

J. P. Gurung, *All in a Cup of Tea* (Sonada & Siliguri: Salesian College Publications, 2020), Rs 699, pp. xviii+206, Hbk, (ISBN 978-93-82216-19-3).

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Darjeeling in popular discourses has a unique place for its tea. *All in a Cup of Tea* is an insider's account on Darjeeling's Tea Plantations. The author belongs to a family involved in tea management for generations. J.P. Gurung has attempted to throw some insights on the details of the tea gardens in Darjeeling as they stand today. He has shared his personal experiences as a tea planter. In the words of Harsh Vardhan Shringla "...perhaps for the very first time a planter has attempted to piece together history along with his long years of firsthand experience ..." The author has tried to take a peep into the life of a tea planter - his club, his life style and habits with ample anecdotes and hilarious incidents.

In chapter I, "History of Darjeeling Tea" Gurung has vividly given the historical account of how tea seeds were brought from China and introduced in Darjeeling on an experimental basis and subsequent historical trajectory of the plantations. The British got this tract of land from the regional rulers and began to develop the place as an army outpost and also as a place where expatriates could escape from the heat and dust of Gangetic Bengal which was under East India Company (p. 2). Britishers were driven by the prospect for tea business in Darjeeling. The author has also accounted the expansion and growth of the tea plantations starting with the successful tea experimentation to commercial plantation—which had proved to be a profitable venture.

Chapter II, "Darjeeling Tea Gardens Today", Gurung, summarizes the details of the 87 Tea plantations that are currently functioning in Darjeeling. Some details include the geographical location, altitude, date of establishment, name and its local meaning, area covered, production per annum and its proprietors.

Chapter III, “Small Tea Growers in Darjeeling”, the author has tried to identify and reveal the existence of small tea growers in Darjeeling amid the bigger Tea estates. He describes the role played by NGOs, local associations and welfare society in reviving the underperforming tea gardens. The success story of how a small tea grower establishes a fully equipped tea factory is truly inspiring.

Chapter IV, “Tea Cultivators in Darjeeling” elaborates on the origination of the seeds that were brought and planted in Darjeeling by the erstwhile planters. He presents the glimpse of the herculean task of clearing out forests and cultivating tea. Gradually, the planters started experimenting with different the types of tea bushes. In 1967, the Tea Research Association started Clonal Proving and Meteorological Station at Ging Tea Estate, which proved beneficial for the Darjeeling Tea Company. The author has mentioned the details of the clone seeds with their clone types and characteristics unique to the climatic condition of Darjeeling (p.46).

Chapter V, “Darjeeling Tea Planter” deals with the account of some tea planters in Darjeeling with whom the author became familiar during his career as a manager of tea estates. Gurung briefly describes some British planters as well as some of the Indian managers who affiliated themselves with Darjeeling tea industry either from a young age or as a legacy of the preceding planters. The author also shares his personal experiences and his association with the individuals, who played an influential role in popularizing Darjeeling tea globally.

Chapter VI, “Geoffrey James Ower Johnston: A Man I Cannot Forget” is thoroughly dedicated to the person mentioned. Author describes about his working experience and association with Geoffrey. His deep connection to the land and his feelings for the local people has been clearly portrayed by the author. Geoffrey marries a local girl, Manang but later he was obliged by his mother to marry a British woman, Janet. His fondness for Manang was such that before marrying Janet he purchased a villa for her and catered to her financial requirements and created a fund to take care of her

in the event of his death (p.75). In 1968, when a landslide had swept the road near Gorabari, the author recounts Geoffrey who was there every single day driving his own bull dozer trying to restore the road. Geoffrey despite undergoing hard financial crisis tried to manage his tea estate but his tragic death puts everyone at utter dismay.

Chapter VII, “Fr. Luigi Jellici, sdb: A Major Influence in My Life” the author narrates about Luigi Jellici a Salesian priest from Italy as a major source of inspiration in his life. The author was influenced by Christian education and values which he contemplates—have largely contributed to what he has achieved in his life today. Gurung recalls one of the biggest virtues of Jellici was his indomitable positive attitude towards life and his ingenuity had influenced the author deeply. He also narrates couple of memorable incidences that took place when he was travelling with Jellici.

Chapter VIII, “Some Weird Experiences” he further goes on to share two occurrences that he had experienced while driving at night towards Sonada. The author still admits that when he thinks of those incidences at 8th mile jhora and Dilaram he feels the chill running through his spine, even after so many years.

Chapter IX, “The Darjeeling Club Limited (Planters Club)” the author encapsulates how secluded the British planters felt—away from their family, with no friends to keep company. Ergo, the need to socialize, led to the foundation of the Planters Club. He further delineates Planters club, decorative quarter deck & World War I Maxim gun and animal trophies. Meanwhile, he tries to unravel the fons et origo of *abdar*. He discusses the difficulties faced by the club management due to the lack of patronization of club by its members. Further, he discerns that due to the burgeoning of communication and leisure—the need to visit the club and the club as place of respite—gradually became redundant. Therefore, only selected members frequented the club resulting in inadequate revenue and consequently leading to difficulty in maintaining the club and paying staff salaries.

In chapter X, “Workers in Darjeeling Tea Plantations” Gurung describes the importance of labour in the tea industry. He states that without the hard work contributed by the work force, the hostile terrain of Darjeeling probably would not have been converted to the lush green tea plantations that we see today. Demand of labour is very high in this industry and the author narrates the stories when workers of one garden were stolen and bought to another garden, for doing this the *Sardar* got a commission for each worker he could bring. Tea industry is the largest private sector in generating employment in the country. The author adds, in Darjeeling Tea plantations employment is based on family basis and passes on from parents to child. Since every parent invariably tries to ensure that the children go to school, after some degree of education the younger generations no longer would be interested in menial jobs that their parents have been doing. This has resulted in large numbers of boys and girls moving off to urban areas. Therefore, the author further suggests three important things: i) Need to improve wage structure, ii) A sense of pride and belongingness needs to be installed in the workmen at every level and iii) A system needs to be created where job of a laborer is looked upon with dignity for the survival, and sustenance.

Chapter XI, “Trade Union Movement in Darjeeling Hills”, Gurung narrates the formation of Trade Unions in tea plantations of Darjeeling. Initially trade unions in the tea plantations of Darjeeling were considered illegal. The author states that, in fact, confidential reports were maintained by many of the garden managers documenting any union activity reported to them by their ‘loyal chowkidars’. ‘Darjeeling Tea Workers’ Union was formed in 1945. Subsequently, Darjeeling ‘District Chia Kaman Shramik Sangh’ was formed followed by ‘National Union for Plantation Workers’. In 1989 ‘Himalayan Plantation Workers’ Union was established with the formation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council which was an outcome of the separate statehood movement headed by Subash Ghising. Tea Labour Union in Darjeeling since then got pushed and pulled by political parties and the Unions were broken and merged under different names and banners.

Chapter XII, “Movement for a Separate State” in this chapter the author links the impact of Gorkhaland Movement on Tea Industry in Darjeeling. He also shares episode of 1986 agitation to the readers. At that instant he was posted as the manager of Gyabaree and Millikthong Tea Estate. He perceptibly reports the brutality of Police after the agitators snivelled the rifle of State Armed Police at Noldara, the repercussion of this incident was massive raids by police in workers line, people from the entire valley being picked up by police and mostly male workers of the garden disappeared after the raids. The maltreatment of Senior Manger of Castleton Tea Estate who was picked and jailed shook the author so much—he divulges to the reader—that he had to go and live in Sikkim for many months (p.123). The author also elucidates on the recent developments on statehood politics of the Darjeeling Hills from 2007 onwards.

Chapter XIII, “China: The Mecca for the Tea Lovers” the author chronicles his visit to China. There he found unlike Darjeeling, tea is not only a culture but is like a religion to the Chinese people. They took pride in making and drinking tea. His travel to China was an eye opener. There he realized the native tea planters in Darjeeling had much more to learn from Chinese regarding tea cultivation. Unlike Darjeeling, in China he found huge areas dedicated specifically for tea market (p.128). The author makes a list of things that he learned from his China trip and compares Darjeeling Tea plantation and marketing with them. He discussed the loopholes and the areas where Darjeeling tea planters could improve.

Chapter XIV, “Protection of Darjeeling Tea” emphasizes on the need to protect Darjeeling Tea under Geographical Indication of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act. The author feels that the topography and the climatic condition of the region act as a factor for the distinctive quality and flavor of tea grown in Darjeeling. The allure of Darjeeling tea has won the recognition, patronage and the heart of tea lovers around the world. He raises the concern that large quantity of tea was fraudulently sold in the name of ‘Darjeeling Tea’ (p.133). He asserts, particularly the tea grown in Sri Lanka are

packed and marked as 'Pure Darjeeling Tea'. In this chapter Gurung appeals the need to protect Darjeeling Tea and to ensure that the tea produced under a demarcated geographical area should only be sold as 'Darjeeling tea'. In the year 2004 Darjeeling Tea became the first product in India to be registered under the Geographical Indication of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act of 1999.

In Chapter XV, "Darjeeling Tea: Organic Farming" Gurung sets forth that the early plantations were organic. However, with the passage of time there rose a need for the use of chemicals and fertilizers in order to meet the rising demands and thirst to increase tea production. During the late sixties tea bushes in Darjeeling were susceptible to pests and diseases due to the increasing use of chemicals and pesticides. Further, he traces how chemical weeding was the most damaging thing that could ever happen in the history of Darjeeling Tea Industry. The organic farming in Darjeeling started around the late eighties when some tea gardens like Malootar, Sivitar, Nurbung, Singhel and Makaibari decided to grow organic tea. He feels the conversion towards organic farming in Darjeeling is motivated by better price realization as the demand for this kind of tea is increasing. The author remarks that the organic farming must not only be looked as a tool for marketing but as a sound strategy which must be backed by full commitment by all the stakeholders for long term sustainability.

Chapter XVI, "Darjeeling Tea Tourism" as Darjeeling is blessed with beauty of nature. Owing to the influx of people the town got mushroomed and overcrowded. Tourist contempt thronged town and craved for scenic joy. Thus swarming tourists got captivated by peace and tranquility of the tea gardens. The author apprises tea tourism not only provides recreation and a gateway but encompasses the rich experience of learning the culture of tea and its heritage (p.147). Gurung states that the Government approved the Tea Tourism policy in 2013 and in the following years the concept of Tea Tourism was taken up earnestly both by the government and by a section of tea estate owners. About 14 Tea gardens in Darjeeling

Hills has converted their Managers bungalow into resorts and are earning the revenue. One can also perceive that home stays have sprung up around the tea garden to serve the needs of the tourist. Such catering improved not only the local economy but many other ancillary industries like transportation and supplies. It has also provided opportunities for training and employment for local educated boys and girls. While many Tea gardens are finding it difficult to sustain with meager revenues generated by tea alone, the author considers Tea Tourism and Allied Business policy of the government as definite step to boost the tea industry.

The Chapter XVII, "Darjeeling Tea: Quality and Marketing" highlights the problems that the Darjeeling Tea industry is passing through in the current scenario. The author emphasizes on the 'quality of the tea' as one of the important factor which draws the consumers to buy the tea and advocates that the first sip must fire up sensation of muscatel, flowery and fruity flavors which are sweet and smooth and linger on his/her pallet making him/her sit up and say 'Wow'! (p.157). He highlights the need to update the machineries used in the process of tea production. Gurung presumes that the making of Darjeeling tea is an art and the best tea can only be made by those planters who have a passion for perfection. He goes on to tell the readers that the process of making tea starts with the clarity of the concept of quality in the mind of the person making it. It is only then that the planter can mould and fold the other parameters of production to produce the desired tea (p.159).

The author is very delighted to explain in great detail the steps involved in making tea, taking up individual processes elaborately from plucking of tea leaves to transporting the green leaf to the factory and once the green leaf reaches the factory it under goes the treatment of withering, rolling, fermentation, drying, sorting to different grades and finally packing and dispatching (p.160). In the later part of this chapter the author has cited the views of a cross section of the buyers and supporters, who have been in one way or the other linked with Darjeeling tea.

Chapter XVIII: “The Future of Darjeeling Tea” the author writes, Darjeeling tea industry is slowly drifting towards a situation where things would get more and more difficult by the day (p.191). The tea yield per hector has declined resulting in an uncontrollable increase in the cost of production and poor wage structure as quotient. He has made proposals for improving the condition of Tea Industry in Darjeeling and has thrown some light on what needs to be done in the future to sustain the plantation while underlining the problems that Darjeeling Tea Industry is passing through.

The author pleads to all the stake holders to cast their differences aside and direct positive thoughts and efforts towards keeping the Tea Industry alive, healthy and to uphold the pride of Darjeeling Tea. In a categorical manner, he prescribes the list of expectations and benefits to the entire stakeholder, i.e., management, political parties, Trade Union and government upon its procurement.

Through this book J.P. Gurung has presented the reality of his times. In the words of Krishan Katyal, “this book is as much an autobiography as it is a perceptive commentary into the life and times of the Darjeeling planter and his milieu...I sense that the author is not writing an account of history. He is a part of what created that history.” The book truly helps to keep the glory of the tea industry of Darjeeling alive for the future generations. The author very persistently showcases his love and concern not just for a cup of Darjeeling tea, but its sustenance for present and the future.