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Formation and Expansion of Tea Culture in India

— With a Special reference to Bengal —

Gurung Roshan

India is considered as one of the native homes of the tea plant. The tea was existed in India from the immemorial time, but due to the lack of knowledge over the plant and its use, tea had not been introduced in Indian culture for quite a long time. In initial phase, when the tea was introduced in India, Indians were unresponsive to tea. After a long time, slowly and gradually Indian began to adopt tea as a drink. Today, India is the largest tea producer country in the world as well as consumer. There are so many factors to be India as the largest consumer of tea in a short period. India consumes nearly 80% tea of its production.

It is no doubt that foreigners germinated the custom of tea drinking in India. Muslims were open minded, they played vital role to establish the tea culture in India. Muslims accepted tea without any prejudice. Before establishing of tea culture in India, Indian used to take Conji, Betel Nut to welcome their guests. But from the beginning of the 20th century, such custom was supplanted by tea.

Development of Industry in India, patriotic movement, use of novel laurite, Rabindranath Tagore for advertisement of tea played a vital role to establish tea culture in India. Moreover, the contribution of literature and Indian Cinemas also contributed to form tea culture in India.

Although the tea culture in India had started in the 19th century, it experienced several difficulties on the way of progress. Finally, tea culture developed very rapidly and succeeded to be the national beverage of India.

Key Words: Tea, Tea Culture, India, Bengal, Europe, National Drink

Introduction:

In this paper, an attempt has been made to know the past and present of tea culture in India. The tea was existed in India from the immemorial time, but due to the lack of knowledge over the plant and its use, tea had not been introduced in Indian culture for quite a long time. Even after the discovery of tea in Assam in 1825¹⁾, there remained noticeable aversion of its use in India and such repugnance was primarily resulted from the lack in general knowledge over the socially acceptable beverage. In the beginning phase of tea production in India, the

1) Noma Haruo, Gurung Roshan. *Discussion on the Transplantation and Cultivation of Chinese Tea in India Focusing on Assam Indigenous Species*, Kansai University, Essay and Studies, Vol. 61, Number 1. 2011. p. 72

野間晴雄・グルン・ロシャン『インドにおける中国茶・アッサム自生茶の移植・栽培の相克について考察』関西大学文学論集、第61巻、第1号、2011年、72頁。

British Tea Planters and Producers had made no noticeable attempt to popularize tea and sell tea in its homeland.

Most of the Indians remained ignorant about the use of tea, the process of consumption and its effect on health and mind for quite a long time. Initially when the tea was introduced in India, Indians were unresponsive to tea. Indian tea became commercial product and nearly the whole production was marketed outside India. Gradually the aversion against tea possessed by the Indians was dwindled and the therapy to overcome fear or dislike of tea was provided by the vested interested groups e.g., European entrepreneurs, in order to maximize their profit. After the renaissance in India, Bengal in particular, fresh air of modernism entered and gradually it affected the principal order and cultural texture of Indian society. Slowly and gradually tea appeared as a national drink of India.

It is equally interesting to know the process how did tea appear as Indian culture as being a socially acceptable beverage. It has a long and well describable history to be described here. As a result of the above proposition, the discussion will be limited to the past and present conditions of tea culture in India focusing on Bengal. Attempts have been made and directed to write this paper with the help of archival corpus and historical materials published at different times. But such attempt proved to be negative when the archival corpus was no more responding in this regard. Despite these hurdles placed before us attempt has been made in this paper to analyze the development of tea culture in India since the British colonial rule. Moreover, ‘Small Culture’ is the most important concept in anthropology and the anthropologists commonly use the term ‘culture’ to refer to a society or group in which many or all people live together having common behaviour that constitutes a society. However, the terms ‘culture’ and ‘society’ are somewhat interchangeable and intermingled. Here attempts will be made to explain how tea became an important cultural trait in India.

1. Dearth of Source-materials:

Huge materials on tea topography, tea plantation, tea manufacture and tea labourers are avail in the unwritten corpus of the archives, printed reports, books, brochures and periodicals along with other literature of modern India published from home and abroad. It is worthy to note that from the beginning the Tea Companies, Tea Boards and official bodies were much more interested in recording the horizontal and vertical growth of tea industry rather than the development of tea culture among the Indians as whole. In fact, for obvious reasons the object of the Tea Companies and Tea Boards was to make a net profit as much as possible from the colony. Although several bodies were created in order to propagate tea culture among the Indians, but never those bodies had recorded the results of such propaganda and general attitude of the population of India regarding consumption of tea. In consequence, there is a dearth in the source-materials in constructing the story of the development of tea culture in the Indian society. In this case, we do not have choices except to depend on Newspapers, records of Royal visits, biography, folk-lore’s, folk-tales, field-work, interviews or something else. Stray references to the development of tea culture in India are available in some contemporary books, articles, stories, novels and the like. In 2005, Professor Gautam Bhadra, Tagore National University, had brought out a brochure entitled as “From an Imperial Product to a National Drink: The Culture of Tea Consumption in Modern India” in connection

of an exhibition on Tea held in Calcutta. It is true that Professor Gautam Bhadra has tried his best for providing some probable hints as to how the subject should be emphasized. But though it is neither desired that the brochure, compiled for an exhibition on tea, should be a complete study, nor should it be possible for the author to do enough justice to the subject within a small brochure during the period under review. Nevertheless, this brochure is helpful in many regards. Furthermore Professor Gautam Bhadra has written an interesting article on tea culture in Bengali which was published in a leading newspaper. In the article the author has provided more information regarding tea culture in India²⁾. However, the present paper on the history of tea culture has been written following the fundamental and empirical methodologies. Before entering into any detailed discourse on tea it should be kept in mind that a systematic and chronological analysis of the development of tea culture in India is not accurately possible without any retrospective examination of many other factors. The esteemed readers are requested to keep this in mind before going through this paper.

Stray references on tea were available in the local newspapers of Bengal³⁾ even before the discovery of tea in Assam. On 21st June, 1798 the Chinese fable about tea was published in the Calcutta Gazette. In fact, such publication was made for the English people who were interested about the origin of tea⁴⁾. It was reported in 1826 that the Chinese merchant brought black tea to Myanmar for selling which was superior to the tea available in the Canton city. It was also heard that Myanmar had own variety of tea generally used considering the Chinese tea is too costly. Curiously enough that the people of Myanmar were accustomed to drink tea after lunch and dinner and they prepared tea mixing with garlic and sesame. Such tea was usually offered to the guests at the first item of reception. Contrary to this such reception to new comer in India was done by offering tobacco⁵⁾. It is difficult to anticipate that how many people of Bengal were then interested to read the newspapers if the state of education in Bengal taken into account.

2) Gautam Bhadra. *From an Imperial Product to a National Drink: The Culture of Tea Consumption in Modern India*, (Calcutta: CSSC, 2005), Gautam Bhadra, "Chaa Chaa Kahini" (The Story of the Thirst for Tea). *The Anandabazar Patrika*, (Calcutta), 28 May, 2006.

3) All the Bengali translations were conducted by Prof. Ratan Lal Chakraborty, former professor of Dhaka University.

4) According to the fable; "In the 519th year of the Christian Era, Drama, the son of an Indian King, went to China preaching religion. He justified his doctrines by an austere and eremitical life, living upon herbs, and passing days and nights in the contemplation of the Supreme Being in conformity to a vow he had made never to sleep. After several years of watchfulness, we are informed he was one night surprised by the power of sleep; waking in the morning, full of repentance and regret for the violation of his vow, he cut off his eye-lids as the guilty instruments of his crime, and threw them on the ground. The next day he found them metamorphosed into two of those bushes which have been called Tea." Walter Scott Seton-Karr, *Selections from Calcutta Gazettes: Showing the Political and Social Condition of the English in India*, (Calcutta: Printed at the Military Orphan Press, 1864), Vol. III, p. 190.

5) Brojendranath Bandhopadhyaya. *Sambad Patrey Shekaler Katha*, (Chronicle of Bygone Days as appeared in the Newspaper, Calcutta: Bangiya Shahitya Parisat, 2001), fourth edition, Vol. 1, pp. 160-61.

2. Tea Culture before 19th Century in India

Although tea was existed in India, it was only a flora and fauna until the discovery of the tea in Assam. It is called that tea was mentioned in Ramayan⁶⁾. But that was not tea like *Camellia sinensis*. That was an herb which was brought from Himalaya for medical purpose⁷⁾. An herbal tea is also called an alternative tea. Herbal teas can be made with fresh or dried flowers, leaves, seeds on roots. It is mainly used for medical purpose. There is a historical record that in 12th century Ahom, aboriginal people of Assam, used to drink tea in daily life. But that custom was not well acquainted by other people.

Tea was introduced in India by British in the mid of the 19th century. Even in 19th century, tea was not well known among the Indian, because in initial phase they produced tea only for themselves or for marketing purpose. Actually tea became popular in India since 20th century.

2.1. English people Travelers in India and Tea Culture

It is well-known to all that India had become a free launching land to European travelers from the 17th century⁸⁾. Consequently the travelogues of 17th and 18th centuries throw light on the tea consumption while the travelers visited in India. The travelogues of earlier travelers suggest that the tea they used to drink was brought from their respective homelands for consumption⁹⁾. It is noteworthy that the early English people travelers in India had no connection with the people of India as a whole, so their habits of drinking tea obviously could not have made any impact on the Indian society and culture. Even after the consolidation of the English power in India, the officialdom as well as other ancillaries followed the same way of drinking tea as the earlier English people travelers in India used to do so long as Indian tea was not available.

After the discovery of the tea in Assam and its subsequent development, that had made a positive drive for the manufacture and production of tea in order to meet primarily, the demands of Europe and other countries. Such process of the development of tea gardens and tea industries could not have been established by the touch of a heaven sent magic wand, rather the process had developed slowly as the entire process of manufacturing tea required huge financial involvement and large number of labours supply.

2.2. English Administrators in India and Tea Culture: Hindu-Muslims Contrasted

The English people were accustomed to drink tea far ahead of the Indians. Many English people went to India in order to improve their fortune by career in any capacity and also business of any kind. Right from the beginning Calcutta was the capital of the British India till 1911 and being the centre, it attracted various kinds of

6) A Hindu religious epic in Sanskrit, believed written in 3rd century. B.C.

7) *Indian Tea*, Books LLC, Memphis, Tennessee, USA in 2010, p. 24.

8) It is worthy to note that the introduction of tea in England is interesting from its early date. In 1650 the East India Company had presented King Charles II with a gift of two pounds of tea and from thenceforth it began to be better known, and to be drunk in fashionable circles. Kathleen Blechynden, *Calcutta - Past and Present*, (London: W. Thacker, 1905), pp. 111-12.

9) The travelogues of Sir William Hedges, Ralph Fitch, and Bishop Heber and many others may be consulted.

people. In the initial phase most of the English people settled in Calcutta. With the rapid progress in territorial possessions, law and order of the East India Company the settlement of the English people in general and the English families in particular had started initially centering round in Calcutta. In the beginning many European families used to bring all the necessaries of daily life from their homeland, later some shops were opened in different parts of Calcutta. With the increase in the number of European inhabitants in Bengal in the later half of the 18th century the need to supply regular provisions for the daily life also increased. Consequently the authority of the East India Company organized auctions of several items including tea and tea utensils. Later individual merchants also opened auction houses and shops. The news of such auction was published in the *Bengal Gazette* of James Augustus Hicky¹⁰⁾ and in the *Calcutta Gazette* of Francis Gladwin in the form of advertisements. In March, 1781 it was advertised in the “Gazette” that very large elegant silver Tea Table Salver and large silver Tea Kettle would be sold at a very high price¹¹⁾. In general normal tea utensils and tea ware also advertised for sale in the same newspapers¹²⁾. Sometimes Green Tea by the ‘General Meadows’ and Hyson Tea were also found in the advertisements¹³⁾. In 1802, the East India Company had withdrawn custom duty of several imported items among those tea constituted important¹⁴⁾. In 1860s tea was then, of course, quite in its infancy¹⁵⁾.

Meanwhile for the reason of administration the English Collectors and other personnel were forced to settle initially at the district headquarters. Some of them had built house, especially those who were forced to live in the country side in later period. But they enjoyed fashionable life. They employed several kinds of native servants and cook locally known as *Baburchi*, *Khanshama* and *Khitmager* etc¹⁶⁾. As the English people were accustomed to drink tea several times in a day, they taught the process of preparing tea to their cook. It is well understandable that the English people could not form their own community in the rural areas, because they were very much scattered all over India according to their respective jobs. And in the middle of the 19th century, some Indians became able to understand English and also some of them could speak to some extent. The same was the case for the English people who could understand the local language of India where they stayed and also could speak to some extent. Finally the result was the beginning of cultural interaction in between the Indians and the English people. The Indian cook became trained well by his master to prepare tea. They knew for the first time that tea is a drink like milk and later disseminated this knowledge to persons.

On the other hand, the English people used to offer tea to their Indian guests during their visit. Reflections of

10) Tarun Kumar Mukhopadhyay. *Hicky's Bengal Gazette: Contemporary Life and Events*, Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1988, p. 10.

11) Walter Scott Seton-Karr. *Selections from Calcutta Gazettes: Showing the Political and Social Condition of the English in India*, Calcutta: Printed at the Military Orphan Press 1864, Vol. 1, p. 31.

12) *Ibid.*, p. 32.

13) Walter Scott Seton-Karr. *Selections from Calcutta Gazettes: Showing the Political and Social Condition of the English in India*, Calcutta: Printed at the Military Orphan Press, 1864, Vol. 2, pp. 582 and 605.

14) Walter Scott Seton-Karr. *Selections from Calcutta Gazettes: Showing the Political and Social Condition of the English in India*, Calcutta: Printed at the Military Orphan Press, 1864, Vol. III, p. 110.

15) Montague Massey. *Recollections of Calcutta for over half a Century*, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and co., 1918, p.16.

16) “Domestic Servants in Bengal”, *The Bengal Magazine*, Vol. II, No. 23, June, 1874, pp. 481-87.

these cultural interactions are available in the contemporary writings of the English people. It is evident from their writings that Indian staffs or servant prepared tea regularly and they did it sometimes being ordered. However, with the stages of the establishment of the British supremacy nearly all over in India, the tea culture took a visible shape, when the upper class families of the subjugated and native states started to be acquainted with the English culture and manners. In consequence the upper class families of urban areas started to imitate English culture in their respective household affairs. It is noteworthy that all the servants and staffs of the English administrators' households in India were all Muslims, because the Hindus had strong caste prejudices.

Consequently, some kind of aversion over tea was noticeable among the Hindus. C.T. Buckland reported that "It is very seldom that a Hindu gentleman takes any refreshment, but some of the Mohammedans occasionally indulge in an ice or a cup of tea. It is very unusual for any native ladies to appear at these garden-parties"¹⁷⁾. Similarly, Mark Thornhill had noted in 1899 that the Muslims were very partial to drinking tea and some of them carried out tea trade to Punjab and Kashmir for the use of the urban elites¹⁸⁾.

Actually, Muslims do not drink alcohol according to their religious beliefs and they also do not have traditional drink. In this case, it is easy for them to accept tea as a drink. Whatever the reason behind this issue, Muslim contributed for the development of tea Culture in India.

2.3. Tea among the Aristocratic Indians and the English Connections

It is well-known that it took long time for the Indians to be accustomed with tea generally. There is no question that Indian became accustomed to drink tea after coming in contact with British people. The reason for this may be attributed to the fact the Indians in general were not associated with tea gardens, tea manufacture and culture even after its discovery. But the power magnates of India, who were being gradually associated with the British officialdom, had shown interest in tea culture. It is very difficult to list them all in the present survey. Obviously random samples may be, to some extent, useful in this regard.

In the undivided Bengal Khwaja Abdul Ghani (1813-1896) of Dhaka was awarded the title Nawab for rendering valuable help during the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857¹⁹⁾. He was closely associated with the British administration. The diary of Mr. Brenand, Principal of Dhaka College provides enough testimony in this regard²⁰⁾.

As a result of his close association with the British, the life and style of Khwaja Abdul Ghani changed remarkably. He became habituated to rise early in the morning and engaged either riding out or hunting or shooting, being busy himself in his garden or taking long walks in the cool morning air. According to F. B. Bradley-Birt "On his (Khwaja Abdul Ghani) return it was his custom to repair to his *Charkhana* (drawing-room) where between 7 and 8 A.M. he took tea holding a kind of informal reception that included not only the male

17) C.T. Buckland, *Sketches of Social Life In India*, London: W.H. Allen, 1884, p. 40.

18) Mark Thornhill, *Haunts and Hobbies of an Indian Official*, London: J. Murray, 1899, p. 233.

19) The Indian Rebellion of 1857 began as a mutiny of sepoys.

20) For the diary of Mr. Brenand, see A.L. Clay, *Principal Heads of the History and Statistics of Dacca Division*, Calcutta: Calcutta Central Press Co., Ltd., 1864, pp. 40-47.

members of his family and his friends, but all those who wished to see him as well as those who came to partake of his charity. Many old and invalid Muhammadans, who had seen better days, were always to be found at this early morning levee which was a strangely assorted gathering where all were welcome whether in rags or gorgeously attired. It was a kind and considerate way of bestowing charity upon those who needed it, for the early morning cup of tea of the Nawab himself always meant in their case a substantial breakfast²¹⁾”.

Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), who was known as the father of Indian nationalism, had been connected with the foundation of the Bombay Association, a political body established in 1852. In 1863, the Association, in recognition of Mr Naoroji's valuable and enduring services, presented him with an excellent silver tea-set of worth Rs. 2,500²²⁾. Such thing deserves more explanation than discussed here. From the whole episode it appears that Dadabhai Naoroji was accustomed to drink tea. It cannot be known that what had prompted him to be accustomed to drink tea. This may well be attributed to his close association with English citizens for a long time.

Nawab Server-ul-Mulk Bahadur, is an epitome of the political and social history of Hyderabad, between 1869 and 1897, the years respectively of his arrival at and departure from Hyderabad. During this period he had taken tea with many political dignitaries at different place and at different times²³⁾.

Sir Salar Jang (1829-1883) was the Prime Minister of the Nizam (state) of Hyderabad. He was also known as progressive administrator. Mountstuart Elphinstone's history of India provides an interesting account of Sir Salar Jung's daily life. He rose at 6 A.M., took a cup of tea and proceeded to hold a public *Durbar*, at which the poorest of the people had opportunities to make their representations²⁴⁾.

Hem Chunder Dutt, a brilliant writer of a renowned newspaper “Amritabazar Patrika”²⁵⁾ had been accustomed to take his tea in the office room, which was considered a luxury. Tea-shops were not then running rampant in those days and so a servant of his brought a kettle full of tea every day at about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. It was unthinkable that Hem Chunder Dutt could minus tea and tobacco. But he rendered valuable services to the newspaper during the emergence of Indian nationalism²⁶⁾.

Sunity Devi (1864-1932), *Maharani* (an empress) of Cooch Behar, a daughter of Keshab Chandra Sen, had experience of taking tea at home and abroad. She had recorded all these occasions in her autobiography²⁷⁾. Actually Sunita Devi stands here for Portuguese Queen Catherine. When Catherine enters in England, custom of

21) F. B. Bradley-Birt. *Twelve Men of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century*, Fourth Edition, Calcutta: S. K. Lahiri And Co., College Street, 1927, p. 179.

22) *Famous Parsis*, Madras: G.A. Natesan, 1930, pp.39-40.

23) For details see, *My Life Being The Autobiography of Nawab Server-Ul-Mulk Bahadur*, translated by Arthur H. Stockwell Limited, n.d.

24) John Law. *Modern Hyderabad*, Thacker, Spink and Company, 1914, p. 36.

25) Amritabazar Patrika was started in 1871.

26) Parmananda Dutta. *Motilal Gosh*, Calcutta, 1935, pp. 91-92

27) Sunita Devi (Maharani of Cooch Behar). *The Autobiography of an Indian Princess*, London: J. Murray, 1921.

tea drinking becomes a fashion among the circle of female. In India Sunita Devi plays a vital role to make tea as a social drinking among the Indian lady. The habits of taking tea by the Indian renowned personnel had a direct impact of on their fellow countrymen; many of them later followed the lead without any hesitation. This in fact had helped to create a positive atmosphere for drinking tea.

2.4. Tea Culture among the Different Societies and Aborigines in India

Tea was welcomed quickly by the aboriginal people of India. The aboriginal people of India were well-acquainted with tea because a large number of aboriginal labourers were engaged in tea industries from garden to manufacture works in many capacities²⁸⁾. It appears from the contemporary literature that tea was a favourite beverage among the Lepchas; though this tea was brought from China. The Lepchas prepared tea by boiling, after which the decoction was done in a *Chunga* (a narrow and small pipe or tube) with butter and salt. But Lepcha never used milk with tea²⁹⁾. Similarly tea was almost a necessary of daily life of the Bhotias and it was largely consumed by them to prevent from the intense cold and wonderful dryness of the atmosphere. The milk of yak is also much used in tea³⁰⁾.

For Tiyan caste of South India the common beverage was *Conjee* (rice gruel), but in the beginning of the 20th century, such drink was supplanted by tea, coffee, lemonade, and soda-water. These drinks were uncommon to the Indians in general in the beginning of the 20th century; such change might be attributed to the process of modernization. In fact, it is probable that the Christian missionary was instrumental to this change³¹⁾. Contemporary research suggests that among the aboriginals of India, the Mongoloid races had exerted a great influence on the culture of India. The use of milk, tea, rice, paper, terraced cultivation, communal houses, head-hunting and betel-nut culture may be mentioned as the contributions of the Mongoloid races³²⁾.

3. Tea Culture in various communities of India in the Early 20th Century

The Royal Commission of Indian Agriculture emphasized the need for systematic studies of the life of people living in rural areas. Mr. Shukla carried out his investigations in the Olpad Taluka of Gujarat during the years 1929-32. It was found in the survey that every big village had a shop which dealt in corn, tea, sugar, sesame oil and petty commodities of daily use. The cultivator either purchases his necessaries from the local shopkeepers

28) On tea coolies (labourers) see Edward Money. *Essay on the Cultivation and Manufacture of Tea: An Essay for which the prize of the Grant gold medal and Rs. 300 was awarded by the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India in the year 1872*, Calcutta: Wyman, 1874, pp. 9-11 and *Notes on Tea in Darjeeling* by a Planter, Darjeeling: Scotch Mission Orphanage Press, 1888, pp. 70-78.

29) J.W. Kaye et. al.. *The People of India: A Series of Photographic Illustrations, with Descriptive Letterpress, of the Races and Tribes of Hindustan*, Vol. 1, London: India Museum, 1868, p. 174.

30) *Ibid.* p.194.

31) Edgar Thurston. *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Madras: Government Press, 1909, Vol. 7, p. 98.

32) C. B. Matoria. *Tribal Demography in India*, Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1957, p. 13.

or goes to the market towns³³⁾. According to the detailed investigations, Kanbi and Koli, Dubla, Dhed, and the Bhangi communities of Gujrat were used to take tea twice in a day. The habit of taking tea, however, had become almost universal among all castes. The high prices of cotton had helped the extension of this habit among these communities to a much greater extent than before³⁴⁾. The custom of tea drinking was spread widely since 20th century in India.

3.1. Tea in Some of the Religious Communities of India: Hindus and Muslims:

There was a custom of tea drinking among the Buddhist monk in the past. Tea is closely related to Buddhist monks and Buddhism. It has been said that the Buddhist monks lead a life of lazy and selfish retirement; their chief religious function is ringing the temple bell, and their chief activity is often that of drinking tea³⁵⁾.

It has been noticed that the orthodox Hindus possessed remarkable aversion against western life and style, whereas the Muslims were far advanced in this regard. There is a custom of taking milk of cow in Hindu community and cow is also worshipped as a god. In the past, they never took any drink except milk. But some of the Mohammedans occasionally indulged in ice or a cup of tea. But very soon Reverend Henry Rice noticed the changes occurred over time that “The Hindus usually have but two meals a day -one at twelve o'clock, and the other at night, when the day's work is over, and before retiring to rest. ‘Pepper water,’ a kind of soup without meat, and a few cold rice left over from the previous night, or else a rice cake, called *hoppah*, and coffee or tea, are now frequently partaken before lunch, on rising in the morning”³⁶⁾. But such testimony may be considered as stray example and not to be treated as totality, since this testimony was given by an author whose knowledge over the traditional rites and customs of the Hindus could not be taken as guaranteed. However, at the fag end of 19th century Mark Thornhill noticed that the natives had aversion for tea cultivation, but they were very partial to drinking it, especially the Mohammedans. “When I left India a large portion of the tea produced in the Doon was purchased by native merchants, and exported to the Punjab and Cashmere. At that time, mostly preferred tea was the green tea”³⁷⁾.

During a visit to India of some sixteen months, from December 1920 to March 1921, the author had the opportunity of studying factory conditions in India. In a short visit it was not possible to secure sufficient exact information to give completeness to a sectional study, and also that in most cases the conditions which demanded attention concerned men and women alike.

“A further step has been taken by some employers, who provide tea. Tea-drinking is a new custom amongst the workers of India, but it has taken a firm hold, and the tea-houses in mills are very popular. In some cases they seem to be opened all day, and workers find their way to them as their will. In others, time schedule is fixed. In

33) J.B. Shukla. *Life and Labour in a Gujarat Taluka*, Longmans, Green and company limited, 1937, p. 210.

34) *Ibid.*, pp. 266-78.

35) James Bissett Pratt. *India and Its Faiths: A Traveler's Record*, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915, p. 369.

36) Reverend Henry Rice. *Native life in India*, General Books, USA, p. 56.

37) Mark Thornhill. *Haunts and hobbies of an Indian Official*, London: J. Murray, 1899, p. 233.

one of the latter the two tea-rooms, one for Hindus and one for Muslims, were managed in a quiet, enclosed yard. At the far end were kitchens, but in this case the two races had chosen to use the same one and the second was turned into a godown for straw. Though both groups used one fireplace, there were two cooks, a Muslim and a high-caste Hindu. Tea with sugar, but no milk, was poured into the buyers' tumblers of brass or white metal, and cost a halfpenny.

A few employees spent another halfpenny on a piece of country bread or a biscuit. The tea-drinkers in this mill were chiefly drawn from the better paid workers amongst the men. Few women took tea, and those who had to drink it in the compound, as the men would not allow them to enter the shelters. Other mills have gone still further and have arranged for canteens from which vegetables, dishes of rice and dhal (Pulse), and loaves are served. Such an experiment demands a Brahman cook with a kitchen into which no one but himself, or another Brahman, is allowed to enter, and different serving windows for Muslims, caste-Hindus, and others. The food is carried to dining-sheds and eaten there. It is probable that the special arrangements for cooking and serving make it necessary to charge rather more than the price for which the workers could get similar food, for in some cases, at any rate, few takes advantage of the new source of supply³⁸⁾.

Hindu covers the nearly 80.3 per cent of population³⁹⁾, but non-Hindus played a vital role to spread tea culture in India. In the beginning, orthodox Hindu neglected drinking tea but later on, they accepted tea as a usual drink in their day to day life.

Hindus did not accept tea in the early stage because of caste prejudice but Hindus played vital role to form the milk tea culture in India. Hindus keep cows and worship as a god and they used to have milk from ancient time. When the fashion of tea drinking spread in India, they did not care at first. Later, they also started to drink tea but adding milk. Because tea was not tasty for them, they had accustomed to drinking milk. Tea became delicious after adding milk. Slowly and gradually, the custom of milk tea spread all over India. In this way, Hindus contributed to form milk tea culture in India.

3.2. Religion, Caste and Food Prejudice Gradually Dwindled

From the beginning of the 20th century the religion, caste and food prejudices had started to dwindle gradually. Many historical factors were responsible for this development. Consequently tea shop started to appear for public consumption slowly. According to Edward Fenton Elwin that in Puna city "There were a few Mohammedan tea shops which seem to do a brisk trade. Hindus have, unfortunately, of late years taken very much to the drinking of spirituous liquors, and it is possible that amongst the upper classes, at any rate English example has had something to do with it"⁴⁰⁾. The Hindus were not altogether different. But the English took all

38) Janet Harvey Kelman. *Labour in India: A Study of the Conditions of Indian Women in Modern Industry*, London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1923, p. 186.

39) According to Census of 2004.

40) Edward Fenton Elwin. *Indian Jottings: From Ten Year's Experience in and around Poona City*, London: J. Murray, 1907, p. 34.

the precautionary measures in order to avoiding the hazards regarding consumption of tea in the given prejudicial circumstances about religion and castes. Edward Fenton Elwin has reported that “This hospitable Hindu gave us tea in the afternoon on the cricket-ground. But as some *Brahmin* players and visitors also partook of it, rather elaborate precautions had to be taken to see that the tea met with no unhallowed contact. Hari Rao asked us rather shyly if we would mind providing our own cups, and care had to be taken that the receptacle which held the tea did not in any way touch the cup. I was also given a chair a yard or two apart from the Hindus. But to drink tea together at all was an immense advance on what would have been possible a few years back⁴¹⁾”.

3.3. Attitude of Indian towards the English Tea Party

The chapter entitled “European Life in Bengal” provides some pictures of the domestic life of Indian and English people as well. “If an Indian couple is invited in a party, a servant is ordered to bring tea and biscuit, and the whole party will sit around the table and sip the delicious Indian tea in beautiful china teacups⁴²⁾”. Traditionally the practice of invitation to relations and friends differed widely according to religion and culture. In the past the Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and other religious sects had custom of inviting to their respective according to religion and culture. In general religious ceremonies, festivals, rites and religion related culture were the determining factors for invitation of all the communities. In fact, there was no secular practice regarding invitation relations and friends. The secular ceremony and invitation was virtually a by-product of colonial rule in India. Practically India had no tradition in her past history to form association for any definite purpose. Indians had become acquainted with the western culture when they received western education. This education had, in return, paved the way for the beginning of transformation.

The western educated Bengali youth was carried away by a very strong justification of introducing western culture. Keeping pace with the western education, Anglicization work proceeded further making a strong body of youths who were eager to espouse western ideas, habits, dresses, manners, customs and usages which were, in fact and practice, revulsion to Indian traditional culture. The result of this venture could not have been perceived instantly. Later being motivated by the publicity of tea and following the English way of life, the Indians adhered to English culture. Following this trail the rich and middle class of Bengal had started to imitate the English culture. Consequently all the culture relating to tea maintained by the English people residing in India had got amalgamation with the Indian to some extent. The clue of the introduction of tea culture in India lies here in depth by the introduction of the western culture. Eventually it became special family fashion to invite friends over a cup of tea which were hitherto unknown to India in general and Bengal In particular. The reflection of this incident is available in the contemporary literature. In a Bengali story a man was very astonished being invited by his friend to visit his family over a cup of tea, because for the first time he received such invitations.

Curiously enough, when Rabindranath Tagore visited Dhaka in 1926, he was invited so many tea parties and

41) *Ibid.*, p. 144.

42) Zebina Flavius Griffin. *India and Daily Life in Bengal*, Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1912, pp. 54-63.

many cases Tagore had participated⁴³⁾.

3.4. Tea in Railway

Indian Railway was introduced in India since 1853 from Bombay to Thane for the first time. It had started to traffic passenger a pantry car was included in it so that people could take some refreshment including tea. But for long time tea was not popular and the tea was available in the pantry car or served inside the railway compartment was not clean and tasty. Mahatma Gandhi had commented on this subject that “On the way passengers got for tea tannin water with filthy sugar and whitish looking liquid miscalled milk which gave this water a muddy appearance. I can vouch for the appearance, but I cite the testimony of the passengers as to the taste”⁴⁴⁾.

Later in 1930s tea had become available even around the railway stations. It was reported that the stands on the raised concrete platform were free of cost, and the sellers weighed out their vegetables, fruits, grains, sweetmeats, and *pice* packets of tea, regardless as ever of the innumerable flies that lighted everywhere. It is noteworthy that *pice*, or farthing, packets of tea were introduced into industrial areas to promote the consumption of Indian tea by the Tea Cess Committee⁴⁵⁾, which also encouraged arrangements for the supply of liquid tea in towns, on railways, and at fairs. It is well-known that the railways in India had brought spectacular changes in the socio-economic conditions of people at large. In the beginning the Central Tea Board had innovated device for the promotion of tea among the general mass of India.

According to the suggestions of the Indian Tea Market Expansion Board and Tea Cess Committee, several canteens were set up by the tea companies at the railway stations which served tea free of coast. Along with this various colourful enamel boards bearing pictures and virtues of tea were placed in many railway stations.

The railway platform and stations were taken as important centre for the propagation of tea by the Tea Companies. The Central Tea Board, Calcutta tried to post numerous signboards and colourful posters carrying detailed instructions about the preparation of perfect tea in several languages⁴⁶⁾.

On the bottom of the advertisement the address of the Central Tea Board, Calcutta was attached asking people to write to the authority of the Central Tea Board, Calcutta, in order to have booklet free of cost in which

43) Ratan Lal Chakraborty. *Tagore and Dhaka University*, Compilation of Articles on the 150 birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore, (in Bengali), Calcutta, 2011, pp. 331-340.

44) Mahatma Gandhi. *Hindu Widow Re-marriage & Other Tracts*, 1920, p. 4.

45) Lord George Nathaniel Curzon, the Governor General of and Viceroy of India (1899-1904), had passed the Indian Tea Cess Act in 1903 for the benefit of the tea trade.

46) It provided five (5) definite suggestions for the preparation of perfect tea in the following manner:

1. Boil fresh water for once;
2. Warm the tea pot before pouring tea in it;
3. Give one (1) spoon of tea per head along with an extra spoon of tea;
4. Allow tea to wet at least for five (5) minutes
5. Mix milk and sugar



Photo1. (a) Near Shyamnagar Railway Station, in Calcutta suburb, advertisement of tea in different languages. (b) A scene of preparing tea, Shyamnagar Railway Station, Photo by Gurung Roshan.

detailed instructions about the preparation of perfect tea in vernacular languages would be available. These signboards and colourful posters are still available in some of the railway stations⁴⁷⁾.

It is worthy to note that a number of books have been written since 1900 though these books throw light only on the tea plantation and manufacture, history and development of tea industry in India⁴⁸⁾. Though these books do not speak anything about tea culture, but demonstrate the increasing interest of the Indians regarding tea.

In India the scenario of tea culture is completely different now. Tea is available nearly in every place in the cities and towns and in some places like railway and mills tea shops are kept open even in the mid-night. The passengers tired for the journey and also for staying up far into the night and labourers too take tea in small tea stall located nearby for removing fatigue. India is totally different culturally. In Japan, people go to Izakaya after finishing their duty and take alcohol. Even today taking alcohol is not considered as a good thing in India. So they take tea or some refreshments instead of alcohols. This is the one reason that India consumes more than 80% of its production.

Small tea stalls are available in and around the very large railway stations. Besides this, instant tea vendors are also available in all crowded railway stations right from dawn to dusk. When a train arrives to railway platform the tea vendors immediately rush to the train by chanting ‘Cha’ – ‘Cha’ (‘tea’ ‘tea’) and if there is any demand for tea they serve instant tea added with huge lump of sugar and small milk in earthen or plastic tea cup. The use of tea cup varies from place to place and sometimes according to the wish of the instant tea vendors and consumers too. There are three types of tea cups available in many places and these are earthen, plastic and thermo-plastic. The people in general favour earthen tea cup which is considered advantageous and not harmful. In the beginning the instant tea vendors get up in a railway compartment with a kettle full of instant tea and chant

47) For details see, Gautam Bhadra. *From an Imperial Product to a National Drink: The Culture of Tea Consumption in Modern India*, Calcutta: CSSC, 2005.

48) Sri Girish Chandra Chattopadhyaya. *Training Process for the Plantation and Preparation of Tea* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1900; Sachindranath Ghosh, *Tea*, (in Bengali) Calcutta, 1920.

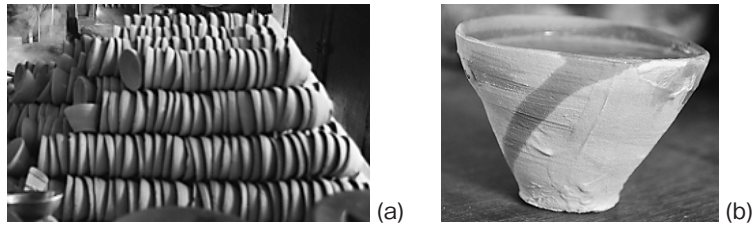


Photo2. The Earthen Cup. Photo by Gurung Roshan.

‘Cha’ – ‘Cha’ (‘tea’ ‘tea’) for selling. They change the compartment when the train stops and immediately get on another railway compartment and do the same⁴⁹⁾.

4. Factors Helped to the Development of General Tea Culture in India: Initial Phase

The popularization of tea was inexorably associated with a set of changes both rural and urban areas of India that had occurred systematically and gradually. Such changes may well be attributed with the urbanization, administrative, agro-commercial and industrial developments as a whole. There are some factors which helped to popularize tea in India and to become a national drink too.

4.1. Development of Industries, Mills, Factories and Tea:

The British rule in India was, in fact, directed to bring prosperity of England and as a result no remarkable industrial development could be attained in India. The traditional industries and crafts of India had declined partly owing to the impact of machine-made goods and partly owing to the deliberate pursuit of a policy to retain India as a permanent market for articles manufactured in the U.K. A vast deal of attention is naturally directed to the mill industries of India, to tea, indigo, and coffee, and to mining industries, as European capital was largely employed in India. Consequently no substantial development of industries could be found in India in the 19th century, excepting tea, jute etc.

Suffice to say that most of the important mills and factories were owned the private companies of the English people for quite a long time. The year 1905 was a turning point in the history of industrial enterprise in India. The partition of Bengal led directly to the ‘Swadeshi Movement’⁵⁰⁾ urging the boycott of foreign goods and the use by consumers of articles produced locally. The industrial consciousness of the people was stirred to a phenomenal degree almost overnight and there was a great outburst of industrial promotion by Indians themselves⁵¹⁾. In 1910s a considerable number of jute, cotton, and rice mills were established by the Indian merchants. All these mills and factories were manned by indigenous labourers who had gradually been habituated to drink tea. As it is well-known to the merchants that tea provides energy and in return workers can work

49) The writer lives near to India. He wrote this paper according to his experience and field work.

50) Patriotic Movement

51) For details see, Nabagopal Das. *Industrial Enterprise in India*, Orient Longmans, 1956.

seriously, so cheap tea shops were established within the premises of many mills and factories by the owners on contract basis⁵²⁾.

Besides these, there had sprung several individual tea shops centering round mills, factories and industries. But gradually cheap tea shops located inside the factory became unpopular owing to the quality of tea supplied. In some factories, staffs and labourers were not allowed to go outside the factory and as a result the labourers are forced to take tea from the cheap tea shop with utter reluctance. Some of the workers of the mills and factories took tea from the tea shops located outside the mills and factories when their shift was over. The establishment of Industries and patriotic movement played a vital role to develop the tea culture in India.

4.2. Royal Tea Party and Its Impact:

Tea Party had become well-known to the knowledgeable public immediately after the commencement of the Coronation *Durbar* (Palace) held at Delhi in 1911. From the last week of November to first week of January, King George V and Queen Mary had visited important places of India and centering round this visit, several tea parties were arranged in honour of King George V and Queen Mary⁵³⁾. This news got special cover up in media and consequently the knowledgeable public of India had become interested in the news of such tea party because they were completely unacquainted with such social gathering centering round tea. The Indian intellectual, cultural and learning bodies had soon accepted this conception and exercised this practice which ultimately had become tagged with the urban culture.

4.3. Political Party and Tea Interval

India is a fully democratic country. Politicians are very powerful and they have very strong impression over public. Once Indian National Congress session was held in Bombay in 1934 where a tea interval was announced. Such news received enough publicity and knowledgeable public had accepted this system with great enthusiasm⁵⁴⁾. Shamsul-ul Ulema Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958), nationalist leader and senior political personality of West Bengal, had appreciated tea to such extent that it was even better than wine and alcohol. He arranged a ceremonial tea at the National Congress Conference held at Pune (Puna). This event was highly appreciated all over India in the news bulletins of tea companies⁵⁵⁾.

4.4. Advertisement of Tea:

In the history of advertisement in India, loss of hair or baldness occupies the top rank and next comes the

52) For details see, Mukhtar Ahmad. *Report on Labour Conditions in Sugar Factories*, 1946.

53) For details see, Sir John Fortes cue. *Narrative of the Visit to India of their Majesties, King George V and Queen Mary, and of the Coronation Durbar held at Delhi, 12th December, 1911*, London: Macmillan and co., 1912; M.E. Fitch, *Happy Holidays in India at the Time of the Last Durbar*, Calcutta: New Printing Company, 1911.

54) Margarita Barns. *India Today and Tomorrow*, London: George Allen Unwin Ltd., 1936, p. 157.

55) Gautam Bhadra. *Chaa Chaa Kahini* (The Story of the Thirst for Tea), *The Anandabazar Patrika*, Calcutta, 28 May, 2006.

question of tea which was conducted by organized efforts for several decades.

It is said that the earliest-known advertisement for tea was in the form of a book, the Ch`a Ching (sic.) 『茶経』 written by Lu Yu about A. D. 780. The next book written which served as an excellent advertisement for tea was Kitcha Yojoki (sic.), 『喫茶養生記』 or the “Book of Tea Sanitation,” written in Japan by the Buddhist abbot Yeisai (sic.) (栄西) in 1214⁵⁶⁾. Of course these two books describe about the merit of tea drinking, but there is no concrete evidence that these books are the earliest advertisement of tea. It is only a presumption that the following two books are the earliest advertisement of tea. The first news paper advertisement of tea appeared in the London Mercurius Politics for the week of September 23-30 in 1658⁵⁷⁾. The advertisement of tea began to appear since 1658.

In the course of time several organs were established under the auspices of the Central Tea Board at different times for the promotion of tea. Among those the Indian Tea Association, the Indian Tea Market Expansion Board, Tea Cess Committee, the Tea Propaganda Section, Indian Tea Merchants’ Association and Calcutta Tea Traders Association, Tea Board of India, the Indian Tea Market Expansion Board were noteworthy. All these organs initiated organized move to motivate common people of India for consumption of tea. These official organs had tried its best to carry on propaganda to familiarize tea in all sections of people through cartoons, posters and others right from the formation of these agencies. These agencies held regular meetings where devices were chalked out for familiarizing tea among the masses. This had ultimately led to innovations of the ways for addressing mass in order to increase tea consumption and selling of tea. It appears that the advertisement of drinking ‘Lipton Tea’ along with the advisements like ‘Imperial Special Cigarettes’ and ‘Little’s Oriental Balm’ were sometimes published in the forms of Post and Telegraphs of the Government of India⁵⁸⁾.

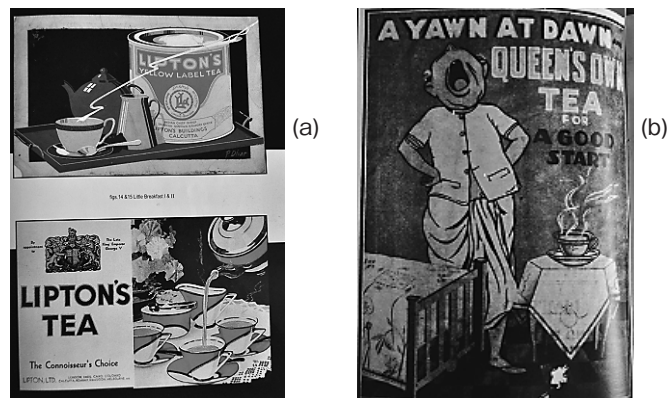


Photo3. Advertisement by Lipton

Source: Gautam Bhadra., *From an Imperial Product to a National Drink: The Culture of Tea Consumption in Modern India*, Calcutta, Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC) 2005

56) William H. Ukers. *All About Tea*, Vol., II. The Tea and Coffee Trade Journal Company, 1935, p. 295.

57) *Ibid.* p. 295.

58) *Rabindra Bhaban Documents*, Tagore’s Archives, Santiniketan.

Besides this, other methods had been adopted for the promotion of tea culture among the urban and rural people. The rhymes relating to tea having religious blend was considered to bear enough testimony among the pious people. The tea was as an essential drink for cordiality and entertainment. Next the cartoons on subject highlighting life and style of the people of India were published in leading periodical for creating humours image of tea had brought enough testimony on the beneficial effect of tea as if tea provided refreshment for tiredness. The caption which was used in the cartoon entitled “Tea is essential for avoiding daily trouble.” Sometimes the advertisement sought to propagate that tea as being well-favoured in rural areas. Its main supposition was that Tea was well appreciated by the rural bridegroom even⁵⁹⁾.

Like the present policy of advertisement charismatic persons were chosen for the promotion of tea. Because in those days advertisement could not have fetched good market if had not been supported by charismatic persons. Here the only Indian Nobel Laureate was Rabindranath Tagore, who had been much used by the Central Tea Board. It is worthy to mention that Rabindranath Tagore wrote poems and songs on seasons of India. From thenceforth the advertisement on tea was published in the journal of *Visva-Bharati* (*Santiniketan*⁶⁰⁾), wherein Tagore’s poems and songs were cited. In an advertisement of the Central Tea Board appeared in the journal of *Visva-Bharati* (*Santiniketan*), which sought to highlight the rotation of seasons and suggested that tea is very tasty during the winter. Along with this the advertisement suggested that tea has different enjoyment and attractiveness to all on every occasion of the rotation of seasons.

In another case the advertisement was in the form of a poem (folk-rhymes) composed metrically. In the poem the husband was characterized as Siva, one of the three principal gods of the Hindus. According to the short poem when Siva had visited the house of his father-in-law in rural area, a good seat was offered to him to sit on. Later snacks were offered to the Siva along with a cup of tea. It is understandable that the object of this advertisement was to address both rural and urban people in order to popularize tea.

4.5. Tea Commissioner was appointed for the Promotion of tea among the Indians:

In order to get better currency from tea, a Tea Commissioner was appointed in the first decade of the 20th century. Prior to these measures for the publicity of tea, the Indian Tea Supply Company distributed tea to the people at a very nominal price. But the new Tea Commissioner had gone further to the extent that he arranged to distribute tea to all classes of people completely free of cost. According to the new arrangement Brahmins, wearing *Upabita* (holy thread), were appointed in order to distribute tea nearly all important railway stations throughout India at free of cost. The appointment of Brahmins wearing *Upabita* was needed considering the caste prejudice. Probably the Tea Commissioner was well aware about the strong caste system prevailed in India and it

59) For Details see, Gautam Bhadra. *From an Imperial Product to a National Drink: The Culture of Tea Consumption in Modern India*, Calcutta, Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC) 2005.

60) The *Visva-Bharati* (*Santiniketan*) was established in 1900 by Rabindranath Tagore, the first Nobel Laureate of India.

was a well-thought plan to serve tea to all at free of cost by a Brahmin which would not offend anybody⁶¹⁾.

5. The condition of Tea Culture in the 20th Century and the Process of Popularization:

Lord Curzon passed the Indian Tea Cess Act for the benefit of the tea trade and at the request of the tea planting community in 1903. It provided for a minute compulsory levy on every pound of Indian tea exported by sea, and produced a sum exceeding £20,000 a year. It was considered that this sum should be spent by representatives of the tea trade in advertising for pushing the sale of Indian tea in India and other countries⁶²⁾.

The task of encouraging the Indians in drinking of tea had been remarkably undertaken by the Indian Tea Cess Committee. However, the Tea Cess Committee started to preach the value of tea-drinking among the Indians so seriously through the gramophone records which had provided a prepared speech on the 'Benefits of Drinking Tea.' The beneficial aspect of drinking tea was highlighted and attempts had been carefully made in order to counteract the baleful rumours against tea. The Commissioner of the Tea Cess Committee remarked that it was better to drink tea instead of water, because the use of tea reduces internal illnesses and the death rate in the one hand and the general energy and initiative of the people would be much increased on the other. Another argument put forward that the habit of tea drinking acts as a counter attraction to the habit of alcohol drinking.

Simple propaganda was not enough to attract Indians to drink unless tea would not be available within their immediate reach. This led to the establishment of tea-shops throughout all the major large towns of India under the patronage of the Tea Cess Committee. In the first instance customers had been attracted to these shops applying various means e.g., cinema shows, Indian orchestras, singing, the provision of indoor games and gramophones, and attractive decoration. According to Report of the Cess Committee report that more than over 700 gramophones and 8000 vernacular records, 200 harmoniums, and large quantities of indoor games were used throughout India for popularizing these newly established tea rooms.

The growth of tea shops in a city like Calcutta demonstrated how tea had been earning popularity among the Indians. There were 444 tea shops in 1915, which became 1124 in 1916 and finally it had become 1420 in 1917⁶³⁾.

In the history of Indian tea culture, First World War Played a vital role to form a tea culture in India. During the First World War It had become increasingly difficult to get large number of cargo carrying ships to export tea overseas. Moreover, over production of tea resulted in the fall in price of tea. Assam Tea Company has producing tea in a large quantity 1840s onwards. Assam Tea Company exported 10 thousands Ib of tea in 1840⁶⁴⁾. As a result new methods had to be innovated to sell tea in the markets of India. It was then suggested that the surplus tea, or part of it, should be made up in small packets to be sold throughout India at the small price of one *pice*⁶⁵⁾

61) Ibid. 55), p. 17.

62) Lovat Fraser. *India under Curzon and After*, London: W. Heinemann, 1911, pp. 318-19.

63) J.C. Kydd. *The Tea Industry*, London: Milford, 1921, p. 51.

64) Sir Percival Griffiths. *The History of the Indian Tea Industry*, Winsley Street, London, 1967, p. 65.

65) An obsolete Indian coin 1/192 rupee.

each. In the beginning it was thought that such idea would prove abortive. But within a year the sale of *pice* packets of tea became common in many parts of India. The method in which all the difficulties were surmounted was as follows. The Tea Cess Committee prepared small envelopes capable of holding enough tea to make six cups where the following instructions were printed in four languages: “Empty the contents of this packet into an earthenware teapot and pour on enough well boiling water for six cups of tea. Add milk and sugar to taste”.

The selling of dry tea in India was started in the beginning of 1918 and later it became a popular with great advantages. In between 1919 and 1920 the Tea Cess Committee had arranged 7,500 *Pice* Packets Shops where seven million *Pice* Packet envelopes had been supplied⁶⁶⁾. These figures provide us with some little idea of how tea was rapidly becoming a popular article of consumption in India. With the long span of time the drinking of tea had become very common amongst all classes of people both town and villages.

5.1. Tea in Urban and Rural India in the beginning of 20th Century

The great Indian historian Sir Jadunath Sarkar observed that in the beginning of the 20th century tea was getting popularity. He found that tea was rapidly advancing in Bombay and Bengal. According to Sir Jadunath Sarkar “Everywhere Indians are building better houses and even the peasants of Bengal have begun to wear coats. Many servants, petty traders and professional men of the towns, now take aerated waters and ice. The habit of drinking tea is very rapidly spreading, the number of its consumers probably doubling in every five years”⁶⁷⁾. He further noticed that the habit of drinking tea had very rapidly spread among city population, especially in Bombay, Bengal and along railways. It became universal among the hill men of the Himalayas. But even then tea could not reach in rural Bengal until 1950s; rather tea had remained confined in the towns and cities.

James Clark Jack, Indian Civil Servant and later in the Royal Field Artillery, had conducted an interesting survey on the social and economic conditions in rural Bengal in 1910s. According to J.C. Jack “It is impossible to take friends or family to the theatre or the picture-palace or out to tea because in the whole district there are no theatres, picture-palaces, or tea-shops”⁶⁸⁾. In 1922 Glyn Barlow had found tea as one of the important articles of trade, but the Chinese crockery was in great demand in India⁶⁹⁾. Around 1920s, tea was established as a part of daily life in India.

5.2. Mess Culture and Tea

Usually the ‘Mess’ was a concept mainly used in the army code for denoting living and dinning together. But such ‘Mess’ became popular in India with the expansion of British empire. It is guessed that in the initial stage of the establishment of British Empire in India there was no instant way for providing accommodation and food to

66) Ibid. 63), pp. 48-54.

67) Jadunath Sarkar. *Economics of British India*, Calcutta: Ghosh Private, 1911, 2nd edition, p. 124.

68) J. C. Jack. *The Economic Life of a Bengal District: A Study*, Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1916, p. 64.

69) Glyn Barlow. *The Story of Madras*, London: Oxford University Press, 1921, p. 22.

individuals irrespective of categories. In such situation the English people had started to live and dine together for their own safety and interest. Such thing might have been imitated by the Indian as well later. However, considerable number of indigenous mess developed all over India in the beginning of the 20th century centering round the cities of India. But official or archival materials on this culture are not available. The subject of 'Mess Culture' is very much highlighted in the indigenous literatures⁷⁰⁾.

Calcutta may be taken up as a case study of Mess Culture. Up to the year of 1911 Calcutta was officially designated as the Capital of India. It is equally true to say Calcutta had remained the headquarters of all cultural activities even for long time. The Bengali people had flocked together in Calcutta even in the second decade of the 20th century with a view to getting job and earn money as well for better and higher education. Initially the education received the highest priority, as all the students had to come to Calcutta in order to appear Matriculation Examinations similar to the Secondary School Certificate Examination. But they had neither capability for hiring a house for themselves nor any facility was available in this regard.

It is learnt through interviews of the octogenarians that there had been some hostels which provided lunch and dinner at cheap price. Some of the owners converted of their hostels into hostel cum accommodation at a nominal cost. Most of them were students, clerks or service-holders of different categories of government or employees other business concerned. Here developed a corporate life to where every facility was common and the mess-mate must have shared everything among them. Sometimes they had to give long cue for toilet and bath. Tea was very much common nearly in every Mess in the morning and evening. Moreover, tea was served to mess-mates several times in the holidays according to their demands. Many renowned writers and artists had spent long time of their lives in the mess and some of them contributed important writings on mess and its tea culture.

It may be anticipated that the Mess life also had helped for the diffusion of tea culture in India, because in the mess life the mess-mates became accustomed to drinking tea that they could not avoid in their life. When the mess-mates returned home they introduced in their houses. This may be taken as passive propagation about tea. Moreover, many of the mess-mates had hailed from rural areas and tea introduced in the rural house of the mess-mates might have been made rural families to be interested in tea consumption⁷¹⁾.

5.3. Tea in Literature

Undoubtedly literature is considered as the mirror of contemporary society. The true scenario of the social condition and culture is invariably reflected in literature. The tea had attracted the Indians so much so that this beverage occupied place in poems, short stories, social drama and novels. Many well-known writers composed poems, short stories, social drama and novels on tea as a social beverage. In fact, tea had gradually become

70) For details see Rajsekhar Basu. *The Complete Works of Rajsekhar Basu*, revised edition, Calcutta, 1992.

71) According to an interview with a person who had spent a few years in mess in Calcutta.

important materials for composing all these things mentioned above. In the short stories, social drama and novels tea represented the medium of formal reception. Some good writers even had appreciated tea as like adoration. For example the poem on 'Tea' was composed Dwijendralal Roy (1863-1913), one of the famous poet, playwright and lyricist. His poem on Tea was published in a literary journal before 1900, but it was published as a book in 1900.

Tea

I do not want property, fortune, money;
Not even fame and honor.
But the God should allow me,
To have a cup of Tea in the morning.
I do not object to have toast and egg along with a cup of Tea in the morning.
I am sorry not for Liquor and claret,
Please eat as you like,
But don't debar me from a cup of Tea in the morning.
The earthly life is bereft, who is whose!
Wife, son, father and mother,
As well the earthly life is bereft.
Only true thing is a cup of Tea in the morning⁷²⁾.

Here the composer was so attracted by tea that he wrote the poem in the form of prayer.

From the second decade of the 20th century tea appeared as a common item to mention in stories and novels irrespective of love stories, plays and subject related to discussion on culture. Such things were published in nearly all contemporary popular magazines. The subject of tea had obviously appeared in all these series. Rajshekahar Basu (1880-1960) was famous for his humorous writings. The drinking of tea and habit of tea drinking has appeared in many of his humorous writings. In one of his stories Rajshekahar Basu has pointed out tea culture in the urban areas of Bengal as tea brings happiness in mind and the young Bengalis have abandoned alcohol through the beneficial affect of tea. It is worthy to note that Rajshekahar Basu had established 'Calcutta Arbitrary Club' where eminent historians, litterateurs and literary critics, scientists and artists were assembled and all of them were also engaged in discussion on miscellaneous topics. In this 'Calcutta Arbitrary Club' Rajshekahar Basu had served tea to everybody which was always prepared by him⁷³⁾.

5.4. Tea in Indian Movies

History of Indian cinema dates back to 1898, when Hiralal Sen had established the Royal Bioscope

72) *The Complete Works of Dwijendralal Roy*. published by the Sahitya Samsad, Calcutta, 1998, (first published in 1964), Vol. 1, p. 594.

73) *The Biography of Rajshekahar Basu*. (in Bengali), Bengal Literary Association, Calcutta, 1991, pp. 24-25.

Company, which was the first exhibition-production organization of the Bengalis. Today, Indian Cinema Industry is one of the biggest industries in the world. India produces more than 1000 films every year in different languages. Every Indian likes to watch movie. They love movies, in other words, it is a part of their life. There is a very big influence of movie in daily life of Indian people. Even there is a big influence of movie in market of India. From 1950s onward tea is used in almost all the Indian movies as well as regional movies. Besides frequent scenes of roadside tea stalls scenes of tea consumption in public houses and apartments are not rare. In case of some scenes of tea consumption in the houses of the rich beautiful tea utensils are shown and used. Tea is used in nearly all the social movies in a manner that demonstrates tea as social culture.



Photo 4.5. Scene of Tea Drinking in Indian Movies

Source: Gautam Bhadra. *From an Imperial Product to a National Drink: The Culture of Tea Consumption in Modern India*, Calcutta, Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC) 2005

Gradually the concept of bed-tea appeared following the English movies, though it remained confined within the upper strata of the society. Slowly tea entered in the rural area and numerous tea stalls developed in the rural Bengal. Drinking tea became a culture and its reflection was also available in the Indian movies. Sometimes songs on tea were composed and chanted in the movies. For example,

If the Cup of Tea would be like a ocean,
I could swim as I as long as I like.
My heart retorts after taking Tea,
The flagrant of Tea overflows my mind.

This is a song used in an Indian movie in 1950s. It appears that tea gets enough importance even in Indian films. Event day, the scene of tea drinking is found in Indian movies. That is also a part of an Indian culture.

Conclusion:

Today, India is the largest producer and consumer of Tea, but tea was discovered in India by the English people. They succeeded to produce socially acceptable common beverage then consumed by most of the English people. All the owners of tea gardens were English people since the discovery of tea in Assam. The European

entrepreneurs found a new and lucrative item for investment of their capital and had profited much in this business and this ultimately led tea as an item of commercial agriculture. In the course of time, the tea companies of India tried their utmost for popularization of tea in India with a view to maximizing the profit. India possessed no culture like tea drinking in the past, because tea was unknown to them. A considerable time elapsed with large money invested for popularizing tea in India; the tea companies became successful to fit tea as a social beverage which had brought important changes in the socio-cultural life of the Indians. The introduction of tea had, in fact, brought metamorphosis in the social texture in India which had borne also the colonial legacy.

In the beginning, tea culture appeared as a fashion of upper class of people following the life and style of English people settled in India. This upper class people had been motivated by the western education and western culture and they constituted very small section of the community. Industrialization, consequent urbanization and establishment of factories and miscellaneous firms had created some job opportunity mostly in the cities. Even then tea was not a popular drink and could not have been available easily. Moreover, the tea companies, mostly owned by the British, manufactured tea for the purpose of importing abroad. A small amount of tea was available locally for the consumption of the European inhabitants and upper class families of India. After the two great wars, the tea culture penetrated in the culture of India.

The situation has changed altogether within broad span of time and tea has been welcomed by most of the Indians. In India tea is inseparable from everyday life. Today it is unthinkable for any formal meeting without tea. Sometimes tea is served for several times if the formal meeting that continues for long time. It is believed that tea removes tiredness. The contribution of political parties, literature and movies is also remarkable for forming the tea culture in India. Moreover, Mohammedans and aboriginal people who played vital role to establish the tea culture in India are praiseworthy. In fact there is no formal tea time and Indians take tea when they like. Tea has become a part and parcel of the life of people irrespective of urban and rural. Today, tea is available everywhere in India. The tea culture had started its journey and experienced several difficulties on the way of progress in India. Tea was introduced only in the 19th century, but finally tea has turned to be the national beverage of India.

