



# Tea Trails

THE PLANTERS SOCIETY OF EASTERN INDIA



## President's Message

I have pleasure in forwarding the fifth edition of Tea Trails. At the outset let me thank and congratulate the Editorial team comprising Ms. Anju Munshi, Ms. Brenda Dennis, and Mr. Kaustubh Bhadra for an excellent effort.

This Edition features an Interview with Mr. A.K. Chowdhury (Babloo da) who apart from being an Industry stalwart was instrumental in the formation of the Planters Society of Eastern India. In fact, Babloo da was the first Vice President of PSEI when it started.

Our member Mr. R. K. Ghosh of Effluent and Water Treatment Engineers has contributed two interesting anecdotes which bring back memories of another day since many of us knew the people concerned. Mr. R. K. Ghosh's knowledge of ground water resources in North East India is unparalleled. I had the privilege of visiting the Library he has painstakingly created which is a reservoir of information on Water Management.

The Planters Society events rolled as per plan. The Monsoon Get together was held in July 2017 at the Masonic Lodge. A fun evening with Lorena on the mike to entertain us.

The last Annual general meeting was held on 15th September 2017 at YULE Hall, Tollygunge Club. This was well attended.

Those of you who could not attend the various events, due to unavoidable reasons were missed by us. We all look forward to interaction by way of a free flowing conversation in a relaxed environment amidst friends and acquaintances, thereby creating magic. Members your absence takes away the essence of this bonhomie

After a gap of a few years the PSEI Golf Tournament was revived. A 9 hole Stableford event was held on 9th March 2018 at Tollygunge Club. The Golf was followed by a High Tea and some elbow bending for all members. We propose to hold a Monsoon Get together for our members in July 2018.

I had sent an appeal on 8th Feb 2018 requesting for support for Tea Trails and the Golf. The response has been overwhelming and I sincerely thank all our Sponsors, advertisers and well wishers for their contributions.

Tea Trails is your magazine. The Editorial team would welcome your contribution of articles, anecdotes with photographs where possible.

Warm personal regards

**Deepak Atal**

# Meet your members

## Ashish Kumar Chowdhury (Babloo)



In London when Lord Swaraj Paul offered him a cup of tea, this gentleman politely declined, saying that he did not drink tea although he worked in the tea plantations. He must have been a courageous man and so he is. Here is a living example of strong grit and matchless positive outlook. Ashish Kumar Chowdhury, popularly known as Babloo Chowdhury has a great record of hard work and merit behind him. His ancestors were landed gentry hailing from Sylhet then a district of Assam province of British India now Bangladesh. Amulya Bhusan Chowdhury, Bablu's father, was a far sighted individual who visualized that moving on to Shillong would be more feasible for the family in the longer run. Babloo's initial schooling was from Shillong. At a very young age he represented his school and later was often selected to play for Shillong district cricket teams that also comprised of armed forces personnel. The school magazine would often refer to him as a polished batsman with many strokes, a fielder of top class and also a good wicket keeper. Babloo was also summoned for trials for selections of Assam Ranji trophy team but was unable to do so for by that time he had moved to Kolkata to enroll in St, Xavier's college from where he graduated and started planning his career.

After college he joined Assam Frontier Tea Company and handled all the assignments handed over to him with aplomb especially the merger of estates where the company faced vehement opposition from union leaders. He rose rapidly in his tea career when in 1990 he was asked to move to the head office in Kolkata, as the CEO on the board of the company from where he retired in 1993.

He along with his wife Krishna made a perfect tea couple gracious and charming as they were. The pair is credited with starting many golf

tournaments noteworthy amongst them is the Ambrosia cup. A cruel twist of fate and he lost his wife in 1993. Life became empty and took a turn.

Babloo is blessed with a son and daughter. Santee, his son is a banker in Brunei and is married to a beautiful Vietnamese girl. His daughter Radha is currently based in Yangon, Burma and is a script writer for television serials. She is married to Fjord Figea, a fine young Dutch gentleman.

Here is in direct conversation with the legend.

### Getting into Tea.

Some family connections in tea and lot of my friends were in the plantations and I think the tea glamour got me. The tea industry those days was dominated by expatriates both at the head offices in Calcutta and also the upcountry plantations ...with the gradual exodus of these expats, local candidates with an expertise and a flair for outdoor life, man management and interest in sports and games were in good demand. I had good prospects and fitted in well. I got selected by Assam frontier of R.G Shaw and company Ltd, London, from a multitude of applicants. Very few of us were sent to Assam as part of the interview process, which was quite unique.

The candidates stayed with various managers like guests, over the week and the managers gave their rating on the basis on one's lifestyle and behavior and were then accordingly selected. In 1958 I received my appointment as an assistant manager and was posted at Liana, an out garden of khobong tea estate. My manager was Buns Ward a fine person as he was, was also grandson of the former governor of Assam, in whose name lies the Ward's lake.

### 1962- Chinese invasion

In 1962 the Chinese invasion was an experience not to be forgotten. All ladies were evacuated and the piano was bought into the bar, and no one thought there would be another club bill to pay! In our own company, we experienced the departure of a very powerful person, K.G Pearson, who panicked and left the post at midnight after the fall of Bomdilla. He was a prisoner of war in the Second World War.

### When did you decide to get married?

I enjoyed the planters' life and soon realized that it was time to settle down to marriage and found my partner in Krishna [kuku]. On 2nd February 1964 I married Krishna, kuku, daughter of Rhine and Ratna Barua of Dibrugarh. Kuku hailed from an illustrious family where her lineage from her mother's side extended to the renowned writer of Assam, Lakhinath Bez Baruah and from the father's side she was the great granddaughter of Hemendranath Tagore, elder brother of Nobel laureate Rabindra Nath Tagore.



I had met Kuku during school days and got to know the family better once in tea. She was a versatile woman. She was sports minded, fun loving and creative in her own way and above all she was familiar with the tea dastoor. Very soon we got into golfing and entertaining; making new friends and interacting with them. I had been a keen golfer and kuku joined me soon enough; gradually turned herself into a champion, playing to a single handicap. It was in the verdant surroundings of Assam that she first started playing golf and it is here that one of her major contributions lies. She was instrumental in promoting golf in Assam. She was the founder member of Assam open golf tournament and also the winner of the all India stable ford competition in 1981. She was the eastern zonal representative of the Indian golf union [ladies section] and a member of their standing committees for inspecting and rating golf courses. When she won the stable ford she was felicitated by Rajiv Gandhi himself. Her score cards are framed at the DoomDooma Golf club for the best ladies net score. There are tournaments in her memory at Tollygunge club for the eastern region. There are three tournaments in her memory at Kolkata and Assam.

Not only Golf, she was a true lover of sports and was equally proficient in tennis and squash. She enjoyed landscape gardening and interior decoration and painting.

### Any humorous tournaments

Yes, but the rules of the game were funny interesting and non conventional. after every hole gents and ladies had to down a bloody mary but anyone who wished to skip the drink had to have a fizzy drink and were not allowed to use the washroom. Those who could not hold were penalized two strokes. It was hilarious and great fun.

### 1965 -Indo pak war.

During the indo pak war in 1965 tea dispatch on the river route from Assam to Kolkata stopped and therefore an alternative means of carriage was sought. Mr. P.L.S.James , Superintendent Doomdooma tea company and also chairman of Assam Brooke Estates the then dispatch member inducted me in his place to take responsibility of all tea dispatch matters.

The journey eventually culminated to my taking on the chairmanship of ABITA and subsequently when in Kolkata, member of the General Committee of ITA.

### Career Graph

It was a great journey. From an Asst manager AFT, to general manager and then the CEO and director of the tea companies. I didn't break or change my path as I went on.

Here I wish to mention the fantastic administration of my mentor J.S. Robertson, superintendent who transformed AFT Company, by means of merger, centralization and various measures which were of immense benefit. He was indeed a great visionary.

### Any funny anecdotes -

When the TRA seminar was being held in Doomdooma club where I was the President, a club staff member called Bijlie babu was asked to lay a welcome tea in the lounge, but Bile Babu felt it should be laid out in the verandah, saying, "last function sir, you know how hot Mrs. James is but I satisfied her in the verandah!"

If there was a disruption in the club cinema he would come out and say "interval is out of stock"

Every cold weather we organized a campfire party on the bank of a meandering river which ran through the garden. There was a bamboo bar with a piano and also a bamboo shed with mattress for those who wished to opt for slumber facilities. One such party continued till seven in the morning and the hard core demanded breakfast in the bungalow. Those days were unbelievable.

### Regrets-

An unfortunate shootout incident which took Mr. Surendra Paul's life haunts me both in mind and body. Till very long I never thought that I could walk again. I was in Woodlands for eight months. My medical investigations were traumatic. It was only during an MRI at the Breach candy hospital that I got to know where the bullets were lodged. My doctor, Dr Ashok Bagchi was a great man with a great sense of humour. Seeing my state he used to make me feel positive and keep me in good humour. He stressed on my physical mobility and used to make me walk and every time I resisted owing to pain and discomfort he would say, 'Just walk; walk in the morning and Johnny walk in the evening '. It was indeed a strong motivation to walk! My wife kuku was instrumental in my recovery by way of her unstinted support.





### **What was tea then and now?**

Tea is technically much more progressive now, but lacks a certain amount of discipline and dedication. Club life for executives is not the same and perhaps television has to a certain extent own up the responsibility for this.

### **How did you think of starting a planters society?**

.All tea planters, once they leave tea, miss the habitat, the environment that they spent their lives in. I also felt that I had left something behind. To recreate that aura we decided to have a society that could have likeminded tea planters, who could talk and relive the good old days, over a drink and experience a sense of bonhomie whenever they got together. This is how Planters Society of Eastern India was born. I established it with Bruno Banerjee ,Gautam Sen, Yash Vohra , Ranjan Mukherjee , Mrinal chowdhury Ratna Dutt, and handed over the reins to Bruno Banerjee , he being the senior most . So he was the president and I was the vice president in the first year of PSEI

### **Tolly club**

Post retirement I had a tenure in Tolly as managing member which was indeed very interesting and enjoyable. Also I have had the satisfaction of

initiating and setting up of the Tolly /ONGC Golf academy which continues to be viable and of national standard.

### **Spending time**

I have many engagements that keep me busy. After my wife passed away, it has been a lone journey but am grateful to lord up above for his kindness. Despite a fractured vertebra I play golf . I am socially active and I enjoy travelling. I have very kind and caring kids and a great group of friends, otherwise with one bullet lodged life could have been difficult. [ laughs]

### **Fitness mantra**

I walk to CC&FC, use the gym for some cycling and then get down to a hearty adda with likeminded friends. I also pursue physiotherapy sessions during the week at home.

Positive thinking and staying occupied is on top of everything else. The local pub in CCFC is sometimes an added attraction.

### **Advice to youngsters**

Be fair and firm at your workplace; just and honest everywhere

### **Thank you so much**



## Experience at Nonaipara T.G By Mr. R.K.Ghosh



The year was 1986, when I was traveling to Nonaipara & OJ Tea gardens with Late Mr. Raja Durgaprasad, the Visiting Agent of the company. Since the assignment given to me was for water supply to the labour lines, he requested that the work be expanded to include irrigation for those two gardens. During that period, the irrigation in Goodricke Group gardens was in a nascent stage since the then Managing Director was not in its favour in the absence of quantification of returns from irrigation in tea.

Mr. Durgaprasad was totally convinced that if the crop was to be increased, irrigation was one of the main inputs. With this view at the back of my mind I reached Nonaipara one December evening. On inspection, I found, that the main source of water, be it for domestic need or for irrigation, was from Bhutan through a 12" dia RCC hume pipe line about 20,000 ft long and the water was being discharged in a masonry tank of 85'x85'x5 ft deep in section 19 at the northern end of garden. On checking the level difference and hydraulics, it was concluded that the pipe should bring down 1 lakh gallon per hour whereas the actual receipt was only 20,000 gallons per hour. We opened up some portion of the 12" dia pipe line and found that the roots of trees from the forest had entered the collar in quest of water and had choked the pipe joints at several places. The pipes were lifted, joints cleaned and as per our experience we packed the collar with bitumen, a chemical which roots do not like and avoid. On relaying the pipes after rectification the flow was restored to 1 lakh gallons per hour. We added a presettling chamber with filtration system so that the water coming to the no. 19 tank was reasonably clean. Since the volume had increased we provided two overflow pipes to lead the excess water into the irrigation flume. During the execution of the work two interesting and amusing events came up. The first was an earthen mound near no. 19 tank when cleaned revealed a well designed sluice gate which could divert water from a small rivulet (Chinai Nala) to increase inflow into the irrigation canal over and above the water received from the 12" dia pipe. This was built during the tenure of Mr.

Gilchrist the Manager ably assisted by Mr. Asim Barooah. The vision that tea will need irrigation in the seventies and cater to it is the hallmark of some of the old Planters. The second episode was quite amusing. I was staying with Mr. Ravi Singh, the Senior Assistant. One day early in the morning the Chowkidar came running to inform that an elephant cub had fallen into the no. 19 tank and a herd of elephants had come to its rescue. We hid ourselves behind some trees and watched the operation from a safe distance. The elephants first knocked off the 12" dia hume pipe which stopped the inflow into the tank. Then all of the elephants combined to take out the water from the tank with their trunks. Once the tank had been dewatered they picked up the cub and after a victory trumpet went away to the forest. It was well executed operation indeed !

R.K.Ghosh

## RICHARD GARY SIMPSON

Once I was standing in front of the exotic grocery shop in Loudon street owned and run by Mrs Kapur, wife of late Mr. M. M. Kapur. I met Mr. Kapur, who had just retired from Goodricke Group as Managing Director, and asked him to narrate some interesting story involving Tea Planters. He narrated the following story but was not sure about exact date, which I later established from the Tombstone of Richard Gary Simpson at Pannery TE.

On 22nd October 1968, one Mr. Dick Simpson, Deputy Manager of Orangajulie TE was returning to the garden with his wife and just born son. The car in which they were traveling met with head on collision which resulted in the instant death of the child and profuse bleeding from both husband and wife. The situation was so critical that the local doctors insisted that they be shifted to Calcutta immediately, if their lives were to be saved. In those days there were no flight to or from Assam after sunset and the nearest airport at Guwahati was a good 5 hours away.

The garden management contacted HO at Duncan House Calcutta and Mr. Kapur who was leading the HR had to rush to Jamair to request them to help in the rescue operations. Jamair agreed to take up the job provided a football field of a certain size, rows of lanterns to light runway and the ATC clearance to fly to Assam after sunset were arranged.

These were arranged the plane landed at about 6.30 PM and the couple were air lifted to Calcutta and saved.

The Tombstone of Richard Gary Simpson at Pannery bears testimony to the events.

R. K. GHOSH





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The Executive Editor, Contemporary Tea Time  
Editorial & Marketing Office  
Contemporary Brokers Pvt. Ltd.  
1, Old Court House Corner, Kolkata 700 001, West Bengal, India  
Ph : +91 33 2220 0099 / 7241 / 7242 • Fax : +91 33 2243 5753 / 2210 4671  
e-mail : [kolkata@contemporary.co.in](mailto:kolkata@contemporary.co.in) • [ps@contemporary.co.in](mailto:ps@contemporary.co.in)  
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# P.S.E.I ANNUAL GOLF COMPETITION

## HELD ON 9TH MARCH, 2018 AT TOLLYGUNGE CLUB

Revival of the Society's Annual Golf Meet, after a gap of 3 years, was a welcome feature as was acclaimed by the Members who were present on the occasion in good number.

It was Planters Society's 12th Annual Golf Competition participated by as many as 32 golfers, including 4 ladies, who were vying for the golf trophies for the occasion. The Golf Meet was held on Friday, 9th March 2018 at the picturesque golf course of Tollygunge Club, and the golf competition met with a great success. The Society remains thankful to Andrew Yule & Co. and to the Managing Members of Tollygunge Club for their support in organising the Golf Meet.

**At the end of the day, the honour of winning the Golf trophies went to:**

Mr. R.N. Ghosal – Guest Category,

Mrs. Sukla Sen and Mr. Mamen Mathew – Senior Citizen Cup (2 trophies),

Allenberry Cup & Andrew Yule Cup

Mrs. Waltza Mathew – Kuku Chowdhuri Memorial Cup (for Ladies)

Mr. Kiran Desai - Gautam Sen Cup (for men),

Mr. Sunil Munshi – Bachchu Cup (for overall runner-up) and

Mrs. Mamta Bhargava – Bruno Cup (for overall winner).

President while congratulating the winners, mentioned that in keeping with the tradition for love of golf among the planters the annual golf fixture would continue to be held every year. He thanked Messrs Tide Water Oil Co.(India)Ltd. and all others whose Participation led to the success of the 12th Annual Golf Meet of P.S.E.I



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**Editorial Board: Anju Munshi, Brenda Dennis, Kaustuv Bhadra**



**Registered Office:**

3D, Satyam Chamber. 460, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road, Kolkata - 700 016, Ph : 033 2226 0306, Website : [www.planterssociety.com](http://www.planterssociety.com)