The Birth of Indian Tea (Chai)

by Ronojoy Ghose

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Tea is one of the most popular hot beverages in India. Youâ€™ll find a tea stall in almost every street corner in the country. Indian tea has a refreshing aroma and taste, and is enjoyed by both young and old people all over the world. Darjeeling and Assam in the North-East and Nilgiri Hills in South-West India are the main areas where Indian tea is grown.

The Role of East India Company

The valleys of Assam have been the home to Indian tea for many decades. Indian tea was introduced and popularized all over the world mainly by the East India Company. It took advantage of its colonial rule to spread the market for Indian tea all over the world, mainly in its colonies.

China is said to be the homeland of tea, where it was produced initially. The British were largely responsible for popularizing tea throughout different parts of India where it had not reached before, though tea had its presence in India even before the British popularized it. Accounts of tea usage have been found in descriptions of world travellers even before the English occupied India.

Tea Cultivation Begins in Assam under the Guidance of Charles Bruce

It was a well known British botanist who was the first to encourage the production of tea in India as the climate was suitable for it. Charles Bruce of East India Company brought tea seeds and bushes from China. They were sent to the Botanical Gardens in Calcutta (now Kolkata) for observation and testing. By then the East India Company had gained complete monopoly over the tea trade and had earned huge profits by selling Chinese tea all over the world.

The initiative taken by Chares Bruce to produce tea in India was ignored at that time. By mid-19th century, East India Company had lost its hold over tea trade. This was the time when it paid attention to tea production in its colonies, mainly in India. Charles Bruce then went to Assam to initiate and look after tea production there, as a representative of the East India Company.

The British Government asked Charles Bruce to cultivate imported Chinese tea bushes in Assam. Tea seeds would be first grown into bushes in the Botanical Gardens of Calcutta. They would then be transported to the tea gardens in Assam. Charles Brooks employed a team of labourers and tea experts to prepare land in Assam for cultivation of tea. During those days, tribes and wild animals inhabited the land which was full of forest cover.

The British Embrace Indian Tea

Charles Bruce was finally successful in setting up tea plantations in the region. The bushes imported from China didnâ€™t survive, while the bushes grown in India flourished. The tea grown in India was appreciated by the royals as well as the commoners in Britain, leading to the birth of Indian tea, popularly known as chai.

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Ronojoy Ghose - About Author:

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