

## Abstract

### Title

## **Rise and Fall of The Bengali Entrepreneurship: A Case Study of The Tea Plantation Industry In Himalayan and Sub Himalayan Region of Bengal (1879 – 2000)**

The ownership and control of the tea planting and manufacturing companies in the Himalayan and sub – Himalayan region of Bengal were enjoyed by two communities, to wit the Europeans and the Indians especially the Bengalis migrated from various part of undivided Eastern and Southern Bengal. In the true sense the Europeans were the harbinger in this field. Assam by far the foremost region in tea production was closely followed by Bengal whose tea producing areas included the hill areas and the plains of the Terai in Darjeeling district, the Dooars in Jalpaiguri district and Chittagong. Tea production was experimentally started in Darjeeling hill in 1840s and in the plains of the district in the year 1862.

The proposed research dissertation have started from the year 1879 because this was the year a few Bengali lawyers and clerks of colonial Jalpaiguri town formed the first Indian Joint – Stock Tea Company, called the Jalpaiguri Tea Company with one garden Mogolkata Tea Estate in the year 1879. Afterwards many more Indian tea gardens, most of them comparatively small, were set up in the district. The growth and development of Bengali entrepreneurship was started with very small capitals which they could gather. Particularly it was an association of poor men to do a big thing. In Darjeeling hill, one company composed entirely of Bengali entrepreneurs and four private gardens had sprung into existence such as Gayabari, Makaibari, Happy Valley, Tindharia, Sourini. These estates were started by individuals on proprietary basis having elegant occupational backgrounds and social origins. The scarcity of khas lands in Dooars drew the Bengali entrepreneurs to Terai for searching suitable lands. The most striking feature in regard to the Bengali entrepreneurship of this region was the entry of tea garden employees, Bank officers, Zamindars, money – lenders, labour contractors as entrepreneurs. They raised the following tea companies such as Merry View, Sahabad, Bhojnarayan, Kiranchandra, Thanjhara, Sayyedabad and so on. The Bengali entrepreneurship of the tea industry in Darjeeling district still

remain the most untouched area of the economic history of Bengal which I want to focus through my study.

The phenomenal growth of Bengali entrepreneurship in tea industry was ultimately culminated in creating racial conflict with their European counterparts. The 'Divide and Rule Policy' of the British Raj always endeavoured to frustrate the Indian planters. They felt a strong desire to be identified with their own social exclusiveness blended with Indian heritage, nationalistic ethos and Indianisation of the trade. This resulted in establishing 'Indian Tea Planters Association', 'Terai Indian Planters Association' which worked as a trade umbrella for our Bengali tea planters.

The Bengali entrepreneurs enjoyed great social distinction in the contemporary society of both the Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts. Their dress code was an exhibition of aristocracy. The Bengali tea planters left their mark in the field of sports and culture. And they were also renowned as accomplished hosts. Their distant relatives or people from their native village came to their houses at any time without any hesitation. They took shelter there and the tea planters themselves helped them to get some employment or engagement. Voluntary donations were one of the main ingredients of the life style of the Bengali entrepreneurs. Our Bengali entrepreneurs also kept interest in politics and some of them later acted as MLA, MP. This high esteem position naturally helped them to make contribution in the socio – economic development of North Bengal.

The upsurge of the Bengali renaissance which engulfed Calcutta in the nineteenth and twentieth century also took long strides and reached Jalpaiguri town in no time. In this field, main initiatives were taken by the Bengali tea planters. They established numerous dramatic societies, cultural institutions, schools and colleges in order to foster the cultural spirit among the youths. The foundation of National School in the Arya Natya Samaj in 1907 was a challenge to the British system of education.

The time period of the research dissertation have fixed up to 2000 because from the last phase of the twentieth century we could hardly see a few tea estate is being controlled under Bengali entrepreneurship. Moreover, at least in 2000 A.D. we cannot observe any new emergence of Bengali entrepreneurship in the tea industry of Bengal. Hence I have decided to do my dissertation up to the year 2000.

The golden days of Bengali entrepreneurship in tea industry began to efface since their third and fourth generation. Today, they have few tea estates to exist on their own. In short, their whereabouts are unknown if they have disappeared into oblivion. Actually various factors were responsible behind the fall of Bengali entrepreneurship in tea industry in post – independent Bengal. They always favoured to spend their life in a Zamindari or feudal style. They never tried to increase the controlling power in the Board of Directors nor even increase the number of shares under their names. Experiences of senior managers, staffs were never paid heed to. Rather they gloated for the degree which they acquired in the abroad. Their utmost attention to luxurious lifestyle rather than looking their family business gradually detached them from the tea atlas of Bengal. If they had abided by the rules and regulations of the Company's Act, things would not have come to such a pass.

As we know, in late 1940s labour unionism and political propoganda among plantation workers had spread which did not led to labour unrest. But during the late eighties of the twentieth century number of strikes hiked more rapidly than the earlier period. The incessant pressure from various unions to implement the Plantation Labour Act weighted heavy on the tea industry. So, certain crisis prevailing in tea industry such as continuous threat of strikes, demand for workers full days wages by working only 3 to 4 hours and huge donation demanding from the management definitely compelled the third or fourth generation of our pioneer Bengali entrepreneurs to ponder over the ongoing stalemate and to decide better to sell the garden rather than going ahead with risk and liability. Lastly, the fall can be attributed to their almost inability to run the gardens, partners quarrelled each other, expensive litigations and extravagant life style – all these engendered the financial condition of the Bengali owned gardens. Therefore, when the tea price fell drastically in 1990s, they could not overcome the situation and thus the ownership of their gardens transferred to other Indians among them the Marwari and Gujrati ranked first.