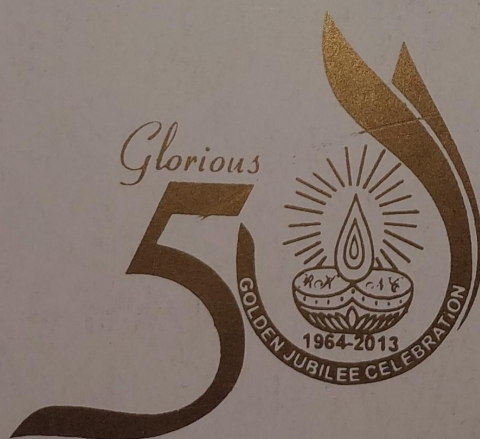


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THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF TEA INDUSTRY IN BARAKVALLEY (1855 to 1900)

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Introduction :

The British first started tea plantation in India in 1839 the first tea plantation was started in upper Assam by the Assam Tea Company, the first tea plantation company of the world which was established on February 12, 1839 by Duncun Macmill Group.¹ Gradually the number of tea garden increased in Assam. The planters were very much inspired by the initial success of tea plantation in upper Assam and expanded the plantation in various parts of the state. The present study will try to highlight the origin and growth of the Tea Industry in barak Valley of assam.

Barak Valley and Tea Industry :

Lord William Bentick, Governor General of India in a resolution, dated January 24, 1834 took up the matters of India tea cultivation. Subsequently a Tea committee was appointed in 1834, with Dr Wallich as secretary to make attempt for introduction of tea cultivation in India.²

The tea committee, in 1835, appointed a scientific commission. Dr D. Wallich, Dr W. Griffiths and J. Mc lelland were the members of this commission who after field study choose Assam for tea cultivation. In the meantime Mr G. J. Gordon, of the firm of Mackintosh & Co was sent to china to collect information, and to bring tea seeds and Chinese cultivators. He brought some plants which were planted in various areas in Assam. C.A. Bruce, brother of Robert Bruce was appointed under Lieutenant Charlton took initiative to raise nurseries from Chinese seeds. He found many indigenous tea plants. First, he selected Sadiya which was not successful. In 1837 a new plantation was established at Chabua and it was successful. This was also planted with china seeds. The China seeds and indigenous Assam plant got cross-pollinated naturally and produced hybrid tea which later on found in a large number³.

Bruce got promotion as superintendent later on and he was the pioneer of tea industry in Assam. He cleared jungles and made friendship with various tribal chiefs and found many indigenous tea plants growing wild in various places of Assam. The first consignment of tea made in Assam was sent to Calcutta in 1836.⁴

The first major tea garden was started in upper Assam in 1839 by the Assam Tea Company. The soil of Brahmaputra valley is very fertile for tea garden. Its climate and topography is also favorable. To attract the planters and capitalist the colonialist enacted many laws in their favour. Within twenty years many British companies entered in various parts of Assam. Within a few decades, tea producers in Assam had occupied 54 percent of the market in the united kingdom.⁵

The planters were very much inspired by the initial success of tea plantations in the Assam and expanded the plantation in different parts of the state.

On the 14th August 1832 the British annexed Cachar. In 1833 Lt Fisher was appointed as Superintendent permanently and Dudhpatil, near Silchar became the Headquarter. Now the British government wanted to earn profit from Cachar because their aim was to get profit as much as possible from our country. So the reason behind the annexation of Cachar was also mainly economic. Besides the attack by the Manipuri's and the Burmese again and again alarmed the British to secure their country, the colonial rulers annexed Cachar. Within a short period of time Cachar became economically sound. Encouraged by the success of tea garden in upper Assam the planters started to extend the establishment of tea garden in Cachar and numbers of tea gardens were established in the district. Captain fisher started planning for developing tea in Cachar. Captain fisher, Captain Stewart, Lt. G. Verner and J.W. Edgar were the forerunners of tea plantation in Cachar.

Geographically, Cachar is located between 2408' and 25015' north latitude and 92020' and 93015' E longitude. It covers an area of 6962 sq km.⁷ (Allan, B.C., Assam Dist Gezetteers (cachar) Allahabad 1905.)

In the north of the district is Khasi Jaintia and North Cachar Hills, in the south the lushai hills and the state of Tripura, Manipur hills and the river Barak in the East and Bangladesh in West. The district Cachar was comprising three subdivisions viz Cachar, Karimganj, Hailakandi. On the 1st July 1983, the subdivisions Karimganj was separated from Cachar and upgraded to another district. Again on 1st oct 1989 Hailakandi was also upgraded to a separate district. Thus the political map of Cachar changed. Nowadays these three districts of old Cachar is collectively called the Barak Valley.

In Barak Valley mainly four types of lands are seen i.e likely areas hilly areas, intermitted high land or tillah, low land (locally called beels or haors) and plain land. The river Barak is the life line of the valley. The plain land covers 45% of the total area, tillah 30% hilly area 20%, beels 5%.⁶

In Cachar the first tea plantations was started in 1855-56 near Burrahangan (presently known as Barsangon/kathal bagan) by Williamson and co. this Burrahangan is situated in chatla beel & circle. But it has been observed that the tea plants were already in existence in the jungles of chatla hoar in Hailakandi.

The entire area under the tea plantation has been divided into seven circles by the Planters Association i, e, Surma Valley Branch Indian Tea Association of India. The southern part of Barak river are Chatla beel, Hailakandi, Chorgola and Longai. The Chatla beel covers 10970 acres of land.

In 12th January 1856 old Assam Rules were started to the Districts of Cachar. Under this system a ninety nine years lease was granted to the planters. One fourth of the grant was rent free for ever, another three fourth were exempted from tax for 15 years and then for next ten years the planters had to pay 3 annas for per acre and at the rate of 6 annas for remaining seventy four years. Area under this rule was 25728 acres.⁷ The first grant was made to Mr G. Williamson. This system of land grant continued upto 1862. But in 1862 the policy of waste land regulation was started. 181 grants had been made which covered an area of 388561 acres⁸

The policy of waste land Regulation was started to deprive the local people in the field of tea cultivation. Under this regulation the British planters had to pay a minimum rate of revenue for the land where the rate of revenue for local people was high. Thus the British administration was able to complete the formation of imperialist capital by transferring the whole tea industry to the British tea planter through its conspiratory regulation⁹ G. Williamson was the first person who applied the policy of grant of waste lands in cachar¹⁰ A large number of planters became interested to start tea plantation in Cachar. Gradually with the initiative of administrative persons like Capt. Fisher, the first superintendent of Cachar, then Lt G. Verner & Lt. T. Stewart, many tea industry were established in Cachar, which resulted in a sound economic condition of this district. During the period of 1865 the tea companies of Cachar suffered a crisis. But in about 1869 the tea industry began to revive and more than one third of all the tea exported from Assam is produced in Cachar district.¹¹

Different system of land grant was introduced for the tea gardeners. Such as i) Grants under old Assam rules ii) Grants in fee simple which included lands originally granted under the waste land rules in 1862 and under the old Assam rules iii) Mirasdari leases for periods of thirty years.

From various sources which is available it can be said that within fifty years the number of tea gardens raise to 199 which covered an area of

280,172 acres of land and the production increased to 20898000lbs. As the soil of Cachar was fertile for tea plant the tea gardens produced a good amount of tea which were exported to foreign countries also. Though it suffered temporary set back for some years but again the tea plantation revived with the efforts of European planters as well as the labourers.

Progress of tea Gardens in Cachar

Year	No of gardens	Total area (in acres)	Area under plantation	Amount of production
1861	54	80000	16000	34000
1869	71	86000	24151	455000
1872	80	91000	23000	5000000
1882	152	Na	48873	12721000
1895	199	280172	58216	2016913
1898	199	280172	62179	20898000
1901	180	*	56000	31088000

Source: 1) District records, DC office, Silchar.

2) State and Society in North East India, PKumar New Delhi 2006.

But the progress of tea garden in cachar was mostly hampered by the lushai expedition in this district. The lushais and kukis started frequent raid and atrocities upon the poor people in southern part of Cachar. These tribal people attacked the peace lover inhabitants of the plains for plunder, slaves and human heads which they needed to fulfill social customs and to please their ancestors. By the year 1871 the Lushais came down from their hills and attacked the villages in Cachar, Sylhet, Tripura and Manipur with a vast force. This attack was going on for many days. On the 23rd January a group of Lushais attacked the tea gardens of Katlicherra and Alexanderpur. A girl of 7 years was killed and another was taken as captive¹². In 26th January another group of Lushais from eastern boundary of Cachar attacked the outpost at Manirkhal and Dharmikhal on the Sonai and cut up a Bengal settlement at Nadigram near Silchar¹³. Many labourers were brutally killed and many were taken as captive. In the same year Ainakhal in south Cachar was raided and twenty five persons were killed and thirty seven persons carried off¹⁴. All these attack in British areas by the lushais threatened the British government and now the government wanted to put an end to the raids of the lushais. Military and police force was strengthened within the district. Plan was designed to make an attack upon the Lushais. Actually the Lushais became very annoyed and started frequent raid on British areas because the tea planters were going deeper into the southern boundary of

Cachar. Ultimately a treaty was made between the British and the Lushais. J.W.Edger the then Deputy Commissioner of Cachar and the Lushai chief Sukhipal entered into negotiation. In 1873-74 Inner Line Regulation was implemented. Thus the raid of the tribal people in plain areas was checked. In 1868 with the southern part of Cachar district a new subdivision was created¹⁵ which led improvement in administration and development of tea gardens.

Though during the early stage of the establishment of tea gardens in Cachar, the authority of tea estates had managed their own affairs and had less connection with the government but after 1863 gradually they started to establish link with the administration and as a result gradually the security of the tea gardens improved. But inspite of the development of management and security some other raids were there in some tea gardens viz, the Baruncherra tea garden were attacked by the Manipuries in April 1892.¹⁶With the effort of T. Fisher, the first superintendent of Cachar and J.W.Edger, the first D.C . of Cachar, the raids of the kukis and lushais were checked strongly and many tea gardens were established on both the banks of the Surma river.

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