

Preface

The work on 'A Study of the Tea Industry in North Bengal (West Bengal, India), in its geographical perspective' was taken up in November, 1973 under the supervision of Prof. B. Bhattacharya, Head of the Department, Department of Geography and Applied Geography, University of North Bengal, Darjeeling. The main idea behind the selection of this topic was to find out the geographical association of this crop, which localising the cultivation of tea to the three northernmost districts has given rise to an industry finding a wide market in the world for its unique products. It may be noted that, unlike the tea from the other areas of India, the North Bengal tea has attained a special reputation for its extraordinary aroma and this alone, coupled with its liquor content, make a high favourite among the buyers.

The close relationship that exists between the environments and the tea culture of this region has to be viewed in terms of the various aspects of tea culture as compared with the other tea producing areas of the world.

Among the many agro-based industries of India, tea is by far the most important plantation crop. It not only is an organised industry, but also has a dominant role in the nation's economy. Apart from the other competitors, like jute, it fetches the highest amount of foreign exchange to the national exchequer.

The author has studied the tea industry of North Bengal, a part of West Bengal, thoroughly and presents his observations in

different chapters in the following order.

Chapter - I. The origin and the botanical nomenclature have been discussed in this Chapter. The historical as well as economic reasons leading to the introduction of tea culture in North Bengal has been taken up here giving an idea about the development of this vital industry.

Chapter - II. The geographical association of this exotic crop ultimately leading to its peculiar localisation has been dealt with in detail. Attempts have also been made to find out the optimum physical conditions necessary for the production of quality tea.

Chapter-III. The art and special methods of cultivation have been discussed in all its aspects. The essential prerequisites for successful production, like planting of shade trees, different types of irrigational practices, manuring and fertiligation, nursery culture as well as different methods of planting the tea bush, prunings, have also been critically discussed here. Discussions have also been made on the cropping seasons and types of plucking practices prevailing in the tea gardens of the regions.

Chapter - IV. The manufacturing of tea is the most important stage of processing. In this Chapter, different manufacturing processes of tea have been taken up, including the various manufacturing techniques followed in the tea factories. Besides, the existing practices of sorting or separation of tea into various grades have been considered in order to make an assessment of the different types of finished tea produced in the region. A comparative study of production of tea in different sizeable estates has also been made in this

Chapter and justifying the views with the help of necessary facts and figures.

Chapter - V. The role of management as well as the organisation of the tea industry have been discussed here in details. The historical background of the formation of Tea Company has been traced and the functions and responsibilities of the different office-bearers and the role and place of the ordinary labour in the tea gardens have been elaborated. Further, facts on the Tea Finance, expenditures and investments in tea estates have been brought to light.

Chapter - VI. The marketing of tea having a significant role in the entire performance of the industry has been taken up in all its details. Due stress has been laid on revealing the quantity of tea sold under different systems.

Chapter-VII. In this Chapter different problems faced by the tea industry have been presented. In doing so, they have been divided according to their character of origin, mainly physical, cultural, economic, organisational as well as financial, etc. Some of the suggestive measures have been mentioned here with an aim to overcome the drawbacks in this regard for the tea industry of this region.

An organised industry like tea, taking an important part in the national economy needs better attention and care for strengthening its foothold. The growing weakness, being the result of so many factors as discussed above, is not difficult to remove.