



Development of Tea Industry in Himachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT: Tea is one of the most popular and widely consumed hot beverages worldwide. Until the end of the 19th century, the production was concentrated in Asia, however, rising global demand for tea have led other countries to cultivate their own tea. Now, it's produced in 40 countries around the world. Tea is mainly grown in Asia, Africa, South America, and around the Black and Caspian Seas; 75% of the world's tea production is represented by four biggest tea producing countries of China, India, Sri Lanka and Kenya [1]. It's been a long journey for tea in India. From being used simply as a medicine in the 18th and early 19th centuries, tea has today become an integral part of life in India. Tea plantations were started in India by the British in 1830's, primarily for export to Britain. Tea is now grown widely in India. There are many producers of tea, with the majority of the estates located in Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Many of these estates produce very high quality teas and have earned a place for themselves in the international tea market. Himachal Pradesh boasts a large area of land dedicated to Tea estate. Numerous challenges over the last century have given rise to problems in Tea Industry. In this paper our main focus is on the development of a Tea in Himachal Pradesh.

Keywords: Himachal Pradesh; Tea Industry.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tea was first planted in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh by the British, and vast tea gardens (as the plantations are known) cover the gentle hills in and around Dharamsala and Palampur today. Some are privately-owned, some are so-called "demonstration plots," and some are research areas owned by the Himachal Pradesh Agricultural University or the Centre for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). The socio-economic history of Indian tea is a wonderful saga of endeavour, courage and success.

Tea has been cultivated and manufactured in the valley since the middle of the 19th century. In 1849 Dr. Jameson conducted a feasibility survey of the valley of Kangra in HP and found it suitable for tea cultivation [1]. He brought China tea plants from the nurseries at Almora and Dehradun and planted them in Government gardens at Kangra, Nagrota and Bhawarna. Despite having suffered a good deal during transit the plants performed excellent in growth. This encouraged the government to go ahead for the establishment of tea industry in the valley. Kangra tea industry occupied prime position with respect to its quality from the last quarter of the 19th century to the third quarter of 20th century. Tea made in Kangra during this period was comparable with that of every part of the world. Both

black and green teas are manufactured in the Kangra valley. Earlier black teas were manufactured by the Britishers only while the green tea by the native proprietors because the green tea manufacturing required very less machinery and also the market for green tea trade was available at Amritsar. In Himachal Pradesh tea is grown in the Mandi and the Kangra districts over 2063 hectare area (Indian Tea Association). Kangra renowned as "The valley of Gods" is famous for its distinct flavoured tea. Tea in Himachal Pradesh is grown at an elevation ranging from 700- 1500 meters above sea level, having a temperature range of 13-35 degree Celsius during March through October, the cropping season, and yearly precipitation around 2300 – 2500 mm of well distributed rains [9].

II. ORIGIN OF TEA CULTIVATION

Kangra district is situated in the North-West Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. This is mountain country, very much part of the Himalayas with dramatic landscapes ranging from pine tree-covered slopes to frozen high-altitude deserts and deep gorges with bubbling streams that flow into the Ganges river of India, and the Indus River in Pakistan. The state shares a border with Punjab to the west, Kashmir to the north, and on the east side has Tibet as a neighbour.

Uniquely, it's the only tea region in India that comprises exclusively China, or China-hybrid, tea bushes. Historical records say that Dr Jameson, then Superintendent of the Botanical Gardens in Peshawar, now in Pakistan, visited the Kangra district in 1849, and pronounced that the lower slopes of the Dhauladhar range lying between 900 and 1400 metres were ideal for tea cultivation. The first commercial plantation was established at Holtta near Palampur in 1852 at an elevation of 1260 metres above sea level. The seeds for planting were largely obtained from China and by 1892 the area under tea extended over 9,000 acres, with plantations owned by Europeans as well as native proprietors [1]. The Gazetteer of Kangra district recorded in 1882-83 that "The tea now made is probably superior to that produced anywhere else in India (Aparna Datta, 2006). The demand has been steadily increasing and much is now bought by natives for export via Peshawar to Kabul and Central Asia." Kangra tea reached European markets through London, Barcelona and Amsterdam and even won gold and silver medals at exhibitions in European capitals during 1886-95 [3].

III. PAST AND PRESENT STATUS

Disaster struck in 1905 when the Kangra Valley was devastated by a great earthquake, from which the tea region, in a sense, has never fully recovered. Tea factories lay in ruins, tea growing areas were destroyed, forcing European pioneer planters to make distress sales and leave the valley now perceived as unsafe, handing over the estates to either their workers or local traders. With the facilities for black tea production disrupted, green tea output became the norm – fortuitously, one may say, as the China variety tea leaves are eminently suited to the making of green tea. Over the years, Kangra green tea developed its own franchise, and was much in demand in Kashmir and Afghanistan till war and political strife took its toll in the late 20th century. Overland transit routes have been cut, and the tea trade dwindled even further after the tea auction center at Amritsar in the neighbouring state of Punjab went into liquidation in 2005.

Quite unlike the organized tea planting that exists in Darjeeling, Assam and the Nilgiris, the Kangra tea district, which includes select areas of Chamba and Mandi districts of Himachal Pradesh, today literally survives against all odds. Dominated by small growers – 96% of growers have holdings of less than two hectares – tea growing here is more of a cottage industry. Labour is hard to come by, with much of the plucking done by migrant labour from the plains. Land holdings have fragmented over the years as families split up units as inheritance. Lower prices for tea have prompted growers to diversify their cultivation to

include cash crops such as rice and potatoes and tea is seen as a side income. The problems get compounded by low productivity and low yields due to poor bush management. Currently, the tea acreage is estimated at 2312 hectares with practically half the area considered either neglected or abandoned.

Support for the industry came from the state government of HP which assisted in the setting up of four cooperative tea factories at Bir, Palampur, Baijnath and Sidhbari during the period 1964-1983. Since small growers lack the financial capacity to set up their own factories, they are encouraged to supply the green leaf to the coop factories, which process and market the made tea. Sadly, by year 2002, only the Palampur tea factory was functional, while the others shut down as operations became economically unviable.

Just when it seemed that Kangra would become a footnote in Tea history, the Tea Board of India stepped in to facilitate change. On the one hand, small growers were given financial assistance and training, and on the other hand, large growers were encouraged to invest in the region. P Chhetri, Assistant Development Officer at the Tea Board regional office at Palampur, himself a native of Darjeeling and exposed to tea all his life, invited tea professionals from other areas to visit the region and support the local industry.

A significant venture formed as a result of such intervention is Manjhee Valley, promoted by A.K. Singh, a veteran tea entrepreneur, and his son Kunal Singh who handles marketing based in New Delhi. In 2003, the HP government leased the Sidhbari cooperative tea factory to the Singhs, who brought in professional supervision, and have now effectively managed a turnaround in operations. Guidance to tea pluckers and higher standards for green leaf, quality control during processing and market development has changed the very trajectory of the Kangra tea industry, such that Kangra tea is once again being exported to international markets such as USA [10]. The Baijnath cooperative tea factory was given on lease to Tewari and partners in March 2006, who are now marketing Kangra teas under the brand name 'Himtea'. Other private tea enterprises have also seen positive growth over the last couple of years. Himalayan Enterprises Tea Factory, Raipur Tea Estate, P.O. Thakurdwara, Tehsil Palampur, Distt. Kangra produces the tea under the brand name "The HIMALAYAN BREW" which offers a complete line of specialty teas from a tea estate which is 150 years old. The company owns its own tea plantations, processing and blending unit. Green Buds Tea is Gopalpur (Himachal Pradesh)- based ISO 9001:2008 certified tea-processing unit. Green Buds Tea Company was established in the year 1927 by Late Sh. Jai Lal Butail.

Wah Tea Estate, established in 1857, perhaps the only large tea plantation and factory that survives intact from the early days, and owned since 1953 by Sheoparshad Jaiprakash & Co., of Kolkata, has seen its fortunes improve through a judicious mix of orthodox black and green tea production [2]. With access to speciality tea buyers in Kolkata, Wah is able to capitalize on the inherent strengths of the Kangra leaf and produces high-end teas that stand out on any tasting table. Remarkably, reasonable investments, care and nurture of tea gardens can achieve wonders, and between them, Manjhee Valley, Wah Tea Estate and the Dharamsala Tea Company, have proved that Kangra tea is indeed highly marketable.

Kangra tea is quite naturally a specialty tea. The China leaf, when processed according to quality norms, yields a distinctive brew that's gold in colour, with a sweet undertone and none of the astringency associated with Darjeeling teas. Kangra tea appeals to the Western palate as it is best when taken neat, without milk or sugar. That's a downside for local Indian markets, but an upside for consumers in Europe, US and Japan. Interestingly, the liquid remains clear and the colour remains stable, even with second and third extracts, so much so that the tea adapts perfectly to ready-to-drink and iced teas. Kangra tea can be consumed several times right through the day, without any caffeine overload, because it is so smooth and mellow [4].

All Kangra tea is produced by orthodox manufacture, and given the traditional manner of cultivation and frugal inputs, the region is by default organic. The more remote tea areas in the region retain vestiges of the past, a quaint living tea museum dotted with vintage Britannia and Marshall orthodox tea rollers, made by 19th century English tea equipment manufacturers, that still turn out a good twist!

Some of the small growers in Kangra are third generation planters and keep the family tradition alive, because "my grandfather grew tea and it's what I've seen since I was a child." The processing methods haven't changed much either – Kangra is the only tea region in India where hand rolling of tea is still in vogue – green tea is produced by both by the steam as well as the pan roasting method and patiently handcrafted.

Far from the commercial tea growing and marketing centers in the rest of India, the Kangra tea region has a certain rustic charm. With its unique planting heritage and distinct cup character, Kangra tea has great potential and yearns to be rediscovered and suitably valued. The very pristine nature and limited production could yet be an advantage as tea buyers seek out this hidden treasure in the Himalayas. Plans are underway for a Kangra Tea Festival in May 2007 to be organized by Kangra Valley Small Tea Planters

Association with support from the Tea Board and other local stakeholders. Speciality tea buyers in particular will revel in exploring what may be termed the final frontier of the tea world: Kangra, one of the oldest, yet newest of tea origins.

Today tea in Kangra is dominated by few major tea gardens viz. Palampur Co-operative Tea Factory, Manjhee Valley Tea Estate, The Wah Tea Estate, Dharamshala Tea Company. The rest are small growers.

IV. REVIVAL OF TEA IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

The Tea in Himachal Pradesh started gaining its momentum with the coming up of the following factories. Tea Board of India is also giving its support and assistance to uplift the Tea cultivation in Himachal Pradesh [8].

Palampur Co-operatives Tea Factory:

The Palampur cooperative tea factory Ltd. started functioning on 1st April, 1980. The Factory covers the planters of Bhawarna and Panchrukhi block. State government, Tea federation of India and 379 Individual tea planters are the members of the society. The tea factory Palampur functions from mid April to end of October [5]. It purchases tea leaf on the basis of grading system. Tea produced by Palampur co-operative tea factory is auctioned in Kolkata auction centre. Palampur co-operative tea factory also introduced new product like Himalayan garden fresh tea, orthodox black tea etc.

Manjhee Valley Tea Estate: Manjhee Valley Tea Estate is located at the Northern corner of India and is located in the state of Himachal Pradesh, and lies in the Kangra Valley. A garden which is more than 100 years old having the finest Chinese Variety of trees. This specifically as the garden was planted way back in 1860's by the British who were trying to grow tea in this valley. At Manjhee Valley Tea Estate have approximately 650 acres under tea plantation. The teas are grown between heights of 4000 feet to 5100 feet. The factory is well equipped where production is of 150,000 kilos of tea annually catering to various customers around the world. Manjhee Valley Tea Estate produces Orthodox tea, White Tea, Oolong Tea and Green Tea [7]. Manjhee Valley is owned by Mr. Abhai Kumar Singh. With an experience of 45 odd years making exquisite tea in Darjeeling his attention is now to get Kangra tea/ Himachal Tea in the World Tea Map. To assist him and to look after the marketing of this tea, his son Mr. Kunal Singh joined him (*Dr. D. K. Taknet*).

Wah Tea Estate: Wah Tea Estate, with a continuous history of cultivation since 1857.

The name Wah derives from Wah in Pakistan - the first owner was the Nawab of Wah. In 1953, the estate was taken over by the 'Chaiwala family'. 'Chaiwalas', which literally mean 'Tea planters', have been closely related with the Indian tea industry for atleast half a century. Wah has passed hands within the family and is now looked after by Deepak and Surya, the third and fourth generation of the family.

Dharamshala Tea Company: Dharamshala Tea Company was established in the year 1882. It was bought by great grandfather of Gurmeet Singh Mann the present fourth generation owner from the Britishers. Till the year 2004 green tea was produced in the factory. From 2005 onwards they have shifted to black orthodox and other speciality tea like white tea, green tea and oolong tea. Teas are packed in the tins and cartons in the name of Mann Brand. They also directly export tea to European countries like Germany and France. The Dharamshala Tea Company owns 65 hectares of land which stretches from Sheela Chowk to the hill tops of Indru Nag. The tea estate is divided into three parts Hoodle Tea Estate, Mann Tea Estate and Towa Tea Estate. Hoodle Tea Estate spreads into 25 hectares of land; Towa Tea Estate also spreads over 25 hectares of land and Mann Tea Estate cover 15 hectares of land and is near to the Tea factory [6].

V. CONCLUSION

Considering the rich history of origin of Tea in Himachal Pradesh effort by the state government should be initiated for regaining the glory as this sector continues to be the major force for economic growth in state. The tea industry should be modernized with the

change in technique of plantation, improvement of encouragement to electronic tea auction and managerial excellence. In near future this industry will on handsome revenue for state.

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