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Not often is it that men have heart when their one great industry is withered, to rear up in a few years another as rich to take its place, and the tea fields of Ceylon are as true a monument to courage as is the lion at Waterloo.

- Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes

REVIVAL OF CEYLON TEA

Tea production is one of the main sources of foreign exchange for Sri Lanka, and accounts for 2% of GDP, contributing over US\$ 1.3 billion in 2021 to the economy of Sri Lanka. It employs, directly or indirectly, over 1 million people, and in 1995 directly employed 215,338 on tea plantations and estates. Unfortunately the non-availability of chemical fertilizer had adversely affected Sri Lanka's tea production. But the Government has successfully negotiated the foreign exchange required for the import of necessary fertilizer supplies and with the provision of fertilizer the tea production is expected to increase thereby enabling the necessary foreign exchange earnings in Sri Lanka.

History reveals that tea plantation was first introduced to Sri Lanka by James Taylor in 1867. The Tea Country is the most scenic part of Sri Lanka with breathtaking views of mountain ranges and ravines, of winding roads and waterfalls. It is home to one of the most significant landmarks in the country, Adam's Peak, the second highest peak at 7,360 feet but second to none in its cultural importance. The sacred mountain holds significance to Buddhists, Muslims and Christians alike. Hundreds of devotees make the six hour trek to the peak, climbing thousands of steps to welcome the dawn - one of the most spectacular sights in Sri Lanka.

A unique experience

In central Sri Lanka, just four hours from Colombo by car is Castlereagh Lake, which lies amidst the Bogawantalawa Valley, known as the Golden Valley of Tea and home to old Ceylon, replete with rolling green hills, plantation bungalows, high tea and exquisite service. Here in solitude, at an elevation of 4,000 feet above sea level is located Ceylon Tea Trails, four clas-

sic colonial bungalows built for British tea estate managers in the days of the Raj. These historic houses have been restored with the co-operation of Bogawantalawa Tea Estates, to offer guests the unique experience of life on a working tea estate. Bungalow sizes range from standard rooms, luxury rooms and suites in all bungalows. Life in all its variety is played out in the living rooms. Pale tones and natural wood create equilibrium in the midst of a hectic life.

Each bungalow has many sitting areas, old wooden desks to write postcards with real stamps and not just email. Silk cushions, regency stripped footstools, huge spaces warmed by roaring log fires. Mulled wine or the finest spirits, a drink that thrills the heart could be obtained. Old books, old prints, antique maps, rooms filled with flowers in vibrant colours with wide verandahs which herald a time for relaxing on cushioned cane chairs, waited on hand and foot by the discreet butler. Long expanses of slate to spend long afternoons with a gimlet, white wine and cucumber sandwiches or fresh roasted cashew nuts.

The Tea Country is the most scenic part of Sri Lanka with breathtaking views of mountain ranges and ravines, of winding roads and waterfalls. It is home to one of the most significant landmarks in the country. Each of the four bungalows is different. Summer-ville, with an air of a country cottage, Castlereagh with an eclectic style of its own, the high colonial Tientsin; one of the first planter's bungalows to be built in Ceylon and the more modern Norwood; abounding with 60s character. Summerville and Castlereagh are situated opposite each other on the shores of the Castlereagh lake, Norwood is at the other end of the valley about 15 minutes away by car and Tientsin is about 30 minutes away in the next valley.

As quoted at the outset, Conan

Doyle refers to the heroics of the early Ceylon planters and the disasters such as failure of coffee plantations they overcame to mould the present tea industry. In 1865 the coffee plantations were devastated by blight. The plucky planters fought back and planted tea. The reversal was dramatic as the extract relates. From utter despair and penury to endless green acres. Over 200,000 hectares of rolling tea carpeted hills make Sri Lanka the world's largest exporter. Nimble pluckers still hand-pick "two leaves and a bud". Tea from Sri Lanka is still known by the country's former name as Ceylon Tea, a name synonymous with the finest tea.

The government in line with its national policies, implemented

through the Ministry of Plantation Industries mainly undertakes the activities such as formulation, implementation and handling of policies, programmes and projects related to the subjects of tea and rubber of the statutory bodies coming under the preview of the Ministry, the functions related to the development and researches of the tea and rubber industries and the issuance of licenses and control of the fragmentation of tea, rubber and coconut estates.

Since the promotion and research activities of the plantation crops which were not specifically assigned to any other Ministry are also coming under the scope of this Ministry, the activities related to the expansion of oil palm cultivation have also been carried out. Sri Lanka Tea Board, Tea



Tea plucker at work.



Export of Ceylon Tea was one of the major foreign exchange earners for our Motherland and with the efforts of the government it would be a major foreign exchange earner resulting in the prosperity of the Sri Lankan nation in coming years. The planters should take a lesson from their predecessors who revived the Ceylon Tea industry after the coffee plantations fell in the past during colonial times.

Research Institute of Sri Lanka, Tea Small Holdings Development Authority, Tea Shakthi Fund, Kalubowitiyana Tea Factory Ltd., Thurusaviya Fund, National Institute of Plantation Management and Tea, Rubber and Coconut Estates (Control of Fragmentation) Board are functioning under the purview of this Ministry in order to carry out the above activities. In addition, the Smallholder Plantations Entrepreneurship Development Programme (SPEnDP) funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is

implemented by the Ministry of Plantation Industries under the contribution of the Government of Sri Lanka.

High quality tea

The programme for mechanization of tea plucking in the tea small holding sector was implemented. Necessary steps were taken to develop nurseries and establish new nurseries at District level to meet the requirement of high quality tea plants in each District itself. Action was taken to make new fertilizer recommendations for improvement of the productivity based on the findings of the adoptive researches conducted in 26 locations of the country, having considered the views and proposals of the tea small growers.

Subsequently, the estates were leased out to the said companies for a period of 53 years from the year 1995. Nearly 72,684 hectares have been cultivated with tea under 20 plantations among the said companies and further 9,381 hectares have been cultivated in the large scale estates under the institutions coming under the government. At present, the contribution of this sector to the total green leaf production is about 28 per cent. The corporate sector in the field of tea production of Sri Lanka plays a significant role in the manufacturing process of 'made tea' and a considerable quantity of green leaf of the tea small holders is purchased by the corporate sector. Therefore, about 40 per cent of the total tea production is produced under the corporate sector.

About 44 per cent of the total tea export of Sri Lanka is value added products such as tea packets, tea bags and instant tea. Sri Lanka contributes the largest amount of value added products in the international market and the amounts of India and Kenya are 12 per cent and 9 per cent respectively.

In conclusion, it must be stated that export of Ceylon Tea was one of the major foreign exchange earners for our Motherland and with the efforts of the government it would be a major foreign exchange earner resulting in the prosperity of the Sri Lankan nation in coming years. The planters should take a lesson from their predecessors who revived the Ceylon Tea industry after the coffee plantations fell in the past during colonial times.

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