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Tracing The Colonial Legacy Of Tea: A Historical Study- With Special Reference To Wayanad

1 Akshaya, S, 2 Suguna, K.

1 Ph.D. Research Scholar, 2 Assistant Professor

1Department of History, PSGRKCW, Coimbatore, India

Abstract: This article traces the origin and evolution of tea cultivation from the colonial expansion to the current scenario. With archival and government records and secondary sources, it highlights Wayanad with its agricultural-climatic condition, migrant labour system, and exploitation of labourers. This paper focuses on significant estates of Wayanad and its current challenges. Ultimately this article asserts that Wayanad tea plantations are not only economic development but also social and cultural adaptations ignited by colonialism.

Keywords: Tea plantations, colonialism, Wayanad, labourers, government boards.

INTRODUCTION

Tea is considered as the queen of beverages and has held a special place in Indian households since the 19th century, when it was introduced by British. This article explores the origin and evolution of tea in India with special reference to Wayanad. Wayanad is known for its soil fertility, tribal communities, and plantation terrain. It also examines colonial penetration into Wayanad, the migrant labourers and the role of government boards and cooperative societies in shaping the Wayanad tea economy. It highlights the transformation of tea from a commercial crop to a major livelihood source for plantation workers after independence.

ORIGIN OF TEA IN INDIA

In 1823, native Assam tea plants were discovered by Robert Bruce and Maniram Dewan in the hilly regions of Assam. After the death of Robert Bruce, his brother Charles Alexander Bruce, a naval officer, took control and was awarded by the English Society of Arts for his efforts in discovering tea's potential. Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala are the largest tea-producing states in India. In Kerala, Idukki and Wayanad are the leading districts in tea production. The 1833 Charter Act abolished the company's trade monopoly with China. This led to the establishment of the Tea Committee in 1834 in order to search for the possibilities of tea cultivation in India. The committee suggested the upper part of Assam to cultivate tea.

HISTORY OF THE TEA INDUSTRY IN INDIA- ASSAM

The Sing Pho tribe cultivated tea in Assam. In 1823, Major Bruce and Beesa Gaum, the chief of the Sing Pho tribe, entered into an agreement regarding the provision of tea plants. Assam was under Burma during that time. The First Anglo-Burmese War was ended on 24th February 1826 by signing the Treaty of Yandaboo between Mahameen and Sir Campbell. As a result, the British took full control over the Brahmaputra Valley. The first experimentation of tea cultivation was held in upper Assam by 1837. The first tea company was formed in 1840 in Assam to carry out tea trade. Assam tea has its own earthy flavour and malty sweetness, called Camellia Assamica. Tea planting in Assam was started by Maniram Diwan in the Lakhimpur district.

LABOURS DURING THE BRITISH PERIOD

The East India Company started to occupy wasteland and forest areas for tea cultivation. They recruit manpower from tribal regions and hilly areas of Bihar, Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh. Act VI of 1865 was passed, which includes punishments and imprisonments for contract violations. Penal contracts were signed between the British and labourers for a term period of 3 years. Later, this act was revised in 1870 and 1873 to protect plantation labourers. In the 1910s, even after the time expired, labourers were forced to continue work under Workman's Breach contracts (Act XIII). In Assam, higher positions in plantations were occupied by the educated class of Calcutta, while other Indians occupied subordinate posts with no promotions in their work.

WORKER'S STATUS

According to the census report of 1931, which stated the "coolies in Assam form a separate class of population regardless of whether they work in a garden or not and settled down as an ordinary agriculturalist. During the Indian freedom movement, many Congress leaders took initiatives to start unions and labour organizations in order to improve the condition of labourers. Still, they suffer due to poor sanitation, health, illiteracy, hunger, poverty, and high female mortality rates. Men in the plantation field used to prepare land for tea seedlings, while women used to pluck tea leaves in most of the estates. The only source of income for labourers was their wages based on their working hours. They were not allowed to own any land. They were never allowed to thrive economically and socially, which resulted in the workers getting into debt. For example, on average, Rs.45/annum was received by plantation workers as a loan amount from Kanganies (landowners). Improvements in the standard of living of labourers were slow, though there were increments in their wages.

FROM SEED TO CUP—MANUFACTURING OF TEA

The entire process from seeds to finished tea product takes some years. The necessary maneuvers for plants are a proper drainage system, trees for shade, proper application of fertilizers and manure, pest control, pruning, and plucking. The different stages of manufacturing are withering, rolling, fermenting, firing or drying, shifting and grading, and finally packaging.

INDIAN TEA ASSOCIATION

In 1881, the Indian Tea Association was established. The membership was accessible to proprietors, partnership firms, public and private limited companies, etc. Every tea estate in North India is a member of the association. Formed by Indian planters who bought tea estates directly from European planters, those who were represented as Indian managing agents and controlled the affairs of the company.

1. Objective Of ITA

- i. To support the growth of the tea sector.
- ii. To increase tea consumption within and outside of India.
- iii. To spread information and knowledge regarding tea through seminars, trade fairs, conventions, media campaigns, etc.
- iv. To undertake research activities on tea.

2. ITA Services

- i. Their contribution in research sector
- ii. To maintain healthy industrial peace
- iii. Timely and essential inputs in tea plantations
- iv. Co-operation with government to regulate tea industry
- v. Development of an effective information system.

TEA CESS COMMITTEE

It was an effort by the Indian Tea Association to establish a tea market among Indians in order to avoid the heavy middleman's charge that covers most of the profits. The association suggested a cess (tax) on tea exports and promoting marketing with the fund, which brought the tea cess committee. In 1903, the Tea Cess Bill was introduced. From 1st April 1903, a compulsory custom cess on tea exported from India was imposed

by law, and the fund was handed over to the tea cess committee to push the sale and consumption of tea outside Britain. The Tea Cess Committee requested associations for renewal once in a 5-year period. Later, the Indian Tea Cess Act IX of 1903 was passed on the request of the tea trade for promoting sales and production of tea.

TEA BOARD OF INDIA

Established on 1st April 1954 under the “Tea Act of 1954” to develop the tea industry under the Central government. From 1953, the board has had to issue the license for production, consumption, and sales of tea in order to improve the tea industry.

1. Functions

- i. To enhance the productivity
- ii. To promote co-operative societies
- iii. To encourage scientific and technological research
- iv. To promote export.

2. Few Labour Welfare Schemes of Tea Board

- i. Scheme of capital grants for the expansion of schools
- ii. To provide better living conditions for plantation labourers
- iii. Grants for educational stipends for the children of tea plantation labourers
- iv. Schemes of financial assistance for disabled persons working in plantation
- v. Schemes of financial aid for vocational training courses for the tea labour.

SOUTH INDIAN TEA

In South India, tea holds a special place among other varieties of tea. Tea from a high range like Nilgiris has its own specialty. Throughout the year, tea is being produced in South India. In South India, Nilgiris, Kottayam, and Idukki are the places where most of the small growers come from. But they depend on big growers or bought-leaf factories to sell their production. In recent years, the state government and Tea Board have provided the small growers with financial assistance on a basis of 50:50 to start their own factories. The areas of tea grown by small tea growers are up to 10.12 ha or less.

1. Challenges for small growers:

- i. Not utilizing the total area.
- ii. Lack of technical knowledge and non-accessibility of material.
- iii. Lack of proper usage of agricultural practices.
- iv. No proper usage of machinery during green leaf processing.
- v. No standardized price and dependence on big growers for livelihood.

ROLE OF UNITED PLANTERS' ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH INDIA (UPASI)

Main objective: Betterment of small tea growers in the South by providing various services.

The Tea Board, in collaboration with UPASI, provides services to small growers, like giving training in modern methods, providing a supply of cloned tea plants at a subsidy rate, and offering knowledge about scientific techniques regarding tea cultivation. It also supports them financially by offering them loans for the purchase of tea machinery and to build factories. It also receives financial support from the Tea Board. UPASI offers scientific advice to small growers with its research centres at Perermede of Kerala and, substations at Vandiperiyar, and advisory centres at Munnar and Mepadi.

MALABAR

Malabar province extends for about 188 miles along the sea coast. Bounded by Coimbatore, Coorg, and Mysore on the east; the sea on the west; South Canara on the north, with the Cochin and Travancore native states on the south. Malabar is divided into 10 taluks. In initial days, Malabar was under a feudal system during 1873-74. Lands were owned by petty chieftains who collected and were independent from each other. During the rule of Tipu Sultan, chiefs managed to enjoy the rents and profits of cultivation. But again, the

revenue was collected by the chiefs during the British period, in which $1/5^{\text{th}}$ of the revenue was secured by the chiefs.

TEA PLANTATIONS IN KERALA

The first appearance of plantation estates starts with the Travancore in Kerala during the 1860s. Tea and coffee were the primary crops grown. Tea plantations in Malabar greatly contributed to economic development, employment, and foreign exchange revenues. Arable land and a huge manpower were the primary requirements for growth of the plantation. Many problems arose during the initial stage of plantation, like shortage of labour and lack of product variety; there was no professional management. The plantation workers faced severe difficulty in estates, like poor living and working conditions, low wages, and suppression. 'As of 2000, tea plantation in Malabar have expanded to 36,762 hectares.'

MAJOR CRISIS IN PLANTATION OF KERALA

Only hand-picked leaves have been considered as high-quality leaves, so manpower is more important despite mechanical harvesting. Tea is ultimately marketed via auction. In Malabar, 77% of tea production will be auctioned off. With lots of active participation of middlemen in tea marketing and auctions. The social hierarchy impacted the lives of plantation labour. The transition from foreign to native ownership was held in 1956, with the foundation of Kerala state. Labour unions are highly influential in Kerala. The daily wage of the plantation labourers was increased to Rs.301/day after an important protest; before it was Rs.216/day. Frequently, workers face conditions like irregularities in their salary and price raises, which are unmanageable to them. In Layam, where the workers reside, maintenance was neglected more often. Most of the tea plantations were situated in remote areas, so another matter of concern is fuel and transportation expense to transport tea leaves from plantation to factories.

ASSOCIATION OF PLANTERS OF KERALA (APK)

Founded as the 'Association of Planters of Travancore' in 1939 before the creation of Kerala state. Later, it was renamed as the Association of Planters of Kerala on 27th September 1957. It is an association of planters with interest in tea, coffee, rubber, and cardamom plantations. It consists of 6 district planters associations, 3 commodity growers associations, and firm members.

1. Objectives

- i. To represent the best interest of the estates
- ii. To consider all matters about different planting industries
- iii. To maintain cordial relations between all the stakeholders of the plantation industry.

HISTORY OF WAYANAD

The name Wayanad was derived from 'Wayal Nadu,' which means "the land of paddy fields." The land was ruled by 'Vedar' rajas during ancient times. Later, it was ruled by Pazhassi Rajah of the Kottayam dynasty. The land came under Hyder Ali of Mysore when he invaded Wayanad. During the rule of Tipu Sultan, Wayanad was restored to the Kottayam dynasty, but under his suzerainty. The Anglo-Mysore War between Tipu Sultan and the British was ended with the Treaty of Seringapatam in 1792; the entire Malabar region was handed over to the British. Wayanad was a part of the Kannur district before the Kerala state was established. After 1957, South Wayanad was under the Kozhikode district, and North Wayanad remained with Kannur. By 1st November 1980, present-day Wayanad comprised 3 taluks—Vythiri, Sultan Bathery, and Mananthavady. Wayanad is bounded by Nilgiris and Mysore on the east, Kodagu on the north, Malappuram on the south, and Kozhikode and Kannur on the west. It is the homeland for various tribal communities. Due to the failure of coffee, tea plantations began. The Kabini River and its tributaries flow through Wayanad. Plantations are the backbone of the economy of Wayanad.

ADMINISTRATION UNDER BRITISH

Wayanad was divided into 13 Amsams in 1806 by the British. Later, they introduced a subdivision system called Hubli, but it was abolished by 1823. The climate of the Wayanad is also very favourable for the growth of tea and coffee. Tea cultivation was started in Wayanad around the 1870s, but organized tea planting was started later. The Parry and Company was the first to start a tea plantation in Wayanad in 1889. In the late 19th century, new factories were established; officials were appointed to the tea estates in Wayanad. In Wayanad, 54% of the labour force was mainly from outside, like Mysore, Cochin, Salem, Coimbatore, Erode, etc. For e.g., in 1877, Wayanad planters had 4/5 of the labourers from Mysore province, nearly 30,000 coolies.

	Local labour	From British India	From Mysore	Total
Wayanad	20	54	26	100

Source: Data from the report of the Southern India's planter's inquiry committee.

PLANTATION HISTORY OF WAYANAD

There was a false speculation of gold deposits in Wayanad; looking for gold, many travellers visited Wayanad. During the process of searching for gold, they got quartz. With the advent of the British, the dense forest of Wayanad was converted to a tea estate. They bought land on lease for 100 years from the landlords of Wayanad. They planted tea saplings and established a tea industry in Wayanad. The Kanganies brought migrant labourers from various places to work in the fields. But they suffered due to epidemics like malaria and smallpox because of the cold climatic condition. Later, some kanganies became supervisors of the plantation. When the scope for new plantations increased in Wayanad, many Europeans migrated to this place—nearly 261 Europeans in 1871. The contribution of Wayanad plays a significant role in the total tea production of India.

MAJOR PROBLEMS PRESENTLY FACED BY TEA GROWERS IN WAYANAD

- i. Lack of proper management
- ii. Lack of financial stability
- iii. Lack of working experience in the tea plantation
- iv. High cost of fertilizers and pesticides
- v. Non-reliability in returns
- vi. Unfavourable condition, cost of labour, etc.

CURRENT SCENARIO OF WAYANAD TEA ESTATES

The Tea Board had classified tea estates into two—larger estates (above 10.12 ha) and small estates (below 10.12 ha). Sevenmalai is the largest tea plantation in the Wayanad district, with 644.18 ha. Followed by Achoor, with 623.05 ha under tea cultivation. Manathavady Tribal Plantation Co-operative Ltd., which is owned by the Co-operative Society of Kerala State and managed by a board of directors known as Priyadarshini Estate, has cardamom and coffee plantations other than tea. Periya Peak Estate Pvt Ltd, which is situated in Wayanad, is a private company managed by owners. There are two varieties of teas planted in Wayanad estates: Assam tea and China tea. Notably, the Achoor estate cultivates both varieties. Another important factor is the age of the tea plant because it directly impacts the productivity.

AGROCLIMATIC REQUIREMENTS FOR TEA GROWTH

- Ideal temperature: 21°C to 29°C is required for tea production
- Rainfall: 150-250 cms is essential for tea cultivation
- Soil: Rich humus and fertile mountain soil along with the mixture of iron and lime is required for tea shrubs to grow
- Land: A well-drained land like mountain slopes is ideal for cultivation because heavy rainfall without stagnation of water is necessary for the tea growth.

TYPES OF TEA

Tea is classified into two.

- CTC (Crush, Tear, and Curl) with high domestic demand.
- Orthodox tea with high demand in exports

In Wayanad district, only CTC-type tea is manufactured in the estates of Achoor, Priyadarshini, Periya Peak etc.

MARKETING

There are four marketing methods:

- Auction
- Direct export
- Packet tea
- Ex-garden sale—mostly followed by estates without factories; they outsource their leaves to other factories for manufacturing.

In Wayanad, the estates follow packet tea, ex-garden sales, and predominantly the auction method.

CONCLUSION

This article explores how tea industry in Wayanad reflects colonial legacy and post-independence transformation. With the establishment of the Tea Board, reshaping of tea sector begun. India is currently a chief tea-exporting country with major markets in the Middle East, the USA, Europe, and Russia. The diminishing manpower, remote location of the estate, transportation of tea to distant markets, poor infrastructure like roads, inadequate warehouses and containers, and pests and diseases are the growing threats of tea plantations. During freedom struggle, Gandhi persuaded people to boycott foreign goods which included tea. But soon tea developed into an enormous industry and closely intertwined with Indian culture, making it one of the largest producers and consumers of tea.

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