

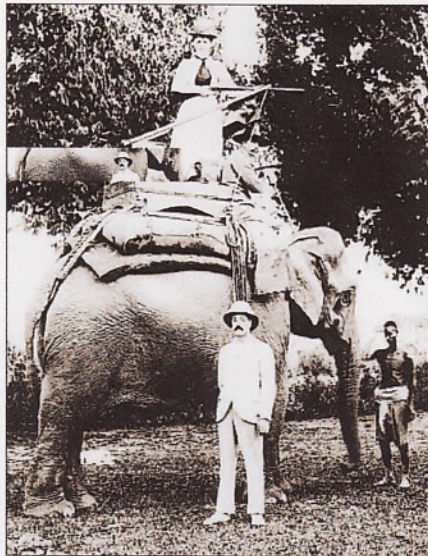
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STORIES IN PICTURES

MADE IN INDIA

THOSE DAYS In the 19th century, the British began growing tea in India. A connoisseur captures the brew's potted history



▲ A mensalib atop an elephant poses with a gun. She is dressed in a formal gown — the high fashion of 19th century London — never mind India's tropical climate

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The story of 'discoveries' is the story of chance. And so it was with tea — in India. In 1822, the East India Company saw at the end of monopoly over Chinese trade, was looking for alternate sources. The plant was found growing in the wild in Assam.

"Chitwa in Dibrugarh was India's first tea garden. Our leaf was found to be larger than the Chinese variety, but tea is tea," says the 73-year-old connoisseur and former parliamentarian Prafull Goradia, twice a member of the Tea Board. With academic Kalyan Sircar, he has just published a voluminous book, *The Saga of Tea*.

The first lot of Indian tea was auctioned in London in 1858. Goradia joined the Kolkata office of J Thomas and Company, the single largest tea auctioneer in the world in his twenties.

Goradia's book is both a photographic account — there is plenty of text as well — of his time in tea and of a certain professional class of 19th century Englishmen who as planters, botanists, managers and agents were making a living in the east and south pre-independence India. Despite the climate change, for their mensalibas, it was a plush life. Picnics, elephant rides, bird-shoots — and all this while trussed up in crinoline, bonnet and lace.

The black and white photographs also include hard-up workers in various stages of toil. Men and women, many of them British, are shown waiting for the day's wages at the table of the Barra Bazar, the bazaar.

The Saga of Tea, says Goradia, will be followed by a second volume, mini-biographies of tea companies. "In Europe and in the US, tea is back as a health drink. Russian scientists say it prevents cancer... Let's talk about it."



▲ A young Prafull Goradia (right) at an auction house in Kolkata. The auction provides every buyer, regardless of his location or level of influence, full information about the teas offered and prices obtained at various world centres PHOTOS: TANBETT ARCHIVES



▲ Even in the 1870s, the relations between workers and planters were strained. The former complained of low and irregular pay. A manager of a tea estate was of the opinion that "if flogging were introduced, it would stop a great deal of their laziness."