MEMBERS OF THE TEA WORLD

A Survey

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For most men, the day begins with a steaming cup of tea. As a matter of fact tea is consumed by the largest number of people all over the world. From Japan, where tea making and tea drinking take on a deep significance which is almost religious, to the United States of America where iced-tea is sipped through a straw with all the pleasure of informality, a billion cups of tea all over the world add daily to the test of life. It follows that there must be a scramble for producing such a fascinating and so much sought-after commodity by all the nations, but as we shall see, the production of tea has been restricted to a few fortunate countries on account of several geographical factors.

India is the largest producer of tea. But she is not the only producer and there are several other countries, notably Ceylon who compete with India on the International market. It is worthwhile to examine the production methods, comparative advantages, etc., of the various tea producing countries. Consideration of space will obviously restrict the survey to broad and salient features only. "Tea" says R. W. Johnson, "will grow almost anywhere if the climate is wet and warm, with a minimum rainfall of 60", provided it is evenly distributed. But the best climate for growing tea on a commercial basis is one which is hot and moist, where variations in temperature does not exceed 95°F and does not fall below 65°F and where rainfall aggregates 100" to 160" and in evenly distributed and where long droughts do not occur." Though suitable climate is the most important factor in tea production, there are other physical and non-physical requirements to be taken into consideration, such as well-drained, deep, friable, acidic soil, a subtropical moist atmosphere, a gently sloping or level land; cheap labour, availability of power and capital resources, transport facilities, etc.

At present, there are about twenty countries engaged in tea production. They have been arranged in groups according to similarity in production technique and in ascending order of importance:

(a) Argentina, Peru and Brazil (b) U.S.S.R., Iran, Turkey (c) East Africa (d) China, Japan, Formosa (e) Indonesian countries (f) South India and Ceylon (g) India and Pakistan.

We append below a comparative table of the area under tea and the total output in the principal producing countries for years 1965 and 1966.
Over the past fifteen years, the world production of tea has been increasing by leaps and bounds on account of many new entrants in the field, in total world production was 653 million Kgs in 1951, 1072 million Kgs in 1966, an increase of 64%.

A survey of the international tea history reveals four distinctive landmarks or stages of growth as follows: The first phase began with the Chinese tea production as early as 1610 A.D. This era was marked by the Dutch merchants exporting tea from China to Europe and it reached the peak activity in 1887. This being the earliest and the most primitive stage very little known about the culture and the field methods of production which must necessarily have been of a very rudimentary nature. The European and Far-West consumers of tea were concerned only with the trade of the commodity which was purchased at the Chinese ports and was shipped to the various countries.

The second phase commenced from about 1825 A.D. in Java and from 1833 A.D. in India. This was a result of the curtailment of Chinese tea conceived on a plantation basis, which generally means the employment of managerial technique for the production of the crop. Of these two countries, progress in India was rapid and remarkable since the physical and non-physical conditions necessary for tea growth were ideal, Java became an important producer in and around 1880. Ceylon entered the field in 1875 and Sumatra in 1910. Before the war disturbed

S. E. Asia in 1942", writer Mr. C. B. Harler, "India, Ceylon and the Netherlands' East Indies had planted up to over two million acres to tea, whilst in 1941, these three areas produced no less than 945 million lbs. of tea.

The third phase of the tea industry may be said to have begun in Africa in 1887 A.D. The tea industry in Africa differs from that in Asia in the sense that it was a replacement industry, by which term is meant that the original agricultural crops were superimposed by the tea production, which was necessary in view of its profitability and marketability for meeting increasing world consumption. The conditions of tea growing in East Africa are near perfect from edaphic and climatic point of view. There is also plentiful power, cheap labour and ready accessibility to sea. The tea production began in Natal in 1887. Other States which opened out lands to tea were Kenya, Uganda, Belgian Congo, Tanganayika, Nyasaland, Portuguese East Africa and Southern Rhodesia. By 1965, about 160.000 acres had been planted, producing about a hundred million lbs of tea. The potential of future tea production of East African countries is very great.

The fourth phase of the International tea industry is marked by the entry of the U.S.S.R., Turkey, Iran and certain other states of South America and Australia: This is a distinct phase, since in all these countries, the conditions necessary for the growth of tea are barely marginal and the industry has to be propped up...
by various technical assistance like scientific manuring, mechanisation in the field and factory, government subsidy etc. The tea industry have been developed in the places to meet the steadily increasing domestic consumption.

(A) The last entrants to the tea world are South American States of Argentina, Peru and Brazil, who have taken seriously to tea production for less than a quarter century. The physical and non-physical conditions are not favourable for the growth of tea but the volume of internal consumption is fast increasing so that by growing tea locally, they could save their foreign exchange resources for more essential imports.

The South American states mark the extreme southerly limit of tea growing and the lands are grass lands—often cleared forests with elevations of 300'—1200'. The winters are cold followed by a hot summer. The cropping season is usually of six months duration, i.e., from October to April. The tea bushes are of a very mixed type comprising of the China, Indo-China and the Assam hybrids. The quality of the tea produced in the South American states is not high, but the prices are low and hence, since 1957, these teas have been much sought after at the London Tea Auctions.

(B) The Russian group of tea producing areas i.e., Georgia, Turkey, Iran etc. are also new comers to the field, because the real progress of the industry started from the second half of the present century, although original tea planting in Russia may be traced back to 1880 April. Another feature of the Russian tea industry is that the production is regulated by government licensing. The average size of the holding is small and the plucked leaf is brought by the small owner to the collecting stations and thence to the factory run by the government. A significant point is that much of the tea is manufactured in the legg-cut or the tobacco-cutter so that there is practically no withering and the rolling processes are completely shortened. Cutting, sorting and grading are done after the orthodox fashion. Russian tea production is supported by extensive research work and for the comparatively small average, there are four research establishments working for the improvement of the quality and quantity.

(C) The tea plantations of East Africa runs from the equator about which the Kenya area is located, down to 20°S where the South Rhodesian area stands, the total stretch being about 1500 miles. However, there is almost unlimited scope for expansion of tea acreage the productivity of some of the areas is as high as 1500 lbs. per acre, while by a careful selection of bushes, the general quality of tea can be greatly improved. The East African areas have increased their tea production by about 170%, over the period 1950-56 and due to their low prices the African teas have greatly captured the international markets.
There are two parallel tea areas running north and south of latitude 5°S, where the warm, wet season is from November to March. Three fourths of the tea crop are grown during this period. Best teas are grown on leached soils, poor in lime but acidic in reaction, known as latasols. East Africa uses Nitrogen manures profusely but not potash or phosphorus.

East African tea estates were laid out under the guidance of exports from India and Ceylon, so the general technique and cultural methods have much in common. The humidity is less, so that short withering is usual. The mobile tea offers the best mechanical contrivance for controlled wither maintaining the optimum time, temperature, and speed of process. Africa being a new entrant in the field of tea, it has no bias for the orthodox methods and the Leg-cutter, the C.T.C. and the Rotor-vane have been fully employed. There is extensive and up-to-date mechanisation in the field and the factory while the industry is actively assisted by research.

The conditions of labour and organisation in the East African tea estates are quite modern. The plantation technique is adopted and the labourers usually are permanently settled on the tea estates. Female labour is available now for plucking the leaves. A significant point about East Africa is that it is trying to develop a successful industry catering both to the home consuming market and for exports. The former is served by a section where tea production is by small holders which is manufactured in central factories run on small or medium scale, while the latter is served by a section organised on a large scale. There are various associations and research institution in East Africa located at Mlanji, Kericho and other places. A public tea auction centre was opened at Nairobi in 1956.

(D) China, Japan, and Formosa, these three countries have been grouped together because of the similarity of the physical conditions and methods of production. It may be noted that China—though the pioneer tea producer, was completely out of the international picture in face of competition offered by other countries. Both in China and Japan, available land for agriculture is very limited and the pressure of population per acre is great, so that tea culture has been developed on cottage industry lines, catering mostly for home consumption. Formosa, on the other hand have been tormented by political unrest and could hardly develop tea production on plantation lines. A notable feature in Formosa is that almost the entire production consists of green tea which allows much simplified factory procedure. Of late, there has been a tendency to produce more tea in China by planned methods, and in Japan, by more mechanisation, but it is very unlikely that they would become major units of international tea production. In the China method, tea seeds are sown in "dug out" holes and not broadcast as in India and elsewhere. Much of it depends on the personal skill of the worker and much attention is given to manuring and fine plucking. The raising of the tea crop and its manufacture are entirely separated so that persons who produce the leaves do not manufacture them. A peculiar feature of Chinese process is that after the leaves are gathered they are sorted by hand into classes according to size and quality, by experienced persons, who could know the difference of the leaves at a glance. There is no withering but the leaves are exposed to the steam of boiling water for about half a minute. There are no mechanical rollers or driers but both these are done by the workers manually. There are successive rollings on palm and drying on pan before the tea is finally ready. For the highest quality tea as many as seven such repetitions are made. The teas are then spread over on mats and sorted by means of sieves. The fine packing is in earthen vessels or baskets and sometimes in boxes lined with lead and covered with a thin species of tissue paper.

The method as described above might appear to be strange and striking contrast to the vast and well organised methods of production of other countries.
but that is all in cottage industry, which Chinese had perforce to adopt.

(E.) A number of countries in S. E. Asia, e. g. Java, Sumatra, Siam, Burma, Indo-China, Malaya etc. produce and manufacture tea. Similarly in geographical conditions justify their treatment as one unit and the broad procedure adopted might be described as the Indonesian tea technique.

The cultivation of tea in these countries was introduced early and they had a major share in world production till world war II. Prior to the war, major part of tea was grown at moderate altitude and were of medium and high grown variety. The soils were naturally rich in nitrogen and potash due to volcanic activity. The field methods have for the most part been developed on a mixture of the Ceylon and Assam pattern. Thus, planting was from nursery stumps and pruning was in a three years cycle. Plucking of the leaves was above a leaf early in the cycle but later on it was down to the “Janam”. The spacing of the bush was usually 3½ x 4”, resulting in a very close cover. The shade tree was of the leguminous type which reduced weed growth.

The factories, buildings and other constructions were very modern and the plantation technique was carried to near perfection. Many of the tea estates were laid out over large areas and had their own hydroelectric power. Withering of tea leaves were done in controlled lofts in 12 to 18 hours. As early as in 1902, there were two research stations in Java, i.e. at Buitenzorg and Medan.

Prior to the world war II. the Dutch East Indies were the third tea exporting country in the world, following India and Ceylon. But the devastations of the war have damaged the tea production beyond repairs. The much dreaded Blister Blight has appeared greatly and the quality of tea has much deteriorated. Fields and factories have been wiped out of existence. There are insufficient capital, shortage of transport facilities and impoverishment of quality bush. Recently efforts are being made to revive the industry, but it is still too early to predict, if Indonesian tea would be able to regain her pre-war status.

(F) The tea culture of Ceylon and South India have been discussed here together because due to climatic similarities and their production technique, they are more akin to each other. The Ceylon tea technique has been analysed below in greater details because she is the closest competitor of India in the International market.

Tea production was initiated into Ceylon by the British towards the middle of the nineteenth century. The original vegetative cover of the major part of the Cylonese interior was dense equatorial rainforest. At first attempts were made to cultivate cinchona but soon it was evident that conditions were very suitable for the growth of tea, which was a more profitable enterprise. “It is a common place to say that tea is the life blood of Ceylon,” writes Mr. D. N. Forrest in ‘A hundred years of Ceylon Tea’ .... “Ceylon is the only country in the world whose economic existence actually depends on this particular crop” In Ceylon tea areas, three elevational zones are recognized—i.e., Low grown (0' to 200'), mid. grown (2000' - 4000') and high grown over 4000'. A characteristic feature of Ceylon in the existence of a very large number of small holdings (below 100 acres), with its incidental organisational draw backs. The tea growing companies in Ceylon have been subjected to heavy taxation but they are continuously moving ahead with production and improvement of tea. In fact, the efforts of Ceylon in achieving large yields from bushes which are over 50 - 60 years old, in extending labour welfare measures, maintenance of administrative efficiency and improvements of the tea estates are highly praiseworthy. The tea industry in Ceylon has already implemented a long term programme of replanting based on a system of vegetative propagation from selected bushes.

In Ceylon, the scientific treatment of the (Contd. Page 167)
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