Army helicopter that landed right in the middle of the tennis court! At other times he supposedly came down the chimney, arrived on a garden tractor, and most hilarious of all was the time he came in through the front gate sitting on a *rickshaw* with one of the Assistant Managers dressed as a *rickshaw wallah*, ringing the bell.

"The adult parties were equally joyful with masked balls, dances and fashion shows. Planters from far and near attended the evenings. Bands from Shillong, Kolkata and a planters' band called The Mudguards formed in the 1960s comprising Larry Brown, Bob Powell-Jones and Ron Aston (all from the Makum Namdang estates) were invited to perform at the club galas. The planters also came up with all kinds of hilarious entertainment and competitions. One such competition involved all the club's cutlery being thrown into the swimming pool and the swimmers, divided into two teams, having to dive down and recoup them." (Anecdote – Davey Lamont)

The Mudguards



At present the club has a total of 42 members from the 11 estates of Mariani circle. The club has facilities such as tennis courts, a squash court, a swimming pool, a table tennis table and an old, well maintained billiards table. The bar with its wooden panelling and floors has a lot of old world charm. "It is the first air-conditioned bar in a tea club in Assam. The bar stools brilliantly made by a Chinese carpenter are so comfortable that they are perfectly contoured to one's bottom."(Anecdote – Alan Wood)

In addition to sports, festivals like Holi, Diwali, Christmas and Bihu are celebrated with great enthusiasm. The club members look forward to the Saturday night club supper hosted by the individual garden members with a round of tambola, sometimes followed by a movie show. The card table draped in a white sheet is always kept ready for interested members to hit the table.

Mariani Planters Club is one of the warmest clubs with strong bonding among all the members from different companies. Its ambience makes it an ideal get-away for members.

A club is a place where the planters get together to enjoy their sports and drink after a hard day's work. With its memorabilia, its aura of history and heritage, this club certainly has a classic touch. It is important for members to take pride in the history and legacy of the past, enjoy the present and think out of the box to bring about new revolutionary trends, changes and development in tune with the present times without diluting the old world charm.













RAINWATER HARVESTING













~ Raktim Adhyapak, Dirok T.E.

It is glamorous to possess a stockpile of guns, gold and diamonds, but without water, life sums up to a zero. With the ever-increasing human population, the demand for fresh water is constantly on the rise, and the limited sources of fresh water which we do have, are fast depleting. It is a bitter truth that water shortages are inevitable and if we are unprepared for this eventuality, we might well find ourselves between a rock and a floor of dry sand. To overcome the situation we have to increase the efficiency of using water and find means of conserving precious 'Fresh Water' without much delay.

There are many direct and indirect ways and means of conserving water. However, one of the most simple and effective techniques of water conservation is Rainwater Harvesting.

What is Rainwater Harvesting?

It is a technique of collecting rainwater from the surfaces on which rain falls and storing it in reservoirs or tanks for use. It is also the process of infiltration of surface water into subsurface aquifers, before it is lost as surface run-off.

Methods of Rainwater Harvesting:

Tea estates already have the basic requirements for Rainwater Harvesting, so it becomes that much simpler to execute the two basic methods, which are:

1. Rooftop harvesting
2. Creating artificial catchment areas like lakes and ponds

All tea factories have a huge roof area which can be easily used as the surface for collecting large quantities of rainwater. Also, in the field, depressions and *hullas* are aplenty and these can be modified to store rainwater.

At Dirok T.E. we are following both the above mentioned methods. In the Rooftop Harvesting System, we have installed two 5000 litre capacity tanks connected to the rooftop guttering pipes so that the rain, falling on to the roof of the factory, is funneled through these pipes into the tanks which store the water. These tanks have a spigot at the bottom which is then connected to the inlet of a High Pressure Washing Machine with the help of a hose, and the harvested water is used for cleaning the processing machinery as well as the floor, after manufacturing. By installing this system the estate saves around 3300 – 3500 units annually, in water supply. The cost of installation of the system is not very high and the only single routine maintenance required, is cleaning of the tanks. One can easily construct a larger harvesting system and benefit even further.

Boring deep tubewells for water supply and irrigation was unsuccessful at Dirok as it has laterite soil and as a result, the plantation suffers extensively because of moisture stress during the winter months. So it was felt that the only way forward was to improve the micro-climate and somehow reduce the depleting water-table during that period. Therefore, in Likhajan Division a *hulla* was modified and converted into a catchment area for Rainwater Harvesting, creating a large water body. The main purpose of keeping the rainwater conserved in the water body is to recharge the groundwater and also to improve the micro-climate. It has been observed that the temperature around the water body is much lower as compared to other areas and the tea Sections around it have better bush health and the bud break is comparatively much faster. The water hyacinth plants which are grown in the water body are used as mulch for moisture conservation in young tea seedlings and infills, in order to survive during the dry winter months.

Rainwater Harvesting is a simple and cost effective technique for water conservation. If such simple measures to 'catch water where it falls', is undertaken by us, most of the water management problems can be resolved.

Every drop of rainwater is precious – catch it. It might be the very drop that will save you, and the millions who will live in this lovely planet in the future.

Mélange

Indus Food – Global Food & Beverage Show





~ Ritwik Palchoudhuri
HO, Kolkata

MRIL participated at 'Indus Food', a Global Food & Beverage Show of India organised by the the Trade Promotion Council of India under the aegis of The Ministry of Commerce and Industries at Greater NOIDA on 18 & 19 January 2018.



The exhibition was well organised and well attended, providing an excellent platform to develop new buyers for destinations that are otherwise difficult to visit.

The exhibition had buyers from over 35 countries who visited over a two day period. The Indian tea industry was well represented with exhibitors that included Wagh Bakri, Girnar Tea, Jivraj Tea, Goodricke Group, Amalgamated Plantations Pvt Ltd, Jayshree Tea & Industries Ltd, Premier Tea Ltd, Madhu Jayanti Industries Ltd, Andrew Yule & Co. Ltd, A Tosh & Sons, Kanan Devan Plantations, Parry Agro Ltd, Udyan Tea and McLeod Russel India Ltd.

Round table discussions were held with buyers from Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Russia. An MOU was signed with the Malaysia Tea Buyers Association. The Iraq Chambers of Commerce invited the Indian tea companies to visit Baghdad and Najaf and attend the International Fairs in both cities.

MRIL's stall attracted a good number of buyers with prospects to develop new business in West Asia and The CIS.







The Indian Tea Association's ITTD Committee, chaired by Mr Azam Monem of McLeod Russel, held India Tea Trade Day 2018 at Hotel Taj Bengal, Kolkata, on 5 April.

Over the years, the ITTD has developed as a platform for the tea trade, and the tea industry in general, to interact and network with business associates and clients from India and abroad before the start of the tea production season.









McLeod Russel Tour Championship 2017





The McLeod Russel Tour Championship 2017, a 72-hole stroke-play tournament held at the Royal Calcutta Golf Club (RCGC) from 21 to 27 December 2017, provided a fitting finale to a highly competitive season as the PGTI Order of Merit crown, eventually won by Shamim Khan, had multiple contenders vying for the honour during the week.

In addition to Indian stalwarts such as Jyoti Randhawa, SSP Chowrasia, Rashid Khan, Chiragh Kumar, Rahil Gangjee and Chikkarangappa, this year's tournament had quite a few participants from abroad. Among them were Adam Blyth and Daniel Fox from Australia, two-time winner on the Asian Tour Md Siddikur Rahman of Bangladesh, Singapore's Choo Tze-Huang, and Japanese golfers Masahiro Kawamura, Shotaro Wada and Yuwa Kosaihira. Last year's winner, Thailand's Pariya Junhasavasdikul, could not participate due to professional commitments.

21-year-old Shubhankar Sharma from Chandigarh "snatched victory from the jaws of defeat" as one newspaper put it, winning by one shot over Rashid Khan in a classic encounter. He posted a winning total of 17-under-271, and equalled the lowest winning score at the McLeod Russel Tour Championship posted by Anirban Lahiri during his 2013 triumph. "Wins don't come easy at the professional level so you have to capitalize when you're playing well. I've managed to capitalize on the form so far. I'm now excited about playing in Europe next season," said Shubhankar, who had won his maiden international title at the European Tour's Johannesburg Open two weeks earlier.

26-year-old Rashid finished second with a total of 16-under-272.

When Kolkata's own Viraj Madappa won the title of Emerging Player of the Year he said, "I didn't have too many expectations at the start of the year as I was going through a change in my swing. But I got really comfortable on the PGTI as the year progressed. The good performances in my rookie season have given me a lot of confidence for the future. Hopefully, a win should come soon."



The Winner & Runner-up

MRIL Rose Bowl Tennis

Margherita Club – 18 March 2018



The Participants



MRIL Team A



Runners-up: The Goodricke's Team



Winners: MRIL Team A (L to R) - D. Sonowal, M.S. Shekhawat, P.S. Aswal, H. Deka, S. Bayan & A. Thoumoung

Weddings


1


2


3


4


5

1. Ronojoy, son of Dhruva Guha Sircar of HO and Lesley, wed Priyam on 11 November 2017
2. Abhijeet Das of Margherita T.E. wed Poli on 30 November 2017
3. Shahan Banerjee & Shradha Panda, both of HO Kolkata, wed on 9 December 2017
4. Gaurav Dey of Monabarie T.E. wed Divyani on 22 January 2018
5. Bikramjit Singh Gill of Pfunda T.E. wed Harleen on 11 February 2018
6. Navin Sinha of Nya Gogra T.E. wed Sweety on 18 February 2018
7. Anjuri, daughter of Sandeep & Shalini Nagalia of Mijicajan T.E. wed Vittal Laksmi Narayan on 4 March 2018


6


7


1




3


2

Births

1. Praneel, son of Pronoy & Shilpi Ray of Addabarie T.E. *13 April 2017*
2. Prrisha, daughter of Priyanka Padia of HO Kolkata and Abhishek Padia *22 September 2017*
3. Ariyo Conrad, son of Ms Noredah Kyohangirwe of Mwenge T. E., Uganda, and Mr Mugisha Silver *10 December 2017*

Laurels

McLEOD RUSSEL UGANDA LIMITED

MRUL received the **Presidential Exports Award 2017** from the Uganda Exports Promotion Board. The Company was represented by Ms Ruth Ndyanabo – Sales Manager and Mr Tiberondwa Patrick – Factory Manager, Bugambe T.E.







Presidential Exports Award 2017 Presided over by Hon. Amelia Kyambadde, Minister of Trade, Industry & Cooperatives.

MRUL was also conferred with an **ICGU Corporate Governance (CG) Award** for the Large Private Sector Category on 17 May 2018. The Award recognizes organizations with outstanding achievements in the governance, risk and compliance fields in Uganda. The ICGU CG Awards play an important role in encouraging improvements in the quality of CG, while reflecting changing attitudes and expectations among shareholders, investors and other stakeholders. ICGU leadership understands the best way to help corporate entities, government and the economy at large is to recognize entities that practice and demonstrate corporate governance best practices.





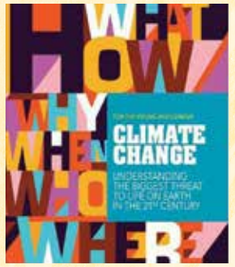


Hon. Cecilia Ogwal handing the ICGU Award to MRUL General Manager Plantations - Mr Harpreet Singh Grewal



Rhinusmita Kakoty Lahkar





Receiving an award for the Guwahati Development Department website.

Rhinusmita Kakoty Lahkar (Tulip) has worked in the print and media industry for over twenty years now, starting off with journalism and then moving into book publishing, working as editor with companies like Tata McGraw and Oxford University Press. She has also had experience with Environment Education, coordinating environment education programmes across the country for Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi. She had started her publishing solutions firm, Red River House, in 2003. She got married in 2004 to Sanjib Lahkar and ever since then, she has been working freelance from the gardens via the Internet. She handles all kinds of assignments ranging from editing (her personal favourite) to web content to ghost writing to design and printing, and all kinds of writing assignments.

Two books she has written and translated respectively in 2017-18:

a) Climate Change for the Young and Curious, published by CSE, New Delhi, December 2015

Rhinusmita Kakoty Lahkar wrote this book as a special assignment by the Centre for Science and Environment. It is meant both for children from Class 5 onwards as well as adults who want to know more. It deals with both the science and politics of climate change and is a 'must have' in every library. The book is easy to read and attractively designed with real life stories and fact boxes. As of now, it is available on the CSE website.

b) If A River, published by Ratna Books, New Delhi, February 2017

Rhinusmita Kakoty Lahkar was part of the translation team of If A River, a collection of translated stories of Dr Kula Saikia, DGP, Assam Police. She translated four of the twenty stories in the book from Assamese to English, which have been highly praised. Besides translating, she has also looked into the editing and coordination of the book. Dr Kula Saikia is not just a 'top cop' but also a Sahitya Akademi awardee. He has praised her work highly.

Other major projects in 2017-18:

She developed 11 websites for Government of Assam departments as part of their ePrastuti website standardization project independently as a part of Web.Com. The websites include those of Guwahati Municipal Corporation, Personnel Department, Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary among others. Two of the websites she developed were among the top five websites awarded by Sri Sarbananda Sonowal, Chief Minister of Assam.

Celebrating 30 years' service



BRIJ JAMWAL ■ AJAY KUMAR SINGH ■ SIMANTA BORDOLOI ■ BIKASH KUMAR KUNDU ■ JATINDER KUMAR KOHLI ■ CHANDAN MITRA ■ NEELIM KRISHNA DUTT ■ PRADIP BHAR ■ SHIBANI HAZARIKA ■ REKHA MUKHERJEE ■ BIHARI KUMAR NEWAR

Farewell



Mr N.R. Srinivasan of HO Kolkata, was bid farewell on 26 March 2018.





We bid farewell to Dr R. K. Gogoi & Dr A. Tamuly of Assam on 3 February 2018.

The Williamson Magor Group's Ex-Planters' Annual Get-together

The Williamson Magor Group's Ex-Planters' 10th Annual Get-together was held at Gurgaon on 11 March 2018. As in previous years, Mcleod Russel India Ltd very kindly sponsored the lunch. It was a great gathering with 45 ex-planters and their spouses coming from Jaipur and Delhi NCR region and remembering the good old days of being part of the Williamson Magor Group.









Courtesy: Mr Anand Saxena

THE GEM COLLECTION



~ Sangita Borah
Bargang T.E.

Old Stalwart – Bijli Prasad

My initiation into Tea and the greater MRIL family included, amongst a host of other things, the mention of a name, Bijli Prasad, the Company elephant at Bargang T.E. Being an avid animal lover, the urge to see Bijli Prasad from close quarters was constantly on my mind and I kept nurturing the dream of meeting him one day. As if destiny had got a whiff of my desire, professional commitment led us to the abode of Bijli Prasad at Bargang T.E.



I still remember with crystal clarity the first day Bijli Prasad visited our bungalow. I was speechless with delight to see him standing in front of me – what a majestic presence he had! But what struck me the most was how affectionate and docile he was, so much so, that even our little son, Bonny, was enamoured of him, and Bijli Prasad is what he calls all elephants to date!

Bijli Prasad is the ultimate pride of the inhabitants here and they love and adore him. Many stories abound of Bijli during his heydays, one being about the time that he got lost in the Rungagarh forest during his routine foray when there was an impending visit by a VIP from London who wanted to meet him. The Management scrambled all over the countryside to trace him and finally managed to get him back in time for the visit. Another one was a recent incident when his favourite *mahout* lost his wits owing to intoxication and fell into a drain. Bijli Prasad carried him home in his trunk and safely handed him over to his family. Simply amazing! It reminded me of *Hathi Mera Sathi*, a movie which had just such an intelligent elephant as the main character.

However, Bijli Prasad is not getting any younger and the tide of time has taken a natural toll on his health.



It was a very difficult time last year when he suddenly fell seriously ill and became so frail that he could not stand up. The Company JCB had to be used to help him stand up every morning. It was agonizing to see him suffering. Bargang's morale came crashing down and even the little school children prayed fervently for his recovery. The Management got in touch with Dr K.K. Sarma, Professor & HOD, Surgery, at the Veterinary College in Guwahati, who is a renowned elephant expert of our country. Dr Sarma's medication worked like a miracle and Bijli was on his feet once again, much to the relief of all. I somehow felt that the prayers of the tiny school children worked.

However, Dr Sarma gave us a grim reminder that Bijli Prasad had already far exceeded the life span of an average elephant and old age ailments were affecting him gradually. But another revelation by him made us all proud, when Dr Sarma declared that our Bijli Prasad was the 3rd oldest captive elephant in India, after the one at Kaziranga National Park and another at Mysore Palace. The oldest elephant at Kaziranga National Park has passed away since then, thereby making Bijli Prasad the 2nd oldest elephant in captivity in the country at present.



Bijli Prasad has donned the MRIL colours for many years now, especially during the John Morice tournaments and the annual T-Up Cup events. His presence lent a lot of character to these occasions. He had many a visitor during his lifetime, coming from all corners of the globe and carrying back fond memories. The most recent ones were Mr Richard Leitch, son of Late J.P.W. Leitch. He came with his entire family just to meet Bijli Prasad. It was an emotional moment for him as his late father was very fond of Bijli. He narrated stories of his chilhood when he, as a Tea Baba, would roam around on Bijli Prasad's back. Mr Richard Leitch was very thankful to the Company for arranging his visit and appreciated Bijli Prasad's being looked after so well.

Unfornately, Bijli Prasad's favourite *mahout*, Birbal Maghaya, passed away recently. Bijli Prasad remains the pride of our Company and no effort is being spared to ensure that he continues to live a healthy and comfortable life.



Kibiro Salt Gardens and Hot Springs



~ Robert Balikenda
Mwenge, Uganda



Hoima District, where MRUL's Bugambe and Kisaru tea estates are located, is the home of the Kibiro Hot Springs. The area has recently come into the limelight because of the oil and gas discovered in Uganda. Hoima town is the seat of the Bunyoro Kingdom whose famous King Kabalega (1870-1899) staged a fierce resistance against British imperialism. Apart from the recently discovered oil and gas, Bunyoro has been well known for its salt deposits at Kibiro Hot Springs from time immemorial.

The Kibiro Hot Springs are located in Kibiro fishing village 35 km away from Hoima town and barely a kilometre from the shores of Lake Albert, known locally as Mwita Nzige (Killer of Locusts) in Kigorobya sub-county of Hoima District. Like many hot springs in Uganda, these too attract many people, mainly for healing and tourism. The water is always at boiling point – one can put eggs, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, cassava or green bananas in the water and within a few minutes, they will be ready to eat! The water from the hot spring forms a stream that meanders westwards into Lake Albert.





Salt is mined and processed in Kibiro in what is commonly referred to as the 'salt gardens'. The highly saline soils owe their contents to the salty water that flows from the spring. The local people use traditional means to get pure salt ready for human consumption.

The entire process is managed by local people and involves sprinkling dry soil over the already moist soils along the water channel and leaving it to dry. To be able to get pure salt, one needs to collect the salty soil and place it in a big pan with a small hole at the bottom. The big pan is placed on top of a slightly smaller pan/bucket or similar container. One has to pour water in the salty soil and wait for the saline water to sieve through into the container, leaving the soil behind as residue. The residual soil is taken back to the 'garden' and thinly spread in order to pick up more salt from the soils below through diffusion. One has to boil the salt solution (brine) until all one has is a thick solution of salt crystals. This solution is scooped using a plastic cup or a dry gourd and poured on the ground forming a cone-like structure.

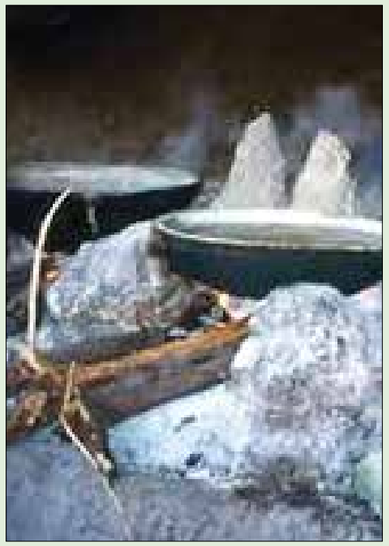


The cone is then lifted and placed near a fireplace to dry. The dried salt is taken to Kigorobya market on Wednesdays and Saturdays. However, since this salt is in high demand in Uganda and the surrounding countries, some buyers do not wait for the market days and instead buy it at the source.

The soils at Kibiro being salty, sandy, and less fertile, the residents do not engage in farming, so no crops are grown there. For a long time, the livelihood of the Kibiro population has depended on the exchange of salt and fish for food with farming communities on the plateau above the Ugandan side of the Western Rift Valley. Kibiro salt-producing village demonstrates a unique example of an industry which has sustained its people for over a 1,000 years and continues to do so, supplemented by fishing on Lake Albert.

The village therefore forms an important cultural site which has combined both archaeology and ethnography in the production of salt. On some occasions, barter trade comes into action. A kilogramme of crystallized salt ranges between Shs8,000 to Shs10,000. In their barter trade, residents consider the monetary value of the goods they want to obtain and exchange those with salt of the same value.



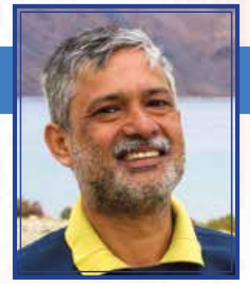


Salt production was and is a female hereditary occupation. Before the introduction of metallic vessels, pottery was used during the leaching and boiling processes and this is evidenced by the rich archaeological depositions of potsherds throughout the village, going as deep as 4 metres and dating as far back as 1000 CE.

The hot spring water contains varying amounts of mineral salts with medicinal value, such as sodium chloride, calcium phosphate, potassium chloride, magnesium chloride, lithium sulphate, calcium sulphate and many other minerals. This is why it can cure skin diseases when people spend time sitting in it. Apart from body purification, the water is also believed to be a cure for many diseases like measles, scabies, skin rash, fresh wounds and boils. It also heals cracked feet.

The hot springs have several myths and beliefs associated with them, which the local guides are always ready to explain. Locals believe that the hot springs are the property of the spirits and the spring water has some supernatural powers that can drive away all the bad spirits and demons one may possess. To purify the body, one needs to bathe naked in this water, but it is best to do this before 7:00 PM, as after that, the spirits come to bathe. If a mortal crosses their path, it angers them and they might turn him or her mad!





Himalayan Odyssey: The Ride of My Life

~ Sujit Kakaty, Guwahati

The most dangerous risk of all... the risk of spending your life NOT doing what you want! Why let the fear of what could happen make nothing happen? With this thought ringing in my heart and mind, I, along with a couple of local daredevil rider friends from Guwahati, set out on a mission to ride on the difficult terrain of the mighty Himalayas.

Long distance motorcycle trips are taken for the thrill and adventure. It is about overcoming fears and battling the roads; to connect with and 'feel' the world. Your senses go on hyper-drive and you notice things around you which you would never notice while travelling by car. There is only you, your motorcycle and the surroundings. "When I hit the open road, the ride becomes meditation, the sound of my pipes becomes music, the rolling through turns becomes a dance, and riding becomes a celebration of freedom!"

On 26 June 2016 we set out on our Himalayan Odyssey along the highest motorable road in the world – atop Khardung La Pass, riding through some of the most breathtaking, challenging and awe-inspiring landscapes found on Earth. It is not an easy ride since most parts of the road are at altitudes of 13,000 feet and above in the Himalayas. In addition, the number of miles one can cover in a day depends on the road and weather conditions and the few places one can stay en route.

Background: Road Captains from Mumbai – Gaurav Jani and Vinod Panicker – are founders of the 60 kph Motorcycle Travel Club. With over 3,00,000 miles of motorcycle travel under their belts, they aim to ensure that every motorcyclist has an unforgettable journey with them. 'Ride of My Life', the expedition in which we participated, is organized by them.



Day 1: We reached Manali from Delhi early in the morning and got acclimatized for the high altitudes ahead. Checking into a quaint guesthouse, we later met up with our fellow riders from all over India, as well as USA, UK, and the Gulf, for the briefing and day-wise plans.

Day 2: Boot Camp: The name says it all! Our day involved rigorous training – riding on rough terrain, steep slopes, hairpin curves and muddy patches. We got acquainted with the sturdy 500cc Standard Royal Enfield bike (which would be our best friend on the varied terrain of the Himalayas for the next 11 days), got our rain checks done, and adjusted our bikes with the help of our route mechanic.

















Day 3: Manali to Keylong: "No intentes en moto correr mas rapido de lo que tu angel de la guarda." (Do not try to run a motorcycle faster than your guardian angel.) With this adage in mind, we set out early in the morning, riding on the world's highest road – the Manali-Leh highway, climbing to the 13,051 feet high Rohtang Pass. After Rohtang, the road descended into the Chandra Valley, passing through Khoksar and Tandi to Keylong, where we stayed at a guesthouse.

Day 4: Keylong to Sarchu: Early that morning we rode from the lush green landscape to the stark moonscape of Ladakh. It was a very scenic ride… at times dramatic, with every hairpin curve passing through small lakes, waterfalls and streams. We crossed Baralach La at 16,500 feet. Meals were eaten en route in small shacks, such as the Peace Café, which serve just basic food – Maggi noodles, biscuits, eggs, and TEA. They call tea the 'magic brew' at such high altitudes and it comes in varieties such as honey-lemon-ginger tea. (During the higher rides, we found this to be our panacea, our manna!) As dusk set in, we stopped to spend the night in Swiss tents with attached toilets at Sarchu. A few riders experienced high altitude sickness for the first time. Portable pharmacies emerged out of back packs and the situation was kept under control.

Day 5: Sarchu to Leh: We were on the best stretch of the Manali-Leh highway. It was like we were on a roller coaster ride, climbing up and down three high altitude passes – Lachlung La (16,616 feet), Nakee La (15,547 feet) and Taglang La (17,480 feet), the second highest motorable pass in the world, ending our ride in the ancient city of Leh.

Day 6: Acclimatizing in Leh: After that gruelling ride from Manali, Day 6 was a breather. We explored various parts of Leh city, like the Namgyal Palace, The Hall of Fame, Tibetan market, Shanti Stupa and other monasteries.

Day 7: Leh – Khardung La – Nubra Valley: Early in the morning, we rode to the highest motorable pass in the world – Khardung La – at 18,380 feet, with its breathtaking landscape. After celebrating at Khardung La pass, we descended to the dramatically different landscape of Nubra Valley with its big sand dunes, and ended our ride just before Thoise at Hunder village.

Day 8: We retraced our path, crossing Khardung La Pass again to reach Leh. A few rough patches caused by landslides were negotiated pretty well – thanks to the Indian Army and the Border Roads Organization.

Day 9: Pangong Tso Lake: Our excitement rose as we rode through the third highest motorable pass in the world— the Chang La Pass at 17,586 feet. After the descent from Chang La, the magical plains of Changthang open up. But the real visual treat was the 135 km long stretch to Pangong Tso Lake, on the banks of which our tents were pitched.

Day 10: After riding for a few kilometres along Pangong Tso Lake, where very few tourists visit, we returned to Leh for a party in the evening after handing over our bikes to our Captains.

Day 11: Julley Leh: We bid goodbye to the Himalayas and left Leh after the Ride of a Lifetime.

**** Si un día la velocidad me quita la vida, no llores ... ¡Estaba sonriendo! ****
(If one day speed takes my life, do not cry... I was smiling!)

Gardening



~ Shuvomita Mukhopadhyaya
Beesakopie T.E.

AFRICAN VIOLETS

African violets are small, easy to grow house plants that produce stunning clusters of blue, white, purple, pink and bi-coloured, single or double flowers, over a rosette of fuzzy leaves. These plants are native to Tanzania and south-eastern Kenya, belonging to the family Gesneriaceae.

Soil Conditions

The soil should be light, loose and airy. For this, a mixture of Peat Moss (2 cups), Vermi-compost(1 cup) and Perlite(1cup) can be used. Perlite is an inorganic product often used as soil additive. Water, at room temperature, is used to make this mixture moist, but not wet. Fill the pot with this soil mixture. New plants can be then planted, one seedling to a pot. While repotting old plants, remove excess soil from the roots, trimming them if required, and cutting off the dry and dead leaves. Place the plant in the centre of the pot and cover the roots with the soil mixture till the lower ring of leaves.

Fertilizer

- Tea leaves compost is a good fertilizer for African Violets.
- Coffee grounds and crushed eggshells can be used as fertilizer too. This mixture is rich in calcium, nitrogen and phosphate, which is beneficial for the plants.
- Liquid fertilizer can be given at 15 day intervals. Use the water after rinsing out milk and fruit juice containers, as this helps plants get micro-nutrients such as Boron and Zinc.

Watering

African Violets die due to excessive watering, so one must be very careful about this aspect. The pot should be kept in a deep saucer filled with water at room temperature. Let it sit for an hour, then throw out excess water from the saucer and put the pot back into it. Keep the soil moist to dry, allowing the soil around the roots to dry out before watering, to encourage blooming. Avoid getting water on the leaves, as this can cause spotting damage. Do not use chlorinated or soft water.





















Light

These plants thrive in moderate to bright, indirect, indoor light. It is important to rotate them so that they receive equal sunlight on all sides and grow uniformly. If plants do not flower and the leaves turn yellow, they are probably not getting enough light. Too much sunlight harms the plant, and the leaves start to get brown edges or brown spots on them. They enjoy early morning and late evening weak, direct sunlight.

Pests & Diseases

Foliage Nematode: Small sunken areas form on the lower surface of leaves, which turn dry and take on a dull black colour. Plants are stunted.

Bacterial Blight: Foliage looks greasy and rotting areas appear reddish to black. The root system is affected as well.

Botrytis Blight: Small, water soaked lesions form on the underside of leaves and spread to the leaf blade. Infected flowers fade prematurely.

Powdery Mildew: White mealy fungal growth on leaves and flowers cause them to dry and die.

Pythium Root Rot: The plants wilt and turn yellow; roots are dark brown. This disease starts at the roots.

Rhizoctonia Crown Rot: Plants wilt, blacken and die.

Ring Spot: Bright yellow or bleached ring patterns form on leaves.

The pests and diseases affecting African Violets which are listed above can be controlled by not over-watering the plants; keeping them in controlled temperature; not exposing them to extreme weather; and feeding them appropriately. Fungicide has to be used in case of fungal infections, which they are most susceptible to.

Propagation

- The easiest way to propagate one old plant into two or more new ones is by dividing the suckers or baby plants that grow off the stem of the mother plant. Tip a plant out of its pot and slice right through it with a sharp knife, taking out the suckers. Division can be done depending on the number of big suckers that the plant has thrown out. Suckers need to be removed else flowering will reduce and the symmetry of the plant is ruined.
- Just one mature leaf is enough to propagate many new plants. Insert the leaf stem into potting mixture, providing a pleasant humid environment. In a few weeks, new plants will emerge from the cutting, which can then be potted separately.
- African Violets can also be propagated by inserting a leaf with its stem into a small container of water until roots and plantlets begin to show. Once they are a little developed, they can be divided and planted into separate pots.

So add cheer to your life by growing these bright and beautiful blooms.



telescope

~ Simanta Bordoloi
Dekorai T.E.

PEARL OF AFRICA



Socrates once said, "The more I know, the more I realize how little I know." The same applies to travelling: the more I travel, the more I realize how little I have seen the world. I, along with Mr & Mrs A. Krishan and Mr & Mrs R. Mehrotra were fortunate to witness the machinery and shear plucking in the lush tea gardens of Uganda. Our journey began on the 16th of December with our first stop at Entebbe, the gateway to Uganda. Entebbe is perhaps most famous for an Israeli commando raid in the mid-70s, when over one hundred, mainly Jewish men, who were held hostage were rescued. After a long drive we reached Mwenge late at night and were put up in a guest house. After a much needed rest, we were greeted by Gary and Benu with a warm welcome the next morning.

Tea plantation in Uganda started as late as the mid-1950s and its temperate climate was very conducive to tea cultivation. Uganda lies astride the Equator and contains some of the best features of Africa, including the source of the river Nile, and Lake Victoria. It is also home to some of the last families of mountain gorillas, an endangered species with only about 800 survivors. Ugandan society is predominantly rural and the people there are warm and friendly. Being there reminded me of Assam as it bears a striking resemblance in terms of the environment and the nature of the people.

In 2010, McLeod Russel India Ltd took over James Finlay Uganda to form McLeod Russel Uganda Ltd (MRUL), comprising 6 estates and 5 factories. Under the leadership of General Manager Plantations - Mr H.S. Grewal, modernization of factories and welfare activities of MRUL have gathered momentum and the Company has now become one of the most esteemed organizations in Africa. Because of its outstanding performance in 2016, it has received the Gold Award for Tea in the President's Export Awards. Some of the social activities undertaken are - building a primary school; establishment of a soil testing laboratory at Mountains of the Moon University at Fort Portal; organization of sports; dance and drama competitions between estates; leisure facilities like Staff Clubs, workers' social hall, etc. In addition to these welfare activities, the Company has also undertaken CSR projects like maintenance of roads, construction of schools, health clinics, construction of fuel saving gas stoves, etc, in the neighbouring areas. The Company adheres to international standards namely Rainforest Alliance, Fair Trade and ISO 2000. All MRUL estates use the technique of machine and shear plucking and in a country where labour is in short supply, whether in Uganda or in India, the tea industry will not move on to the next level without embracing new technology. Our main agenda was to see the machine and shear plucking and understand their workings so as to hopefully implement them successfully on the Assam estates as well.

While our main task was to witness the mechanized plucking, it was not all business but also involved pleasure. One would be guilty if one went without seeing the picturesque views of the East African country. On the second day of our trip, we visited Queen Elizabeth Park and checked in at the Mweya Safari Lodge, one of the finest in the heart of the park, surrounded by the magical Rwenzori Mountains aptly described as the 'Mountains of the Moon'. It is a beautiful lodge where the stunning view of the lake greets you through the large windows in the lodge foyer. The Park is famous for its sprawling Savannah, shady humid forest, sparkling lakes, fertile wetlands and enormous craters. The interesting part of the visit was the boat cruise in the Kazinga channel that links Lake Edward and Lake George. The channel attracts a varied range of animals and birds, with one of the world's largest concentration of hippos, elephants and Nile crocodiles.

After visiting the Park, we reached Ankole T.E. located in Bushenyi District at an altitude of 4,800 ft with endless rolling hills. The following day started with the field trip and the next couple of days involved a hectic schedule as we visited Kisaru, Kiko, Muzizi and Mwenge to see the functioning of the Ugandan estates till the last day of our visit.

It is true when one says all good things must come to an end. Our journey ended on the 23rd of December with priceless memories. I would like to thank Gary and Benu for hosting us and sparing their time to organize our trip, helping us make the best use of our limited time.









Health Watch



~ Dr (Mrs) Nipa Mahanta
Bargang T.E.

OSTEOPOROSIS

Osteoporosis is a disease that makes a person's bones weak (reduced bone quantity and quality) and likely to break easily. A slight stumble or even a mere sneeze may result in a fractured osteoporotic bone.

Healthy bones, as seen under the microscope, have a honeycomb-like structure. In osteoporosis, there are holes or spaces in the honeycomb that are much larger than normal.

THE SILENT DISEASE

Osteoporosis is the result of bones losing minerals such as calcium, more quickly than the body's ability to replace them, causing a loss of bone thickness (bone density or mass). Unfortunately, the loss of calcium and other minerals from the bones is a gradual process which goes on steadily for a long time before it becomes evident. There is no flashing red light to warn us that our bodies are losing calcium.

Because osteoporosis has no symptoms, it is often called the Silent Disease.

One in three women and one in five men are most likely to break a bone in their lifetime due to osteoporosis.

A woman's risk of fracture due to osteoporosis is equal to her combined risk of heart attack, stroke and breast cancer combined.

A man is more likely to break a bone due to osteoporosis than he is to get prostate cancer.

Over 80% of all fractures in people over 50 years of age are caused by osteoporosis.

DIAGNOSIS OF OSTEOPOROSIS

The diagnosis of osteoporosis is made by a bone density scan also referred to as dual x-ray absorptiometry (DXA).

Peripherel DXA: Scans forearm, wrist, fingers, or heel. It takes only a few minutes and is a screening tool to learn if a central DXA is required.

Central DXA: Scans the hips, spine, and other bones of the torso.

RISK FACTORS OF OSTEOPOROSIS

A few common risk factors associated with osteoporosis are:

- **Menopause or Removal of the Uterus with the ovaries:** increased risk of osteoporosis due to oestrogen loss
- **Female gender:** more common in women
- **Age:** increased risk as one gets older
- **Race:** more common in Asian and Caucasians
- **Family history:** a parental history of osteoporosis and associated history has prominent association
- **Dietary Factors:** low calcium intake and eating disorders
- **Lifestyle Choices:** common in a sedentary lifestyle; excessive alcohol and tobacco use
- **Medical conditions:** such as IBD, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Celiac disease
- **Medications:** long term use of corticosteroids

STRATEGIES TO REDUCE RISK OF OSTEOPOROSIS AND FRACTURES

1. Active lifestyle
2. Adopt a balanced diet
3. Avoid negative lifestyle habits and maintain a healthy weight
4. Learn about the risk factors which you cannot change
5. Seek Medical advice and get treated if required

Bones 'Breathe' in the Sun, 'Grow' on Calcium, gain 'Strength' in Action.

ACTIVITY – PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (PA)

Physical Activity is the single most important factor in preventing osteoporosis. Studies have found that:

- The acquisition of Peak Bone Mass (PBM) is achieved by age 18 in girls and 20 in boys. Building strong bones during childhood and adolescence can be the best defense against developing osteoporosis later in life.
- PBM occurred despite the low calcium intakes (median 400 mg / day) by physically hardworking subjects as compared to those with sedentary habits (median 700 mg / day).
- The Peak Bone Mass (PBM) and its subsequent preservation until the age of 90 years was signifcantly greater in subjects doing hard physical work as compared to those with sedentary habits.
- The subsequent loss of bone in hardworking women slowed and did not enter the fracture zone until 90 years of age as compared to sedentary women who revealed accelerated immediate post-menopausal bone loss and entered the fracture zone at the age of 65 years.

ADOPT A BALANCED DIET

It is the key to prevent the development of osteopenia and osteoporosis.

Calcium: It is essential for healthy bones. Ideally it should be obtained from the diet.

- Milk has long been considered a good source of calcium.
- An excess of animal protein in the diet has been found to increase the average calcium loss from the bones. Meat, fish and eggs should be taken in moderation.
- A vegetarian diet has a very positive effect in maintaining the calcium balance in the bones by reducing the average calcium loss from the bones.

Vitamin D: It is called the Sunshine Vitamin. A minimum of 60 minutes' exposure to the sun each day may be considered suffcient to synthesize the daily requirement of Vitamin D.

Walking in the sunrise – you **Make** the bone,
Physically active during the day – you **Maintain** the bone,
Walking in the sunset – you **Optimize** the bone,
Sleeping at night – you **Dissolve** the bone.





Retracing Footsteps

~ Rachel Bateson
Bristol, UK

My father, Kenneth Baber, worked on tea estates in Assam for ten years, leaving in 1962 after the Chinese invasion. He and my mother never returned, and my sister and I were born in the UK. However, over the passing years, they attended tea planters' reunions with the 'Koi Hai' group. At one such recent event, my father became inspired by talk of India and asked me to accompany him back. I informed Dilsher Sen (UK Company Secretary) of our wish to visit the McLeod Russel estates my father had worked on. To my amazement, this set off a flurry of emails from Dhruva Guha Sircar (General Manager) in the Company's head office in Kolkata and his colleagues working on the estates in Assam.

We were so touched by the kind hospitality extended to us during our visits to Corramore, Phulbari and Kettela estates. Arunjyoti and Rengani Borgohain gave up their weekend to welcome us to stay in their beautiful home at Corramore. They, together with Vibhor Sharma and Uttam Baruah, provided a comprehensive tour of the factory and the estate. An amazing *jhumur* dance was also arranged and a presentation of the traditional Assamese *gamusa* scarfs. Rengani's cooking proved to be legendary, especially her delicious banana cake!

My father was pleased to see the CTC machine he had installed in 1961, although he noted that the rollers had increased in size. He was also reminded of the trouble he had had with Marshalls of Kolkata



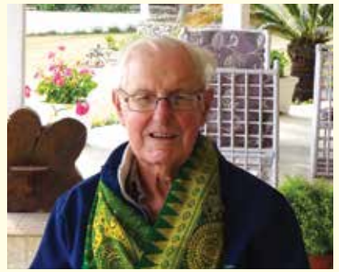






















when asking them to send parts, which culminated in him sending a rather rude letter to ensure the quick dispatch of the items required!

Next, we visited Rajeev Mehrotra, General Manager at Phulbari T.E. Having been shown the factory, we were taken on a tour of the excellent hospital facilities, which demonstrated the high priority assigned by McLeod Russel to employee wellbeing. Rajeev searched for over thirty minutes for the site of my father's original bungalow at Harchurah T.E. and also introduced us to the staff there. We went on to Paniputra and found my parents' bungalow, which was little changed. Rajeev was with us all day, whilst fielding calls from the six estates under his charge.

We were most touched to see the rolls of honour board of past Managers dating back to the 1930s proudly displayed in the tea estate offices we visited. It underlined to me the appreciation of the work done by my father and his contemporaries and the strength of the bond among the tea planters' fraternity.

Finally, we visited Kettela tea factory and met the charismatic Bipul Gogoi. I was shown the factory and then we drove around the neighbouring estate, visiting my parents' chung bungalow. Bipul provided us with a delicious lunch, serenaded us on his guitar, and enabled Dad to sample a bottle of Kingfisher beer!

On our return to Kolkata, we went to the Company's head office at Four Mangoe Lane and spent a very enjoyable afternoon there meeting executives and having an excellent cup of tea!

Following these visits, I was struck by the scale of the role of a tea estate's Manager: from HR, Finance, Production Management, Engineering, Horticulture, PR, to Social Responsibility. It is clearly a very complex job, with many challenges including absenteeism, global warming and security issues to name but a few. Having met the brilliant management teams, I am confident of their continued success. I would like to thank them all for their very warm welcome, which meant so much to my father and me.

Kamjari



My transition from BABA to SAHAB

~ Saurav Bayan
Namdang T.E.

Having been born in Tea, my memories take me back to those days when I was called *Baba*, as the sons of executives are fondly referred to, by the garden and bungalow workers. Growing up, I had often heard the word *Kamjari*, but paid no heed to it until I became a *Sahab*. It is an imperative word in a planter's life, where a day would be non-functional without it. Everyone working on an estate is well-versed with, and understands the importance and significance of the word very clearly.

By the time people wake up in the morning in cities, we planters have already planned our work schedule for the day and have started executing it. The day starts with reporting to our Burra Sahab, who delegates work for the day. Once the instructions are given and tasks delegated to the Assistants, it is a given fact that the work will be completed by day's end. The boss's instructions are always taken seriously, without a doubt!

Kamjari is not just about the factory or the garden, but also encompasses any big event that takes place at the Club. We take care of all the necessary arrangements to execute the task on hand in a perfect manner. Well, we are efficient Event Managers, a task which is a career these days! A planter's *kamjari* is not just limited to his office desk, he can do it from his Division, his colleague's place while having a drink or at the tennis court over a game.

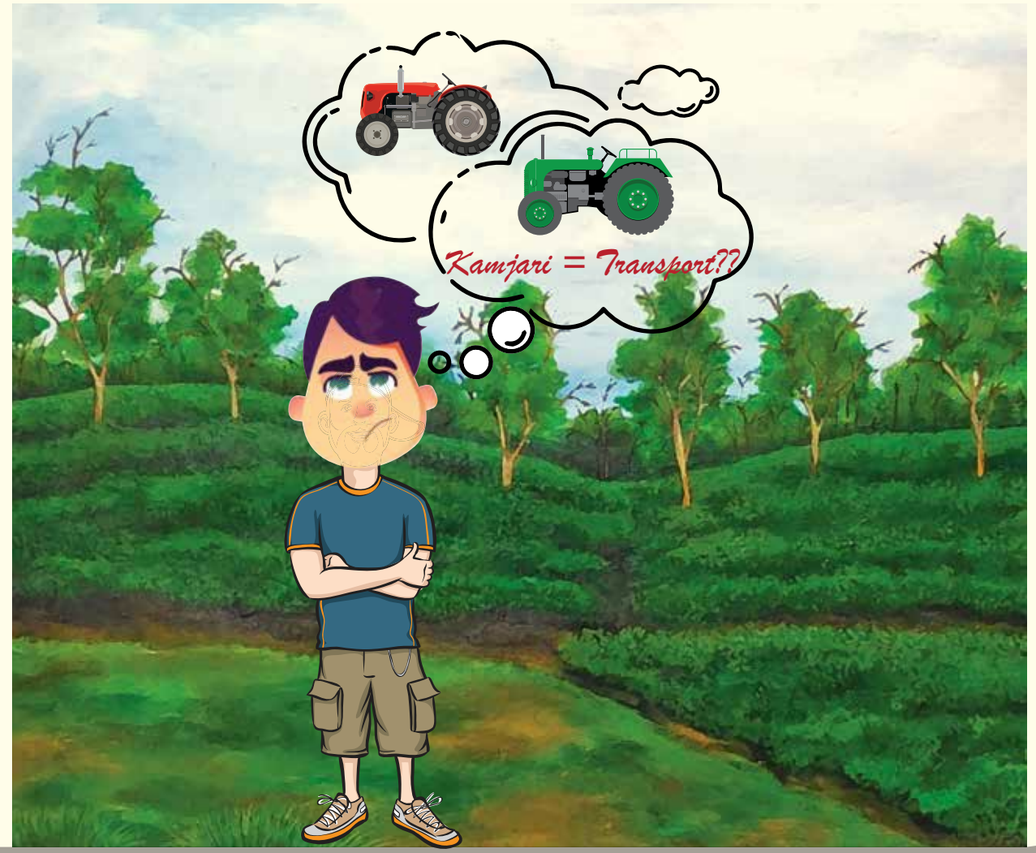
I remember the first day of joining Tea, when I was given my *kamjari*. I was asked to look after the spraying of pesticide and taking it very seriously, stood in the assigned Section for hours on end, to ensure it was done correctly. I wanted to set a perfect example of adherence to my boss's instructions! I enjoy doing my work because I am not confined to four walls, where I have to stare at a laptop screen the entire day. Instead, my work includes heaps of outdoor activities which are fun to do, except maybe on rainy days and the early winter mornings. Well, it is not entirely pleasant being in wet attire and squelchy shoes, what with this inclement weather, and one does feel lazy getting out of bed on cold winter mornings!

An incident that comes to mind is when I was given the task of ensuring that the workers were using their PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) correctly. I had to help them don it in the correct manner, which included wearing their dungarees, caps, masks, aprons and rubber boots. It made me feel like I was dressing a crèche full of toddlers, given their reluctance to wear these, due to the humid Assam weather. So, I cited the example of the Indian Army, saying that the soldiers guard the borders suited in their heavily armed gear every day and since it's just a matter of willingness, we can do it too. Everything in garden life involves getting things done with a dose of style and even our *kamjari* is done with a certain panache that is very characteristic of Tea life.

Our colleagues are very helpful and we live like a close knit family. The seniors in the estate shadow the new guys and teach them all there is to be learnt. I am reminded of a funny incident that occurred a few years ago when a new trainee had joined and the word *kamjari* was alien to him. Visibly perplexed, he asked his senior, "Sir, what is *kamjari*?" The senior being very comfortable with the word, told him very casually, "*Kamjari* is like transport, etc…" Not getting further clarification, he jotted down on his notepad '*kamjari* is transport'! I'm sure it didn't take him long to stand corrected on the matter.

Anyway, coming back to our seniors, I certainly learnt a lot from them. My seniors taught me to take the initiative and made me understand that I alone am responsible for my actions or tasks. Working in the gardens is a twenty-four hour job. At times we miss out on our sleep and our meals, but this is life in Tea with all its charms, and the life I've come to embrace and respect.

Cheers!



It's a Wild World

Encounters with Creatures Great & Small...

~ Sarita Dasgupta, Kolkata

All of us who have lived on the tea estates have had several encounters with wild creatures... mostly those that have strayed into our bungalow compounds, or comfortably made their homes there.

Many years ago, my father was posted in the Naharani Division of Dekhari T.E. (then the property of James Warren & Co.) The bungalow being located in the out division, wasn't connected to the generator in the factory, so we had to use lanterns when the grid went off after sunset. The darkness attracted bats which flew around casting huge shadows on the walls. It was sinister but thrilling, reminding me of ghost stories set in Victorian times.

Our bungalow at Mijicajan T.E. had tiny orange and maroon land crabs living in holes under the bamboo hedge. I would wait patiently for one of them to venture out, but more often than not, our Golden Retriever, Ace, would lollop affectionately to my side, sending the shy crab scampering back into its sanctuary. I did manage to photograph them, though.





Dragonflies of many hues with gossamer wings would alight and rest on the bamboo leaves, giving me time to admire their delicate beauty, unlike the butterflies which would flit away in seconds.



A chameleon would look at me with hooded eyes from an azalea bush outside the bedroom verandah, and sometimes from the bottlebrush tree under which I sat and wrote on winter mornings and afternoons, keeping me quiet company.





At Bordubi T.E., we were visited by various kinds of birds. Pairs of starlings even nested in the eaves of our bungalow, and a pair of mynahs I christened Tweedledee and Tweedledum squawked for crumbs when we had breakfast on the verandah. Spotted doves, magpie robins and wagtails strolled on the grass every day. I was amazed to see a honey buzzard one day, which put its head into a hornets' nest and, despite their angry buzzing and stinging, managed to devour a few of them before flying away. A roller once delighted me by spreading its wings and basking in the sun on the thatched roof of our gazebo. I usually saw it perched on the windsock post when I walked on the airstrip/golf



course every evening. A chattering of parakeets once stopped for a breather on the coconut palm by the swimming pool, blending with the tender coconuts growing on it.



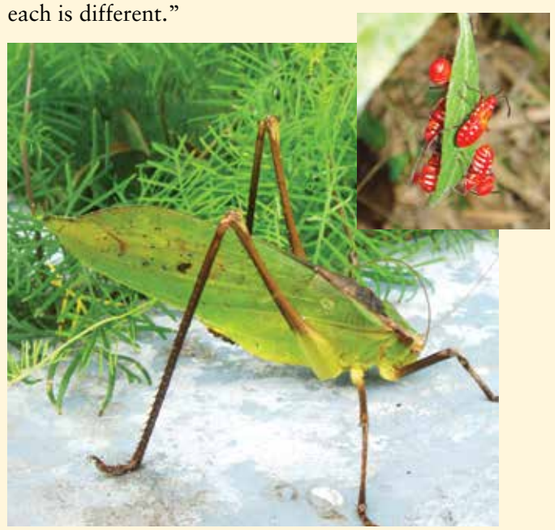
Troops of monkeys would gambol on our lawn and eat the avocados while still unripe, so that we never got any! Unfortunately (both for the monkeys and us), the tree was struck by lightning, and despite our best efforts, withered away branch by branch. The monkeys also competed with us for the vegetables growing in the kitchen garden or the fruit on the trees. They never touched the plums or oranges, though. Perhaps out of experience – they were terribly sour and unfit for anyone's consumption, human or simian!

A mole entered our bathroom at Rajmai T.E. one night. What a time the chowkidar and I had trying to chase it out of the back door! My husband slept on, oblivious. The next day, however, he did mention the peculiar squealing sounds that had emanated from the bathroom the previous night!

Elephants were regular visitors at Namdang T.E. The bungalow lies on a small hillock, so there is no hedge around it. The low fencing is no deterrent to these massive creatures as they tramp majestically by. Once, a couple of them pushed open the gates and made a dignified exit, while the guard manning the gate hastily made an undignified exit in the opposite direction. The next morning, we found all the jackfruit from a tree next to the gate, lying on the ground; some trampled upon and squished flat. The elephants had used the tree trunk to scratch their backs, dislodging all the fruit in the process!

People look at me goggle-eyed when I tell them about the time I tried to chase away a cobra. Since I was standing on the back staircase of the chung bungalow at Koomsong T.E., I believed I was safe… until I saw it raise itself to its full length, with only the last inch or so of its tail resting on the ground! Visions of it slithering into the guest room downstairs and confronting the GM from Kolkata expected that evening made me persevere and eventually, to my great relief, it went away. Incidentally, the whole time that I was banging the stick on the ground, hoping that the vibrations would deter it from coming farther forward, my six foot tall Bearer was prudently standing one step behind and above me!

Furry caterpillars, slugs, snails, small four-legged creatures and strange insects that even an entomologist may not recognize… elephants, civet cats, leopards, porcupines, flying squirrels, bats and snakes….all these creatures and more inhabit our world in Tea. I think how fortunate I was to have lived in such close proximity with all these wonderful creatures and developed an affinity for them all. As Hippocrates said, "The soul is the same in all living creatures, although the body of each is different."



Gourmet in the Gardens



Good food served attractively is the legendary hallmark of entertaining in Tea. Whether it be at home or at a Club event, the delicious dishes adorning the dining table makes eating an experience in itself. Now, there is an untold tale behind it all…that of the hardworking ladies (and even some gents) who toil endlessly in hot, sweaty kitchens, to serve up these awesome gourmet dishes, all cooked with a lot of love and care. If the cooking goes off smoothly, then it is fine, and one breathes a huge sigh of relief! But God help one if any catastrophe were to arise. The panic button is switched on and one has to do some quick thinking out of the hat on how best to cope with the situation in hand, along with the advice of the more expert cooks in the gardens, and salvage the ruined dish. One is considered extremely fortunate if there's a cook around, but they are a rarity these days.

There have been many a time when the soufflé collapsed; the milk curdled due to umpteen things I had done wrong; the sponge cake failed to rise to glorious heights, and various other such mishaps. Well, there is no shortcut here, neither were there any shops to save the day. So, I simply had to grit my teeth and make the dish all over again. I once baked a sponge cake which would have knocked someone out if it had been used as a missile! Turns out, I had skipped a page of my recipe book and followed instructions of a totally different cake recipe! Then there was this day when the mutton refused to cook and the guests were arriving in an hour. The pressure cooker worked overtime with no visible results! The guests arrived and it was still whistling away. Ultimately it all went into the dustbin along with my pride and I had to make alternative arrangements. I thank my stars now that I was not catering for a major Club event! But with the confidence instilled in me as a Tea lady, I suppose I would have dealt with it with panache!

I would say that each lady here in the gardens has faced some problem or the other of this sort, especially as a new bride, if cooking was not one's forte earlier, as in my case! But with the guidance of senior ladies who are always around, helping and instructing, one sails through these culinary mishaps. Time tested recipes and valuable tips have been handed down from experienced Burra Memsahabs, which have stood each of us in good stead over the years. Not to mention the Internet these days - a veritable treasure trove of recipes should one require it. And so each of us graduated from making sandwiches, dal and rice, to the more exotic dishes that would give professional chefs a run for their money!

As each new bride makes her debut in Tea, there is a bit of advice which was given to me once very many years ago, that I would like to share… that hospitality here is not just about serving beautiful dishes, but more about the resources of a generous heart. It is much more than mere entertaining. And 'where there's a whisk, there's a way' so, just 'beat it'!

Rupa Saikia

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